ATTITUDES TOWARD THE UTES NICKNAME AND LOGO

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Sports teams with American Indian (AI) nicknames and logos have encountered controversy over the last 30 years, experiencing backlash attributed to their negative cultural and societal effects. Discussion of the acceptability of these symbols and images has been particularly persistent at schools that use AI nicknames or logos. At the University of Utah (UofU), rhetorical analysis of the use of the Utes nickname and logo have been conducted (Endres, 2015). The present work adds to existing scholarship by using quantitative survey data to examine attitudes of people on campus toward the Utes nickname and logo. We posed the following research questions:

RQ1: What attitudes do students, faculty, and staff on the campus of the University of Utah hold toward the use of the Utes nickname and logo?

RQ2: Do students, faculty, and staff see value in learning more about the Northern Utes nation?

RQ3: Are behaviors at sporting events (e.g., wearing headdresses, tomahawk chops, etc.) viewed as acceptable both by those participating in them as well as those observing the behaviors?

We also wanted to view the controversy from a comparative lens so we could determine whether or not school affiliation and identity was impacting how students, faculty, and staff perceived acceptability in the use of the AI nicknames and logos. Because our survey was fielded on the UofU campus, we felt that individuals' exposure and attachment to the Utes nickname and logo would impact their attitudes toward its acceptability. Because of these concerns, we hypothesized the following:

H1: Students, faculty, and staff at the University of Utah perceive our use of the Utes symbols to be more respectful than other schools and professional sports teams with AI imagery and names.

Method: We constructed a survey assessing student, faculty, and staff attitudes. We measured respondent identification with the Utes nickname and logo and acceptability of AI behaviors at sporting events – among other variables - on 7-point Likert scales (1 = "Do not agree at all," 7 = "Agree very much"). Data were collected using intercept survey methodology at the Marriott Library and A. Ray Olpin University Student Union building over the course of eight weeks. We also measured perceived acceptability of the Florida State Seminoles and Catawba College nicknames and logos. to compare with respondents' perceptions of the Utes nickname and logo. This allowed us to determine whether respondents' affiliation with the UofU was impacting their perceptions of acceptability. Data were analyzed using cross-tabulations, independent samples t-tests, and paired samples t-tests.

Results: 91% of our respondents were students, with 9% representation from faculty and staff ($N = 104$). The majority of respondents were female (51%), white (78%), and between the ages of 18-23 (72%). Respondents identified strongly with the Utes nickname and logo. Roughly two-thirds of respondents perceived medium to high value in learning about the Northern Utes Nation,

there was much less enthusiasm with taking a class on the topic; only 24% of respondents were highly likely to do so. Perceived acceptability of AI behaviors at sporting events was relatively low.

To address our hypothesis, we compared the mean perceived acceptability of our respondents toward the Utes, Catawba Indians, and Seminoles nickname and logo. All respondents answered questions about the acceptability of the Utes nickname and logo, while the other two schools were randomly assigned. No statistically significant differences in attitudes were found between those who participated in such behaviors and those that had only observed them, due to the fact that there were not enough respondents who had participated in such behaviors in the study. The results also demonstrate that respondents perceived the Utes nickname to be more acceptable (M=4.06, SD=1.89) than the Seminoles nickname (M=3.63, SD=1.50) to a degree of statistical significant (p=.011).

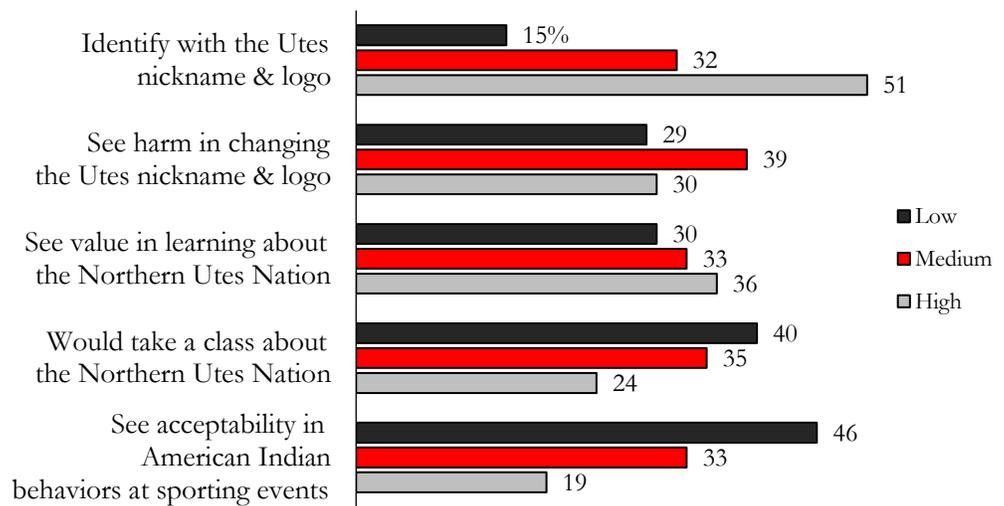**Figure 1.** Percentage of respondents that… (*N* = 104)

Discussion: Our research shows that the general attitudes students, faculty, and staff on campus have toward the Utes nickname and logo are mixed. While respondents identify strongly with the symbols – potentially due to their direct affiliation with the school – they do not feel as passionately about changing the logo. This would indicate that potentially the feelings of identification with the logo are linked to something other than the AI aspects of the imagery. Respondents also perceived value in learning about the Northern Utes Nation, but few were willing to take a class on the topic. This could indicate that the commitment of taking a class is too strong, or that the desire to learn about the Northern Utes Nation is a result of the fleeting attachment to the school. Our variables specific to RQ3 showed that individuals felt AI behaviors at sporting events were not acceptable; however, our pool of responses was not big enough to dig into specific or prove statistical significance of this claim. As we originally hypothesized, the results did demonstrate that students, faculty, and staff perceive our use of the Utes symbols to be more respectful than other schools, specifically Florida State, even though both schools have AI elements to their symbols. This serves to strengthen our claim that school affiliation is a strong factor in how much individuals perceive the acceptability of AI imagery and names.

References: Endres, D. (2015). American Indian Permission for Mascots: Resistance or Complicity Within Rhetorical Colonialism? *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, *18*(4), 649–689.