



## The influence of social media on fan reactionary behaviors



Michael Mudrick<sup>a</sup>, Michael Miller<sup>b</sup>, David Atkin<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Hospitality, Recreation, and Sport Management, York College of Pennsylvania, United States

<sup>b</sup> Department of Communication, University of Connecticut, United States

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of social media on social identity demonstration in the domain of fan reactionary behavior, specifically the medium's interaction with public fan expression behaviors and the types of behaviors that are typically exuded. Social identity theory and concepts of impression management were used to inform a multidimensional perspective that can help advance our understanding of sport-related social network posting behavior. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, a sample of 630 fans was surveyed about their sports-related posting across varying posting conditions. Results suggest that SNSs allow fans to express their status as members of certain groups and provide an additional dimension to social media uses and gratifications via a form of social identity demonstration. Fans high in team identification were found to be the heaviest users of social media for sports expression. SNSs, thus, serve as an accessible resource for fans to remain behaviorally active with sport consumption.

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Social networking sites represent an emerging forum in the domain of sport communication. Prior forms of online communication included blogs, chat rooms, email, and instant messaging, but the online sphere has been dramatically transformed by the influx of social media (e.g., McCarthy, 2013; Mou et al., 2011). Research suggests that blogging grew in popularity in the early 21st century—particularly among teenagers and young adults—but declined as social networking sites flourished (Lenhart et al., 2010). The growing popularity of social networking sites can be attributed to their ability to include direct contact features with people of common interests (e.g., Ellison et al., 2007).<sup>1</sup>

Acar (2008) highlighted the key attributes of social networks, asserting that they “enable people to set up contacts with individuals they would like to get to know for either professional or personal reasons who they otherwise would be unlikely to meet” (p. 63). Social networks, according to Boyd and Ellison (2008), allow users the ability to create profiles for a degree of public view. Users can also comprise a list of other handlers with whom they can associate. Through these connections, individuals can access the acquaintances of those in their network.

Ellison et al. (2007) found that social networking site usage facilitated user relationships without having users connect face-to-face. Part of this phenomenon can be attributed to communication apprehension (Hunt et al., 2012) or a desire to expand one's weak tie network (Granovetter, 1973) through the accrual of social capital. Social networking sites facilitate affordances to connect with those lacking strong ties and enable simple search functions (Boyd and Ellison (2008)). Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found that social networks enable users to remain in contact with longstanding associates. Social media services are also free of charge and can easily facilitate connection with others (Lin and Atkin, 2014). Unless

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [david.atkin@uconn.edu](mailto:david.atkin@uconn.edu) (D. Atkin).

<sup>1</sup> The most popular social network site, Facebook, eclipsed one billion users in October 2012 (Smith et al. (2012)). Twitter, the second-most used social network venue, reported 500 million users in 2012 (Lunden, 2012).

privacy blocks are issued for a given user, most sites offer individuals a simple way to accrue network totals by allowing the user to search for a name, and then simply click on a link to follow that person (Clavio and Kian, 2010).

As social media have grown in popularity, so too has their ability to be used in conjunction with other communication-based leisure activities. Specifically, a rise in online media usage enables sports fans to become a more active media audience (Dart, 2009). The present study explores the influence of SNSs in the domain of fan reactionary behavior. Specifically, we seek to ascertain whether the presence of social networking sites facilitates an increase of public fan expression behaviors, and if so, the types of behaviors that are typically exhibited.

## 1. Background

Sport fans represent intriguing subjects for the study of communication-related behaviors. In particular, those who exhibit high levels of behavioral and cognitive involvement are likely to exude affective demonstrations after a sport performance (Gantz et al., 2006). In the past, sport fans were able to communicate face-to-face, via telephone, or through email over game outcomes or team-related news. However, the influx of social media represents a new and more appealing communication podium. Social media provide increased accessibility to communicate with others, while those in the network can easily view and join the conversation. In fact, while the 2014 World Cup set television viewing records in certain countries (Stubits, 2014), the Brazil-Germany semifinal match elicited a record-setting 35.6 million tweets during the game (Koch, 2014). Furthermore, in a 2013 report of social media usage in conjunction with television viewing, four sport-related cable network productions (ESPN Sportscenter, an NHL hockey game and two NBA basketball contests) resided in a list of the top-10 most mentioned programs (Buck, 2013).

Other findings have confirmed an amalgamating relationship between sport fandom and social media usage (Laird, 2012; Phua, 2012). In particular, Laird (2012) found that 26% of sport fans utilize social media in an attempt to connect with teams, leagues, and players; networks such as Facebook and Twitter were preferred methods for news accrual over nationwide news sites. Phua (2012) found social media has a positive effect on the accrual of social capital within a sport community. This effect was even greater for those who considered themselves highly devoted sport fans. Greater social networking usage was also associated with higher levels of fan identification, self-esteem, and general life satisfaction (Phua, 2012).

Current research connecting sport and social media has also focused on the role of athletes in moderating the social media relationship with fans (Clavio and Kian, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). Others have examined the general demographics and characteristics of sport fans and social media users (Blaszka, 2011). Nevertheless, research has yet to connect specific facets of fan behavior with social media usage. Because of sport's unpredictable nature – and its ability to provoke attempts at expert analysis from highly identified consumers (Mullin et al., 2007) – fan reactionary behavior remains an important concept to evaluate.

Research demonstrates that posting messages on social media has a significant relationship with a desire for positive perception (Hunt et al., 2012; Krishnan and Atkin, 2014), thus impression management provides a desired avenue for evaluation. It is plausible to suggest that impression management is largely displayed on social media sites connected to one's identity, and, as such, social networking sites appear to provide a strong platform to examine. While internet-based platforms such as message boards can be conducive for sport fans to discuss team-related matters (Clavio, 2008), personal identification is increasingly difficult to extract. However, many social media users, particularly on a site such as Facebook, use their actual names. This may allow individuals an opportunity to maximize their use of social networking sites for impression management purposes. In addition, by focusing on social networks, these concepts are dispersed to an individual's entire network, as opposed to merely fans of a team. Thus, considering the emergence of social network sites, this study aims to examine social media influences on fan reactionary behavior in this emerging electronic sphere.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Social identity theory

Social identity theory has been used as a framework to examine the foundation and development of group selection and associative behaviors. Specifically, scholars have claimed that individuals seek group affiliation and have a proclivity for aligning with entities that are perceived as viable self representations (Dutton et al., 1994). Individuals gravitate toward these groups because they “embody the attributes they ascribe to their organization into their own self-concepts” (Fink et al., 2002, p. 196). Thus, alignment with a group, as opposed to personal identification, is indicative of a form of vicarious involvement.

While one may be attached to a group, their involvement may be inimitable in that individuals may not be conventional members of the organization. This is typical in the realm of sport team alignment, as fans often consider their support as if they were direct members of the group (Boyle and Magnusson, 2007). Although the choice often involves a match between professed personal and group characteristics, it is goal-directed with the intent of accruing a positive external persona (Trepte, 2006). In fact, Hogg (2001) argued that group membership is habitually used as a way to position oneself in relation to other groups. Toward that end, group selection can serve as a form of self-enhancement (Hogg and Terry, 2001).

According to Hogg and Terry (2001), one's adopted social identity can influence their attitudes and behaviors. Consequently, groups often constantly desire to maintain positive perceptions for external individuals. Per Stets and

Burke (2000), this is known as a demonstration of in-group bias, as the boosting of self-esteem is a goal of outward group promotion. Another component of promoting the in-group involves out-group de-valuation and castigation (Greene, 2004). Hence, behaviors related to the in-group are deliberately conducted with the intent of amplifying collective identity (Hogg and Terry, 2001). Likewise, as group acclimation increases and self-esteem undergoes a corresponding boost, the individual becomes more identified and committed to the faction. To wit, expressions of support for the group – via a range of behaviors – will be increasingly demonstrative.

While social identity theory has been widely investigated in sport consumer studies, little work has examined social media activity and fan reactionary behavior in the wake of a sporting event. The interaction of such popular leisure activities presents an easily accessible, yet poignant venue for sport consumers to carry out team representation and in-group display tactics. Concepts of impression management thus represent a key determinant of computer mediated communication (Hunt et al., 2012) and aspects of social identity promotion (Greene, 2004).

## 2.2. Impression management

In an attempt to be perceived in a positive fashion, individuals display a tendency to publicize their positive experiences (Cialdini et al., 1976). In particular, people may openly display connections with positive occurrences in an attempt to be perceived favorably (Hirt et al., 1992), via a form of “indirect image management” (Snyder et al., 1986). The larger concept can be attributed to an individual’s desire to boost self esteem (Hirt et al., 1992).

That is, being perceived positively by others can produce a gratifying internal feeling. Snyder et al. (1986) tested the connection between self esteem and image management in a study of follow-up behavior of subjects upon receiving test results. Subjects who were told that they scored extremely well – far above the national average – expressed a greater preference for being present at a public presentation of their success. Conversely, subjects in the failure group had the highest mean scores for not wanting to be present for the presentation.

The Internet has become a facilitator of the impression management movement, as it provides individuals an accessible and creative avenue to formulate an “online representation of self” (Boyd and Ellison (2008), p. 219), in addition to providing an outlet to adopt and maintain a valued identity (Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000). Individuals tend to use these outlets in order to be perceived in a positive manner (e.g. Hunt et al., 2012, 2014a,b). Thus, users are more likely to publish favorable material about themselves for public consumption, in an attempt to boost collective identity in the cyber world (Jung et al., 2012). In fact, Hunt et al. (2012) found self-expression to be a significant predictor of Facebook use, as the site was seen as a prime vehicle for displaying facets of oneself through status updates and the ability to upload pictures.

According to Jung et al. (2012), “users who have a greater desire for impression management are highly motivated to post and read more messages for creating and managing their desired identities” (p. 1631). Krishnan and Atkin (2014) found that narcissism was a key predictor of social media use. Furthermore, Hong et al. (2012) found that frequent internet users were more apt to post in public forums to seek conferring comments about themselves or their associated group. The authors also postulated that the ability to influence others to comment on one’s cyber-identity “leads observers to perceive the profile owner as more popular and socially attractive than when there is incongruence” (Hong et al., 2012, p. 343).

Sport fans represent a group that habitually seeks positive public perception. Research has found that fans have traditionally demonstrated positive image management tactics, often in the constant pursuit of promoting positive collective identity (Branscombe and Wann, 1994; Dietz-Uhler and Murrell, 1999). Given the prominence of group representation through team support, these individuals desire to exude a positive public image. Such activity is a clear demonstration of goal-directed social identity enhancement (Tajfel, 1982). For fans high in team identification, the value of group membership is held in high regard, similar to those who passionately support political or religious initiatives. In fact, James and Trail (2008) found that team identification had more influence on team-related media consumption than attendance.

Based on the theoretical dynamics outlined above, we assume that sports-related social networking site (SNS) usage serves as a venue for sport-related identification and expression; more formally, we hypothesize that:

**H1.** Level of team identification will positively predict sports-related social networking site usage.

In light of such public perception, the study of fan reactionary behavior impinges upon the concepts of image management. It is useful, then, to examine expressive conceptions that have evolved from the sport consumer behavior literature.

## 2.3. Theories of sport fan expression

One of the earliest theories established with regard to fan response behavior was that of BIRGing, also known as “basking in reflected glory” (Cialdini et al., 1976). Individuals who BIRG “appear to feel that they can share in the glory of a successful other with whom they are in some way associated” (Cialdini et al., 1976, p. 366). As a result, people use others for their own impression management. For instance, sport fans BIRG by way of purposefully wearing apparel after a team victory or publicly celebrating the success of their team. Other BIRGing behaviors may include collecting memorabilia from notable players or teams as a mechanism to connect with a period of success. This conduct has been found to be prevalent among highly identified sport fans. These fans are so strongly attached to their teams that success – and failure – can have a carryover effect to their own identities (Wann and Branscombe, 1990).

The antithesis of BIRGing is CORFing, also known as “cutting off reflected failure.” This occurs when individuals attempt to distance themselves from those who are perceived as unsuccessful (Wann and Branscombe, 1990). Such acts may be exhibited by fans who publicly wear bags over their heads, in a deliberate attempt to mask their identity at sporting events for ineffective franchises. These behaviors are clear indicators of lesser degrees of loyalty to an organization, in addition to a statement of separation between team and supporter. Nonetheless, while completely different actions, BIRGing and CORFing share a similar goal in that the actor seeks positive reflection in the public eye. In fact, research has also found that fans tend to refer to winning teams that they support as “we,” while denoting them as “they” after a loss (Cialdini et al., 1976; Hirt et al., 1992).

Although these phenomena have not been widely explored in the online realm, we assume that social media – notably Facebook and Twitter – represent viable expressive options for fans interested in projecting these kinds of sport-related sentiments. We further assume that team identification would positively predict BIRGing and CORFing on social media. These expressive behaviors should, in turn be influenced by contextual factors, with victorious game outcomes related to BIRGing and losing outcomes predicting CORFing. Based on this expressive dynamic – including the contextual dynamics determining when BIRGing and CORFing are likely to occur – we hypothesize that:

**H2a.** Level of team identification will positively predict BIRGing behaviors on Facebook.

**H2b.** Level of team identification will positively predict BIRGing behaviors on Twitter.

**H2c.** Level of team identification will negatively influence CORFing behaviors on Facebook.

**H3a.** Victorious game outcomes will positively predict BIRGing on Facebook.

**H3b.** Victorious game outcomes will positively predict BIRGing on Twitter.

**H3c.** Losing game outcomes will positively predict CORFing on Facebook.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants

Six hundred fifty-three students were recruited from a large public northeastern university. After incomplete responses were removed, the final participant pool dropped to 630. This final sample consisted of 294 (46.7%) males and 336 (53.3%) females. Caucasians comprised 74% of study participants, Asian-Pacific Islanders 9%, Hispanics 6.7%, African Americans 5.1% and other 5.2%. Respondents indicated that they used social networking sites for an average of 125 min per week and television for an average of 64 min per week. Lastly, of those surveyed, 611 (97%) and 477 (75.5%) indicated that they used Facebook and Twitter, respectively. While purposive, the college sample was applicable for this study, in light of previous research revealing significantly elevated social networking site usage by college students (Ellison et al., 2007). In fact, the Pew Internet & American Life Project reported that users aged 18–33 remain the dominant demographic for online social networking use (Zickuhr, 2010).

#### 3.2. Materials and procedures

##### 3.2.1. Online survey stimuli

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups. To begin, participants selected their favorite NFL football team and biggest rival. Each experimental condition included a scenario involving the participant's favorite team's participation in a pivotal game against their perceived biggest rival, with playoff implications. Two of the conditions ( $n = 314$ ) involved the individual's favorite team winning the contest, while two conditions ( $n = 315$ ) involved a team loss.

##### 3.2.2. Measurement instruments

After reading the game and outcome scenario, participants were prompted with questions relating to social media reactionary behaviors, derived both from personal (Facebook) and anonymous (Twitter) accounts. All measurements were made using a five-point Likert scale ( $1 = strongly disagree$  and  $5 = strongly agree$ ). Specific reactions included tendencies to post messages relating to BIRGing (e.g., “I would consider posting a message in celebration of the team's performance”) and CORFing (e.g., “I would disassociate myself with the team to those in my social network”). For conditions in which the participant's favorite team lost, BIRGing behaviors were still tested, by gauging demonstration of pride in being a fan of that team (e.g., “I would consider posting a message to my network, crediting the team for a good season”). CORFing behaviors, however, were only tested in losing conditions, as it is not possible to cut off reflected failure in a victorious situation.

**Table 1**  
Predictors of BIRGing and CORFing (St.  $\beta$  weights).

	Facebook BIRGing	Twitter BIRGing	Facebook CORFing
Level of team identification	.30***	.24***	-.10*
Victorious outcome	.52***	.25**	
Losing outcome			.23**

\*\*\*  $p > .001$ .

\*\*  $p > .01$ .

\*  $p > .05$ .

Team identification (Trail and James, 2001;  $\alpha = .87$ ) was measured to gauge levels of fandom. The instrument has been consistently used in sport fan research as a measure of team loyalty. Specific items included “Regardless of whether my favorite team wins or loses, I will continue to support the team” and “I would experience some sort of loss if I had to stop being a fan of my favorite team.”

The five measures demonstrated adequate reliability. The alpha reliabilities were as follows: *BIRGing* ( $\alpha = .71$ ), *CORFing* (no alpha: only 1 item), and *team identification* ( $\alpha = .90$ ). All measurements were retained for analysis purposes.

### 3.2.3. Demographics

Respondents answered demographic questions about their age, sex, race, using commonly accepted measures. In addition, types of social media usage (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter), and provided the number of minutes that they used social networking sites per week. This information was collected at the beginning of the study.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Team identification and sport social network usage (H1)

A multiple regression model was used to examine H1’s predicted linkage between *team identification* on individuals’ *sports-related social networking site usage*. Results showed that increases in *team identification* corresponded to increases in *social networking site usage* ( $t(627) = 19.192$ ,  $\beta = .666$ ,  $p < .001$ ); this provides support for H1. Our results did not suggest the presence of any multicollinearity between the variables, as variance inflation factors ranged from 1.003 to 1.026.

### 4.2. Team identification: BIRGing and CORFing (H2a–H2c)

The penultimate set of hypotheses posited that level of team identification would positively predict BIRGing behaviors on Facebook (H2a) and Twitter (H2b), as well as CORFing behaviors on Facebook (H2c). These three hypotheses were examined via regression analysis. With regard to Facebook, results showed that *team identification* (model 1:  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $F(1, 627) = 51.265$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $t(627) = 7.160$ ,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significantly and positively related to *Facebook BIRGing*; this provided support for H2a. Model two indicated that *BIRGing on Twitter* was significantly and positively ( $t(627) = 5.624$ ,  $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) related to *team identification* ( $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1, 627) = 31.628$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This provides support for H2b. By contrast, *Facebook CORFing* was significantly and negatively related to *team identification* (model 3:  $R^2 = .013$ ,  $F(1, 313) = 4.125$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $t(314) = -2.031$ ,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This relationship provides support for the prediction in H2c.

### 4.3. Winning or losing game outcome: BIRGing and CORFing (H3a–H3c)

The final set of hypotheses posited that victorious game outcomes will positively predict BIRGing on Facebook (H3a) and Twitter (H3b), while losing outcomes would predict CORFing on Facebook (H3c). These hypotheses were also tested using a series of three regression analyses. For models one and two, the four condition variable – which contained two winning conditions and two losing conditions – was converted into a dichotomous variable labeled “win-loss.” A win was coded as a 2 and a loss was coded as a 1. This variable was used as the predictor for subsequent analyses. Model one was significant ( $R^2 = .049$ ,  $F(1, 627) = 32.213$ ,  $p < .001$ ), illustrating that the *victorious condition* was positively related to *BIRGing* behavior on Facebook ( $t(628) = 5.676$ ,  $\beta = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This provides support for H3a. Our second model was also significant ( $R^2 = .011$ ,  $F(1, 627) = 6.897$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and highlighted the positive influence of the *victorious condition* on *BIRGing* via Twitter ( $t(628) = 2.626$ ,  $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). H3b is thus supported.

Lastly, for model three, only the two losing conditions were used to examine the relationship between *losing outcomes* and *Facebook CORFing* since CORFing is not expected to occur in victorious situations. Model three was significant ( $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 313) = 11.535$ ,  $p < .01$ ), illustrating a positive relationship between *losing* in sports and *CORFing* via Facebook ( $t(314) = 3.396$ ,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This provides support for H3c. Table 1 shows a summary of test results for H2–H3 using standardized beta weights.

## 5. Discussion

The present study set out to explore the impact of social networking sites on fan reactionary behaviors. As expected, sport fandom and social media have a complementary effect on each other, given that social networking site usage was found to be a positive predictor of incorporating team-related discussion as a rationale for overall usage. Moreover, the results demonstrated that social networking sites are perceived as legitimate forums for the expression of sport fandom, and in essence, the display of one's social identity group. This appears to be indicative of a particular mindset that, owing to the pervasive nature of sport, fan expression has become a valued component of public discussion and exhibition to individuals in social networks.

Moreover, given the emergence of team identification as a component of individual social identity (Fink et al., 2009), social networking sites provide an effective pulpit from which to manage one's image via fan-related behaviors. The strong role played by expressive motivations here reinforces research on uses and gratifications for Facebook, the use of which was predicted by such motives as entertainment, companionship, professional networking, and social interaction (e.g., Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011). Given current study findings, it is plausible to suggest that these sites allow fans to express their status as members of certain groups and provide an additional dimension to social media uses and gratifications via a form of social identity demonstration.

As expected, fans scoring high in team identification were found to be the heaviest users of social media from a sport angle. Social networking sites, thus, serve as an accessible resource to remain behaviorally active with sport consumption. This also supports previous findings that avid sport fans prefer to demonstrate their loyalties in large, social settings (Gantz et al., 2006; Wann et al., 2003). Because fans scoring high in identification are said to be attitudinally and behaviorally strong as consumers of a given support (Mahony et al., 2000), this finding came as no surprise. Social media, though, now represent an additional, yet easily accessible and vast public venue to behave accordingly.

Additionally, parallel early work in uses and gratifications research included self-esteem enhancement as a strong motive to consume media (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000). This dynamic has not consistently emerged in the realm of new media uses and gratifications research (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000). Yet, in this study, the perception of social networking sites as sport fan expression venues positively predicted BIRGing behaviors. Given that fans BIRG as a mechanism to boost self esteem (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976) – particularly in the online realm – the present findings provide an additional bridge to contemporary uses and gratifications as well as social identity research (e.g., Krishnan and Atkin, 2014).

In addition, it is striking that BIRGing after victorious outcomes was much greater on Facebook than on Twitter. This finding suggests that, because profiles on Facebook are often connected to one's actual identity – unlike with Twitter, in which “handles” oftentimes resemble a formed screen name – individuals appear to deliberately seek to associate their actual name with success. Contrary to the notion that Twitter's mobile posting capacity might afford a superior forum for BIRGing, particularly at the conclusion of a game, the preference for Facebook suggests that posting may be a more deliberative behavior than originally thought (e.g., Hunt et al., 2014a).

These findings further illustrate how the use of social networking sites can serve as a viable, deliberate mechanism to promote the perception of one's in-group. This would resemble an act that Ashforth and Mael (1989) claimed would seek to increase identification via a perception of group cachet. As such, the promotion of association with an in-group utilizes image management principles through a desire to be viewed in positive fashion. Such expression can also serve as an attempt to incite what Ashforth and Mael (1989) called a “bandwagon effect” (p. 25). That is, once individuals notice an association of prestige as means for group identification, others may seek to join. Hence, the quantity of group identifiers gains momentum, positively impacting the strength of the unit.

Contrary to our hypotheses, perceptions of social networking sites as sport fan expression moderators did not predict CORFing behaviors. Such findings lend additional credence to the idea that sport consumers may seek these specific settings to feel positively about their fandom, rather than utilizing them as a way to expunge association upon team failure. The lack of CORFing behaviors may also suggest that, to manage one's perception virtually – rather than publicly shame an associated group – individuals would simply neglect to showcase their dismay.

Fan behavior could likewise be construed as a form of social capital, which Putnam (2007) defined as “social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness” (p. 137). Social networking site usage emerged as the strongest predictor of social capital in Ellison et al.'s (2007) seminal study. In the political realm, for instance, SNS's are strong predictors of citizen involvement and participation (de Zuniga et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2016). Just as social networking sites make it easy for people to connect with political or social movement activists, their affordances also enable fans to connect with each other and express individual or group opinions about various teams. In this way, emerging social media may be helping to offset the depletion of social capital that Putnam (2007) and others saw being eroded by mass media over the past half-century.

Based on the conceptual linkages involving social capital, we assume that sports related expression is encouraged by one's level of fan identification (or orientation), and further reinforced by offline interpersonal communication activity. These same dynamics should also obtain in the online environment, rendering such behaviors as posting activity important predictors of other SNS related activities. This should apply to general posting activities – as well as posting among friends – and also be positively influenced by more favorable evaluations of the importance of SNS activities.

Although the levels of variance reported for some of the SNS usage measures here compares favorably to that of past such explorations (Hunt et al., 2012), this study is not without its limitations. While college students remain an important group

to examine for new media adoption (Vishwanath and Chen, 2006), the current findings present obvious limitations in terms of sample generalizability. However, it should be noted that little, if any research exists, which focuses on this sample with regard to sport expression. The sample was also presented with a situation in which their favorite NFL team was involved in a pivotal game against a rival with playoff implications.

Thus, we cannot make robust claims about the generalizability of study results, as our experimental approach is a better guarantor of internal (as opposed to external) validity. Later work should focus on a wider range of contexts, given the prospect that game meaningfulness may incite fan reactionary behaviors. That is, while highly identified fans are expected to demonstrate consistent emotion, such expressions may increase given the scope of the individual game, depending on the postseason ramifications of a given context, to say nothing of the opponent. A game in week three of the NFL season against an unfamiliar opponent may yield different results, as the level of drama associated is likely to be meager. However, because this was an experiment, behaviors may increase in an actual game situation. As such, future research could involve a content analysis of actual behavior on social media to truly capture evidence of typical fan reactionary responses. Social media responses, in which the user provides evidence of their fandom, could offer useful and rich data to further illustrate this phenomenon. However, we caution that it would not be feasible to examine the relationship between team identification and such behaviors from this method, due to a lack of participant self measures.

It is also possible that perceptions of team support in one's social network may play a pivotal role in one's decision to express their fandom. For instance, support of a team that is widely despised in a social network may mitigate one's desire to BIRG when their favorite team is successful. Survey items used for this study neglected to account for such perceptions, but could be addressed in later work.

In addition, it is difficult to generalize these types of reactionary behaviors across levels of sport. Future studies may discover that BIRGing behaviors are greater in a college athletic setting, as students possess a greater connection with athletic programs, given their status as members of the university community. It is our opinion that this relationship is much more segmented in college than it might be for fans residing in a resident in a city that hosts a professional team.

While this study illustrated the impact of social media on fan celebration and detraction behaviors, it is important to note that dysfunctional fandom on social media is certainly a growing concern. The advent of social media has given fans unparalleled access to athletes and members of sport organizations in an anonymous, cues-filtered way that has never existed before (Browning and Sanderson, 2012). As a result, because fandom is such a strong aspect of one's identity, negative repercussions may surface if outcomes go awry (Wakefield and Wann, 2006). For instance, former Oklahoma State football stars Brandon Weeden and Justin Blackmon were on the receiving end of a tweet from an Oklahoma fan, suggesting that the Cowboys' plane should crash en route to a game against the Sooners (DeShazo, 2013). Such behavior has even seeped down to the high school recruiting ranks, as fans have castigated recruited athletes via Twitter for not choosing their schools (Trotter, 2012). Given this dynamic, future research could explore the use of social media as a driver of dysfunctional fandom. Such behavior would further examine the effect of anonymity in online settings, regarding users pushing traditionally accepted limits.

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