DOWN, SET, LIKE? A STUDY OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

AND SPORTS FANDOM

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Sports in the 21st century have become popular across multiple industries, and a major boon to a television industry dealing with increasing audience fragmentation. So an understanding of fans' behavior is important to all parties. This study, an online survey consisting of 242 responses, examined fandom and its relationship with time spent using social networking sites and found no statistical correlation. Six uses and gratification factors obtained: human connection, network content, distraction/amusement, social integration, social surveillance, and active entertainment. The low comparative saliency of the social integration factor suggests that perhaps fandom is distinct from other ways of identifying with similarly-minded individuals (e.g. political and/or religious affiliation), or that perhaps fandom as a factor is less than sufficient to explain how/why sports fans use social networking sites.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Two highly divisive topics that, according to conventional wisdom, one must not bring up in polite conversation are politics and religion. Spending any amount of time on a sports message board site, or perhaps even on Facebook on weekends during football season or during the baseball playoffs, leads one to believe that the topic of sports might be making a case for a third category.

At a time when professional sports like the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), and the National Basketball Association (NBA) continue to grow in popularity, and when National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic conferences' membership are being shuffled around due in part to television ratings and the increasing value of TV contracts; sports have seemingly never been bigger business. The last three NFL Super Bowls, including the 2013 game, (XLV, XLVI, and XLVII) are the three highest-rated broadcasts in television history; while audiences for other programming continues to fragment and scatter (Collins, 2013). The 2012 NBA Finals garnered the series' highest average rating since 2004, tying the 2011 Finals (NBA.com, 2012; O'Connell, 2012).

NCAA Division 1 sports have undergone major shifts in members' conference affiliations over the last two to three years, with conferences negotiating larger and larger broadcast television deals being viewed as a major driver (Chi, 2012). These deals are expected to play a major role in determining the future(s) of smaller conferences, as revenues from television deals exceed revenues from ticket sales in many schools' cases (Chi, 2012; Wolken, 2013). Several conferences (the Big Ten, and Pac-12) and even some individual schools (University of Texas-Austin, Boise State University) have either started their own networks to

bring in TV money, or in the case of Boise State, have retained rights to some of their own sports broadcasts (Martin, 2012; SI.com, 2012).

Broadcast rights for the upcoming Word Cup Soccer tournaments for both English and Spanish broadcast rights sold for record amounts of $425 million and $600 million, respectively. Fox Sports paid $100 million more for the English rights for the 2015-2022 World Cup matches than ABC/ESPN paid for their current rights deal; and the Spanish rights cost Telemundo nearly double what Univision paid in their current deal (Longman, 2011).

It should be easy to see that sports have become a big boon to media industries, especially television, and it would certainly be understandable for media companies, or companies/organizations even associated with media, to want to understand sports fans and how they utilize various media technologies, including social networking sites. For many Facebook users, Saturdays and Sundays during football season mean that a deluge of sports-related posts are inbound to their news feeds Not long after a post touting a particular team's good (or bad) fortune pops up, a debate or smack talk pops up in response. It would appear at first that sports fans might use these new social media platforms in distinct ways.

This study's definition of social networking sites (sometimes abbreviated as SNS) aligns closely with Boyd and Ellison's (2007), whereas: "construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007 p. 211). It's worth noting that message boards, newsgroups, and similar sites were not included here as social networking websites, as these sites are distinct from social networks as they only offer one distinct service, whereas social networking site can incorporate message boards into the broader content. SNS provide a sense of community for its users, similar to

being part of a group, as these sites enable people to keep in touch with their friends and meet new people that may (or may not) share their interests. Being a sports fan can provide similar benefits as well, namely a sense of belonging and camaraderie (Zillman, Bryany, & Sapolsky, 1989). An important parallel can be drawn between religious and political groups and being a sports fan. Identifying oneself as a fan of a particular team can provide a person with a sense of identity, of belonging to a certain social group, similar to identifying with a particular religious denomination or political party might (see Cartwright & Zander, 1960; Forsyth, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 1991). Much like individuals in specific religious or political groups, research shows that sports fans perceive themselves and other fans of their team as sharing an important group identity (Reyson & Branscombe, 2010). Studies of social networking use for religious (Armfield & Holbert, 2003; Nyland & Near, 2007) and political reasons (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009) exist, but curiously, studies exploring relationships between social networking and sports fandom are lacking. This exploratory study centers on how self-identified sports fans utilize social networking sites.

Literature Review

Uses and Gratifications Theory

A brief historical overview of the uses and gratifications model used in this study is necessary here, as these earlier theoretical studies provide a foundation for more current Internet studies, including this one. In the years following World War II, a radio research group under the direction of Paul Lazarsfeld, commissioned what has been considered the original uses and gratifications study. The researchers, led by Herta Herzog, looked at why people tuned into radio serials (what we would now refer to as soap operas); programs like *The Goldbergs, Hilltop House, The Romance of Helen Trent, The O'Neills,* and *Woman in White.* Perhaps the most

telling results of this particular study revolve around the reasons listeners gave as to why they listened to these programs:

- Emotional release: Listening to other people's problems helped listeners feel better about their own lives; or helped listeners identify with the characters' problems.

- Wishful thinking: The characters' circumstances inspired listeners to imagine "what if my life were more like that?"

- Advice: What to do about relationship problems, how to cope with aging, and how to handle certain social situations, among others, (Herzog, 1944; Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

This study in particular marked the beginning of uses and gratifications research. The central question in this model is why. Why do people use media and what do they use it for (McQuail, 2005)? Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) state that studies within this model are concerned with:

> (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities) resulting in (6) need gratifications, and (7) other consequences" (p.510).

Various researchers have tried to classify these various "needs" into categories. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a classic example (Maslow, 1970). Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1974) categorized these needs into the following five areas: cognitive (gathering knowledge, understanding), affective (emotionally pleasurable or aesthetic experience), personal integrative needs (strengthening credibility, confidence, status), social integrative needs (contacts with family, friends) and tension release (escape and diversion) (Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass, 1974 p.166-167). Lull (1980, 1990) proposed a framework for classifying the more social uses of mass media where uses may be *structural* or *relational*. *Structural* uses include providing background noise, companionship, or entertainment, and/or structuring time, conversation, or

activity. *Relational* uses serve several purposes: facilitating communication, providing opportunities for developing (or avoiding) interpersonal connections, offering opportunities for social learning, and allowing individuals to express their competence, or perhaps dominance, within a given arena (Lull, 1980, 1990). Building off of this analysis of social uses of media, Anderson and Meyer (1988) argued that as socially situated beings, we are continually assessing and making sense of our environments and lives. In our modern society, media are an accepted and almost-natural part of our environment. Therefore media use is so intertwined with social actions that people interpret media messages by accommodating them into their worldviews and everyday lives (Anderson & Meyer, 1988).

In the 1990s, Perse and Courtright devised a list of 11 basic psychological needs, which includes items like 'to relax," "to be entertained," "to forget about work or other things," "to have something to do," "to learn things about myself and others," "to pass the time particularly when I'm bored," "to feel less lonely," and "to let others know I care" (Perse & Courtright, 1993). A study by Robinson and Martin (2008) concerns television watching and happiness. A prevailing view at the time was that television made viewers happy, but their results called this view into question. Robinson and Martin concluded that television either causes people to be less happy as it is "a pleasurable enough activity with no lasting benefit" or that since people with vastly differing social skills can watch it, "television is a refuge for people who are already unhappy" (p. 570-571).

It's important to note that in uses and gratifications research there tends to be a distinction made between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained. In their study of TV news, Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn (1981) found that measures for gratifications obtained were very predictive of viewing choice among three news programs, whereas gratifications

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sought measures were not. The authors argued that "gratifications sought from a particular medium, content type, and so on will be influenced by gratifications obtained from the various components of that medium" (p. 475) and that subsequent viewing of various programs and content types will further influence the gratifications obtained from them (Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn, 1981). In other words, a viewer who watches several programs of a certain type (for example, sports-talk programs) will already have certain expectations and/or gratifications in mind when they view another program of that type. Davis and Woodall (1982) expanded on this by observing that *perceptions* of gratifications obtained were more important as a predictor than *actual* gratifications obtained. Subjects in their study had indicated that they watched TV news in order to learn about what's going on in the world. A comprehension test revealed that the subjects had actually learned very little, but still the perception of learning about the world remained (Davis & Woodall, 1982).

A closely related theory to the uses and gratifications model is Reiss' sensitivity theory (Reiss, 2000). The basic premise of this theory is that "people pay attention to stimuli that are relevant to the satisfaction of their most basic motives, and they tend to ignore stimuli that are irrelevant to their basic motive" (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004, p.363). Reiss and Wiltz go on to detail what they term as the 16 basic motives (curiosity, independence, status, social contact, vengeance, honor, idealism, physical exercise, romance, family, order, eating, acceptance, tranquility, power, and saving). These basic motivations influence what people do and pay attention to. The person paying attention doesn't have to directly experience the emotions that satisfy these desires, but can experience them vicariously, like through a movie or a television show, or even through the postings of their social networking friends.

Uses and Gratifications and the Internet

The Internet (including social networking sites) is still comparatively young relative to other media, so it's no surprise that the study of its uses is young as well. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) examined three topics: 1) computer-user motives for using the Internet; 2) how antecedents (i.e., contextual age, unwillingness to communicate) and media perceptions (i.e. social presence) relate to Internet motives; and 3) how Internet antecedents, perceptions, and motives predict behavioral and attitudinal outcomes of Internet use (i.e. amount and types of Internet use, duration of Internet use, Internet affinity, and Internet satisfaction). Papacharissi and Rubin identified five motives that would remain relevant in subsequent work: interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. Users who found interpersonal interaction rewarding tended to be more mobile, be more satisfied with their lives, were less anxious with face-to-face communication, and used the Internet more for seeking information and entertainment, as opposed to interpersonal utility. Conversely, those who were more anxious with face-to-face communication (and hence found interpersonal communication to be less rewarding) were more likely to use the Internet as a functional alternative for interpersonal utility and also to fill time (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

Recchiuti (2003) obtained similar results from a study of computer-mediated communication (CMC), specifically e-mail, instant messaging, and online chat rooms. The three CMC forms shared five common uses: task-related, social-related, offline, online, and long distance. Recchiuti found motives for use that were very similar to other uses and gratifications Internet studies; namely interpersonal utility, escape, entertainment, pass time, information seeking, and convenience, with information seeking, entertainment, and interpersonal utility being held in common across all three forms of CMC studied. Each form of CMC had unique

motives: convenience for email, companionship and anonymity for instant messaging, and chat room benefits for users (Recchiuti, 2003). The differing motives are indicative of the uses and gratifications approach, which dictates that people utilize different channels because they are motivated by different reasons (Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass 1974). Recchiuti states "The Internet is no longer a single channel of communication; it now has many different channels involved in it. The unique attributes of these channels give rise to different motives and uses" (Recchituti, 2003, p.130), which indicated that other forms of CMC (such as social networking) should be studied separately in order to ascertain the differing uses and gratifications obtained by the particular form's users.

Similarly to Papacharissi and Rubin, Recchiuti found that users who are lonely, less satisfied with face-to-face communication, and/or who find communication to not be particularly rewarding spend less time utilizing chat rooms and similar services, as indicated by a positive correlation between loneliness and time spent using CMC. Recchiuti suspects this is likely because people who are lonely can better express themselves on the Internet rather than face-to-face (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Recchiuti, 2003). Recchiuti's results lend credence to Papacharissi and Rubin's idea the CMC can be used as a "functional alternative," or perhaps even a substitute for interpersonal interaction (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Recchiuti, 2003). Subsequent research on social networking sites (which can be seen as the latest form of CMC) substantiated the idea of the Internet being a form of social interaction a key component of this study (see also Bumgarner (2007), Joinson (2008) Raacke & Bonds-Raacke (2008)).

Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade (2004) criticized uses and gratifications studies on the Internet as incomplete, as they had not identified Internet-specific gratifications. The authors thought that, in coherence with the content and process gratifications model discussed earlier,

Internet users might be motivated by the enjoyment of the browsing/surfing process itself (process gratifications) whereas users of specific web sites might be motivated by a desire for a specific type of content offered by the site (content gratifications). In a study of AOL users, Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade uncovered and confirmed a third uses and gratifications category exemplified by the Web: social uses.

Similarly, Reiss and Wiltz (2004) proposed several social motives (social contact, social status, acceptance, order, power) to explain why people view certain programs, but were careful to distinguish what they termed as motives from uses and gratifications. Their sensitivity theory model connects the media experience to their basic motives but unlike the classic Uses and Gratifications model, doesn't link the gratification obtained to increased overall satisfaction, but rather the basic motive that is gratified to the specific joys/satisfactions of that specific motive. Examples of social uses and gratifications uncovered by Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade include chatting, interaction with people, and meeting new friends (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004, p. 273). These social uses and gratifications have become a major focus in studies of social networking sites as well as an integral component to this study.

Uses and Gratifications of Social Networking Sites

In a study of social networking sites' impact on adolescents, Valkenberg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) concluded that the more the individual frequented friend networking types of sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace, Friendster where the primary aim is to encourage members to establish and maintain networks of friends), the greater the likelihood his/her social status and well-being were impacted (Valkenberg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Raacke and Bonds-Raacke's 2008 study of the uses and gratifications of Facebook and MySpace users concluded that users must be satisfying personal and/or social needs. For example, popular uses and gratifications

such as "to keep in touch with old friends," "to keep in touch with current friends," and "to make new friends" indicated that users were meeting a "friend" need. Similarly, uses and gratifications such as "to learn about events," "to post social functions," and "to feel connected" indicated that users were meeting a need by using the site as a source of information (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008, p. 171).

Bumgarner (2007) examined why college students use Facebook and how the site fulfills their various needs. Bumgarner points out that social networking websites, Facebook included, give young adults a way to build and/or maintain their friendship networks by being able to connect with people both inside and outside their geographic area; thus making it easier to connect with and join groups (Bumgarner, 2007; O'Murchu, Breslin, & Decker, 2004). In a study of UNC-Chapel Hill students, Bumgarner found eight motivations for using Facebook, in order of their commonality: social utility, directory, diversion, voyeurism (keeping tabs on people from afar), herd instincts (everybody else is using it), collection and connection (amassing, organizing, and connecting to friends), personal expression, and initiating relationships (Bumgarner, 2007). Bumgarner notes that social utility and directory are likely to be more applicable to Facebook than other social networking sites, because Facebook was more centered on colleges (as opposed to open to all like MySpace) at the time the study was conducted. The structure of Facebook could also explain, Bumgarner speculates, why "initiating relationships" was so uncommon; college users are more likely to already know a lot of other users on their college network. "Initiating relationships," " voyeurism," "diversion," "personal expression," and "collection and connection" could very well be more common among users of other social networking sites (Bumgarner, 2007).

Joinson (2008) also looked solely at Facebook, investigating the ways users use the website, and the gratifications obtained from those uses. The second stage of a study of 240 Facebook users revealed six factors (motivations) behind the participants' Facebook use. These uses and gratifications were social connection, shared identities, content, social investigation, social network surfing, and status updating (Joinson, 2008). In the study, "social connection" refers to actions such as keeping in touch with people, making new friends, and maintaining relationships; "shared identities" refers to joining groups and/or events, and communicating with like-minded people; "content" refers to apps, quizzes/games, and the posting of photographs; "social investigation;" and "social network surfing," referring to browsing a user's friends' friends and profiles of people they don't know (Joinson, 2008). Joinson's "social investigation" is very similar to Bumgerner's "voyeurism," people-watching, looking up certain types of people, and even "stalking other people" (Joinson, 2008, p. 1031). Status updates, use of photographs and participants' gender were found to be significant positive predictors of visit frequency; age (younger spend more time) and content gratifications were found to be significant positive predictors of time spent on Facebook. Joinson noted scores on the content gratifications items were negatively related to the number of friends on one's profile, suggesting that "a sub-set of users gain gratification through the use of applications within Facebook, rather than through the accrual of 'friends' " (Joinson, 2008, p. 1034).

Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) sought to examine the uses and gratifications of users of Facebook Groups as well as any relationship between those gratifications and the offline civic and political participation of the users. Their survey of 1700 college students aged 18-29 uncovered four key factors: socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Park, Kee, and Valenzuela explain that Groups users who use

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the Groups function for socializing do so to meet and communicate with others as well as gain a sense of community. Entertainment users are interested in leisure and amusement needs; information-seeking users want to learn about events and/or specific products/services; and finally, self-status seeking users use the Groups function to mitigate peer pressure, advance their career, and/or to make themselves look cool (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). In regards to users' political and civic participation, information-seeking uses of Facebook Groups were more highly correlated with civic and political action than other uses, as the authors had predicted (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). While sports fandom isn't directly related to a Facebook Group category, Park, Kee, and Valenzuela's four key factors, and variants thereof can be used to examine fandom's correlations with uses and gratifications of social networks.

Urista, Dong, and Day (2009) examined uses and gratifications for both Facebook and MySpace, but their study relied on focus groups instead of online surveys like most previous works. Results from the focus group discussions revealed 5 themes that answer their question of why college students use Facebook and MySpace: efficient communication (as one user put it "if you want to spread news quickly about an event or something, you can do it very easily on MySpace" (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009, p. 221), convenient communication (Facebook/MySpace are easy ways to remain connected with people geographically separated from oneself and it's an asynchronous communication method), curiosity about others (learn more about their friends or learn about people that they would like to know more about), popularity (go with the crowd or seek to enhance their own popularity by having a lot of friends), and relationship formation and reinforcement (meeting new people, maintaining pre-existing relationships, and finding out "who your true friends are based on the interactions that occur on SNS" (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009 p. 224). The authors note that their study suggests, among other things, that there is a distinct

difference between online friends and online interactions and "real" (offline) friends and interactions.

Quan-Haase and Young (2010) compared the uses and gratifications for Facebook with those for instant-messaging services. The data from Facebook users revealed six key dimensions: pastime, affection, fashion, share problems, sociability, and social information. They also found that Facebook is geared more towards having fun and knowing what's going on in one's social world, whereas instant messaging tended to be geared more towards developing and maintaining personal relationships (Quan-Hasse & Young, 2010).

Religiosity seems like a non-sequitor here, but there is a definite parallel that can be drawn between the purpose of Nyland and Near's (2007) study comparing religiosity and Facebook use and this current project: namely the similarities between religiosity and fandom. Identifying oneself as a fan of a particular team can provide a person with a sense of identity, of belonging to a certain social group, similar to identifying with a particular religious denomination might also provide (see Cartwright & Zander, 1960; Forsyth, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

Nyland and Near (2007) compared an individual's level of religiosity with five other main uses (meeting new people, entertainment, maintaining relationships, learning about social events, and sharing media). These uses were adapted from earlier studies on Internet uses and gratifications by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and Recchiuti (2003) with new social-network specific measures added; their new measures boasted strong internal consistency (Nyland & Near, 2007). Religiosity, defined on an additive scale combining behavior (participation in religious meetings) and attitude (how important religion is in one's life), was found to be a

predictor of certain social network uses, namely maintaining relationships and learning about social events.

Fandom and Group Dynamics

There are some clear differences between participating in sports and merely being a sports fan. Being a fan or a spectator, the benefits of vigorous physical activity and/motor-skill coordination mastery are unlikely to be seen (Zillman, Bryany, & Sapolsky, 1989). In the 1960s, Dumazedier (1964, 1967) theorized that being a spectator provides many of the same benefits as other leisure activities: namely relieves boredom, relaxes tensions, and provides for personal development. Being a fan can also bring about similar gratifications to those experienced in being a member of a close group, mainly feelings of camaraderie, community or belongingness (Zillman, Bryany, & Sapolsky, 1989).

Brzozowski, Hogg, and Szabo (2008) examined user behavior from the site Essembly.com, which billed itself as a "fiercely non-partisan social network that allows members to post resolves reflecting controversial opinions" (Brzozowski, Hogg, & Szabo, 2008 p. 817). Members then vote on these statements using the 4-point scale of *agree*, *lean agree*, *lean disagree*, and *disagree* and such votes are visible to everyone, forming an ideological profile. Based on these votes, users can establish three different types of connections with other users, *friend*, *ally* (someone they don't really know, but they agree with philosophically), and *nemesis* (someone who they don't agree with philosophically), and it's possible for a Person A to be connected to Person B in multiple types (i.e. both friend and nemesis). The authors found that a user's *friends* were more likely to influence their voting behavior on the resolves than either the *allies* or *nemeses* groups. Also, of the three, *friends* was the only statistically significant predictor, defying the researchers' expectations that ideological stances would be more

influential (Brzozowski, Hogg, & Szabo, 2008). These results would seemingly suggest the dynamics of belonging to a particular group (in this case, an ideological group) might not play as important of a role in an individual's particular use of a social networking sites compared to the behavior of an individual's friends list.

In a tangentially related study, Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld (1983) examined the connection among media usage and media fandom and individual respondents' perceptions of the gratifications obtained from various media. Their results indicated that media usage (high, moderate, and low) and media fandom (high, moderate, and low) were not related to individual perceptions of obtained gratifications from various forms of media (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983).

<center>Fan Identification</center>

As social creatures, humans have a natural tendency to form social groups and to operate within groups (see Mazur, 1985; Adolphs, 1999; Cozolino, 2006). We seem to have a need to associate and identify with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Wann (2006) suggests that feelings of identification with social and community groups "assist in the development of a social network that provides psychological support and, consequently, result in a more mentally healthy individual" (Wann, 2006, p. 272). Like other kinds of social groups, participation in group-based leisure activities have been linked to better psychological well-being (Compton, 2005), and sports fandom is no exception (Eastman & Land, 1997).

Fan identification, like many psychological measures, can be linked to emotion (see Schimmel, Harrington, & Bielby, 2007; Wann, 2006). Sloan (1989) surveyed basketball fans of the home team before and after various games. Positive feelings increased among the fans after a close victory and negative feelings, such as anger and discouragement, increased after a loss.

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Although Sloan didn't measure fan identification, the author theorized that changes in emotions were related to the home fans closely identifying with their team (Sloan, 1989). Later studies, like Rainey, Yost, and Larsen (2011), link sports' fan identification to feelings of disappointment. Fan identification and disappointment were determined to have a positive relationship; the more that fans identified with their team, the greater their sense of disappointment at their team's poor performance (Rainey, Yost, & Larsen, 2011).

<p align="center">*Fan ID and Social Benefits*</p>

When a person develops a sense of identification with their team, this identification has been shown to provide benefits to social and psychological health. Wann (2006) states: "Thus, simply following a team would not be expected to result in improved well-being. Only when the role of team follower leads to a sense of belongingness to and camaraderie with others would one expect to find psychological benefits related to the identification" (Wann, 2006, p. 275). Simply being a member of a group with a common interest in an activity isn't necessarily enough to attain these benefits, active participation in that activity is needed (Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Wann, 2006).

The phrases "team identification" and "fan identification" are used seemingly interchangeably in the literature because they are defined so similarly. Team identification is defined as "a fan's psychological connection to a team, that is, the extent to which the fan views the team as an extension of his or herself" (Wann, Melnick, Russel, & Pease, 2001). Fan identification is defined as the extent to which a person is involved with or invested in their team. Wann and Branscombe (1993) described highly identified fans as people who were very involved with their team. They expect their team to do well and invest heavily (be it money,

time, or otherwise) in their team. In the interest of clarity, this paper will utilize the term "fan identification" to describe this phenomenon.

Research Questions

Due to the dearth of similar studies available relating to this subject, very basic research questions are explored in this study. This study seeks to explore the connections between a person's level of fan identification and the time they spend online using social networking websites.

RQ1: Is a person's level of fan identification related to their time spent using social networking sites?

This study stuck with the precedent of previous studies' measurement of social network usage (e.g. Joinson, 2008; Nyland & Near, 2007): using either "time spent using" *or* "frequency of use" is used as a variable, unlike several general Internet studies that utilize both measures to gain a better usage picture (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Boneva, Kraut, & Frolich, 2001). Simple correlation statistical analysis is most appropriate to answer both parts of this initial research question.

Uses and gratifications of social networking websites are beginning to be explored, but little work has been done to explore possible linkages between such uses and gratifications and other factors. In order to accomplish this, this study sought to explore the connection(s) between the uses and gratifications obtained from social networking websites and a person's level of fan identification.

RQ 2: What gratifications from using social networking sites do self-identified sports fans obtain by using SNS?

RQ 2 seeks to further explore a question raised by Brzozowski, Hogg, and Szabo (2008) about whether belonging to a particular group of people would be significantly associated with social networking site use. Using the gratifications obtained from factor analysis of the results of RQ2, a third research question sought to ascertain any association between those gratifications and the amount of time spent using social networking websites. Correlation statistical analysis was used to answer this question.

RQ 3: Which (if any) of the uses and gratifications obtained from using social networking sites are associated with a person's time spent using social networking sites?

The gratifications obtained from RQ2 were examined to determine if those gratifications were associated with the time spent using social networking websites.

Chapter II delves into the methodologies used to answer these research questions in greater detail, including fandom measurement, uses and gratification scales, and the statistical methods utilized to analyze the survey results.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized an online survey, an appropriate distribution method here because social networking websites are a key focus in this study and Internet access is a given for social network users. As this study can be classified as an exploratory study (given that there are few studies examining uses and gratifications of social networking's potential relationship to aspects of one's personality), and that age/gender aren't being considered as variables (merely as descriptive notifiers), a nonprobability snowball-type sample was utilized. Traditional pros of utilizing this survey population (namely ease of dissemination and potentially large and easy to reach survey base), outweigh the traditional cons; as mentioned previously age and demographic diversity (e.g. gender, race, income) are not being considered as variables here. Although it's acknowledged that such a sample prevents the generalizability of the results to the population of social network users as a whole, in an exploratory study such as this such generalizability, although surely ideal, isn't necessary.

A small-sample pretest was distributed via URL beginning December 10, 2012 for the purposes of evaluating measurement items, clarity of survey instructions, and implementation of the optional "question logic" settings utilized by the SurveyMonkey format. A total of 30 individuals participated in the initial pilot test. The initial target was around 25-30, distributed via web link to a varied group of personal contacts. Feedback was solicited from these participants and as no major clarity issues were found; the measurement items were judged easy to follow, and the preliminary constructs appeared to be appropriately composed.

The main test was distributed via URL starting December 20, 2012 and responses were closed January 31, 2013. The long open window was due in part to slow response rates during

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the earlier distribution dates, perhaps due to the holiday season. The targeted response range of 200-300 was met; a total of 254 individual responses were tallied. Out of those 254, 12 responses had to be filtered out due to being incomplete. A final total of 242 valid responses were used in the analysis.

<center>Measures</center>

<center>*Measuring Fan Identification: SSIS and PCT Scales*</center>

In terms of measuring fan identification, two scales are commonly used in the literature, the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) and the Psychological Commitment to Team (PCT) scale. The SSIS was developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993) and is designed to assess "individual allegiance or identification with a sport team" (Wann & Branscombe, 1993, p.3). Wann and Branscombe report strong internal consistency, reliability, and validity for the measure and the SSIS has been used in over 100 sports studies and been translated into several languages (Wann & Pierce, 2003). The PCT scale was developed to "establish a scale for assessing the strength of an individual's commitment to sport teams" (Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000, p. 18). The PCT has garnered attention and use in the sports management and sports marketing arenas (Wann & Pierce, 2003). Both scales are similar in their measurements of fan behavior and both are valid instruments; however SSIS seemingly is a slightly better predictor of fan behavior, as Wann and Pierce (2003) note that the SSIS scale relates more closely to a general measure of fandom (Wann & Pierce, 2003) which is why it was used here.

<center>*Fan Identification*</center>

Fan identification was measured by the Sports Spectator Identification Scale, consisting of seven questions. After answering in the affirmative to a filter question asking if they

considered themselves a sports fan in any way, participants were asked to identify their favorite sports team in any sport. Respondents were then asked to select a number on a scale of 1-8 (with 1 being the most negative response, 8 being the most positive response) which reflects their position along the differential scale to the following questions: "how important is it to you that the team listed above wins," with options ranging from *not important* to *very important;* "how strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the team listed above," with options ranging from *not at all a fan* to *very much a fan*; "how strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the team," with options ranging from *not at all a fan* to *very much a fan*; "during the season how closely do you follow the team via ANY of the following: in person or in television, on the radio, or televised news or newspaper (to reflect modern news consumption "online sports sites" was included here), with options ranging from *never* to *almost every day*; "how important is being a fan of the team important to you," with options ranging from *not important* to *very important*; "how much do you dislike the greatest rivals of the team," with options ranging from *do not dislike* to *dislike very much;* and "how often do you display the team's name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing," with options ranging from *never* to *always.*

Classification of respondents as *low*, *moderately*, or *highly* identified was accomplished based on the totals of their numerical responses. Totals less than 18 was considered *low*, values between 18-35 was considered *moderate*, and values greater than 35 were considered *high*.

Social Networking Use

Participants were asked to select from a list of social network sites that they had personal profiles on (in other words not their company account) and used regularly. From there, social networking use was measured by the respondents' answer to the open-ended question: *On a*

21

typical day, how many hours do you spend visiting a social networking site like the ones listed

above?

<div align="center">Social Networking Uses and Gratifications</div>

Uses and gratifications were measured using preliminary constructs consisting of items adapted from Nyland and Near (2007) and Joinson (2008) (see Table 1); constructs that were reported to have good internal consistency in those studies. Nyland and Near report Cronbach's alpha values of 0.83 and above for items contained in "Social Investigation" (they referred to that as "meeting people" (0.84) and "maintaining relationships" (0.83)) (Nyland & Near, 2007). Joinson reported Cronbach's alpha values of 0.71 and above for the items under "Social Connection" (0.89), "Shared Identities" (0.74), "Social Network Surfing" (0.79), "Social Investigation" (0.75), and "Status Updates" (0.71) (Joinson, 2008). Responses to these items were indicated along a classic seven-point Likert scale.

Table 1

Preliminary Constructs and Survey Items by Source

	Nyland/ Near	Joinson
Social Connection		
Finding out what old friends are doing now	**X**	**X**
Reconnecting with people I've lost contact with		**X**
Connecting with people I otherwise would've lost contact with	**X**	**X**
Receiving a friend request		**X**
Finding people I haven't seen in awhile		**X**
Maintaining relationships with people I may not get to see very often	**X**	**X**
Contacting friends who are away from home		**X**
Shared Identities		
Organizing or joining events		**X**

<div align="right">*(table continues)*</div>

	Nyland/ Near	Joinson
Joining or participating in groups/pages		X
Communication with likeminded people		X
Social Investigation		
Virtual people watching		X
Using advanced search to look for specific types of people		X
Meeting new people	X	X
Stalking other people		X
Boredom Relief		
To pass the time when I'm bored	X	
Occupying my time	X	
Social Network Surfing		
Looking at the profiles of people you don't know		X
viewing other people's friends		X
Browsing my friends' friends		X
Status updating		
Updating my own status		X
Seeing what people have put into their status		X
Entertainment		
Playing games		
Entertaining myself	X	
Amusing myself		
Media Consumption		
Posting/Sharing videos	X	
Watching uploaded videos	X	
Posting pictures I've taken		X
Listening to uploaded music	X	
Viewing photos posted by others		X

Preliminary constructs included were social connection (7 items), shared identities (3 items), social investigation (4 items), boredom relief (2 items), social network surfing (3 items), status updates (2 items), entertainment (3 items), and media (5 items).

Classification

Each respondent was asked to indicate which social network sites they have a profile on from a list. If they had a profile on a site that is not listed, there was a space for other. The survey was strictly anonymous, as no names and little identifying personal information (i.e. names, race/ethnicity) with the exception of age and gender (disclosure of which were voluntary) were collected.

Chapter III describes the above classifications in relation to the sample population and details the results of the survey, with discussion in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Sample Demographics

The final sample population consisted of 242 respondents. The sample was evenly split regarding the gender of the participants; with 49.0% female ($n = 119$), 49% males ($n = 119$), and 4 cases where the respondent chose not to answer. Reported ages ranged from 17-92, and the sample skewed older. The average age of the participants was older than anticipated, at 46 years of age ($M = 46.7$, $SD = 16.8$). When broken into standard range categories, 15.7% ($n = 38$) fell between the ages of 17-24, 10.3% ($n = 25$) fell between the ages of 25-34, 12.8% ($n = 31$) fell between ages 35-44, 24.8% ($n = 60$) fell between ages 45-54, 24% ($n = 58$) fell between ages 55-64, and 11.6% ($n = 28$) were age 65+. Two respondents did not disclose their age.

Fan identification (Fan ID) values ranged from 11 (low, out of a possible 56) to 55 (high), with the average value of 36 (high, $M = 35.7$, $SD = 12.6$). In terms of classification, 9% of the respondents ($n = 22$) were classified as having a low level of Fan ID, 33.9% ($n = 82$) were classified as having a moderate level of Fan ID, and 57% ($n = 138$) were classified as having a high level of Fan ID.

The most popular social networking websites among this sample was by far Facebook, with 96.7% of the survey respondents ($n = 234$) having a personal profile on the ubiquitous social network. LinkedIn ranked a distant second with 43% ($n = 104$) having a personal profile, and Twitter ranked third, with 36.8% of respondents ($n = 89$) having a profile on that site. Further breakdown of the sites used by respondents are detailed in Table 2. Note that websites with fewer than 3 respondents have are not included in Table 2.

Table 2

Sites with Respondents' Personal Profiles

Site	Respondents with Profiles	Percent
Facebook	234	96.7
LinkedIn	104	43.0
Twitter	89	36.8
YouTube	79	32.6
Google Plus	65	26.9
Pinterest	56	23.1
Instagram	32	13.2
Myspace	31	12.8
Classmates	27	11.2
Tumblr	22	9.1
Goodreads	18	7.4
LiveJournal	12	5.0
Blogger	12	5.0
Windows Live	12	5.0
Yelp	11	4.5
Flickr	10	4.1
Flickster	4	1.7
MyLife	4	1.7
Playlist	4	1.7

Fan ID and Time Spent

RQ1 asks whether a relationship exists between a user's level of Fan Identification and the time they spend using social networking websites. Fan ID values ranged from 11 (low) to 55 (high) out of a possible 56, with the average value being 35.7 ($M = 35.7$, $SD = 12.57$), a value classified as High. Time spent using social network websites ranged from 0 hours to 12 hours during a typical day, with the average time spent being 1.84 hours, approximately 1 hour, 50 minutes ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 1.89$). Simple Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine any relationship between users' time spent using social network sites and Fan ID. Pearson

correlation is an appropriate statistical method here as this study is exploratory in nature, and doesn't purport to establish any sort of causal link.

A Pearson correlation test revealed no statistically significant relationship between Time Spent (in hours) and Fan ID ($r = -0.091$, $n = 242$, $p = .157$.)

<div align="center">Usage Items</div>

Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 1-5 scale (where 1 = *strongly disagree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*) with 29 statements about how/why they use social networking sites. Mean and standard deviation values are recorded in Table 3. *Viewing photos posted by others* had the highest average value of all the survey items ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.80$), followed by *maintaining relationships with people I may not get to see very often* ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.89$). *Stalking other people* had the lowest average agreement value ($M = 1.40$, $SD = 0.68$).

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Usage Items

Survey Item	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Viewing photos posted by others	242	4.04	0.80
Maintaining relationships with people I may not get to see very often	242	3.95	0.89
Finding out what old friends are doing now	242	3.79	0.96
Seeing what people put in their status	242	3.79	1.07
Contacting friends who are away from home	242	3.75	1.00
Reconnect with people I've lost contact with	242	3.71	1.12
Connecting with people I otherwise would've lost contact with	242	3.67	1.03
Finding people I've lost contact with	242	3.62	1.07
To entertain myself	242	3.60	1.09
Posting pictures I've taken	242	3.59	1.20
Updating my status	242	3.52	1.15
Receiving a friend request	242	3.43	1.09
Watching uploaded videos	242	3.34	1.10
To amuse myself	242	3.33	1.27

<div align="right">*(table continues)*</div>

Means and Standard Deviation for Usage Items, continued

Survey Item	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Passing the time when I'm bored	242	3.32	1.27
Occupying my time	242	3.05	1.27
Communication with like-minded people	242	2.98	1.21
Posting/sharing videos	242	2.98	1.32
Joining or participating in groups/pages	242	2.62	1.30
Organizing or joining events	242	2.56	1.23
View other people's friends	242	2.51	1.15
Listening to uploaded music	242	2.50	1.25
Looking at profiles of people I don't know	242	2.43	1.17
Browsing my friends' friends	242	2.41	1.12
Virtual people watching	242	2.21	1.12
Playing games	242	2.19	1.34
Meeting new people	242	2.14	1.12
Look for specific types of people	242	2.00	1.05
Stalking other people	242	1.40	0.68

Note 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree

Usage Items and Factors

RQ2 seeks to ascertain the uses and gratifications obtained by self-identified sports fans by using social networking sites. An exploratory factor analysis using the measurement items outlined in Chapter 2 (Table 1) utilizing principle axis factoring and Promax rotation was used to analyze the uses and gratifications of self-identified sports fans. Principle axis factoring accounts for only the common variance in the variable scales, compared to principle component factoring, which additionally includes unique and error variance, and as such it's typically recommended for uses and gratifications studies (Dobos & Dimmick, 1988). Promax rotation is appropriate here instead of Varimax rotation, as Promax doesn't assume that each resulting factor is independent of the others (Sanstedt et al., 2004), which is not necessarily the case in this study. Subsequently, a follow-up factor analysis was limited to six factors due to low loadings for two items, and two subsequent follow up analyses were limited to six factors due to cross-

loadings on five total items (two in the first follow-up, two in the second, and one in the third and final), and a small variance beyond the six factors. Factor loadings were obtained from the Pattern Matrix and considered acceptable at .40 or higher with a minimum Eigenvalue of 1.0 and at least two variables per factor, as the smallest of the initial measurement scales consisted of two measurement items.

Eight scales were used to measure self-identified sports fans' uses and gratifications obtained from social networking websites on the survey questionnaire: *social connection* (α = .932), *shared identities* (α =.770), *social investigation* (.745), *boredom relief* (α =.893), *social network surfing* (α =.838), *status updating* (α =.833), *entertainment* (α =.767), and *media consumption* (α =.680). Factor analysis reduced these into six factors accounting for 71.6% of the total variance. All factors, Eigenvalues, and factor loadings are listed in Table 4.

Five items included in the original scales didn't load onto any of the factors: *receiving a friend request* from the Social Connection scale; *look for specific types of people*, *stalking other people*, and *virtual people watching* from the Social Investigation scale; and *seeing what people have put in their status* from the Status Update scale.

Table 4

Factor Loadings of Facebook Uses

		1	2	3	4	5	6
Factor 1: Human Connection	Finding people I've lost contact with	**0.984**	-0.160	0.037	0.008	0.009	0.073
	Connecting with people I otherwise would've lost contact with	**0.978**	-0.105	-0.013	0.013	0.013	0.077
	Reconnecting with people I've lost contact with	**0.977**	-0.071	0.042	-0.090	0.026	-0.006
	Finding out what old friends are doing now	**0.811**	0.180	-0.086	0.006	-0.088	0.006
	Maintaining relationships with people I may not get to see very often	**0.771**	0.157	0.007	0.021	-0.006	-0.095
	Contacting friends who are away from home	**0.630**	0.146	0.003	0.257	-0.016	-0.094
Factor 2: Distraction/ Amusement	Passing the time when I'm bored	0.023	**0.965**	0.049	-0.059	-0.065	-0.103
	Occupying my time	-0.059	**0.880**	0.120	-0.051	0.104	-0.155
	To amuse myself	-0.023	**0.830**	-0.099	-0.040	0.017	0.206
	To entertain myself	0.088	**0.738**	-0.100	0.081	-0.009	0.162
Factor 3: Social Integration	Joining or participating in groups/pages	-0.085	0.046	**0.824**	0.110	0.073	-0.128
	Communication with like-minded people	-0.038	0.055	**0.791**	-0.045	-0.121	0.169
	Organizing or joining events	0.003	-0.090	**0.773**	0.162	-0.041	-0.045
	Meeting new people	0.251	-0.006	**0.648**	-0.268	0.122	0.160
Factor 4: Network Content	Posting pictures I've taken	0.224	-0.167	0.003	**0.807**	0.034	-0.093
	Posting/sharing videos	-0.090	0.024	0.131	**0.763**	-0.110	0.002
	Viewing photos posted by others	0.025	-0.058	-0.175	**0.708**	0.048	0.239
	Updating my status	0.292	0.144	0.077	**0.507**	0.060	-0.121
	Watching uploaded videos	-0.182	0.149	0.188	**0.466**	-0.003	0.310
Factor 5: Social Surveillance	View other people's friends	-0.072	0.081	-0.025	0.064	**0.917**	-0.126
	Browsing my friends' friends	-0.005	0.025	-0.091	0.102	**0.851**	0.116
	Looking at profiles of people I don't know	0.048	-0.066	0.090	-0.187	**0.831**	0.049
Factor 6: Active Entertainment	Listening to uploaded music	-0.104	-0.103	0.066	0.156	0.042	**0.817**
	Playing games	-0.191	0.195	-0.020	-0.074	-0.039	**0.611**
	Cronbach's Alpha	0.945	0.888	0.794	0.769	0.838	0.452
	Eigenvalue	8.410	2.490	1.930	1.790	1.500	1.060
	% of total variance explained	35.040	10.380	8.050	7.460	6.240	4.420

Note 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree

Inter-factor correlations between all factors are low. The highest correlation found was between *human connection* and *distraction/amusement* (0.442) which fits into the low range. The other inter-factor correlations showed low correlations between each factor, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Inter-Factor Correlations

Component	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Factor 1: Human Connection	-				
Factor 2: Distraction/Amusement	0.442	-			
Factor 3: Social Integration	0.291	0.335	-		
Factor 4: Network Content	0.449	0.417	0.244	-	
Factor 5: Social Surveillance	0.386	0.312	0.191	0.227	-
Factor 6: Active Entertainment	0.136	0.334	0.225	0.157	0.227

Respondents were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale their level of agreement with each statement, where 1 = *strongly disagree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. Means for each factor are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

Factor Means

Factor	Mean	Std Deviation
Human Connection	3.75	0.90
Network Content	3.49	0.81
Distraction/Amusement	3.33	1.06
Social Integration	2.57	0.96
Social Surveillance	2.45	0.99
Active Entertainment	2.34	1.04

The strongest usage factor was *human connection* ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.90$), which was comprised of six of the seven items in the original *social connection* scale. *Network content*, the second strongest factor ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.81$=) was comprised of four of the five items in the original *media consumption* scale and the sole item from the original *status update* scale that loaded. *Distraction/amusement* ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.06$), a less salient factor, was comprised of the two items from the original *boredom relief* scale and two of three items from the original *entertainment* scale. *Social integration* ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.96$) was comprised of the sole loading item from the original *social investigation* scale and the three items from the original *shared identities* scale. *Social surveillance* ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.99$), a comparatively weak factor, is the most consistent with the original scales, being comprised of all three items from the original *social network surfing* scale. The weakest factor, *active entertainment* ($M = 2.34$, $SD – 1.04$), was comprised of one item each from the original *entertainment* and *media consumption* scales.

Factors and Time Spent

RQ3 asks if there is a relationship between respondents' time spent using social networking sites and the uses and gratification factors obtained in the previous research question. Simple Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to determine any relationship between users' time spent using social networking sites and the usage factors uncovered earlier. Pearson correlation is an appropriate statistical method here as this study is exploratory in nature, and doesn't purport to establish any sort of causal link.

A summary of Pearson correlations among time spent and the other factors is shown in Table 7. Out of the six factors, four showed statistically significant correlation with Time Spent: Distraction/Amusement (r (240) = .447, p = 0.000), Social Integration (r (240) = .284, p = 0.000), Network Content (r (240) = .228, p = 0.000), and Active Entertainment (r (240) = .246,

$p = 0.000$). Distraction/Amusement had the strongest correlation with Time Spent, with its value

classified as moderately strong, whereas the other factors' correlations were classified as

moderately weak.

Table 7

Pearson Correlations

		Time Spent	Human C.	Distraction	Social Int.	Network C.	Social Surv.	Active Ent.
Time Spent	R	-						
	p-value							
Human Connection	R	.068	-					
	p-value	.295						
Distraction/Amusement	R	.447**	.452**	-				
	p-value	.000	.000					
Social Integration	R	.284**	.323**	.357**	-			
	p-value	.000	.000	.000				
Network Content	R	.228**	.545**	.464**	.352**	-		
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000			
Social Surveillance	R	.068	.371**	.329**	.208**	.264**	-	
	p-value	.289	.000	.000	.000	.000		
Active Entertainment	R	.246**	.232**	.424**	.310**	.369**	.269**	-
	p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

$** = p < .001$

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Overview

This study was designed to examine three major components: how/why self-identified sports fans use social networking websites, investigating of any potential relationships between fandom and the amount of time spent using these sites, and between fandom and how/why sports fans use social networking sites. To that end, the research questions outlined in Chapter I were examined, and will be repeated here for clarity.

RQ1: Is a person's level of fan identification related to their time spent using social networking sites?

The results of this study indicate that Fan Identification isn't correlated with users' time spent using social networking sites. This proved to be an unexpected result; the initial pilot test implied a strong correlation between Fan ID and time spent on social networking sites. Earlier studies implied that connecting with people, belonging to a community, and other social motives were significant motives for using social networking sites (Gangadharbatla, 2008; Joinson, 2008; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008), so on the face it would stand to reason that being a member of a sports fan community would bear a correlation to time spent on social networking websites.

It's possible that there really is no such correlation, and that the appearance of a relationship in a smaller test was just a statistical anomaly due to the smaller sample set. Perhaps there might be a correlation that's more limited to sports-centered sites. It's also possible that there are unique aspects to being a sports fan that make it distinct from other social groups that may have an impact on time spent using social networking sites (Brzozowski, Hogg, & Szabo,

2008; Nyland & Near, 2007;); aspects that are beyond the scope of this study to examine. Regardless of possibility, however, at this time an individual user's level of Fan Identification appears to have no statistical bearing on the amount of time they spent using social networking sites.

RQ 2: What gratifications from using social networking sites are obtained by self-identified sports fans?

This study revealed six main factors self-identified sports fans obtain by using SNS. They are (in order of saliency): Human Connection, Network Content, Distraction/Amusement, Social Integration, Social Surveillance, and Active Entertainment. It was a little surprising that the social integration factor came in only mid-pack, behind Network Content and Distraction/Amusement; recall that the factor consisted of the items *joining or participating in groups/pages*, *communication like-minded people*, *organizing or joining events,* and *meeting new people*. These items that would appear to describe behavioral interactions that would be expected of a group of like (or similarly-) minded individuals, a phrase used here to describe the general common label of a sports fan; various sports' fans view their sport differently and may behave accordingly (NASCAR fans, for example might behave in a more extreme fashion than golf fans, for example.). Perhaps such expectations are fallacious, or perhaps self-identified sports fans utilize other platforms more than traditional social networking sites for these purposes. Further research is needed to gain a more complete picture of sports fans' social networking activities.

RQ 3: Which (if any) of the uses and gratification factors obtained from using social networking sites are associated with a person's time spent using social networking sites?

Results from this study indicate that four of the factors (*distraction/amusement*, *social integration*, *network content*, and *active entertainment*) were positively correlated with users' time spent; of those *distraction/amusement* was the strongest, classified as moderately strong, while the others were moderately weak.

Contributions of the Study

Much like individuals in specific religious or political groups, research shows that sports fans perceive themselves and other fans of their team as sharing an important group identity (Reyson & Branscombe, 2010). Studies of social networking use for religious (see Armfield & Holbert, 2003; Nyland & Near, 2007) and political reasons (see Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009) exist, but curiously, studies exploring relationships between social networking and sports fandom are lacking. This study hopes to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding the key topics explored here: social networking sites, uses and gratifications, and sports fans and their level of identification.

This study found that fandom is not correlated with either time spent using social networking sites, or social integration uses that would be typically expected to be seen when examining such a group of like- or similarly-minded individuals. The phrase "like- or similarly-minded individuals" might not accurately describe what's happening here as fans of different sports aren't all that similar (NASCAR fans might be more hardcore in their fan behavior than golf fans, for example), despite having the general label of "sports fan" in common. Perhaps self-identified sports fans utilize other platforms more than traditional social networking sites to satisfy such social needs (message boards or sports blogs perhaps?). Perhaps the fandom construct is not entirely adequate in this situation.

This study contributes to the further validation of the uses and gratifications approach when analyzing SNS and the Internet in general, as uses and gratification results were uncovered. This study illustrates that uses and gratifications may not be neatly tied with fandom and/or similar constructs, calling into question the soundness of tying such constructs together with uses and gratifications, at least in the absence of construct-specific gratifications. In this case, sports-specific (or more general fan-specific) gratifications might be present that weren't examined.

At a time when professional sports like the NFL, MLB, and the NBA continue to grow in popularity, when NCAA athletic conferences' membership are being shuffled around due in part to television ratings and the increasing value of TV contracts; and World Cup Soccer broadcast rights selling for record sums, it should be easy to see that sports have become a big boon to television. It would certainly be understandable for television companies, or companies/organizations even associated with television, to want to understand sports fans and how they utilize various media technologies, including social networking sites. Sports organizations, media organizations, and companies that sponsor/profit from sports (i.e. Nike, Under Armour, Adidas, and the like) could definitely be interested in understanding the way fans utilize social networking websites as these companies refine their social media approaches. This study would provide a cautionary note in assuming that fandom would be a significant factor in SNS usage. The results here might spur such interested parties to take a closer look at the viewers/users/fans they wish to examine, as mere fandom appears to be a non-sufficient factor when it comes to social media.

Limitations

Being an exploratory study, a non-probability snowball sampling method was used, and while useful for gaining an initial picture of the issues examined here, such a sampling method

hinders solid generalizability of the findings to a larger population of social network site users. Representativeness of the sample is also potentially a problem. In this study, many basic demographic classifications (e.g. race/ethnicity, income, education, etc) were eschewed in favor of maintaining participant anonymity. Thus, the representativeness of the sample cannot be determined, presenting another potential hurdle to broader generalizability.

This study also collected very little in potentially personally-identifying information, maintaining anonymity for the purpose of ensuring responses. Being an anonymous survey could also come with its own set of limitations, namely the idea that anonymity permits people to provide inaccurate (or outright false and dishonest) responses. After all, anyone who's frequented Facebook pages, YouTube pages, message boards, and other such venues are probably familiar with the anonymity the Internet offers, through the phenomena of trolls and Poes. A "troll" is typically defined as an individual who posts outlandish things (that may or may not represent their own views) for the purposes of baiting an argument (Donath, 1999; Hardaker, 2010). "Poe" is a label referring to "Poe's Law", wherein it's difficult to tell the difference between a genuine believer in ridiculous ideas (typically applied to religious claims) and a parody of those ideas (Akin, 2012). Although anonymity might allow for a greater freedom of expression from individuals in certain cases, Trolls and Poes illustrate the potential of online anonymity to result in inaccurate, or outright false and deceptive, responses. A classic *New Yorker* cartoon proclaiming "On the Internet no one knows you're a dog" (Steiner, 1993) suggests that the Internet renders identity so hidden that anyone can pass themselves off as anyone else and no one would be the wiser (Hargittai, 2007).

Research, however, shows that this is not necessarily the case. People have a tendency to bring the constraints, opportunities, and personalities of their offline identities online with them

(Boyd, 2001; Hargittai, 2007), suggesting that concerns about less-than-honest responses may not be as big of a deal of one may think. Although at this time, it's impossible to ensure that every survey response is genuine and accurately reflects the participants' thoughts, a risk that is inherent in survey research as a whole.

The general label of "sports fan" is also a potential problem here; sports fans are hardly a homogeneous population; substantial variation in fandom and fan behavior might very well be present among fans of different sports. By focusing on the general label as opposed to the specific, this study might be obscuring any potential links that may be present among fans of one sport that might not be present among fans of other sports.

Suggestions for Future Research

Probability sampling is recommended for future research to expand upon this topic. This work's exploratory nature allowed for nonprobability sampling, but future work should seek to incorporate some form of probability sampling in order to obtain better (in terms of generalizability) results. Age distribution should also be addressed in later works. This study's sample skewed towards older age groups, which may or may not be representative of the target population of self-identified sports fans who use social networking websites. A more equitable age distribution could provide a broader and more solid picture across the overall population. This study's sample size of approximately 250 was reasonable (although a bit on the small side), but a larger sample size would always be better, while increasing reliability and possibly validity.

Slightly related to the sampling and age distribution recommendation is the idea of looking at additional variables such as demographic variables (age, gender, education, etc.) and differences among different social network platforms. Examining differences in terms of both

Fan ID and uses and gratifications among fans of various sports would also be another facet of the issue worth exploring in future research.

More refined timing delineations for time spent on social networking sites is another potential recommendation for further work. This study examined time spent using an open-ended question asking respondents how many hours they spent using social networking sites on a typical day, to which every participant respond with an integer number of hours. Perhaps a range scale (for example, 1-1.5 hours, 1.5-2 hours and so on) could allow for a more nuanced picture on any potential relationships with time spent, as time spent values may be more variable than they were in this study.

Open-ended uses and gratification items, a typical method employed by many classic uses and gratification studies, were not used here mainly for the sake of simplicity. Uses and gratification items for social networks tended to be similar across different studies, even going back to general Internet studies, so reinventing the wheel didn't appear necessary in this study. Future work, however, might wish to include open-ended questions in this area to discern any uses and/or gratifications that may be specific to the self-identified sports fan population.

Further research should make an effort to parse down from a more general label of "sports fan" to focus on a particular sport (i.e. "football fan") in order to gain a clear picture of fandom and/or fan behavior within individual sports. Fan Identification should also be parsed out more in later research. This study focused on fans across the entire Fan ID spectrum (low, moderate, and high), work focusing solely on those who classify as highly identified would provide a more solid picture of fan behavior, especially if compared to individuals of other classifications.

Conclusion

This study examined fandom and its relationship with time spent using social networking sites and found no statistical correlation. Uses and gratification factors obtained from this sample population of self-identified sports fans consisted of, in order of saliency: Human Connection, Network Content, Distraction/Amusement, Social Integration, Social Surveillance, and Active Entertainment; factors roughly in line with previous work on social networking (e.g. Bumgarner, 2007; Joinson, 2008). The midpack placement of the Social Integration factor suggests that perhaps fandom is distinct from other ways of identifying with similarly-minded individuals (e.g. political and/or religious affiliation), or that perhaps fandom as a factor is less than sufficient to explain how/why sports fans use social networking sites. Sports in the 21st century have become big business across multiple industries, and a major boon to a television industry dealing with increasing audience fragmentation. So an understanding of fans' behavior is important to all parties. This study makes no claims at being definitive, but rather a starting point in terms of examining this under-examined demographic in light of the current social media phenomena.

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