

Article

Framing Sports Nostalgia: The Case of the New York Islanders' Fisherman Logo Revival Across Broadcast and Social Media

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Abstract

Sports teams increasingly use nostalgia-based marketing to spark fan engagement and boost merchandise sales. Yet these efforts can also provoke backlash, especially when they resurrect contested imagery. This article examines how one such campaign—the New York Islanders' 2015 revival of their controversial fisherman logo—was framed across team broadcasts and interpreted by fans on social media. Drawing on a qualitative textual analysis of television and radio coverage alongside a quantitative content analysis of 563 tweets, the study reveals a divide between institutional messaging and grassroots reaction. While team broadcasts emphasized charity and sentimental appeal, fan discourse was notably more critical, mocking the jersey's design and recalling past failures. By positioning nostalgia not only as a branding asset but as a reputational risk, the article contributes a novel perspective to debates about commercialization, mediatization, and fan co-production in sports. It also demonstrates the value of mixed methods for analyzing how branding narratives are negotiated in real time.



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1. Introduction

Nostalgia-based marketing has emerged as a powerful trend in professional sports (Scola and Slavich 2024). By evoking memories associated with a team's past, retro advertising and promotions gain positive media attention, energize the fan base, and provide new sources of revenue (Dwyer et al. 2020; Scola and Gordon 2018). The National Hockey League has capitalized on sentimentality with outdoor games such as the Centennial Classic and NHL 100 Classic in 2017 and "Reverse Retro" jersey campaigns launched with Adidas in 2020 and 2022 (Price 2017; Rosen 2017; Wyshynski 2022). The Original Six teams that made up the NHL from 1942 to the league's expansion in 1967—the Boston Bruins, Chicago Blackhawks, Detroit Red Wings, Montreal Canadiens, New York Rangers, and Toronto Maple Leafs—have especially leaned into legacy iconography in merchandise (NHL Public Relations 2023). Meanwhile, newer franchises such as the Anaheim Ducks, Florida Panthers, and Tampa Bay Lightning have revived colorful designs from the 1990s (Ledra 2020). Sales of retro gear have proven lucrative for both leagues and apparel companies: In 2022, Fanatics reportedly spent USD 250 million to acquire Mitchell & Ness, a leading producer of vintage NHL jerseys, and the heritage-branded Winter Classic in 2023 set new records for game-day concessions and online retail sales (Kosman 2022; Wyshynski 2023). However, for as much enthusiasm as throwback jerseys can generate, they also carry

risk. Many nostalgia-based uniforms have been mocked by fans and media alike, perceived as unattractive, inconsistent with the team's brand, or evoking losing eras (Breech 2025; Licciardi 2024).

These tensions were especially apparent in 2015 when the New York Islanders revived a controversial logo as part of a one-night promotion (Cyrgalis 2015). In a case that illustrates the competing forces in nostalgic sports branding, the Islanders skated in warm-ups wearing a fisherman logo that had last appeared on their jerseys during two dismal seasons from 1995 to 1997 (Kimelman 2022; see Figure 1). The team hoped the promotion would drive attendance and spark sales of fisherman logo caps and shirts for sale on the arena concourse for the first time in nearly two decades (Best 2014). The Islanders also justified the fisherman logo's return as an altruistic endeavor, auctioning off the jerseys a few weeks earlier to benefit a children's charity (Klopsis 2015; NHL.com 2015). However, the logo had an infamous past that threatened to undercut goodwill: In the mid-1990s, Islanders fans unflatteringly compared the fisherman to the mascot for a frozen seafood brand and held rallies to pressure the team to abandon the jersey (Hirshon 2018). Several news outlets, including Bleacher Report, CBS, *Sports Illustrated*, and Yahoo, called it one of the worst hockey logos ever (Gretz 2015; Leahy 2014; *Sports Illustrated* 2015; Zaldivar 2010).



Figure 1. Islanders players warm up in jerseys featuring the fisherman logo on 3 February 2015. Photograph by Irene Jedrlinic Hirshon.

The Islanders' decision to revive the fisherman logo underscores a conflict in nostalgia-based marketing between commercialization and mediatization. Commercialization refers to the increasing entanglement of sports with market logics, where team identity and heritage become commodified assets (Winell et al. 2023). Mediatization, meanwhile, describes

how sports are shaped by and through media, with broadcasters and social media users serving as powerful agents of framing (Ličen et al. 2022). These dynamics profoundly influence how fans interpret symbolic gestures like throwback jersey promotions. The diversity of fan and media reactions reflects the delicate balance teams must strike between commercial appeal and cultural meaning. It also highlights the shift toward participatory culture, where fans no longer passively consume branding but help define and reshape it through remixing, critique, and creative circulation (Kassing 2023). Understanding how these forces interact requires close attention to both official representations of nostalgia, such as game broadcasts, as well as spontaneous fan discourse.

Despite the ubiquity of throwback jersey promotions across professional sports, little research has examined how these events are framed by the media or interpreted by fans. This study provides novel insights by investigating how the Islanders' 2015 revival of the fisherman logo functioned as a nostalgia-based marketing strategy—and how that effort was received across both official broadcasts and grassroots fan discourse. The case illustrates how nostalgia can simultaneously serve as a branding asset and a reputational risk, offering broader perspective into how retro campaigns are negotiated between institutions and audiences within a mediatized sports environment. Drawing on a qualitative textual analysis of radio and television broadcasts from the night of the promotion, alongside a quantitative content analysis of social media posts by fans, reporters, bots, and the team itself, this article explores how the event was framed and interpreted in real time. By situating the promotion within conversations about nostalgia, commercialization, mediatization, and fan engagement, the study contributes to sports historiography while offering generalizable insight into the contested nature of brand identity in sports.

2. Background

2.1. Modern History of Sports Promotions

Sports teams try to drive attendance by offering promotions such as throwback jerseys, fireworks displays, and giveaways of shirts and bobbleheads (Montieth 2022). As early as 1992, *The Seattle Times* labeled sports promotions “the rising superstars of the business world” with the ability to “draw huge crowds” (Williams 1992). By 2012, a study found that Major League Baseball promotions could have a greater impact on attendance than team performance, ticket prices, or weather (DeSarbo et al. 2012). In the minor leagues, teams have gone to extremes—from *Desperate Housewives* Night to Vasectomy Night—to attract media attention and distinguish their brands (Associated Press 2002; Silverman 2012).

Yet promotions hinge on more than a one-time bump in attendance or publicity. They affect long-term brand equity, the set of associations that shape consumer loyalty and purchasing behavior (Aaker 1991). Poorly planned promotions have drawn widespread criticism or even led to physical harm, as when a ten-cent beer night in Cleveland in 1974 and a disco-burning promotion in Chicago in 1979 devolved into riots (Sports Illustrated 2014). Even seemingly innocuous promotions can backfire. In 2003, the Islanders faced national embarrassment on ESPN after inviting fans dressed as Santa Claus to walk on the ice—only for some of them to rip off their red suits, reveal Rangers jerseys underneath, and start a fight (Caldwell 2003).

2.2. Throwback Jerseys

Among promotional initiatives, throwback jerseys stand out as especially impactful. While the player names and numbers on jerseys change frequently due to trades and free agency, retro designs assure fans of a timeless look (Segal 2015). Teams rarely release itemized sales figures, but third-party coverage offers some insight into the commercial performance of throwbacks. In 2015, when the Islanders auctioned off the fisherman

warm-up jerseys, one sold for more than USD 3000 (Klopsis 2015). The rollout of the NHL's "Reverse Retro" jersey series in 2020 accounted for roughly 30% of international NHLShop.com sales during its launch window (Williams 2020). Despite a USD 224.99 price tag, the Washington Capitals' vintage "Screaming Eagle" jersey for superstar Alexander Ovechkin sold out online within minutes (Oland 2020). By 2024, one market analysis estimated the global market for vintage hockey uniforms at USD 1.38 billion, with a projected compound annual growth rate of 6.1% through 2033 (Patel 2024).

While throwback promotions can boost revenue, they are not without reputational risk. Many have been criticized for unattractive esthetics, problematic historical associations, or brand incoherence (Breech 2025; Lengel 2015; Morelli 2011; Padilla 2015). Like the Islanders, the Arizona Coyotes revived a mid-1990s jersey in 2015—only for a former player to admit in an interview that his teammates used to complain, "I can't believe we have to wear this thing" (Brown 2015). The NHL's "Reverse Retro" campaign in 2020 reintroduced several polarizing logos with mixed results. The Anaheim Ducks brought back their 1995 "Wild Wing" emblem, featuring a cartoon duck in goalie gear, sparking renewed debate about its Disney-inspired aesthetic (Stephens 2020). Meanwhile, the Colorado Avalanche reopened the wound of the franchise's relocation from Quebec by wearing the logo of their Canadian forebears, the Nordiques, drawing criticism from fans and media who viewed the gesture as a commodification of lost heritage (Cadorette 2020). Reviving old jerseys poses unique risks for teams that have changed their names due to cultural pressure—such as the Cleveland Guardians (formerly Indians) and Washington Commanders (formerly Redskins)—as doing so can undermine efforts to move beyond racially insensitive histories. These cases reveal that nostalgia-based marketing is not merely a stylistic exercise but a form of cultural storytelling that can affirm or fracture team identity.

The Islanders' decision to revive the fisherman logo illustrates the commercial and cultural stakes of nostalgia-based marketing. When the fisherman debuted in 1995, the team was not merely adding a new look to its wardrobe but fully replacing its beloved original logo, a stylized map of Long Island that had been worn since 1972, including the team's run of four consecutive Stanley Cup championships in the early 1980s. Opposing fans mocked the new crest's resemblance to the mascot for Gorton's frozen seafood by chanting "We want fish sticks!" The team deteriorated on the ice, posting a 51–91–22 record over two seasons, while dysfunction plagued the front office, culminating in the sale of the franchise to a fraudulent owner who was later imprisoned (Hirshon 2018). The logo was discarded in 1997 and banished from team branding until 2015, when the Islanders celebrated their farewell season at Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum, their home for 43 years, before relocating to Brooklyn (Kreda 2015). With a playoff-caliber roster and renewed nostalgia for franchise history, the Islanders deemed it safe to revive the fisherman logo, albeit for a single night and only on warm-up jerseys.

2.3. Sports Promotions and Social Media

Social media, with its enhanced accessibility and interactivity, has become a valuable source for understanding how fans and commentators respond to nostalgia-based sports promotions in real time. Marketing scholars have found that user engagement on social media can amplify the visibility of promotions through sharing and word-of-mouth (Chae et al. 2017; Kozinets et al. 2010; Yang and Wang 2015). These dynamics also shape how sports promotions are received (Buarque 2015; Colapinto and Benecchi 2014), particularly given the influence of fan-driven discourse in the online sports landscape (Martin 2012). These digital traces offer insight into how audiences interpret and reconstruct the past when teams invoke historical imagery. In this study, the researchers examined the discourse

surrounding the Islanders' revival of the fisherman logo, analyzing how the promotion was framed and received on the platform then known as Twitter, now called X.

3. Materials and Methods

This study sought to evaluate the impact of the Islanders' fisherman logo promotion. Of course, a major indicator of a promotion's impact is ticket sales. During a season when the Islanders sold out 27 of 41 regular-season home games, the fisherman logo promotion drew 14,704 fans on a Tuesday, about 1500 shy of Nassau Coliseum's capacity, for a game against the respectable Florida Panthers, a team with a record four games over .500 ([Hornick 2015](#); [ESPN 2015d](#)). By comparison, a larger crowd of 15,608 fans came to Nassau Coliseum the following Tuesday, when no promotion was held, for a game versus the lowly Edmonton Oilers, a team 15 games under .500 ([ESPN 2015c](#)). Based on attendance, then, the promotion appeared to be ineffective.

Other factors, such as the reception of the nostalgic promotion on radio and television broadcasts and social media, also determined its impact. Guided by sports branding literature, this study addressed three research questions.

- RQ1: Did the radio and television broadcasts cover the fisherman logo promotion positively?
- RQ2: Did social media posts evaluate the fisherman logo promotion positively?
- RQ3: How would the coverage of the fisherman logo promotion on the radio and television broadcasts compare with evaluations of the promotion on social media?

To evaluate the impact of the promotion, this study employed a two-phase, mixed-method design ([Creswell 2009](#)). Findings from a qualitative textual analysis of broadcast game coverage were compared against the attitudes and ideas from the public through a quantitative content analysis. This approach enabled direct comparison between official and fan-driven discourse. The study underscores the value—and difficulty—of comparing institutional broadcasts with spontaneous, decentralized fan commentary, especially without access to a team's internal marketing metrics or throwback jersey sales data.

4. Results

4.1. Textual Analysis of Radio and Television Broadcasts

To address the first research question, a textual analysis examined the Islanders' radio and television broadcasts for the game that featured the fisherman logo promotion on 3 February 2015 ([Bauer 2015](#); [Gallagher 2015a, 2015b](#)). The broadcasts aired on WRHU 88.7 FM, the radio station of Long Island's Hofstra University, and the regional television channel MSG Plus, known on screen as MSG+. The coverage spanned six and a half hours, including the television pre-game show and radio post-game show.

No broadcast transmits a raw event in its authentic form ([Hall 2000](#)). Similarly, Islanders broadcasts require encoding by producers and decoding by audiences. Media texts are polysemic and interpretations vary depending on culture, experiences, and psychology, so no textual analysis can be considered definitive ([Fiske 1987](#); [Morley 2004](#); [Real 2011](#)). What is indisputable, however, is that Islanders broadcasts contain frames. [Entman \(1993\)](#) describes framing as the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality that makes them more salient. Framing holds that no media representation can be value-free because even unintentional frames, such as the presence or absence of words and images in a broadcast, can reinforce facts or judgments ([Entman 1993](#); [Woo 1996](#)).

The textual analysis identified eleven meaningful frames about the fisherman logo promotion, eight on television and three on radio. The frames generally focused on the logo's acceptance by players and fans.

The televised pre-game show *Visa Islanders Game Night* was the only portion of the broadcasts on air while the Islanders were skating in the fisherman jerseys (Gallagher 2015b). The program included footage of several players wearing the logo, including all-star captain John Tavares, all-star goaltender Jaroslav Halak, and top defenseman Johnny Boychuk. Boychuk and centers Casey Cizikas and Brock Nelson were seen smiling, fostering the impression that they enjoyed wearing the jersey.

Eighteen minutes into the pre-game show, host Shannon Hogan made the first aural reference to the fisherman logo. The program returned from a commercial break with footage of two male fans wearing fisherman jerseys on the arena concourse. The fans were wearing the authentic fisherman jerseys from the mid-1990s, which included the fisherman logo, disjointed lettering on the nameplates to evoke the rolling sea, a teal ocean wave across the bottom, and lighthouse patches on the shoulders. Meanwhile, the warm-up jerseys for the promotion included only the logo and disjointed lettering. As the two fans were shown on the pre-game show, Hogan said, “Lots of fisherman jerseys, you’ll notice, this evening, because the Islanders were doing a little charity bit. They actually wore the fisherman jerseys for part of warm-up.” Hogan’s comments conveyed that fans embraced the logo’s return.

Hogan then poked fun at her broadcast colleague, longtime Islanders analyst Stan Fischler, whose older, bearded face has drawn teasing comparisons to the fisherman. The exchange between Hogan and Fischler marked the only sustained televised discussion of the logo on the night of its return.

Hogan: And every time I see a fisherman jersey, it makes me smile because I get to think of you, Stan Fischler. You bear a resemblance to, you know, the fisherman a little bit.

An on-screen graphic of the logo transformed so the fisherman’s face was replaced by Fischler’s.

Fischler: Holy ma. . . [Fischler seemed to be starting to say, “Holy mackerel.”]

Hogan laughs.

Fischler: That’s. . .

Hogan: Oh, it’s perfect.

Fischler: Oh my. Is that . . . that’s incredible.

Hogan: That’s incredible.

Fischler: I’ve got to get royalties on this thing. I mean, this is. . .

Hogan: I think you should.

Fischler: It’s about time.

The most significant reference to the fisherman logo on television stressed its comical resemblance to Fischler, framing the logo as fodder for jokes. Notably, the segment did not include historical footage from the fisherman era or interviews with former players who wore the logo.

In the closing moments of the pre-game show, Hogan made another meaningful reference to the logo. As cameras showed players wearing the logo, Hogan stressed the altruistic aspect of the promotion: “I know a lot of the fans don’t love these fisherman jerseys, but they have a cool retro vibe, and the players are wearing them today for charity.” She appealed to fans who disliked the logo to consider the charitable factor.

On the MSG+ game broadcast, four references were made to the fisherman logo, all involving shots of fans in the stands (Gallagher 2015a). The broadcast twice showed fans wearing fisherman memorabilia, leading Hogan to remark that “lots of fans [are] getting into the spirit” and the Islanders’ play-by-play commentator, Howie Rose, to observe that

the logo was “in vogue” that night. At another point, the camera showed two fans wearing fake blue-and-orange beards that evoked the bearded fisherman. Rose said, “That’s really getting into the spirit of the fisherman jersey thing tonight.” Lastly, a shot of a fan in a different jersey, unveiled by the Islanders in 2007, inspired Rose to say, “That is not the jersey of honor tonight” (NHL Uniform Database 2022).

Meanwhile, the WRHU radio broadcast made three references to the promotion (Bauer 2015). Early in the game, longtime play-by-play commentator Chris King noted that the jerseys were auctioned for “a good cause,” emphasizing the charitable component as Hogan had. King said that “a lot of folks got a kick out of” seeing the logo but added that the Islanders had abandoned it because “it wasn’t a good idea.” The radio broadcast also included two pre-recorded interviews in which players were asked about the logo. In the first clip, Islanders winger Michael Grabner said that he had “heard a lot” about the logo “from the fans over the last few years” and expressed curiosity about the fans’ reaction to the promotion. Later, Islanders captain John Tavares implicitly acknowledged the varying opinions about the logo by saying, “It was a different time . . . whether it was good or bad.” But, he added, “We’re proud to be Islanders and with whatever jersey we wear we’re proud to represent the people here and the community and the organization.”

Together, these examples from the team broadcasts signal the generally positive tone used to present the throwback promotion. Only twice did the broadcasts include explicit negative value judgments, when Shannon Hogan said that “a lot of the fans don’t love these fisherman jerseys” and Chris King said that the logo “wasn’t a good idea.” Explicitly positive comments included references to the logo’s “cool retro vibe,” the fisherman being “in vogue” that night, and the charitable justification for reviving the logo. Game broadcasts tend to include extended discussions relating to promotions, but the coverage did not dedicate much airtime to the logo besides superimposing Stan Fischler’s face onto the fisherman’s in the television pre-game show.

4.2. Content Analysis of Social Media Posts

Tweets were collected on the day of the fisherman logo promotion and the next day, 3–4 February 2015. This time period was selected to reflect an exhaustive scope of tweets about the promotion, from anticipation before warm-ups to in-game observations to post-game comments. Twitter users have created conventions such as # for hashtag trend finding, and Islanders fans use the hashtag “#isles,” the team’s nickname. Via Twitter’s search function, the researchers looked for any of three combinations of keywords: “#isles” and “fisherman,” “islanders” and “fisherman,” and “islanders” and “#gorton’s.” Each of these keywords referred to the Islanders and/or the fisherman logo promotion. The 563 tweets collected were posted by a wide range of users, from ordinary people to Islanders-affiliated accounts to reporters to bloggers to bots. Coders identified the above information about the users by verifying each user’s biography. Table 1 illustrates the frequencies of each type of user.

Table 1. Frequency of Twitter posts by user affiliation.

	Frequency	Percent
Ordinary people	309	54.9%
Islanders-affiliated	9	1.6%
Reporter/media professional	69	12.3%
Sports blogger	50	8.9%
Bot/other	126	22.3%
Total	563	100.0%

A coding sheet, included as Appendix A, was generated by constructing categories for analysis that cover the concepts set forth in the research questions (Neuendorf 2002). The tweets were coded according to the categories below:

- Comparison to broadcast coverage: This category focused on whether Twitter users posted in reaction to the radio or television broadcasts of the game.
- Response to broadcast: This category refers to whether the tweet was a response to the radio or television broadcasts. Coding results enabled the researchers to compare variables such as tone, stereotypes, negative history, acknowledgment, charitable nature of event, and retro (further defined below) with results from the textual analysis.
- Evaluation/success of event (evaluation categories): In relation to the second research question, categories were formulated to analyze how Twitter users assessed the success of the fisherman logo promotion.
- Tone: This category referred to the positive or negative reception of the promotion (neutral, positive, negative).
- Acknowledgment of event: Due to the immediacy of social media, scholars have posited that mentioning an event by name in discourse increases the likelihood of its successful reception (Velasquez 2012). Therefore, this category considered whether the user acknowledged the occurrence of the promotion.
- Event's cause: Related to acknowledgment, event's cause explored whether users mentioned the charitable cause of the promotion, adding to the Islanders' brand equity.
- Share/word-of-mouth: Also related to acknowledgment, this category focused on the widespread accessibility and dissemination functions of social media. Sharing and word-of-mouth (WOM) are significant factors for the successful implementation of an event or campaign (Chen and Huang 2013; Phillips 2013). The category looked at whether the tweet was a responsive or shared post of another user's tweet (Greer and Ferguson 2011).
- Stereotypes toward Islanders: As Buarque (2015) noted, a sports brand is influenced by stereotypes in terms of performance, prestige, and monetary success. This category refers to stereotypes about the Islanders, coded for both positive (e.g., the team's championships in the early 1980s or positive stereotypes of Long Island) and negative (e.g., as an unsuccessful, unpopular, and small-market team compared to the rival New York Rangers, or negative stereotypes of Long Island).
- Negative history. This category referred specifically to the team's poor performance in the era when the fisherman logo was worn from 1995 to 1997. Coding was conducted for both subtle and specific references to negative history.
- Retro/nostalgia. This category examined whether tweets described the promotion with terms such as "retro," "nostalgia," and "return," or referred in a nostalgic manner to the mid-1990s Islanders teams that wore the original fisherman jerseys.
- Participation. This category, a key measure for the promotion's impact, looked at users expressing their intent to participate in the event by buying tickets to see the fisherman logo or encouraging others to buy or wear fisherman jerseys.
- Unattractiveness. Reviving an esthetically unpleasant uniform is risky, so tweets referring to the jersey as ugly were key for evaluating the promotion's impact.

After a training session on the definitions of each category, the two coders independently analyzed 56 randomly selected tweets. Comparison of the two coders' agreement yielded a Krippendorff's Alpha of 0.87. The coders discussed results and reached consensus on discrepancies. Each coder analyzed half of the remaining Twitter posts.

To understand how the evaluation categories correlated to overall attitudes of the tweets, researchers performed chi-square tests for frequencies of categories in association with *Tone*. By doing so, the researchers could discern which categories were more closely

linked to positive or negative attitudes and analyze tweets from different user types to assess the success of the fisherman logo promotion. As shown in Table 2, all but one evaluation category yielded statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) results. *Stereotypes* ($\chi^2(2) = 29.778$), *Negative history* ($\chi^2(2) = 148.317$), and *Unattractiveness* ($\chi^2(2) = 49.967$) were strongly correlated with negative tone, and *Retro/Nostalgia* ($\chi^2(2) = 173.870$) and *Participation* ($\chi^2(2) = 80.059$) were strongly correlated with positive tone.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of evaluation categories in relation to Twitter post tone.

	Tone			χ^2	df
	Positive (n = 121)	Neutral (n = 256)	Negative (n = 186)		
Stereotypes	1.7	0.4	7.4	29.778 ***	2
Acknowledgment	43.0	70.7	50.5	32.439 ***	2
Cause/charity	0.3	1.2	0.5	4.218	2
Share/WOM	32.2	60.2	34.4	39.968 ***	2
Retro/nostalgia	64.5	56.3	28.5	173.870 ***	2
Negative history	5.8	3.1	45.2	148.317 ***	2
Participation	25.6	2.0	2.2	80.059 ***	2
Unattractiveness	0.0	0.8	14.5	49.967 ***	2

Note: values are in frequency terms (percentages); *** = $p < 0.001$.

To specifically address the second research question, another chi-square test was conducted on coding decisions regarding categories associated with evaluating the impact of marketing events and how they compare in terms of two factors: *affiliation* and *tone*. These factors were important in gauging how ordinary users differed in comparison to other kinds of Twitter accounts (*affiliation*) in responses and whether the evaluation categories differ in terms of attitudes (*tone*). A statistical significance of $p < 0.05$ was used.

Table 3 indicates that every type of user not affiliated with the team displayed more negative tone. No hockey fan (i.e., ‘ordinary user’) mentioned the charitable cause (*Cause/Charity*) of the promotion ($\chi^2(5) = 27.759$, $p < 0.001$), while all users other than Islanders-affiliated accounts mentioned the retro and nostalgic nature (*Retro/Nostalgia*) of the fisherman logo ($\chi^2(5) = 24.939$, $p < 0.01$). Only the Islanders-affiliated accounts posted tweets that displayed *Participation* ($\chi^2(5) = 12.477$, $p < 0.05$). Twitter users acknowledged the promotion (327 posts; 58.1%), but only 8 (1.4%) of 563 tweets indicated prior knowledge of the charitable cause. This was a significant difference from the broadcasters.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation of evaluation categories in relation to Twitter user affiliation.

	Affiliation					χ^2	df
	Ordinary User (n = 301)	Islanders- Affiliated (n = 9)	Reporter/Media Professional (n = 66)	Sports Blogger (n = 48)	Bot/Other (n = 112)		
Tone (positive)	27.9	55.5	21.2	16.7	8.9	53.924 ***	5
Tone (negative)	38.5	11.1	39.4	27.1	26.8	53.924 ***	5
Stereotypes	5.0	0.0	1.5	8.3	1.8	6.374	5
Acknowledgment	50.2	77.8	59.1	64.6	88.4	35.047 ***	5
Cause/charity	0.0	11.1	7.6	2.1	0.9	27.759 ***	5
Share/WOM	39.5	44.4	53.0	35.4	73.2	34.593 ***	5
Retro/nostalgia	53.1	33.3	48.5	56.3	47.3	24.939 **	5
Negative history	20.9	11.1	19.7	20.1	10.7	17.337	5
Participation	9.0	22.2	10.6	4.2	1.8	12.477 *	5

Note: values are in frequency terms (percentages); * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$.

The analysis also shed light on important aspects for successfully executing and promoting an event. While posts were mostly neutral (256 posts; 45.5%), results skewed more negative (186 posts; 33%) than positive (121 posts; 21.5%). All user types except for those affiliated with the Islanders showed a more negative tone than positive. The discrepancies were largest with categories such as *Stereotypes*, *Acknowledgment*, *Retro/Nostalgia*, *Negative history*, and *Participation*. For instance, 58 (10.3%) posts made a subtle reference to negative history and 41 (7.3%) specifically mentioned it. Though few, tweets mentioned only negative stereotypes (22; 3.9%), not positive ones. The stereotypes and historical references associated with the fisherman logo were mostly negative, alluding to both the poor performance of the team in the era as well as the unattractiveness of the jersey.

4.3. Comparison Between Team Broadcasts and Fan Social Media Discourse

To investigate whether Twitter's reaction to the fisherman logo promotion differed from the radio and television broadcasts, frequency statistics were analyzed on coding decisions regarding categories that were comparable to results of the textual analysis.

Twitter users displayed acknowledgment of the promotion (327 posts; 58.1%), but only 8 (1.4%) of 563 tweets indicated knowledge of the charitable element. This was a significant difference from the broadcasters, who framed the promotion as charitable. Moreover, only 17 of 563 (3%) of tweets responded to the television broadcast. This finding suggests that the broadcast had little influence on the Twitter discourse.

The tweets did align with the broadcast coverage in one category: nostalgia/retro. Close to half (48.8%) of tweets mentioned nostalgia and the retro nature of the jersey to some degree, 36.9% of them making a neutral/positive historical reference and 11.9% mentioning the esthetically pleasing nature of the retro look.

5. Discussion

Given the impact of nostalgia-based marketing on the brand equity of professional sports teams, this study sought to evaluate the impact of the fisherman logo promotion on radio and television broadcasts and on social media. The textual analysis found the broadcasts generally framed the promotion in positive terms, but the frames were brief and infrequent. The most salient frame involved the mocking of the logo's similarity to a television analyst. No references were made to popular players and fond moments from the fisherman era, which might have stirred nostalgia among fans and sparked throwback merchandise sales. However, the textual analysis demonstrated some successful aspects of the promotion. Teams can encourage positive framing of throwback promotions on game broadcasts by complementing the return of a throwback logo with throwback prices. The Islanders offered discounted USD 25 tickets to fans wearing apparel with the fisherman logo, and three of the eight television frames involved shots of fans wearing fisherman jerseys, creating the impression that the fan base embraced the promotion even though the fans on the broadcasts may have worn the jerseys just to secure cheap admission ([New York Islanders 2015b](#)). In addition, auctioning the fisherman warm-up jerseys for charity made the promotion more difficult for radio and television broadcasters to criticize.

The content analysis considered how coding categories associated with the impact of a sports promotion (*Acknowledgment*, *Cause/Charity*, *Share/WOM*, *Stereotypes*, *Negative history*, *Retro/Nostalgia*, *Participation*) appeared in light of each Twitter post's *Tone* and the user *Affiliation*. Analysis with *Tone* affirmed that most of the evaluation categories indeed correlated with positive or negative reactions toward the promotion, as discussed in the literature ([Buarque 2015](#); [Chen and Lee 2014](#); [Greer and Ferguson 2011](#); [Grunig 2009](#); [Killian and McManus 2015](#)) and operationalized by the researchers. Stereotypes and historical references associated with the fisherman logo were mostly negative, alluding to both the

poor performance of the team in the era as well as the unattractiveness of the jersey. On the other hand, for some, the fisherman logo fostered positivity from a sense of nostalgia and approval of the retro look. Perhaps due to this, a portion of the Twitter public did indicate their willingness to participate in the event, either by purchasing tickets or wearing the fisherman jersey.

However, two key categories believed to be measures for success on social media, *Acknowledgment* and *Share/WOM* (Greer and Ferguson 2011; Tuten and Solomon 2013), did not show a significant difference between positive and negative tone. The study found that statistical significance was achieved due to a high frequency of neutral posts associated with each coding category. Although smaller in overall frequencies, mentions of the promotion's charitable cause showed similar trends. In fact, for each of these categories, the tone of the posts was slightly more negative. While people did mention their knowledge of the promotion on Twitter, their content on social media had more negativity. This finding points to an important lesson for planning and evaluating the success of a promotion on social media: the sheer amount of information distributed or shared does not mean success (Ashley and Tuten 2015; Killian and McManus 2015; Vardeman-Winter and Place 2015). A team can accurately measure social media performance only by incorporating other positivity-related concepts into social media discourse. In the Islanders' case, the team ought to have focused more on branding the event with nostalgia, retro look, and means to accommodate consumer participation.

Analysis with user affiliation also shed light on important aspects for successfully executing and promoting an event. All user types except for those affiliated with the Islanders showed more negative tone than positive. The discrepancies were largest with categories such as *Stereotypes*, *Acknowledgment*, *Retro/Nostalgia*, *Negative history*, and *Participation*. From the team's standpoint, this finding emphasizes the importance of understanding fans' attitudes toward a promotion and creating content tailored to such opinions. Proper research should be conducted before a promotion to alleviate potential negativity and reinforce items that might bring positive reactions. In light of the sporadic and unpredictable nature of social media reactions (Deuze 2006), a team should closely monitor user conversations as they occur, so that possible issues and negative perceptions can be addressed in real time (De Landtsheer and De Vries 2015; Grunig 2009).

The tweets illustrated how the lackluster attendance at the game provided fodder for fans to critique the promotion. Posts included "Not even half full at the Coli so far. The attendance must be a throwback to the Fisherman days as well #isles" and "It's fisherman jersey night and the crowd reminds me of the ones here during those days. Empty barn #isles." The Islanders could have had more success at the turnstile and on social media by accentuating the logo's revival. One fan tweeted excitement about the prospect of seeing television analyst Stan Fischler dress as the fisherman. With Fischler already in the arena to broadcast the game, the Islanders could have invited him to judge a fisherman lookalike contest between periods to generate social media buzz and create another opportunity for the broadcasts to convey fans embracing the revival of the logo.

Teams can also maximize promotions by incorporating popular former players. The study found that fans associated the fisherman logo with the Islanders' former star winger Zigmund Palffy of Slovakia, who scored 91 goals and 86 assists in the two-year fisherman era (Hockey Reference 2022). On the day of the logo's revival, the Islanders tweeted a link to a video with some of Palffy's goals and an interview with defenseman Lubomir Visnovsky, who is also Slovakian (New York Islanders 2015b). Visnovsky called the jersey "nice" and said that it was "cool" to wear the same logo that Palffy did. Shortly after warm-ups, a fan tweeted the hashtags "#welcometomychildhood #bringbackpalffy," demonstrating a desire to see Palffy as part of the promotion. To create positive talking points for the broadcasters

and fans on social media, the team could have honored Palffy with a bobblehead giveaway or induction into the Islanders Hall of Fame. Between January and April 2015, the Islanders welcomed back former players on four nights and filled the arena to more than 99% of capacity each time (ESPN 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d; New York Islanders 2015a). The Islanders could have completed the mid-1990s feel by reviving their goal horn, goal song, and mascot from the era.

Teams that revive unpopular jerseys should consider shifting the focus from the jersey itself to the period when it was worn. While some fans dislike the fisherman logo, they may feel nostalgic about the mid-1990s more broadly. Many sports teams have hosted '90s nights with features such as 1990s prices for beer and hot dogs, pogs playing, a Pokémon contest, grunge music, tributes to *The Simpsons* and *Beverly Hills 90210*, a ceremonial first pitch by *All That* star Kel Mitchell, and a concert by the rapper Vanilla Ice (Brooklyn Cyclones 2014; Capitol Broadcasting Company 2013; Grand Rapids Griffins 2015; Highkin 2013). For a pop culture reference with particular significance for Long Island audiences, the Islanders could have played Billy Joel's 1990 song "The Downeaster Alexa," whose allusions to Long Island fishermen supposedly inspired the fisherman logo (Botta 1995).

Close to 40% of reporters and media professionals tweeted something negative about the promotion. Media relations are imperative prior to a promotion's execution to disseminate information to various key publics, especially if the potential for negative reception exists (Swann 2014). The media professionals and reporters were responding to a promotion without much context from the Islanders. Carefully preparing and curating information distributed to news media can enable teams to better engage with their fans (Păun 2009). Considering that broadcasters attempted to cover the event in a positive light, the missed opportunity for managing the flow of information and coverage of the news media could have generated a synergy across platforms enhancing social media discourse (Vardeman-Winter and Place 2015). While the team broadcasts attempted to frame the promotion through humor and charity, fan reactions on social media largely bypassed these institutional cues, instead emphasizing the logo's association with on-ice failure and esthetic ridicule. This disconnect illustrates how broadcasters and fans operate in parallel but often divergent framing processes, reinforcing the contested nature of nostalgia in a mediatized sports environment. Taken together, these findings point to broader patterns of commercialization and mediatization in sports, where nostalgia is crafted to drive merchandise sales and engagement, yet often reinterpreted or resisted by fans on digital platforms (Ličen et al. 2022; Winell et al. 2023).

This study identifies further opportunities for scholarly exploration. Future research might consider the extent to which the reception for a sports promotion hinges on the team's performance in that game. On the night of the fisherman logo promotion, the Islanders fell behind 3–2 and the logo became an obvious scapegoat. Fans tweeted, "So are we calling this game cursed by the fisherman yet? #Isles"; "This game sucks just as much as the fisherman Jerseys. . . fitting #isles"; and "I hope I never see the fisherman again. Wake up and get back on track, #isles." The blame intensified after the Islanders lost. Tweets included "Curse of fisherman!!!! #Isles"; "I blame the fisherman jerseys on that #Isles loss"; "This loss is all on that good-for-nothing Fisherman logo. #Isles"; and "Blame the fisherman jersey. And all of you who bought or wore one. #isles." While teams cannot guarantee victory on the day of a promotion, they can increase chances of winning and putting fans in a positive frame of mind by scheduling promotions for games against weak opponents.

Since the 2015 promotion, the fisherman logo has experienced a revival. The Islanders wore it again for six games during their 50th anniversary season in 2022–2023 (Kurz 2022), and in 2024, their minor-league affiliate in Bridgeport, Connecticut, adopted it as a primary logo (Fornabaio 2024). The logo's return to the ice provides the opportunity for a companion

study comparing the radio and television broadcasts and social media posts in 2015 against its public and media reception in the 2020s. To better gauge the impact of throwback jersey promotions, scholars should collaborate on studies with teams and apparel companies, agreeing to share their findings in exchange for proprietary information such as the number of throwback jerseys sold in the aftermath of a promotion. In addition, interviews with fans attending a throwback promotion may provide valuable insight into how the reception for a jersey is affected by the framing in the off-air game presentation, such as turnstile giveaways, appearances by former players, scoreboard videos, and songs played over the public address system.

6. Conclusions

This study, while centered on the revival of a single throwback logo promotion, contributes to deeper understandings of nostalgia-based marketing as a contested strategy in professional sports. The findings demonstrate how team broadcasts and fan communities on social media actively participate in framing, interpreting, and at times challenging institutional efforts to evoke history. Ultimately, this case illustrates how retro campaigns are shaped by both commercial imperatives and the mediatized dynamics of participatory fan culture. These dynamics reveal that nostalgia-based promotions are not merely visual callbacks but cultural negotiations over meaning, memory, and identity.

By bridging institutional messaging and grassroots discourse, this study offers a multidimensional view of how nostalgia is produced, challenged, and recontextualized in contemporary sports. The findings highlight the role of fans as co-producers of meaning and reveal the limitations of top-down branding strategies that may become even more pronounced in an era of influencer marketing and emerging platforms such as Threads.

In doing so, this research provides novel insights by analyzing nostalgia not only as a branding asset but also as a reputational risk. Prior scholarship, such as [Scola and Slavich \(2024\)](#), has focused almost exclusively on nostalgia's benefits in shaping fans' attitudes and purchasing decisions. The Islanders' controversial revival of the fisherman logo shows how such campaigns can provoke backlash, revive unwanted associations, or fracture fan identity—dimensions largely overlooked in existing literature. By critically examining both broadcast framing and fan responses to this promotion, the study advances theoretical understanding of how nostalgia operates in a commercialized and mediatized sports environment and enriches debates about institutional control and fan agency.

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Appendix A Coding Sheet

1. Originality (0 = non-original; 1 = original comment, including quoted tweet with some original comment)
2. Author affiliation (1 = ordinary person; 2 = Islanders-affiliated; 3 = reporter, news outlet, NHL.com-affiliated; 4 = sports bloggers; 5 = bot; 6 = other)
3. Response to broadcast: Was the tweet written in response to the TV broadcast? (0 = no; 1 = yes)

4. Tone: Negativity or positivity of the tweet (0 = neutral; 1 = positive; 2 = negative)
5. Stereotypes: Stereotypes of Long Island or of the Islanders, e.g., the Islanders as perennial losers or bush league (0 = none; 1 = positive; 2 = negative)
6. Humor: Humorous nature of the tweet (0 = no humor; 1 = humor)
7. Cause/Charity (0 = no mention of charity as the cause for the fisherman logo promotion; 1 = mention of charity)
8. Share/WOM of event promotion: Quoting tweets and/or reposting links from the Islanders, news media, or blogs promoting the return of the jersey; not simply discussing the event (0 = no share/WOM; 1 = share/WOM)
9. Retro/Nostalgia: (0 = no mention; 1 = any reference to the historical nature of the promotion, including words such as “retro,” “vintage,” “throwback,” and “return,” or allusions to mid-1990s Islanders teams; 2 = any positive commentary on the esthetics of the fisherman jersey, including desire to buy one)
10. Participation: Self-participation by wearing the fisherman jersey or buying game ticket to see the fisherman logo promotion as well as encouraging participation of other fans to wear the fisherman jersey or buy tickets to the fisherman logo promotion (0 = no mention; 1 = mention of participation)
11. Reference to negative history (0 = no mention; 1 = any subtle negative reference to the historical nature of the promotion; 2 = any specific negative reference to the historical nature of the promotion, e.g., referencing bad players or bad memories from the mid-1990s period when fisherman jersey was worn)
12. Superstition (0 = no mention; 1 = positive; 2 = negative)
13. Outcome of game: Does the tweet reference the Islanders’ poor performance in the game or the fact that they lost? (0 = no mention; 1 = mention of outcome)
14. Acknowledgment of promotion: Does the tweet directly acknowledge the one-night return of the fisherman jersey, e.g., “The Islanders will wear their fisherman jerseys tonight”? (0 = no; 1 = yes)
15. Disappointment: Does the tweet express disappointment that the fisherman jersey was worn only during warm-ups and not the game itself/worn permanently? (0 = no mention; 1 = mention)
16. Putting things in perspective: Does the tweet advocate against negative overreaction to the fisherman jersey promotion? (0 = no; 1 = yes)
17. Voyeurism: Does the tweet express amusement in watching others react to the fisherman jersey promotion? (0 = no; 1 = yes)
18. Unattractiveness: Does the tweet describe the fisherman jersey as unattractive in an esthetic sense? (0 = no; 1 = yes)

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