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COMES AROUND)**

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THERE'S NO CRYING IN BASEBALL (UNTIL CORONAVIRUS COMES  
AROUND)

by

Jessica Payne

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of Arts and Sciences  
and the School of Communication  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate fan reactions to the NCAA communication around the elimination of NC State from the 2021 Baseball College World Series. NC State was eliminated due to Covid-19 protocols. A content analysis was conducted by looking at posts from various NCAA related accounts on Instagram and Twitter: @ncaabaseball, @ncaa, @ncstatebaseball, @vandyboys, @hailstatebb, and @texasbaseball. Content was analyzed using frames such as Health/Covid-19, Fans, Team Spotlight, Game Update, Elimination, Hype, Merch, and Sympathy. The study concluded that while NCAA accounts ignored the incident and Health/Covid-19 frames altogether, the posts about Health/Covid-19 from team accounts actually gained a lot of attention from fans. Also, Instagram seemed to have a strong influence, which is something that the social media managers of these accounts should not ignore.

*Keywords:* NCAA, CWS, Baseball, Framing, Health/ Covid-19

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Finally, I would like to thank my family for their love and support throughout my educational career.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to all of the student athletes that were directly impacted by Covid-19, specifically NC State Baseball, “America’s Team.” Also, for all of us out here dealing with the mess that we call Covid-19.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>USM</i>	<i>The University of Southern Mississippi</i>
<i>CWS</i>	<i>College World Series</i>
<i>NCAA</i>	<i>National Collegiate Athletic Association</i>
<i>NC State</i>	<i>North Carolina State</i>
<i>VCU</i>	<i>Virginia Commonwealth University</i>
<i>NFL</i>	<i>National Football League</i>
<i>PGA</i>	<i>Professional Golfers' Association</i>
<i>PCR</i>	<i>Polymerase Chain Reaction</i>
<i>HIPAA</i>	<i>The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996</i>
<i>FERPA</i>	<i>The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act</i>
<i>MLB</i>	<i>Major League Baseball</i>
<i>VIP</i>	<i>Very Important Person</i>
<i>NBC</i>	<i>National Broadcasting Company</i>
<i>CBS</i>	<i>Columbia Broadcasting System</i>
<i>ABC</i>	<i>American Broadcasting Company</i>
<i>FOX</i>	<i>Fox Broadcasting Company</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Research Question</i>

## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Covid-19 pandemic was abrupt and uninvited. The whole world came to a jolting halt in a matter of weeks in the spring of 2020. People went from a fully functioning society to being locked in their homes with their families for months upon months. Covid-19 caused people to no longer be able to see each other face-to-face, so video conferencing programs like Zoom took off so that friends, colleagues, and families could communicate. Communication is a necessary function for humans, and when that was taken away people had to adapt the best way that they could. People had to adapt their working environments.

Social media became a necessity to communicate with others and advertise yourself, not only for individuals but for brands, organizations, universities, and sports teams. Whereas before the pandemic sports organizations could use social media as a supplementary way to communicate with their fans, after games were cancelled and in-person events postponed indefinitely, social media became one of the primary ways that teams could get in touch with the people who follow them and care about them.

Although the pandemic continued to dominate society and news cycles, by the spring of 2021 many gatherings had begun to take place again in-person, including athletic events. As athletics started to open back up, the NCAA and universities had to create rules and policies in order to protect themselves, fans, and athletes. Some of these rules and policies were controversial to the public. Athletics is a money making business, so in order to make money, teams need to be competing. These rules and policies were set up in order for sports to go back to normal so that money could be made.

However, these protocols and rules have had an effect on the way that games and matches can be played across all levels of competition, and across a number of sports.

Examples include:

VCU forced out of the NCAA men's basketball tournament the day before its first game; the Cleveland Browns, whose roster and coaching staff were hit by covid-related absences before an NFL playoff game; and golfer Jon Rahm, forced to withdraw from a recent PGA Tour event he was leading after a positive test (Hill, 2021, para. 4).

These forfeitures and withdrawals have an effect on sports organizations and on fans. And during the College World Series competition in June of 2021, the North Carolina State men's college baseball team (NC State) was eliminated from competition due to Covid-19 protocols. This caused a controversy online among fans and sports commentators alike.

This study will focus on how the NCAA and related NCAA teams communicated the elimination of the NC State team from the College World Series due to Covid-19 protocols on social media during the summer of 2021. Specifically, this study will examine social media posts on Twitter and Instagram from related NCAA and team accounts during the days following the CWS controversy.

## Literature Review

### *College World Series 2021 Controversy*

During the Baseball College World Series of 2021, a scandal resulted from the elimination of a team because of Covid-19 protocols. The College World Series (CWS) for baseball is double elimination until the championship which is a three-game series

with the final two teams, meaning that losing two games would eliminate teams from competition until the last two teams reach the final three-game series. The Mississippi State team defeated the University of Texas team to gain their ticket to the championship game, while Vanderbilt and NC State were set to compete to see who would play the winner of the other game (Mississippi State).

Elliott Avent, head coach for NC State said “a few players and an assistant coach had been battling what he called "a bug." The next day, a player tested positive” (Merrill, 2021, para. 12). By Friday, June 25<sup>th</sup> the NCAA had delayed the game a few hours for medical reasons; NC State had about 12 of their 13 available players who had played against Vanderbilt that night (Daniel, 2021, para. 3). NC State had won the first game of the series, but Vanderbilt beat NC State the night of the 25<sup>th</sup>, meaning that because of the double-elimination process these two teams would rematch Saturday to see who went on to the championship. At 1:10 a.m. on Saturday the 26<sup>th</sup> , the NCAA decided to rule the upcoming game as a no contest, eliminating NC State from further competition (Medina, 2021, para.1).

Soon thereafter, athletes went to social media to share their thoughts on how the NCAA handled it. A sports journalist, David Schiele mentions that most if not all the NC State players were probably asleep when this news was announced, and that he could not imagine waking up to that news (Medina, 2021; Schiele, @Deacon\_Schiele, 2021). Emmanuel Acho, former NFL linebacker, also commented on the matter saying that the announcement was “trash” and that it was “low even for the NCAA” (Medina, 2021; Acho, @EmmanuelAcho, 2021). People were very upset because the NCAA had handed Vanderbilt a spot in the championship game by eliminating NC State. This meant that the

Vanderbilt team also got an extra day of rest because they did not have to play the final game against NC State. As a result, many fans began to speculate that the championship should have an asterisk behind it, or that the game should have been delayed until after NC State could quarantine.

There were many things that went into the NCAA decision to eliminate NC State, such as being able to complete the championship before the professional Major League Baseball (MLB) draft, the previously scheduled TV time allotted to the championship games, the money involved with waiting two weeks to start back after the team quarantined (including but not limited to universities having to pay for players to stay in hotels), as well as NCAA Covid-19 policies and the Omaha, Nebraska city and state policies governing the location where the games were played.

Before the CWS competition, the NCAA did have policies set in place for Covid-19. According to those guidelines, vaccinated and unvaccinated players had different sets of rules. These were some of the guidelines for players:

Baseball is considered in the low and intermediate risk transmission level sport category. All members of a team's travel party and game officials are classified in Tier 1. Prior to arrival for those in Tier 1 consists of a negative antigen within one day of arrival, or negative PCR within two days of arrival. Testing upon arrival is required and must quarantine until a test is confirmed negative, then testing every other day while participating on-site. This initial test upon arrival must occur before any practice/competition. All Tier 2 individuals must have a negative antigen within one day of arrival, or negative PCR within two days of arrival. Tier 2 personnel will be tested upon arrival and then will not be tested thereafter,

unless on-site for more than seven days and/or clinical conditions warrant testing. If Tier 2 personnel are on-site for more than seven days, they shall be tested at least once in each seven-day period. Tier 3 individuals, regardless of sport, will not be tested but must complete a daily health screening (NCAA, 2021, p. 56 - 57).

Meanwhile, vaccinated players went by the following guidelines:

For those individuals who are fully vaccinated as well as individuals who are at least 14 days post- infection and within 90 days of the first known date of infection, shall be exempted from COVID- 19 testing and contact tracing.

Masking will be required for those individuals who are not fully vaccinated, and physical distancing will also be required, but will only need to be tested if they have COVID-like symptoms that cannot otherwise be explained by another illness (NCAA, 2021, p. 57).

Despite the explicit detail of these policies, many fans and competitors were upset because of how far along the championship was—NC State was only a game or two away from championship play (Associated Press, 2021). Fans remained upset with the NCAA for their decision.

From the NCAA's perspective, they had to protect themselves because each university and conference has their own Covid-19 policies. In order to hold a championship between different teams and conferences, the NCAA has to set up their own policies to be followed during the events that supersede the policies of the individual conferences and teams. Unfortunately, the NCAA did not do a good job of communicating this scandal to the public or the teams at the time of the elimination.

Giglio (2021) states that “while frustrated by how the NCAA handled certain aspects of the decision, NC State athletic director Boo Corrigan said on Monday in an interview with 99.9 The Fan that the school was treated fairly by the NCAA and that the NCAA followed its protocols” (Giglio, 2021, para. 3). Fans and players were confused, and the way that they confused people could have been avoided if the NCAA would have practiced good communication skills and not left it up to the individual fans to find the policies so that the NCAA could avoid confrontation. The NCAA did have to be careful how they communicated the elimination due to HIPAA and FERPA (which protects college students), but there were ways to point to their policies without revealing personal information about the players and coaching staff involved.

The communication which comes from an organization such as the NCAA and the teams related to it contains messaging not only explicit in the words of the text, but more subtly through larger themes and context, known in the literature as framing.

### *Framing Theory*

Entman (1993) describes framing best when he says that “the concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text” and the “influence over human consciousness is exerted by transfer of information” (Entman, 1993, p.51). Another author, McQuail (2010) defines framing in two different ways. The first refers to framing in terms of content production as the way that “news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists within some familiar frame of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning” (McQuail, 2010, p. 557). The second definition is related to how the public is affected by framing and how the



audience sees the world based on how journalist portray the world and information to them (McQuail, 2010, p. 557).

Framing theory is based on the idea that “an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations,” and that it “refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (Chong, 2007, p.104). Chong (2007) breaks down the steps to learning more about frames in communication. He states that first, the research must identify the issue or event that has occurred. Second, the researcher has to fully understand how public opinion could be affected by the frame of communication. Third, a coding scheme is formed based on the “initial set of frames for an issue,” and finally, once that has happened the researcher can pick a source to use for a content analysis (Chong, 2007, p.106 &107). Chong also explains how frames affect individuals. Chong states that frames can “affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences” (Chong, 2007, p. 109). One might ask how to create a strong frame that will draw in viewers. The key to a strong frame is to “connect a proposal to a positive idea or value that is widely available in the population” (Chong, 2007, p. 116).

de Vreese defines framing as “a process and it outlines an integrated process model of framing that includes production, content, and media use perspectives” (de Vreese, 2005, p.51). He states that “communication is not static, but rather a dynamic process that involves frame-building (how frames emerge) and frame-setting (the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions)” (de Vreese, 2005, p.51). “Frame-building refers to the factors that influence the structural qualities of news

frames;” meanwhile, “Frame-setting refers to the interaction between media frames and individuals’ prior knowledge and predispositions” (de Vreese, 2005, p.52).

Tewksbury and Scheufele discuss the influence that framing has on an audience (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Similar to framing, but not to be confused with it are three other effects that are seen in the news. Those effects are information, persuasion, and agenda setting. Information effects are how news stories can be combined with actual information plus frames. The authors refer to Simon and Jerit (2007), who looked at the use of the words “fetus” and “baby” in abortion procedure articles. The articles were exactly the same; however, some readers read the article with the word “fetus” used, and others had the word “baby” instead. They explained how a single word can alter how one views the text that they are reading (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 53). When the information that media consumers are given is different even in the slightest way, it can alter their mood, opinion, emotions, and beliefs. Persuasion effects is another thing that Tewksbury and Scheufele discusses in that framing can be used to influence an audience. Specifically, “persuasion studies usually involve the presentation of intentionally persuasive content to audiences presumably aware of that intent” (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 54). Tewksbury and Scheufele initially talks about agenda setting effects and states that “framing effects may superficially resemble agenda setting effects, a relationship that has garnered some attention (e.g., McCombs, 2014; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Agenda setting is the process by which audience exposure to news about an issue raises its accessibility (Price & Tewksbury, 1997)” (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 54).

Framing is used frequently to examine media settings, but this study will be specifically looking at how framing is used when communicating sports news, as studies before it have done. For example, framing theory was used to look at how the rape case against the Duke University Lacrosse team in 2006 was framed by the press (Barnett, 2008). In this particular instance, three members of the Lacrosse team were incorrectly accused of raping a woman during a party. Previous research found that it would be beneficial to see how public relation strategies were used in the sports industry to frame a scandalous case such as this. Barnett (2008) outlined a detailed response on how Duke framed themselves as commenting that, “Duke proved itself adept at speaking about its own image and integrity” (Barnett, 2008, p.194). However, Barnett also noted that the university failed to look at the larger issue of rape; Duke put out a statement in an alumni magazine a few months after the incident, and had their public relations team address the relationship between drinking and rape. Barnett felt that the public relations team could have used more credible sources for information and that the university could have spoken more strongly regarding the issue. The university framed itself based off the image that they wanted to keep and did not take enough consideration into the rape accusation itself.

Similarly, framing can shape an individual’s perceptions of athletes themselves. Eagleman “sought to determine what differences exist, if any, in the frames used by the mass media in describing athletes of differing nationalities and racial backgrounds” (Eagleman, 2008, p. vii). Eagleman looked at a proximately “white” sport, baseball, by examining the “best” athletes in the MLB. The results that Eagleman found were very interesting in that stereotypes such as “white athletes’ working harder for success, black

athletes' being naturally talented, Latino athletes as deviant criminals, and Asian athletes as the "other" were maintained over the eight-year time period of the study" (Eagleman, 2008, p. vii). With these results, Eagleman sees that baseball was in fact still using stereotypical frames at this time.

Sports journalists and commentators also use framing. Parker discusses how "framing is evident in televised sporting events" (Parker, 2008, p. 177). This is true for those that view sports updates on social media too. While fans that attend the actual game in person are watching the game live, those that are using a media to watch or stay updated are relying on a journalist or commentator for all of their information. Parker mentions that the commentator or journalist themselves have an influence on how the fans listening to them will react to the athletic event (Parker, 2008). For example, if one were watching a baseball game on the television, and the commentator is talking about how the opposing team's batter "might" have said foul language to the catcher and umpire, this might affect the way that people view this player. The commentator might go on joking about what this player might have said, which could fuel audience aggression towards this player; meanwhile, the commentator realistically is in a box in the stands so he or she has no idea what the player actually said. The commentator is just making engaging conversation on air so that viewers will be entertained. The player could have simply said "good catch" for all the viewer knows. It is all about how the commentators frame it; a person sitting front row at the game in person would know what the player said, and could form their own opinion of him based on what was heard rather than relying on commentators and framing.

*The Sports Industry and Social Media*

During Covid-19 many people in the sports industry had to lean on technology to communicate with teams, programs, and future athletes. This meant that social media became an avenue for communication amongst people in the sports industry even more than it had been previously. In cases where stadiums and other sports venues were not allowing fans in the stands, fans were able to go to Twitter to view live updates on the game. Even before the pandemic, researchers such as Smith, Pegoraro, and Cruikshank (2019) were looking at how fans had been increasingly turning to social media to enjoy games. Li and Xie (2020) explain that “social media has enabled average internet users to share their experiences and opinions online and to let their voice be heard by many others. It also allows marketers to communicate with their customers in a direct yet inexpensive way” (Li and Xie, 2020, p. 16). Social media gives fans an easy way to interact with the game and other fans whether they are at the game or not. Teams can use social media to promote themselves, and they can do so at a minimal cost to the organization.

As the pandemic continued into 2021, this made social media crucial. Social media gave people a way to communicate and enjoy themselves while public gatherings were still limited. This also helped both fans and teams because for many, money was tight and so being able to enjoy sports through social media rather than having to pay for in-person games was a huge win. Hull outlined one benefit of using social media, which was that “some of the broadcasters acknowledged the potential Twitter has to convert online followers into evening news watchers” (Hull, p.250). This means that by using Twitter as a media to connect with audiences online, teams can also potentially gain more actual

followers that may translate into people becoming fans that want to come to games in person or spend money on merchandise.

One issue that comes with the use of social media is professionalism. Reed examines this issue through research, and found that while social media might not have the credibility of the television or traditional news, it offers the same professionalism in a new way that fits today's society and trends (Reed, 2013). Social media is also a great way to offer other activities for fans, such as behind the scenes and VIP events and activities. This can look like setting up an event for alumni or donors, showing highlights from games, or hosting interviews with players and coaches (Clavio, 2011; Zimmerman, Clavio, & Lim, 2011; Lukach, et al., 2011).

While fans and sports business people can use social media, so can the athletes. With new rules regarding an athletes' name, image and likeness, athletes need use social media to their advantage. Athletes need to create a name for themselves in order to get sponsors and therefore make money outside of their athletic contracts. College athletes had been asking for the rules governing their likenesses to be changed by the NCAA; now that they have, players need to take advantage of it. Baysinger (2014) even commented on the issue of an athletes' name, image and likeness in 2014 when he talks about a group of Vanderbilt football players that filed a lawsuit against the ESPN, NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX, and the NCAA in order to get rights to their own image (Baysinger, 2014, p. 4).

#### *Communication During Covid-19*

Covid-19 caused many issues for the world, and changed the way that people communicated both interpersonally, online, and through mass communication. People

were used to seeing and talking with others on a regular basis, but Covid-19 forced people to find other ways to communicate after many daily activities came to a grinding halt in the spring of 2020. Instead of going to the movies with friends, people were having Netflix parties where friends could watch the same movie with friends remotely. de Blasio and Coll-Rubio (2020) note that:

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a communication challenge on a global scale. It forced a redefinition in the communication strategies of companies and media. For several months, crisis communication has become a crucial issue in our society, a society which is witnessing the acceleration (Micó and Coll-Rubio, 2020) of the process of digital transformation in all political, social and economic scopes, including media (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). (de Blasio & Coll-Rubio, 2020, p. 7).

For many countries crisis communication played a crucial role. Governments were using knowledge and skills from past disasters to create content. One example can be seen in the research of Jiménez-Sánchez, Margalina, and Vayas-Ruiz (2020), where they demonstrated that some governments used a “gratitude campaigns targeted to professionals that are fighting against COVID-19 and even to the citizens that are staying home in order to obtain social support. Another frequent objective of their campaigns is the persuasion of people to stay home” (Jiménez-Sánchez, Margalina, & Vayas-Ruiz, 2020, p. 42). This research outlined how many brands have joined in on the campaigns with the government in an effort to convince people to stay at home. Companies started to create new products that were geared to a stay-at-home lifestyle and selling products that will enhance your experience while staying at home.

“Agility” is a word that is often used when looking at whether or not a company has “the ability to adapt and respond rapidly to events and changing conditions” (*Intermedia*, 2020, p. 26). For many companies, with the advanced technology that is available, agility is easy to obtain; however, during the Covid-19 pandemic, smaller companies and “many of the less agile organizations who found the switch to remote working harder seem to have taken the experience as a wake-up call” (*Intermedia*, 2020, p. 26). Depending on how up to date the company is, the location of employees, and number of resources, many companies found it hard to make the necessary transitions that Covid-19 required. Communication, again, is one of the obstacles that companies had to face. How do workers that are being forced to work from home in rural areas gain the appropriate amount of internet access needs to stay in touch with staff? This was an issue for schools as well, and many phone companies provided free internet access to students who are not fortunate enough to have the luxury of WIFI. While efforts have been made to better suit Covid-19 circumstances, it is still important for companies to go back to normal at some point because “in-person social interactions do remain the most authentic and effective. Despite the remarkable effort and creativity to socialize digitally, we should not pretend that digital interactions reach the same level of richness” (*Intermedia*, 2020, p. 27).”

#### *Covid-19's Impact on Sports*

Covid-19 has affected everyone, even athletics and the communication that comes from sports organizations. People travel tens and thousands of miles to watch their favorite sports team compete, but the pandemic meant that long-distance travel was no longer an option. Many games and matches were postponed, and of those that were



allowed to continue, many if not all were not allowed an audience. This played a huge role in sports communication because for sport fans, television and social media became their one and only outlet for sports.

Not only fans were affected, but athletes and coaches had to adapt too. Many college athletes were given an extra year of eligibility. Coaches also had to adapt their strategies with regard to recruiting. With current athletes getting an extra year of eligibility, this meant that coaches did not have as many spots on the roster for incoming students. If incoming students had been promised a spot then some teams had bloated rosters. Recruiting itself was the biggest challenge for many coaches in that recruiting is already too tedious before Covid-19 even came into the picture. Luckily for many coaches' social media and other technology provided assistance. The NCAA had "lifted its ban on texting in 2014, and social media limitations were lifted in 2016" (Miles, Burch, Pedersen, Z., Williams, & Pedersen, P.M., 2020, p. 233). The lift of this ban allowed coaches to be able to interact with recruits more. Coaches "are free to befriend, retweet, and like their posts (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016)" (Miles, Burch, Pedersen, Z., Williams, & Pedersen, P.M., 2020, p. 233). Fortunately, Covid-19 came after the NCAA had lifted this ban, and the generation of athletes that are playing now grew up on technology. Generation Z were the perfect generation for this to happen to, as:

members of this generation struggle with face-to-face communication and lack the ability to recognize nuances or other nonverbal cues (Turner). Generation Z has become accustomed to communicating via smartphone; therefore, utilizing that smartphone to research the college-decision process makes sense from a financial

and resource perspective (Miles, Burch, Pedersen, Z., Williams, & Pedersen, P.M., 2020, p. 234).

The pandemic worked to the Generation Z athlete's advantage. They were allowed to communicate with others the best way that they knew. Miles, Burch, Pedersen, Williams, and Pedersen (2020) also discuss how colleges had to get creative with their graphic content. The authors mention how Tulane had an athlete do an Instagram takeover, and that this encouraged people to follow their page to stay in-the-know. Other social media sites, such as TikTok and Twitter, have also been avenues for colleges to reach out to athletes in unique ways during the pandemic.

The NCAA does have strict rules as to how recruiting is handled. Bylaw 13.6.4 says that official visits for recruits can be no longer than 48 hours. It also says that colleges "can pay for a prospect's (and up to four family members) transportation to and from campus, lodging, meals, and entertainment" (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020, p. 256). The NCAA states in Bylaws 13.6.6; 13.6.7.7 that a recruit's visit should be similar to that of a normal student at the university and should not be fabricated to be more than what a normal athlete at the institution is provided (Corr, Southall, & Nagel, 2020). Due to the lack of time coaches are allowed with recruits, normally universities plan to have recruits come on weekends. This way the recruit does not miss school, and the recruit also gets the full college experience. Most sports hold events on the weekends so this allows recruits to go to games while they are on campus visiting. Social media allowed coaches to fill in the gaps with recruits that Covid-19 left after travel and many campus visits were affected.

Sports programs had a difficult time during Covid-19 with recruiting. Ross (2020) looks at what athletes and coaches found most difficult about recruiting during Covid-19. Ross (2020) interviews athletes Claire Tuggle, Justina Kozan, and Rye Ulett. Each athlete experienced how the recruiting process was overwhelming, and they wished that they could see the campus before committing. Tuggle stressed that the hardest part for her was not being able to meet with the coaches face-to-face. The hardest part for Kozan was not being able to do an in-person campus tour. Ulett had many concerns, the top being “what ifs.” Ulett comments some of her “what ifs” were:

What if I never get to set foot on a college campus before I commit? What if all the college tours are virtual? What if I never get to see how a college coach truly interacts with the swimmers? What if I just have to take these coaches at their word? What if I never get that feeling that I have heard people talk about when they take their college visits and know that this is the fit for them academically and athletically? (Ross, 2020, p. 45).

While many athletes struggled with the recruiting process during Covid-19, so did coaches. Ross (2020) also interviewed coaches Emma Svensson, Neil Harper, Jeanne Fleck, and Jordan Wolfrum. The coaches mentioned many hardships, mainly the issue of not being able to bring the recruits on campus. Harper mentioned that normally he gets time to watch his athletes train and how they interact with other teammates, and he said that now he has to trust that the team will work. Wolfrum and Svensson both mention that they struggle with not being able to give their athletes clarity. Covid-19 left many unanswered questions for both athletes and coaches.

### *Research Questions*

The current study seeks to investigate the interplay between the framing of NC State's removal from CWS play by the NCAA on related social media accounts. In the current analysis, framing refers to the overall tone and theme of a social media post on either Twitter or Instagram. Reactions refers to the number of Likes and Comments on Instagram, and the number of Likes, Comments, and Retweets on Twitter.

RQ<sub>1</sub>: How was the elimination of NC State from the CWS framed on social media?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: Will framing affect reactions on social media?

The NCAA used social media during this time to address fans and the public, and so it is necessary to understand how NCAA accounts differed from official team accounts—which may have taken a different approach to framing their reaction to the incident.

NCAA accounts are the official @ncaa Twitter and Instagram accounts and the official @ncaabaseball Twitter and Instagram accounts. Team accounts are the associated Twitter and Instagram accounts of the four teams that remained in CWS play at the time of the NC State incident: @ncstatebaseball, @vandyboys, @hailstatebb, and @texasbaseball. The following research questions are proposed:

RQ<sub>3</sub>: Will framing differ between NCAA Official Accounts and Team Accounts?

RQ<sub>4</sub>: Will reactions differ between NCAA Official Accounts and Team Accounts?

Additionally, NCAA and associated university teams may have used social media differently depending on which platform they were posting on. These research questions will address the differences between framing and public reactions on Twitter and

Instagram:

RQ<sub>5</sub>: Will framing differ between Twitter and Instagram?

RQ<sub>6</sub>: Will reactions differ between Twitter and Instagram?

## CHAPTER II - METHOD

This study will use quantitative content analysis to assess how the NCAA and other NCAA affiliated organizations communicated the removal of NC State from the CWS during the summer of 2021. Social media outlets Twitter and Instagram will be used as the platforms for content in this study. The social media pages under examination are pages that fans look at frequently for game updates and other information. This makes these pages the prime location for fans to go for information on games such as the NC State game.

### Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis used for this study was a post on either Twitter or Instagram. Instagram posts are a single post made by the account. Twitter refers to posts as tweets, and these tweets were looked at based on the original tweet by the account, and excluded any quoted tweets.

Twitter has a unique way for users to interact with each other. Users have the option to post text, photos, and videos. Users also interact with other posts by hearting, retweeting, replying, or quoting a tweet. This allows for interesting conversations between users. It is important to note that Twitter's "post" are called tweets not post. They are essentially posts, but the social media site calls them tweets to stand out from other sites.

Instagram, on the other hand, has a different set of ways that they do their posts. Posts are called posts. Likes and comments are called likes and comments. Instagram allows you to add stories to your page for people to watch. Stories are just short clips or videos from a user. On Instagram, you can post photos or videos with text to go along

with it. You have to post a photo or video though, that is your only option. You can not post text only. Instagram also gives you the option to post multiple photos and/or videos at once. If any post for the accounts being looked at have multiple photos and/or videos then the researcher will look at all of the photos and make an assessment based on the post as a whole.

### Sampling

#### Twitter:

@ncaabaseball [337,400 followers]

@naaa [1,900,000 followers]

@ncstatebaseball [58,3000 followers]

@vandyboys [185,000 followers]

@hailstatebb [167,2000 followers]

@texasbaseball [98,000 followers]

#### Instagram:

@ncaabaseball [230,000 followers]

@naaa [301,000 followers]

@ncstatebaseball [41,400 followers]

@vandyboys [299,000 followers]

@hailstatebb [133,000 followers]

@texasbaseball [102,000 followers]

The analysis will look at content from the following accounts on both Instagram and Twitter: @ncaabaseball, @naaa, @ncstatebaseball, @vandyboys, @hailstatebb, and @texasbaseball. These social media accounts were chosen based on their relationship

with the event that occurred and their activity on each social media outlet. All accounts were NCAA or NCAA related in some way. Vanderbilt, NC State, Mississippi State, and Texas were the last teams left in the CWS when the event occurred, so that is why they are also included. All accounts had the same handles on Instagram and Twitter. All of these accounts were also verified accounts associated with the appropriate universities, and had a blue check mark to prove it.

Content posted between June 25<sup>th</sup> to July 1<sup>st</sup> will be included in the sample. These dates were chosen because of their proximity to the date of the incident. The following numbers were the amount of posts that were found on each Instagram and Twitter account: @ncaabaseball (357), @ncaa (12), @ncstatebaseball (32), @vandyboys (164), @hailstatebb (229), and @texasbaseball (134).

#### Coding Categories

The researcher looked at how the independent variable affected the dependent variable. Since the researcher looked at framing theory, some of the frames for the independent variable were Health/Covid-19, Fans, Spotlight, Game Update, Elimination, Hype, Merch, and Sympathy. Health/ Covid-19 is a significant frame because this whole event was caused due to it. So, a frame for Health/Covid-19 may look like an account posting a reminder to wear masks in the stands. Fans and Spotlight are frames because these are all people that are going to be at the games. These people might be pictured in posts shared by the accounts. The frame of Sympathy may be seen in posts when a team is sent home or loses a game. Hype, on the other hand, may be a frame that is seen when a team is preparing for a game or has just won a game. Another frame that may be seen is Game Updates, each account is going to keep their followers up to date on what is going

on and how each team is doing. Merch is a frame that is seen in some tweets and post where programs may remind fans to buy merchandise for their team before the game to show support. Finally, Elimination is a frame that might be seen in post when teams are getting sent home from the championship. The dependent variable was the reaction of fans to the NCAA communicating that NC State was eliminated from the CWS. Some dependent variables that were looked at were as followed: social media site used; name of the account the connect was taken from; the number of Likes, Comments, and Retweets; the amount of post during the time period being looked at; the time the post was shared.

### Coding Process

Since the researcher used content analysis as the method for this paper, the researcher did the following process to code the data that was collected. Once the content that the researcher was going to analysis was decided upon, the researcher communicated with another coder in order to establish intercoder reliability. The coders created an Excel sheet where they jotted down the appropriate findings. These findings being, who posted the post, what social media account it is coming from, amount of Like, Retweets, and Comments, time and date posted, and frame that it fits under. The sections of the Excel sheet were the independent variables that the researcher hoped to use to learn how each one might have influenced the dependent variable of how fans reacted to NC State being eliminated from the CWS. These coders did this with 200 posts, and then they used SPSS to make sure that they had intercoder reliability. A threshold of  $\alpha = .80$  level (Cronbach's alpha) is considered acceptable reliability, and the coders had  $\alpha = .995$ , meaning they had acceptable reliability. After establishing intercoder reliability, the researcher finished coding the sample that came out to be 928 posts in total.



### CHAPTER III - RESULTS

There were a total of 928 posts coded within the sample. There were 630 posts from Twitter and 298 post from Instagram, meaning there were significantly more posts that came from Twitter  $\chi^2 (1, N = 926) = 118.78, p < .001$ . Within the 928 total, 559 post were from Team Accounts and 369 posts were from NCAA Official Accounts, also showing significantly more posts from Team Accounts than from NCAA Official Accounts  $\chi^2 (1, N = 926) = 38.90, p < .001$ . When looking at the frames, Hype, Spotlight, and Game Update stood out the most having the top 3 amount of posts under their frames.

Before any data was analyzed, tests for normality were performed on the continuous variables used in the study (Likes, Retweets, and Comments). The data was not normally distributed for any of these variables. Therefore, a Kruskal-Wallis test was employed as a way to examine non-normal data using mean ranks. This was done on Research Questions 2, 4, and 6, where the Like, Retweet, and Comment variables were of interest.

Research Question 1 asked how was the elimination of NC State from the CWS framed on social media? Table 1 shows the findings of this questions.

Table 1

*Framing of Social Media Posts by Account Type*

	Health / Covid- 19	Fans	Spot light	Game Update	Elimin ation	Hype	Merch	Sym pathy	Total
<hr/>									
Official Accounts									
NCAA	5	16	53	61	8	212	2	0	357
Baseball									
NCAA	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	12
Total	5	16	65	61	8	212	2	0	369
<hr/>									
Team Accounts									
NC State	1	0	15	3	0	6	0	6	31
Vanderbilt	0	8	52	23	0	80	1	0	164
MS State	1	11	56	56	0	103	1	1	229
Texas	0	0	66	15	0	49	0	4	134
Total	2	19	189	97	0	238	2	11	558
Overall Total	7	35	254	158	8	450	4	11	927

To answer RQ1, Hype was the most frequently used frame, representing almost half of the sample. Then, Spotlight was the second-most frequently used frame, representing about a quarter of the sample. Game Update was also used frequently, representing about 17 percent of the total sample. The other frames were used far less frequently, where some frames—including the Health/Covid-19 frame—were only used a handful of times.

Research Question 2 asked will framing affect reactions on social media? A Kruskal-Wallis was used to assess this research question. The mean rank for the following frames under Likes can be found in Table 2, and overall there was a significant difference between these means  $H(7, 868) = 144.62, p < .001$ . The mean rank for the following frames under Comments can be found in the table below, and there was a significant difference between these means  $H(7, 927) = 103.35, p < .001$ . The mean rank

for the following frames under Retweets can be found in the table below, and there was a significant difference between these means  $H(7, 629) = 87.19, p < .001$ .

In order to examine where the significant differences were, a Bonferroni post-hoc correction was used to account for multiple comparisons. In this case, the threshold for significance became  $p < .0018$ . A Mann-Whitney test was used for each of the multiple comparisons. There is a significant difference in the Comments between Health/Covid-19 and Fans  $p < .001$ , with there being significantly more Comments on Health/ Covid-19 post than Fans post. There is a significant difference in the Comments between Spotlight and Game Update  $p < .001$ , with there being more Comments on Spotlight posts than Game Update posts. There is a significant difference in the Likes between Fans and Game Update  $p < .001$ , with there being significantly more Likes on Fans posts than Game Update post. There is a significant difference in the Comments and Retweets between Sympathy  $p < .001$ , with there being significantly more Comments than Retweets. A significant difference was found in Likes with Spotlight and Game Updates, with Spotlight posts getting significantly more likes. Also, there is a significant difference in the Likes, Comments, and Retweets for Spotlight and Hype  $p < .001$ , there were significantly more Likes than Comments or Retweets. There is a significant difference in the Comments and Retweets between Sympathy  $p < .001$ , there were more Comments than Retweets. There is a significance in the Likes, Comments, and Retweets between Game Update and Hype, there being more Likes than Comments or Retweets. There is a significant difference in the Likes, Comments, and Retweets between Sympathy  $p < .001$ , there being more Likes than Comments or Retweets. There is also a significant difference in Likes and Comments for Game Update and Elimination  $p < .001$ , with significantly

more likes and comments on elimination posts. Finally, there is a significance difference in the Comments between Hype and Sympathy  $p < .001$ , with there being significantly more Comments on Sympathy posts than Hype posts. Please see Table 2 for framing compared to social media reactions.

Table 2

*Framing of Social Media Posts and Mean Reactions (Rounded)*

	Health / Covid -19	Fans	Spot light	Game Update	Elimin ation	Hype	Merch	Sym pathy	Mean
<u>Twitter</u>									
Likes	1651	966	825	427	1044	1148	602	5537	925
Comments	760	18	14	26	349	30	18	264	34
Retweets	1974	112	117	67	473	199	40	619	160
<u>Instagram</u>									
Likes	10462	13772	15856	13305	14811	11339	none	39553	12668
Comments	1315	165	101	49	517	90	none	690	115

Research Question 3 asked will framing differ between NCAA Official Accounts and Team Accounts? Because both variables were measured at the categorical level, a chi-square was used to test this research question. The test revealed that there was significance in the model  $\chi^2(7, N = 927) = 54.529, p < .001$ . This shows that framing did differ between NCAA Official Accounts and Team Accounts. Please see Table 1 for framing on both Official and Team Accounts. We analyzed what the proportion of each frame was in order to better understand the results. We found that while most of the frames were consistent, Spotlight and Hype varied greatly depending on the type of account. Spotlight posts accounted for 18 percent of the posts from Official Accounts, but 34 percent—almost twice as much—on Team Accounts. Additionally, Hype posts made

up 57 percent of the posts made by Official Accounts, but only 43 percent of the posts made by Team Accounts.

Research Question 4 asked will reactions differ between NCAA Official Accounts and Team Accounts? A Kruskal-Wallis was used to assess this research question because the independent variable was categorical and the dependent variable was continuous, but not normally distributed. The mean rank for Likes for Official Accounts was 435.83, and Team Accounts had 434.39. This difference was not significant  $H(1,868) .007 = , p = .933$ . The mean rank for Retweets for Official Accounts was 329.12, and Team Accounts had 307.34; there was no significant difference between these  $H(1,629) 2.11 = , p = .146$ . The mean rank for Comments for Official Accounts was 526.77, and Team Accounts had 423.39. This was the only value that had a significant difference between these means  $H(1, 927) = 33.09, p < .001$ , meaning that there were significantly more Comments on Official Accounts than Team Accounts. Please see Table 1 for framing results compared to Official and Team Accounts.

Research Question 5 asked will framing differ between Twitter and Instagram. Because both variables were measured at the categorical level, a chi-square was used to test this research question. The test revealed that there was significance in the model  $\chi^2(7, N = 925) = 81.83, p < .001$ . This shows that framing differed between Twitter and Instagram. Please see Table 2 for framing results. We analyzed what the proportion of each frame was in order to better understand the results. We found that while most of the frames were consistent, Game Update and Hype varied greatly depending on the social media outlet. On Twitter, almost a quarter of the sample were Game Update posts (23 percent) while on Instagram these types of posts only accounted for four percent of the

sample. Conversely, Hype posts on Twitter were 40 percent of the sample, whereas on Instagram they represented 68 percent of the sample—a huge proportion compared to all other frames.

Research Question 6 asked will reactions differ between Twitter and Instagram? A Kruskal-Wallis was used to assess this research question because the independent variable was categorical and the dependent variable was continuous. There was a significant difference in these means in both likes and comments. The mean rank for Likes on Twitter was 311.67, and on Instagram, it was 731.95, and there was a significant difference between these means  $H(1, 868) = 505.13, p < .001$ . The mean rank for Comments on Twitter was 365.53, and on Instagram, it was 673.73, and there was a significant difference between these means  $H(1, 927) = 267.67, p < .001$ . Therefore, the answer to RQ6 is that there were significantly more Comments and Likes on Instagram than on Twitter,  $H(1, 868) = 505.13, p < .001$  and  $H(1, 927) = 267.67, p < .001$ .

## CHAPTER IV – DISCUSSION

Covid-19 brought the world to a halt, and when it began to restart, many things were not the same—including sports, competition, and how collegiate tournaments would be decided. Teams and official organizations like the NCAA used social media to attempt to bridge these changes, but the results of this study show that the way that Twitter and Instagram were used might not have been enough to completely address the issues that fans were concerned about—specifically when it came to the College World Series elimination of NC State. The results in this study show that there was not much talk about the incident or any explanation of what happened from Official or Team Accounts. Fans and various athletes took to social media to discuss the incident, but the official and team accounts themselves did not dare to go into detail about what happened for NC State to be eliminated from the CWS, other than just the bare mention of Covid-19.

Overall, it seems like both official and team accounts largely ignored the Health/Covid-19 frame and didn't post about it even though it is the thing that ended up altering the outcome of official NCAA competition. The results indicated that Hype was the most frequently used frame, representing almost half of the sample. Then, Spotlight was the second-most frequently used frame, representing about a quarter of the sample. Game Update was also used frequently, representing about 17 percent of the total sample. These three frames represent what are likely the traditional uses of social media by sports organizations; hyping up audiences, spotlighting players, and updating about the progress of games. The other frames were used far less frequently, where some frames—including the Health/Covid-19 frame—were only used a handful of times. Accounts were

more focused on the players and the game than Covid-19, indicating that both official and team accounts were seemingly trying to ignore a global pandemic and continue on with the CWS competition as though nothing was amiss.

However, there were some differences between posts on the official NCAA accounts and relevant Team Accounts on social media. Spotlight posts accounted for 18 percent of the posts from Official Accounts, but 34 percent—almost twice as much—on Team Accounts. Additionally, Hype posts made up 57 percent of the posts made by Official Accounts, but only 43 percent of the posts made by Team Accounts. This is understandable because Teams would want to spotlight their own players whereas Official Accounts would take a more comprehensive approach to their posts rather than focusing on individual players. And Official Accounts would also want to hype up the entire tournament and get people excited for the competition. In the Game Update frame, a lot of times the post would end up falling under Spotlight because even though the post referenced an update about the game, it was tagged or giving recognition to a player who made a big play.

While Covid-19 was not talked about much, @hailstatebb posted about not having a walk through for fans before the CWS finals in precaution for Covid-19. This was the only team that talks about Covid-19 really other the @ncstatebaseball that mentions Covid-19 due to their elimination. @vandyboys never sympathizes for NC State or gives them condolences after NC State is eliminated, even though Vanderbilt is automatically advanced to the CWS finals.

Within the results, there were very few Health/Covid-19 posts, yet these were the posts with some of the most visceral reactions from fans in terms of likes, retweets, and



comments. Despite having only five posts in Health/ Covid-19 frame, they had a large reaction on both Twitter and Instagram. Sympathy was the same, representing the smallest number posts with the biggest reactions. It is likely that this is because those post were centered around the controversy itself, which was largely ignored outside of these select-few posts.

Other findings suggest that on Twitter, almost a quarter of the sample were Game Update posts (23 percent) while on Instagram these types of posts only accounted for four percent of the sample. Furthermore, Hype posts on Twitter were 40 percent of the sample, whereas on Instagram they represented 68 percent of the sample—a huge proportion compared to all other frames. Twitter was more appropriate for Game Updates because of the ‘live tweeting’ nature of how the accounts were posting. Live tweeting is simply when an account gives live updates of an event that is occurring. Instagram was better for Hype posts because they could easily add a picture of a team or player to get fans excited.

Another interesting finding was that there were significantly more Comments and Likes on Instagram than on Twitter. It seems like although there were far more posts on Twitter, people seemed more engaged on Instagram both in Comments and Likes. Both Team and Official Accounts should be aware of this because it was found that they are focusing on posting more of Twitter when their real engagement with fans is on Instagram. The accounts should think about moving their attention to Instagram to communicate better with fans.

There were significantly more comments on Official Accounts than Team Accounts, which could be due to many reasons, some being the social media managers

for the official accounts probably have more resources and a bigger reach than Team Accounts. Many people follow the Official Accounts because they reach every team; while the Team Accounts are only representing and posting about their own team. Another reason could be that the comments were directed towards the Official Accounts to argue the elimination of NC State, since the Team Accounts did not have anything to do with the decision. It looks like Likes and Retweet saw no difference. The Official Teams perhaps had more Comments because fans were more willing to share they thoughts on the Official Accounts than the Team Accounts that they might support. Furthermore, in this case for fans, it was easier to comment on Official Accounts about the controversy than their Teams Accounts, because many fans blamed the NCAA rather than the teams playing.

Earlier literature indicated that the NCAA and other teams did a poor job at communicating what happened during the CWS (Medina, 2021; Schiele, @Deacon\_Schiele, 2021, Medina, 2021; Acho, @EmmanuelAcho, 2021), and the results here back up those claims; however, the NCAA did not specifically do anything that was wrong, and indeed followed their own protocols regarding Covid-19 and the CWS. The NCAA clearly lay out their Covid-19 protocols in their handbook, and it was each team's responsibility to conform to those protocols and guidelines. Where the NCAA failed was their communication regarding the incident, in which they failed to appropriately communicate with fans that NC State had been eliminated from competition. The NCAA announced the removal of NC State while players were asleep in the early morning. After announcing their removal, the NCAA did not formally thank NC State for participating and post the same elimination post as other teams that had lost games. It was not until

several hours after the announcement of their removal and a post of another team's elimination that NC State was acknowledged by the NCAA. The NCAA did not break any rules, but the communication behind the incident could have been done differently to eliminate some of the confusion that arose.

Smith, Pegoraro, and Cruikshank, (2019) discuss how the world is leaning on technology and social media in order to watch games. Li and Xie (2019) talk about how social media gives people the opportunity to share their experiences and opinions and let their voices be heard. This is shown in the comments fighting the decision as well as the interaction with the few posts talking about Covid-19. The fans are trying to be heard. Hull (2016) is another author that discusses the power that Twitter holds. All social media sites hold power. This can be seen every day, and this was seen when this incident took place because social media went crazy about the decision being made with little to no explanation from the NCAA.

#### Theoretical Implications

Entman (1993) stressed the power of communication and framing, while Chong (2007) talked about the way frames can affect attitudes and behaviors of the audience and how framing can be connect things to positive ideas. With this in mind, the accounts were likely trying to cover up a possible negative reaction from fans when the NCAA removed NC State from competition, with few posts about health protocols or the decision-making process, but rather focusing on Hype and Spotlight posts in order to keep fans in a positive state of mind. Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) emphasize how a single word can alter a view. Additionally, the absence of a single word or topic, such as Covid-19, might alter how the fans view the NCAA and the situation with NC State. The NCAA

might have been taking an “out of sight, out of mind” approach to the controversy by not acknowledging or posting about it on social media. This selection in itself is framing.

Barnett (2008) writes about another communication error in sports. Duke was accused of having athletes that committed rape, while the claim was found to be false, when the university addressed the issue, the university solely focused on their image, failing to mention the issue of rape. This case is similar to the CWS incident in that the NCAA fails to address the issue of Covid-19 or the thought process and decision-making that lead to the elimination of NC State from competition. Parker (2008) even mentions that “framing is evident in televised sporting events” (Parker, 2008, p. 177), and the results here indicate that TV is not the only place that framing is taking place. Social media has become an immediate, personal way for organizations to reach fans and frame their messages. Interestingly enough, Entman (1993) describes framing best when he says that “the concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text” and the “influence over human consciousness is exerted by transfer of information” (Entman, 1993, p.51).

One would think that the Official and Team Accounts would use have used Health/Covid-19 and Sympathy in more frames; however, both of these frames were seen the least. Framing theory says that framing should affect the audience, but the question that is posed here is does the lack of framing Health/Covid-19 and Sympathy affect the audience too. The accounts fail to communicate about the controversy and Health/Covid-19 on their social media, thus leaving fans confused, angry, and demanding for answers. As mentioned above, despite having only five posts in Health/ Covid-19 frame, they had a huge, huge reaction, and Sympathy was the same, those were the smallest number

posts with the biggest reactions. This shows that while Health/Covid-19 and Sympathy frames are not seen enough, they grabbed the most attention from fans, thus having a huge effect on the audience. It seems that the accounts were trying to hide the Health/Covid-19 and Sympathy frames by covering them up with positive frames to get fans to move on from the controversy; however, by ignoring the problem, the NCAA itself seemed to gain a lot of hate, as can be seen in many comments on social media. Interestingly enough, many comments showed that Vanderbilt also got a lot of hate for the incident because they were automatically advanced to the finals.

## CHAPTER V – LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

### Limitations

This study had a few limitations. The study ended up being lop-sided because there was a much larger number of posts on Twitter than Instagram. There were a total of 928 posts that were coded; out of those 928, 630 posts from Twitter and 298 post from Instagram. Another limitation was that out of the 8 frames, only 3 hit over 100: Hype, Spotlight, and Game Update. Hype had the most post that fit into its frame. Since Instagram does not have Retweets, that variable was lop-sided too. Since this study was quantitative, there is no way to catch everything. A critical or qualitative analysis of the same incident and reactions on social media might provide a more nuanced understanding of the issue.

### Future Research

This study showed that social media stands as an important part of sports. One of the most significant frames was Game Updates, during a time like now with Covid-19, social media is the main way that people keep up with news. A question that could be asked in future research is how much attention would be on social media if Covid-19 were not around? This issue gained attention from many famous athletes commenting on the controversy, catching their followers ultimately grabbing the attention of even more people. Would there have been as many people keeping up with the updates online, or would they be actually attending the games in person? These are things that the researcher cannot answer, but it is interesting to think about the impact that Covid-19 has on social media, the more people using it as a form of communication.

Another important thing to point out is the impact that Covid-19 has had on sports, changes in recruiting, time to practice, canceled seasons, etc. All of these things were not expected, but the teams, administrations, and fans have to learn to adapt to the world that we are living in. Covid-19 was the reason that NC State got eliminated. This would not have happened in 2019. It is just something people have to come to terms with.

### Conclusions

Within this study, the researcher was able to answer all of the research questions posed. The researcher concluded that the NCAA might not have done anything “wrong” that could get them in trouble, but they seemed to ignore the incident that happened and Health/Covid-19 frames altogether—thus leaving many fans without accurate information, and feeling confused and frustrated. This can be seen in the posts made from the accounts that focus on the Health/Covid-19 frame which got a lot of reactions from fans on social media. Fans and athletes took to social media to comment on the poor communication and professionalism of the NCAA. While the NCAA ignored the incident and Health/Covid-19 frames, the NCAA and other team accounts tried to redirect the fans attention to more positive frames such as Hype, Spotlight, and Game Update. Additionally, the social media managers of these accounts should not ignore Instagram. It was found that Instagram had a huge influence on the audience. This is something that the social media managers should take a better look at for future posts in order to gain more attention from viewers and fans. There were altogether 928 posts collected as data, only 298 of those post were from Instagram. Which means if social media managers focused more on Instagram than on other social media sites, they might have more of an influence on their audience. With the rise of Covid-19, people have had to adapt, and

communication is one of those things that people have had to learn to do differently. The NCAA should have adapted, but they failed to do that successfully.



## APPENDIX A – CODING INSTRUMENT

Social Media Site:

1. Twitter
2. Instagram

Account:

1. @ncaabaseball
2. @ncaa
3. @ncstatebaseball
4. @vandyboys
5. @hailstatebb
6. @texasbaseball

Date:

[enter as mm/dd/yy]

Time:

[enter as 00:00 on a 24 hour clock]

Likes:

[enter as number]

Comments:

[enter as number]

Retweets [Twitter only, Instagram coded as missing values]:

[enter as number]

Frame:

1. Health/ Covid-19 frame

2. Fans frame
3. Team spotlight frame
4. Game update frame
5. Elimination frame
6. Hype frame
7. Merch frame
8. Sympathy frame

Definitions for each codes:

1. Health/ Covid-19 frame- This post will specifically mention health or Covid-19.
2. Fans frame- This will be when a post is sharing content about fans, e.g. maybe a fan that won a prize during the game or how the fans are huge part of the success of the team.
3. Spotlight frame- This will be a post that gives a spotlight to a specific player, coach, recruit, or staff member. Anything that explicitly says in the captions @personsname or name falls here or deals with the athletes NIL.
4. Game update frame- This will be posts that are posted during the game that provides an update of what is going on e.g. score, big plays, etc. This is NOT a post about events that occur before or after the game such as pre-game announcements or an announcement about a loss or win.
5. Elimination frame- This is a post that is specifically saying that a team has been eliminated from the CWS.

6.Hype frame- This can be pre-game videos, or any content meant to pump up fans and players, this could also be a post for after a win to get fans and players excited.

7.Merch frame – This is any post about merchandise for the school, event, or organization.

8.Sympathy frame- Words of encouragement, disappoint, sympathy, etc. in regards to the teams eliminated, NOT an elimination post but maybe a response to one, or if a team loses, it goes here, but not eliminated from CWS.

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