UTE NICKNAME RESEARCH PROJECT:
THE RHETORIC SURROUNDING THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH’S NICKNAME ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON REPRESENTATION OF THE UTE NATION
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ABSTRACT

Our current society is largely focused on activism and equality for many underrepresented groups, yet one of the longest standing groups in our nation, Native American Nations, are still largely overlooked. In addition, their symbols, logos and cultural artifacts have been appropriated for uses that do not accurately or positively represent their cultures (Black, 2002; Richard, 2016; Spindel, 2000). Stereotypical misrepresentation of Native American cultures through appropriated symbols, and nicknames is detrimental in both how it is replicated by non-natives, and harmful to the Native American Nation’s growth and preservation (Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2015). The aim of this research project is to expound and respond to scholarly conversation on appropriation of Native American symbolism, logos, and mascots used by Universities.

The purpose of this research is to understand how the Ute Nation is being represented on social media through the Utes nickname, and how individuals identifying with the Utes nickname are using it in their daily lives. The research question for this study is: How do Instagram users use the Utes nickname and related symbols to represent the Ute Nation and its culture? This research contributes to a better understanding of the prevalent themes and rhetoric surrounding the idea of identifying with #Ute on Instagram. Using qualitative research analysis, this thesis examines the #Utes through both the hashtag, along with the accompanying visuals and text of the Instagram post to gain a more holistic understanding on how social media communicates representation. I found that the majority of hashtags associated with #Utes correlated with other hashtags
that represent a user’s personal identification in relation to an event, sporting event, or life moment. This indicates that social media users have made a dissociation between the origination of the nickname as a way to positively represent the Ute Nation and how it is used on social media. In the conclusion, limitations, and direction for future research is discussed.
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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The use of Native American symbolism by organizations and universities has been a controversial issue since 1968 when the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) launched its campaign to address Native American stereotypes found in print and other media (Change The Mascot - Launched By The Oneida Indian Nation). Professional sporting teams and universities have been the main organizations under scrutiny of these guidelines established by the NCAI (NCAI.org). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) also started heavily monitoring teams under NCAA affiliation that had logos or nicknames potentially detrimental to any culture or peoples group. This policy was directed at 18 specific schools and universities, including the University of Utah, and asked schools to submit self-evaluations to determine if any of the portrayals of Native American Culture, both on and off the field, was considered derogatory (NCAA Executive Committee Issues Guidelines for Use of Native American Mascots at Championship Events, 2005).

Opponents of the use of nicknames and symbols of various Native American Nations argue that negative stereotypes are a main cause and effect of this misrepresentation of the Nations. Additionally, opponents point out that these symbols have a negative impact on Native culture. This argument for eradication highlights that mascots, nicknames, and other symbols portray a skewed representation of Native Americans that distorts Indigenous customs and culture, damage the self-esteem and self-concept of Native Americans, and contribute to a racially hostile environment (Freng,
Many organizations and universities with Native American nicknames or mascots have faced the choice to either rebrand, or gain tribal permission and moderate how the symbolism is used (Freng, 2011; Rosenstein, 1997; Spindel, 2000). Notably, schools such as Dartmouth, Marquette, Stanford, and Syracuse have all given up their mascots and nicknames, with Stanford being a leading example of going from the Stanford Indians with “Uncle Tomahawk” as a sports symbol to the Stanford Cardinals, forgoing all appeals to keep the name (King, 2004).

While elimination of Native American logos and symbols has been one response to this debate, other institutions and universities feel that using Native American symbols, with permission, will actually aid in helping keep Native American culture and Tribes alive and raising awareness about Native American experience (Endres, 2015; Rosier, 2003). Those in favor of keeping symbols and nicknames associated with various Native Americans argue that the symbols honor indigenous people (Freng, 2011). One such attempt to honor Native American culture can be seen through the University of Utah.

The University of Utah gained permission to use the “Utes” nickname from the Ute Nation in 1972, with this marking the beginning of a journey for the university to maintain this unique relationship with the Ute Nation. The University of Utah and the Ute Indian Tribe signed an official Memorandum of Understanding in 2003 that expounded on earlier agreements between the two entities and called for more Native American representation on the campus. This memorandum was updated in 2005, in light of recent NCAA nickname regulations, to outline that the University of Utah is within the Ute
Nation’s permission to use the nickname. This Memorandum of Understanding was again updated, after requests from the Ute Tribe, and resigned in 2014 under President Pershing giving official permission to use the nickname for the university’s athletics department. Additionally, this MOU states that the university must educate its immediate community on the history behind the nickname and the Ute Nation. Within the MOU, a section on the “Nature of the Agreement” indicates that while the University of Utah is given permission to continue to use the nickname, the Ute Nation will benefit through raising awareness and tribal visibility, which can serve as a “source of pride to members of the Ute Indian Tribe” (Memorandum of Understanding between the Ute Indian Tribe and the University of Utah | University Leadership, 2014). Along with this the Memorandum the Ute Nation asks that they be a continued presence at the University of Utah (Wilkins, 2014).

The University of Utah’s is one of four universities to receive tribal permission to use cultural nicknames and logos. Central Michigan (Chippewas), Florida State (Seminoles) and Mississippi College (Choctaws) have also been successful in appealing to the NCAA to keep their mascots and logo after initially being deemed by the NCAA as “hostile and offensive” (USATodaySports, 2013). All schools report having good relationships with the Nations that they represent, with the Florida State Seminoles using Native American tribe members in halftime and sports performances and Central Michigan offering a class on tribal history. Less is known about Mississippi College’s relationship with the Choctaw tribe, but they have been endorsed with NCAA approval and verbal permission from tribal leaders (About the CMU and Tribal Relationship; Culpepper, 2014). These four unique cases shed light on the significance of better
understanding and researching how universities that have permission to use Native American symbols interact with those nations.

In the case of the University of Utah, the Memorandum of Understanding not only includes provisions for the University to use the nickname and logo, but also establishes a scholarship category for Ute tribal members and provides recognition and education about the Ute Nation to University of Utah students, faculty, staff, alumni, and fans. The MOU also adds that standards for appropriate fan behavior must be widely disseminated and events such as the campus Powwow and Native American Month must be widely advertised and materials available (MOU).

In addition to raising tribal awareness through community education, research initiatives at the University of Utah seek to document the rhetorical history of the University’s use of Native American symbols and the relationship between the Ute Nation and the University. Dr. Danielle Endres of the Department of Communication has begun work on the Ute Nickname Project, a digital archive which serves as an effort to “promote awareness, education, and research about the history and contemporary usage of the Native American symbols by the University of Utah, particularly the use of the “Utes” nickname” (Utes Nickname Project). The Utes Nickname Project was created to be an accessible source for historical and contemporary texts that archive the history of the use of the “Utes” nickname and other Native American symbols by the University of Utah, to develop material that can be used at the University of Utah to help better inform individuals of the nickname and relationship to the Ute Nation and to establish research opportunities and collaboration that may use the archive as a foundation for further research. This foundational research has already led to multiple other research endeavors.
led by faculty and students at the University of Utah including, for example, a quantitative survey led by Dr. Sara Yeo and Adam Whalen to understand attitudes and beliefs surrounding the Utes nickname. All findings will be added to the archive for a more robust conversation on the topic. The Utes Nickname Project is an opportunity to conduct research that connects students with their university and community. A goal of this program is to not only raise awareness of the history of the nickname, but to give students valuable research and academic skills through engaging in real life topics. With cultural appropriation being a threat to both the standards of the University of Utah and the well being of the Ute Nation, this research seeks to see real life change come from its primary research.

With the increasing difficulty for Native American Nations to keep traditions alive, this research can further serve the purpose of understanding misrepresentation of Native American culture that adds to detrimental replications by non-natives and engage in activities that do not harm the growth and preservation of the Ute Nation (Black, 2002). There is beauty that comes from tradition, and without research to better understand how to preserve it and represent it appropriately, these things have the ability to be lost.

Often times only members of the community above a certain age know how to speak the Ute language Yutish Genus, or Eastern Numic, depending regionally where the tribe is located (Utah American Indian Digital Archive). Another factor that is present in the struggle to keep Native American traditions alive is the fact the Ute Nation is growing, building new businesses and franchises and entering into a more entrepreneurial phase of their history. The Nation operates several businesses, the Uinta River
Technologies Company, owns a bowling alley, supermarket and gas stations as well as starting a new energy company called Ute Energy (*Utah American Indian Digital Archive*). So while these advances are all welcome additions to the Nation, it still makes it difficult to split time between keeping the language alive and focusing on new endeavors. In an attempt to aid in keeping tradition alive, many institutions and universities feel that by using Native American symbols, with permission, this is actually aiding in helping keep Native American culture and Tribes alive (Endres, 2015; Rosier, 2003).

These sentiments for a more representative and respectful atmosphere at the University of Utah are highlighted through a statement by Ute Tribe member Forrest Cuch stating that, “I am troubled that the University of Utah administration has not done more to better inform the university community of the native peoples of the state to curb the disrespectful behavior of some of the U. fans. Again, I see this as an opportunity to education the greater community about the native peoples. After all, isn't that the purpose of the university?” (Cuch, 2013). Cuch’s comments are aimed at some of the past representations the University of Utah has had of the Ute nickname and other Native American symbols. The University of Utah aims to find a respectful and uplifting way to honor the Ute Nation, while giving it the recognition and praise it deserves which brings me to my research question.

My research question stems from being a student at the University of Utah and also identifying as a “Ute” through attending this university. I have noticed a gap that exists between what the intentions of the University of Utah and the Ute Nation’s agreement about how individuals and community members should appropriately
represent themselves as a “Ute” and how these representations actually play out. One form of representation that has not been widely studied is how the Utes nickname is used on social media platforms and whether there is a discrepancy between the intentions of the MOU to educate about Ute history and culture how the Ute nickname is actually used on social media. With this in mind, I am interested in studying how individuals construct their online “Ute” identity through posts on Instagram that include the #Utes tag. I seek to examine whether these Instagram posts uphold the forms of appropriate behavior laid out in the MOU or contribute to negative stereotypes of Native American culture. I will examine the rhetoric and rhetorical images that are embedded with the #Utes to better understand what associations and implications are made through social media in concerns with being a #Ute and use this as an aid in better understanding the impacts of misrepresentation and cultural appropriation.

The overall research question of this project is: Do Instagram posts use the #Utes tag to represent the Ute and other Native American cultures? In answering this research question, I conducted an in-depth, qualitative analysis to study specifically how Instagram posts represent or misrepresent the Ute nickname and Ute culture. Focusing my research question on social media is significant not only because it has been understudied in scholarship on Native American mascots and nicknames, but also because many students at the University of Utah fall into the millennial age group and place a high priority on their online, social media identities. I will use the remainder of this thesis to outline and define my key terms. Then I will give the historical background on the University’s use of the Utes nickname and other Native American symbolism. Following, I will highlight the framework under which this analysis will be conducted.
After that methodology will be given on how primary research was conducted and implemented. Finally, results and analysis will lead to a discussion section on future recommendations and significance of findings.

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

In this section, I will define some key terminology that informs my research. This section will lay the foundation for terminology and historical background for analysis and discussion. This paper’s definition of cultural appropriation will be outlined for clarity, and following that will be a discussion on #Utes as a rhetorical representation. Definition and description of the Utes nickname, Circle and Feather Logo, and Swoop the current mascot will follow.

*Cultural appropriation*

With multiple definitions being present for this term it is important to understand how it is being utilized not only in this paper but also in how it was understood when conducting primary research for this project. According to Richard Rogers’ article, “From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation,” cultural appropriation is defined as “the use of a culture’s symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture” (Rodgers, 2006). Rogers breaks down cultural appropriation into 4 main categories: exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation. Of these four transculturation, or the transfer and appropriation of culture, stands out as the main area of focus for this research.

This definition serves as a checkpoint for research, trying to better understand the
line between representation and cultural appropriation. While the Memorandum of Understanding allows for usage of the nickname, it does however clearly state that credit and respect be given to the Ute Tribe. With additional research needed to make an argument for or against cultural appropriation, this paper serves as a touch point to understand if Instagram use of the nickname is misrepresenting, or appropriating, the Ute Nation’s culture

#Utes as a Rhetorical Representation

Rhetoric is another term that is widely misunderstood because of its broad scope in both practice and theory. This research will be using digital rhetoric as a way to describe the Instagram posts under analysis. Mary Hock (2003) defines digital rhetoric as “a system of ongoing dialogue and negotiations among writers, audiences, and institutional contexts, but it focuses on the multiple modalities available for making meaning using new communication and information technologies.” Although Utes is the name of a Native American peoples group, it is also connected to the University of Utah as an identifier for its sports teams. The #Utes tag is found in social media as a way of identifying with this nickname. If we see digital rhetoric as a productive art, then nearly all digital texts can be seen both as objects of study for analysis and as products of digital rhetoric practices (Eyman, 2015). So while #Utes may just be one of many hashtags within a post on social media, it is saying more than just a word, it is alerting others to this identity and idea and can contribute both positively and negatively to the image of the Ute Nation.

Utes nickname, Circle and Feather logo, and Swoop mascot
The University of Utah uses the name “Utes” for its sports teams, as it has done with permission from the Ute Indian Tribe (University of Utah Marketing Homepage). A common symbol for the University of Utah athletics department is the circle and feather logo, or more commonly known as the drum and feather logo. This directly uses Native American symbolism, and is only permissible to use with under athletic branding, with the remainder of the University’s academic marketing using the Block U.

Although Utes services as a name for the University’s athletic teams, the current mascot of the University of Utah, Swoop, is a red tailed hawk and was introduced in 1996. Swoop reflects the soaring spirit of our state and school. Previously, the school did not have an official mascot from 1985-1993, and instead had the “Crimson Warrior” as a sideline symbol. The University of Utah was however the only university in the Western Athletic Conference not to have an official mascot during this period (Trademarks and licensing, University of Utah, 2015). The University of Utah is one of four schools to receive tribal permission to use its name, and is the only one to use an unrelated mascot for its representation.

While the MOU outlines the Utes nickname as athletics related, the lines become easily blurred on campus. As a student on campus, and apart of the Salt Lake community, in practice many University students and other members of the University community consider themselves to be “Utes.” As such, this paper takes a more comprehensive look at what it means to be a Ute and extends this term to all members at the University of Utah from students, athletes, faculty and alumni. These groups, and the community that the University of Utah is in, have all had interactions
and experiences with identifying as a “Ute” and therefore to get a more holistic view of how the Ute Nation is being represented, all of these groups fall under the category of which this research will take place. If there is a correlation between using #Utes on social media and a misrepresentation of the Ute Tribe I am interested in seeing the full scope of the problem and not just sports related misrepresentations or issues.

*Historical Background: The University of Utah and Native American Symbols*

Gaining insight to the history and relationship of the Ute Nation and University of Utah better allows accurate understanding of how social media representation through Instagram affects this research on cultural appropriation. In 1947, for example, a picture of a small cartoon Native American child with face paint and a tomahawk considered the “l’il Ute mascot” was officially named Ho-Yo, as a result of a contest held by the Associated Students of the University of Utah (ASUU) to name it (Utes Nickname Project). Moreover, throughout the history of the University, fans have attended games with things such as war paint, headdresses, tomahawks and other symbols being used and abused by stakeholder groups at the University of Utah (Utes Nickname Project), particularly at sporting events that continue to add to this outdated and disrespectful image of Native Americans.

Over time, the University’s symbols have become adapted and become more respectful as other mascots and symbols were filtered through the find a more representative fit. In 1985, the “Crimson Warrior” a mounted person dressed in Native American garb rode into the stadium leading the football team, similar to the ritual that
continues with the Florida State Seminoles. While this was an improvement and had support from the Ute Nation, not all tribe members and students on campus supported it (Page, 1985).

The *Utah Daily Chronicle* reported in 1986 that, “considerable progress has been made toward portraying the Ute as a dignified symbol, say members of the U. Intertribal Student Association” (*Utah Daily Chronicle, 1986*). Beverly Sutter, the University’s Native American Student Advisor, stated, “This is not an honor. If the U. wants to honor the Utes, they need to change their mascot. They should also acknowledge that the land the U. is sitting on was taken from the Utes by pioneers” (Moore, 1993). This led to the final mascot change in 1996 to “Swoop” the red tailed hawk that currently serves as the mascot to the athletics entities of the University of Utah. Thus far, the current mascot has not raised concerns over cultural misrepresentation but has yet to be further studied on its link to the Ute Nation and Native American symbolism. The Ute Nation continually works towards maintaining traditions, language and culture in light of stereotypes that make it difficult for growth (*Utah American Indian Digital Archive*).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

A large majority of archival research was previously complied through the Utes Nickname Archival Research Project by Dr. Danielle Endres and colleagues. This archive documents the history of the relationship between the Ute Nation and the University of Utah through various sources such as the *Daily Utah Chronicle* newspaper, digital media, and statements from the University of Utah and the NCAA, with documents dating as far back as 1914. This project aims to add to this
archive by looking at the use of the #Utes tag in social media and to investigate the representation of the Ute Nation through the #Utes tag in social media platforms. This section will expound on the history of Native American mascots, and then turn to more modern depictions of Native American symbolism and the use of the “Utes” nickname through Instagram as this paper's social media platform under critique.

**Native American Mascots**

Most scholarly articles on Native American mascots and nicknames point towards elimination of mascots and nicknames altogether as the best way to eliminate misrepresentation (Davis, 1993). The NCAA has been one of the major catalysts in changing how universities can use mascots and nicknames by creating policies that stated universities with those images would be ineligible to host NCAA championships starting in 2006. This along with adding that any university with Native American related imagery would not be allowed to be displayed at NCAA-sponsored events ignited a firestorm of controversy and really began to make waves for those in opposition to Native American based nicknames and logos (Staurowsky, 2007).

Other research argues that Native American mascots and other symbols are detrimental to the image and history of the tribes (Rosier, 2014). Other studies aimed to see if exposure to a Native American mascot activated Native American stereotypes in a predominately European American sample. This study was done using the Chief Wahoo image (i.e., Cleveland Indian’s logo) and found that when compared to other images Chief Wahoo activated negative, but not positive, American Indian stereotypes (Freng et al., 2011). Other studies have confirmed these findings and stated that the pervasiveness
of media coverage of sports teams with American Indian names and imagery has arguably supported stereotypical beliefs of those referenced (Laveay, 2009).

While there is robust interdisciplinary research done on the nature of sports mascots, affiliations with Native American symbols, non-native performances at halftime and universities gaining tribal permission (Spindel, 2000; Endres, 2015), there is still little done specifically on how groups at the University of Utah use the Utes nickname. This research is unique in that while there is research on mascot use without permission, little to no research has been done on mascot or nickname use with permission. Additionally, no specific research has been done on the University of Utah and its relationship with the Ute Nation under these circumstances. While previous research has found correlations between Native American imagery and symbolism use by universities with negative representations and stereotypes, there is still an inquiry to be made into how these patterns play out at the University of Utah, with permission from the Utes Nation to use the nickname.

*Instagram as a Significant Social Media*

In addition to conducting a literature review on Native American mascots and nicknames, this paper conducted a literature review on the significance of Instagram and an investigation of social media rhetoric as a whole. Instagram posts will be used because of its significance of both its number users (500 million/mon) and as a platform that both creates and emits users identity (Ruths and Pfeffer, 2014). One such point of research came from the book *Social Media in an English Village*, by author Daniel Miller, that identifies a purpose of visuals on social media accounts, taking more of a generic
approach that was later applied to Instagram as our social media platform for this paper. Daniel Miller writes in his book that,

“In scanning thousands of images we can soon discern clear patterns, and the analysis can quickly ascend from the idea that this is simply an individual doing something trivial to an appreciation that these are cultural genres in formation. Indeed one of our conclusion will be that such images do more than simply craft a look; they are a means by which young people change the frame through which they experience the world” (Miller, 2016).

As this quotation suggests, social media posts, including Instagram, offer a means to examine how users are identifying with and representing the Utes nickname.

With an education piece being a provision in the 2014 MOU signed between the Utes Nation and University of Utah social media is not only one way to study representations of the #Ute but this same tagging pattern can be used to put forth images and rhetoric that is a cohesive representation of what the Ute Nation would like to be depicted as. “Growing numbers of educationalists are beginning to consider the possible significance and likely implications of social media for education practice and provision—especially in terms of high education” (Selwyn, 2011). The University of Utah Instagram page currently has roughly 54 million followers, indicating a large audience that might identify themselves as being a #Ute. This social media platform allows for the University of Utah to use this same space that can been deemed as having potentially negative rhetoric souring the #Utes and use it from an educational standpoint to change the status quo.
Along with the significance of Instagram as a platform comes the significance of understanding the contemporary rhetorical devices that are used on social media. One of the most important areas of digital rhetoric is the formation of digital identities (Eyman, 2015; Zappen, 2005). It is a key area of research to see who is identifying with being a “Ute” and if this identity is in any way similar to the Ute culture it is representing. As research is conducted and other devices emerge they will be noted, and represented in the analysis to gain a better understanding into an area of research that has not been heavily covered.

Since hashtags serve as a form of self expression, and attention seeking mechanisms it is important to study the actual words and phrases in correlation to the #Utes. James Harper wrote in 2013 “people are only one hash-tagged word away from possibly being seen by thousands, if not millions of people through social media” (Harper, 2013). Simply put, hashtags are used not just to make a post look better, but have the direct intent to be noticed and seen by other, unconnected users and through that hashtag make a connection. With this in mind it is important to remember that these posts that are using #Utes are using that phrase or nickname with a purpose, and the aim is to find out what associated terminology is being used that can provide a window into the representation of the Ute Nation.

METHODS

This research is focused on better understanding of what other terminology, visuals and hashtags are circulating in association with #Utes tag and if these keywords and phrases are representative of the wishes of the Utes as expressed in the memorandum
of understanding signed with the University of Utah. I utilized an inductive qualitative approach to collect and analyze #Utes hashtags with accompanying text and visuals. This method ensures that the results are directly generated from the data collected in the study. In this section I will discuss the methodological details of my study, and then provide justification for the collection, analysis and synthesis of data in this research project.

Data

Instagram posts that use the #Utes hashtag are the primary data that will be collected, analyzed and synthesized. This will allow us to begin to find answers to the research question about how the Utes hashtag represents the Ute Nation. A post consists of a captioned visual on Instagram that includes the hash tag #Utes. For the purposes of this study, I collected the entire post, including the hashtag in question, other hashtags, the textual caption and the visual image. These posts served as an indicator for relevancy and significance with Instagram as our social media choice, letting us know if Instagram is being used as a place for self writing and identity creating, or alternately if posts are unrelated to Utes identity. All data points will be recorded in separate categories based on their identification of a hashtag, text or visual.

Collection

All data points were recorded in separate categories based on their identification of a hashtag, text or visual. One method used for this categorization was word frequency lists. This was done by simply reading the captions and hashtags and making notes of other hashtags that were used along with #Utes. A list was also generated for a more formal research method that counted how many times these words or phrases appeared in
contrast to how many unique or individual words were present (Ryan and Weisner, 1996).

To collect the data for this study there was a strict time frame and collections methods. The data that was analyzed were posts or visuals on Instagram accounts that incorporate the #Utes hash tag before and after important University of Utah football games. Athletics was essential in understanding the representation of the Ute Nation when taking into consideration that only the athletics department has permission to use the nickname, with the academic side of the University of Utah using Block U as their logo and name. Only was football game was chosen based on the significance of athletics, and more noticeably football, has had on the debate over cultural Native American appropriation.

The time line for the data collection was a 24-hour period to the last football game of the season on Saturday, November 26th at 5:30 pm MST. This time frame was chosen based on the amount of data points needed to conduct a study and centered around the peak times of the football game, encompassing the sentiments both before and after the results of the game. This methodology also only looked at one game so findings could be sited as either significant, or inconclusive based on the individual posts at that time and surrounding the particular final game of the regular football season. Extending this research to all public Instagram posts using #Utes would limit the extent to which conclusive statements could be made. This is because there is no way to comment on the factors that could not be controlled, or mentioned as limitations at this time. Because of this, any data found would not accurately represent the individuals posting at the time of
the game. These posts will be collected based by first typing in the #Utes in the search engine of my own Instagram account\(^1\).

From there I selected the time frame in which posts will be recorded for data. This would include any posts within the hours of 5:30 am MST November 26\(^{th}\), to 5:30 am MST on November 27\(^{th}\). This puts the game time of 5:30 PM MST on November 26\(^{th}\) right in the middle of the collection period. From there, screenshots from my MacBook air were taken of each section or sections of photos that appear during this predetermined time slots. These screenshots were stored in a folder on my desktop to later be revisited for analysis. After all posts were recorded, a count of how many posts collected was done and divided into number of posts before the game, and number of posts after. This number was recorded in a Google spread sheet.

**Analysis**

Analysis began with a thorough read through of each post. Posts will be analyzed in 30-minute increments so that the researcher does not get tired, bored or lazy. The first stage of this study will be to do a quantitative count of how many hashtags were used total, how many were #Utes. Then, this analysis was extended to the text itself dividing up each caption into singular words or phrases and recording them separately. Visuals will only count as one point of data, but will be counted to record how many visuals there were total. All counts, hashtags, visuals and phrases were collected in a Google Sheets workbook.

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\(^1\) It does not matter that it is a personal account because when using the search engine for a specific keyword it does not only show my friends or connections, it shows everything that has been posted with the #Utes hashtag.
Next, after an initial count has been done a qualitative lens will be used to read through the hashtags, visuals and phrases to group like things into categories. Extension of concepts and constant comparative analysis will be used to compare the data to the categories to determine accuracy in coding the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As the researcher will scroll through and group the data, annotation will be made when a category is formed and data points are put into the category so no overlap happens and an accurate count of words and phrases is maintained. This tactic will be used to make note about how these emerging categories can begin to explain or identify just how the #Utes is correlated and connected to the representation of the Ute Nation, if at all.

RESULTS

Results from the analysis of Instagram hashtags, captions, and visuals yielded a lot of information about what symbols are being circulated around the #Utes hashtag on social media. Results are broken down by each category analyzed: hashtags, captions, and visuals then overall results and implications are given based on complete analysis of all three categories together.

Hashtags

A total of 279 individual hashtags were collected, with many of these hashtags being repeated through posts. Of these 279 hashtags, these were further broken down and regrouped based on their rhetorical likeness, or similarity to each other. A general understanding of the terms was needed to accurately divide data points into groups. For example, hashtags such as: #UrbanMeyer, #Holden and #MaizenBlue are specific
references to coaches, nicknames of opposing teams, and cars. These hashtags are indigenous categories that are based in local terms that may sound unfamiliar or are used in unfamiliar ways (Patton, 1990; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). These indigenous categories became a point of reference for how some themes involving #Utes may not be understood by outside groups. Categories of the data were also determined by number of similar hashtags found in the data points. So while some subgroups have a fairly small number, all groups had to be over 8 posts to be deemed a group of their own. 8 was chosen as a marker for a category existing based on it being the threshold for themes to emerge. There were many words or categories that had from 1-5 data points in it, then a drop off was seen around 5-8, and then emerged again at 8. The smaller categories were not counted because there were so many. No hashtags were thrown out, all unrelated hashtags were grouped in a category considered miscellaneous as these seemingly unrelated rhetorical hashtags can lead to further inquiry about the use of the #Utes hashtag. The main categories that emerged are show below in figure 1.1

![Categories of Instagram Hashtags](image)

Figure 1.1 Categories of Instagram Hashtags
The three most predominant categories of hashtags were Sports, College, and Miscellaneous. A few examples from each category include: Sports-basketball, NCAA, play, College-college, student, collegelife, Miscellaneous-street tacos, missing, sunset. The prevalence of sports and college related hashtags can be correlated to the fact that these data points were collected on the day of the final Utah Football game of the season. More interestingly, the largest amount of hashtags were miscellaneous, which I define as unassociated hashtags in these posts. Some examples of hashtags found in the miscellaneous category include: #tinydogbigworld, #Italy, #limo, #grilled and many more. This suggests that Instagram posters may be using #Utes to create their own online identity, one that may have little to nothing to do with either the University of Utah or the Ute Nation.

Frequency of usage of these hashtags was also taken into consideration, with importance given to what the most used hashtag was between all posts. Figure 1.2 illustrates the most used hashtags of the study.
Figure 1.2 Most Used Hashtags

Not surprisingly, based on the criteria under which to include a data set, #Utes was the most used hashtag, as this was the common tie between all posts. Interestingly, there was a large amount of location or geography based hashtags among the most used hashtags. Examples include: This indicates that the use of the #Ute hashtag was often related to a location like Utah or Colorado, putting emphasis the relationship between the #Utes and the location of the University and the location of the opposing team’s University. It can be seen on this chart that these locations do not reference Native American-based locations, such as the Ft. Duchesne reservation, nor do the most used hashtags have a clear link to Native American culture. These findings suggest that while geographic location plays a role in how the #Utes hashtag relates to Instagram users’ online and offline identity construction, there is still little to no demonstrated knowledge about the Ute nickname’s origin with the Ute Tribe.

Tone of Posts

A final inquiry was done into the overall emotional tone of these Instagram posts that included the #Utes hashtag, with a question of if hashtags, circulating around the #Utes hashtag were positive, negative or neutral. This analysis can contribute to determining if Instagram users were using hashtags in a positive way or promoting misrepresentation of the Ute Nation. These findings can be seen on figure 1.3
Figure 1.3 Emotional Frequencies in Posts

It can be seen in figure 1.3 that an overwhelming majority of the posts were categorized in the neutral category, meaning that there is no positive or negative correlation between the #Utes hashtag and other rhetoric circulating alongside of it. This neither supports nor denies Ridolfos theory of Rheorical Velocity meaning when a user shares #Utes, it is not being changed by social media and the perspective of other users to be used as a positive or negative identifier of the culture and lifestyle of the Ute Nation, but instead according to these findings it has nothing to do with the Ute Nation at all.

*Visuals*

Visuals, or photos, make up the main component of Instagram. Instagram has set itself apart from other social media sites like Twitter and Facebook that rely more heavily on text to communicate a message, by being visual focused. With that in mind, it is extremely important to understand what visuals are accompanying the #Ute hashtag to gain the most understanding of whether posters are using the tag to represent the Ute
Nation. A similar method of analysis was applied to the visuals as was used for the hashtags, with each picture being examined then being summed up to a one or two word phrase of what it was picturing. From there all like phrases and words were grouped into categories, and categories display both numerically and visually to understand what themes were emerging from the visuals. Figure 2.1 shows how these compared to the other categories that emerged from the data.

![Image Content Graph](image.png)

**Figure 2.1 Emerging Image Content**

From this count, the most prominent themes that emerged were categorized as: action sports shots, merchandise and selfies. The category with the most visuals was “action sports shots” at 15 photos which included examples such as these:
Image 1.1: Sports Action Shot

Image 1.2: Basketball Arena

Image 1.3: Game Action Shots
The visual category with the second highest rate of visuals was merchandise with 13 pictures portraying things like helmets, University of Utah gear and food and dress with related logos.

Image 1.4: Trading Cards

The final significant group that emerged from the visual was selfies, or pictures of one’s self either alone or with others. This category had 11 photos in it with many of these selfies being taken at University of Utah football games.
Image 1.5: Fans At Home

What these emerging themes tell us is similar to what we discovered with the hashtag analysis. These results lead us to believe that while there is not a negative association, or visual representation the what it means to be a Ute in an online, social setting, there is however a lack of understanding and a general distancing between the history of the nickname and the online representation. Not a single theme emerged that was in correlation to the Ute Nation, or the history of the tribe, all were commercialized and personalized.

_Captions (text)_

Captions, or the text that is used to explain a visual, is the third and final component of an Instagram post and our data set. Not all Instagram posts have text or captions, with visuals and hashtags being the main components to the social media site. 9 of the posts total had no accompanying text or caption to supply their visuals. So this analysis of the text, and the themes that emerged from it, do not include the entire set of data analyzed for the other two categories.

The first qualitative approach in understanding the text was to discover any indigenous categories or groups that emerged from the text. Eight examples of this “insider word choice” was found in the captions. Figure 3.1 outlines these below.

- Garage is on point
- Two tuff cammed UTes
- At the Big House
- Buffs by 90
- Going to play spoiler
- Sunday Ute cruises
- Buffs clinch the South
- An "H" for Hayes
These terms were deemed as “indigenous categories” based on the additional knowledge needed for someone outside the local group to understand how it represented the accompanying visual or hashtag. These phrases were analysed and set aside from the start, considering that they were unique in that no other captions related. While researchers did not want to throw these out as outliers, it is important to see what groups are using both their own “indigenous category” in congruency with the #Utes and how these overlaps happen.

After these categories were identified and examined they were set aside so that all other words and phrases could be broken down, and grouped into categories just as the visuals and hashtags were. Over 215 indivual words or phrases were found after breaking down the captions. From those 215, all were grouped into 12 sub groups and analysed both in part and then the caption as a whole. Figure 3.2 shows the breakdown of the 12 categories that emerged from the data.

Figure 3.2 Emerging Categories In Text
Actions, emotional response and sports were the top three themes that emerged from the captions and text. Actions are similar to the visual category in which they are considered verbs, commands, and/or terms related to movement. Emotional responses were words and phrases that used descriptive language about their emotions, feelings, or situation. Many of these captions used emotional language to describe sports.

Image 1.6 Young Ute Fans

Not surprisingly, sports was the most prominent theme that emerged from the caption text analysis with 50 of the words or phrases evoking that category. This facilitates the overall theme that sports and athletics is the overall image that comes to mind when someone uses #Utes on Instagram.

Combined results

Overall, these findings point to the conclusion that users identify with being a #Ute in relation to sporting team or names of branded items with a primarily neutral tone. This result emerged directly from the given data and points dramatically to the fact that there is little to no Native American references, and any reference to #Utes has primarily to do with the athletics at the University of Utah. Based on these findings there are three main arguments that can be made about the use of the #Utes hashtag on Instagram posts.
Ultimately, analysis of all three of these data points highlight that while representations may not be negative, there is still little to no understanding of the origination of the Utes nickname. Many might think “no harm, no problem” but the remainder of this results section will break down the findings in three predominant themes that emerged from all three data sets and how it is still a limitation for furthering the Memorandum of Understanding and the education piece called for by the Ute Nation.

_Utes as a commodity_

This theme emerged based on primarily the visuals and hashtags that were analyzed for this research. Many of the posts used #Utes as a way to attract social media users to a page or profile that had no correlation to the University of Utah. These posts used the common social media tactic of using a popular term to gain attention. Some examples of this in visual form can be seen below.

![Image 1.7 Merchandise With Ute Hashtag](image)

This image has no relation to the University of Utah or the Ute Nation in terms of this study. This advertisement for a tattoo parlor is targeted at college students who
might identify as a #Ute, making it a marketing technique but not an insight into representation. Captions that do similar things were found throughout multiple data sets with captions such as, “College gameday leis and lavalavas!” This caption indicated that they were selling merchandise for the game to wear and represent a certain culture and identity, not related to the Ute Nation.

Another interesting insight was the large community surrounding the “Ute” car. This research indicates that it is a certain version of a Ford and owners of this car are proud of it and its brand posting photos such as this.

Image 1.8: Cars with Ute Associated Name

These data points, along with merchandise being an overall theme in both visuals and word repetition lead researchers to believe that the Ute Nation has been dissociated from the nickname and the #Utes hashtag, and it is now used online more for marketing and identification purposes than intended by the University of Utah. So while these uses may not contribute to negative stereotypes it is not an accurate representation of the Ute Nation and it leads to some concern that this same commodification could happen to other aspects of the nickname, and it turn become a monetary, or commercial product more than a relationship between the University of Utah and the Ute Nation. This concern has been addressed with other institutions such as Florida State and their mascot of the Seminole Indian. The U.S. Commission of Civil Rights released a statement arguing
that the use of the Seminole as a mascot was blocking a contemporary understanding of Native people as fellow Americans (Black, 2002). This research indicates a commodification, and appropriation, of a native culture has already been demonstrated elsewhere for various purposes of universities.

#Utes as a divorcing of identity

One of the main goals of this research was to understand how the hashtag #Utes and other components of social media were being used to represent the Ute Nation. As previously mentioned, no negative representations were found mainly because there were no representations at all. While there was an identity subgroup that emerged from the data points it contained identities from #reggae to #gayteen to #asianfamilnight, indicating that these posters have taken a nickname related to another culture and identity and remixed it to apply to their own. #Utes is used in relation to other identity terms which contributes to scholarship that fans take on the Native American nickname as a part of their own identity (Black, 2002). While this may seem harmless, there is still a question raised as if the University of Utah is doing their part in educating their immediate followers and subgroups about what it truly means to be a Ute, if there are no references to the Nation that originated this name.

To go even a step further, the problem is not just that individuals are using #Utes to bolster their own identity, but more importantly that the use of the #Utes hashtag is divorce from the original meaning of Ute. This distancing and separation is worrisome for the University of Utah’s educational mission. The Memorandum was signed to bring benefit to both parties, and while the University of Utah seem to be thriving both in their
commodities and athletics, the identity of what it means to be a Ute seems to be lost in the message. This example below demonstrates how one individual used the hashtag #Utes in a post that correlates more to personal beliefs and tradition than one regarding the history behind the name.

Image 1.9 Scenic Utah Temple Picture with Ute Hashtag

All aspects of this post, from the visual of the Temple, the caption talking about family to the hashtags related to seasons and the time of year they visited Salt Lake point at using the nickname in a construction of personal identity. This identity however gives no homage to where this nickname comes from and how it is required to be used. The research aims to understand why this divorcing has happened and what implications it has which move us onto our third and final theme.

#Utes as cultural appropriation

Some of the major concerns and debate over the usage of Native American nickname and logos stems from the reality that they are misused and appropriated. While the University of Utah has gone to lengths to make the distinction that it is only for
athletics, has a code of conduct associated with it and even started a marketing campaign entitled “Ute Proud” to raise awareness, this data leads us to believe that it has not been effective in shaping the daily usage of #Utes on social media, and in turn in everyday life.

Cultural appropriation can be seen in how the nickname has taken on a life of its own via social media and has aided in the construction of marketing, spatial-self and identification online. We find others like “us” based on what we search out, so when search for #Ute on Instagram we will come across others who are using it similarly; however, none of these usages are an accurate representation.

While the University of Utah may have met the needed qualifications to keep the name with both the NCAA and the Ute Nation, that does not mean that there is not an issue of cultural appropriation present. This research leads us to believe that based on the Memorandum of Understanding, cultural appropriate for personal marketing and use is just as serious as an issue as use of cultural logos and symbols for misrepresentation and stereotyping.

So in many ways we found much more than we were looking for through this research, uncovering a major area of improvement in the educational mission of the University of Utah towards its community.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative research project has aided in better understanding not only the relationship between the University of Utah and the Ute Nation but also in recognizing some previously unknown areas of concerns regarding the rhetoric and its significance circulating around #Utes hashtag While users have appropriated this nickname, they have
done so in applying it to their own identity and culture instead of the original research question concerning if it was being used inappropriately in regards to Native Amerian culture and identity. In conclusion, three main themes emerged from the analysis of the hashtag, visual and caption components of the Instagram posts. The #Utes was being used in a way that promoted commodification, in a way that highlighted a divorcing between the history of the nickname and how it is used today and ultimately set the stage for using the nickname online in a way that constructed a personal identity and one that appropriates the original intent of both the Nation and the University of Utah. This research serves as not only the basis for future research to be conducted on this topic that can contribute to the scholarly debate on the nickname but also serves as an opportunity for other organizations and institutions to use this information to form better relationships and representations of various peoples groups they might work with and represent. I would be interested to see what steps the University of Utah can take to raise awareness and instill pride into this community. Maybe then we will see more #Ute posts that are truly uplifting and representative of the proud nation that lent us their name.

RECOMMENDATION

I would recommend a second study done regarding Instagram posts and the rhetoric surround them as this research is only representative of a small demographic captured and centered around a time of a peak sports moment. Now that themes have emerged it would be interesting to see if it holds true and applies to a second set of data collection, or if these themes are time sensitive to when the data was collected. Future
research recommendations would open up social media to other influential platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat.

Future plans for this research include creating a new marketing campaign to raise awareness on the topic and to reassign the meaning back to the Ute Nation for the use of the #Utes. This would include coming up with new catch words and phrases that can be used in a purely sports, personal, or professional sense that do not appropriate the Ute Nation.

In summary, there are a lot of unanswered question surrounding this unique relationship between the Ute Nation and The University of Utah and its stakeholders and this research along with the Utes Nickname Archival Research Project serve as just the tip of the iceberg of what research can be done and what positive changes can be made for the future years of the University of Utah.
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