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# From Tailgating to Twitter

## *Fans' Use of Social Media at a Gridiron Matchup Between Two Historically Black Colleges*

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**Cody Havard**

**Richard L. Irwin**

### **Abstract**

The current study investigated the uses and gratifications of attendees using social media at the Southern Heritage Classic (SHC), a Historically Black Colleges and Universities football game between Tennessee State University and Jackson State University. Descriptive data revealed how attendees used various types of media to find information about the SHC, and how social media was utilized by participants during and surrounding the event. Further, following Clavio (2011), two one-way ANOVAs found that attendees did not differ in their use of social media by sex, but did differ by age groups. Specifically, younger age groups were more likely than older attendees to utilize social media to gather information about the SHC. Theoretical implications are discussed, recommendations for practitioners are presented, and areas for future research identified.

**Keywords:** *social media, fan behavior, event engagement*

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Today's sports fans have more than the action on the field and the communal roar of fellow die-hards vying for their attention. Social media usage at sporting events carries a host of implications for sports marketers and teams seeking to capture the loyalty of fans and ensure they are providing the kinds of information and interaction on social media that will enhance fans' bonds with the brand and with each other.

This study explores the uses and gratifications of social media among attendees at the Southern Heritage Classic (SHC), an annual football game played in Memphis, Tennessee, by two historically Black colleges, rivals Tennessee State University and Jackson State University. This event, held each September at the Liberty Bowl Stadium, typically attracts between 45,000 and 65,000 fans, and also includes a full weekend of other related festivities, including a fashion show, concerts, and a golf tournament.

This exploratory research will utilize uses and gratifications theory to examine motivations for game-related social media use among African Americans, such as connecting with others/socializing, getting or sharing news and information about the event, entertainment, and self-expression (Ruggiero, 2000). Understanding these motivations will help sports marketers and advertisers develop brand communities among African American sports fans and promote events with relevant content on social network sites. The study will also look at differences among age groups in social media usage at the event.

Facebook and Twitter have become critical to marketers seeking to build their brands and drive sales; they are spaces where businesses and consumers connect and where people can easily get credible reviews and other information from trusted contacts (Solis, 2012). Facebook is the largest of all the social networks, used by 71% of all Internet users and at similarly high rates among demographic groups (Pew Research Internet Project, 2013). Twitter use continues to grow rapidly; about 18% of online adults use Twitter, up from 11 in 2011 (Pew Research Internet Project, 2013), and four times as many users as late 2010 (Smith and Brenner, 2012).

The demographics of this contest between two historically Black colleges also make this study a unique opportunity to examine some of the ways in which African Americans use social media. African Americans are significantly more likely than whites to be Twitter users; according to a 2013 study by the Pew Research Internet Project, 29% of online African Americans use Twitter, compared with 16% of whites. Facebook is the largest social network with 845 million active users and one of every five page views (Fach, 2012); 51% of consumers said they were more likely to buy a product after becoming a fan of it on Facebook (Swallow, 2011).

African American consumers are more relevant to marketers than ever, according to data collected by Nielsen (2013). Their current buying power of \$1 trillion is forecasted to reach \$1.3 trillion by the year 2017 (2013). Nielsen's data also suggests that black consumers exhibit unique behaviors from the total mar-

ket; for example, they're more aggressive consumers of media and they shop more frequently (2013).

Thus, due to this increasing popularity of Twitter and Facebook and the differences in the ways different demographic groups use social media, it is important for sports marketers to understand African American consumers' habits and motivations for using and engaging in discussion of brands on these social media sites. Thus, the ultimate purpose of this research is to examine how and why black fans use social media channels during a sporting event.

## **Literature Review and Research Questions**

### **Brand Communities**

Social media enables consumers to establish and maintain relationships with others, often connecting both online and offline networks (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). For example, Facebook and Twitter allow users to communicate with "friends" or "followers" respectively, and to share messages, images, and website links with other users. The capacity for interactivity creates unique marketing opportunities in comparison with traditional media channels, including the creation of a brand community, defined as a "specialized, nongeographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Marketers are able to harness the power of these online brand communities to glean strategic insights into consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions, and also provide consumers with a positive brand experience that creates word-of-mouth and brand ambassadors.

Consuming sports team-related media has long been associated with building a bond with other fans and developing a group identity, and being up to date on team-related information facilitates interactions with other fans (Phua, 2008). Because social media, unlike traditional media forms like print or television, allows sports fans to talk to each other online and publicly express their team loyalty, social media may increase fans' identification with their team further and their feeling of being part of a group.

Specifically, social media empowers consumers to take active roles as both marketers and advertisers of their team or other favorite products and brands (Sheehan & Morrison, 2009). Research has shown that "psychological connections to a sports team is an important aspect of self-identity that contributes to a group norm which prescribes certain behavioral intentions that are considered to be supportive of a team" (Madrigal, 2000, p. 21). Social media is driven by consumers and allows them to be part of the marketing process. For example, Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury (2009) analyzed more than 150,000 tweets and found that 19% mention a brand; 50% of which were positive and 33% were negative. Thus, social media are relevant platforms for marketing and advertising (c.f., Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Utz, 2009) and electronic

word of mouth (c.f., Chu & Kim, 2011; Dwyer, 2007; Libai et al., 2010; Vilpponen, Winter, & Sundqvist, 2007).

Consumers are not only actively participating in the persuasion process through their use of social media tools, they are controlling the information they receive depending on their needs and preferences (Chung & Zhao, 2004). Consumers' fascination with social media has forced advertisers to communicate via these platforms. Advertisers seek to establish brand communities to facilitate brand-centered relationships (Casalo, Flavian, & Guinaliu, 2008). For instance, brands such as Jeep (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002), Volkswagen (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005), and Apple (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) have been successful in creating brand communities that foster long-term relationships with their consumers.

Brand communities are usually composed of consumers who share an interest in a particular brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005; McAlexander et al., 2002), and are thought to influence other consumers' behaviors (Thompson & Sinha, 2008). Research exploring the outcomes of participating in brand communities ultimately finds (1) brand communities create a sense of brand loyalty among participants (Thompson & Sinha, 2008), (2) word of mouth is influenced by the shared communication (Algesheimer et al., 2005), (3) brand communities influence participants' perception of the brand (Cova & Pace, 2006; Woisetschlager, Hartleb, & Blut, 2008), and (4) brand communities influence the likelihood that participants will purchase the brand in the future (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Thompson & Sinha, 2008). Unlike traditional communities, online brand communities tend not to be limited by race, gender, or socioeconomic status, although are not "entirely outside the influence of social stratification" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 421). What is important inside of these brand communities is shared consumption experiences and general enthusiasm for the brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

According to Buss and Strauss (2009), emotional experiences with the brand are important to increasing brand visibility and awareness among consumers. Social media can generate brand exposure and create opportunities to initiate emotional connections through mutually beneficial two-way communication. Consumers can benefit from brands' use of social media because of its immediacy and the ability to tailor information. One study also found that Facebook has a strong positive impact on "brand personality," or the set of human characteristics associated with a brand, particularly in association with sporting events (Lovell, Blaska, Walsh, & Clavio, 2012). Chi (2011) says social media marketing "provides meaning and connection between brands and consumers and offers a personal channel and currency for user-centered networking and social interaction." However, little existing research explores consumers' motivations for using social media during a live event.

The study of brand communities is a rather new topic of study, especially regarding social media networks like Facebook and Twitter. Even further, only a

few studies have examined brand communities related to sports (see Blumrodt, Bryson, & Flanagan, 2012; Devasagayam & Buff, 2008; Dionisio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008; Richardson & Turley, 2008) or African American consumers. In the current study, the SHC represents a brand the attendees build a community around. Therefore, the following research question is posed to determine how attendees gather information about the brand, and thus the community surrounding that brand:

**RQ1: What attendees use digital and social media to gather information about the SHC?**

**Uses and Gratifications**

There are a variety of reasons why consumers join brand communities. The current research applies the uses and gratifications theory (c.f., Blumler, 1979; Rubin, 2002) to explain the needs people seek to fulfill in and social media. This theory assumes that (1) audiences are active; (2) media use is goal-driven; (3) media fills a variety of consumers' needs; (4) consumers know and are able to express their reasons for using specific media; and (5) gratifications are in media content, exposure to media, and the social context which media exposure takes place (McLeod & Becker, 1981). Katz and colleagues (1974) argue that consumers are aware of their needs and select media to gratify those needs. Much research examines uses and gratifications of traditional media use (c.f., Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974), but also that of the Internet (c.f., Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Ruggiero, 2000). The gratifications obtained from using the Internet are similar to those of traditional media; however, the Internet also enhances "relationship formation and reinforcement" through interactivity (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2008, p. 215).

Digital media technologies are two-way communication channels that allow consumers to be active users, engaged with content or with other users. Digital and social media users can actively search for information by clicking on links or asking questions, suggesting that the use of these channels is goal-driven and that users are aware of the needs they are trying to satisfy. For instance, Fowler and Efrati (2010) found that Facebook users do not like brand self-promotion, but would rather look to their networks for brand referrals when deciding which brand to purchase. Marketers and advertisers must know and understand consumers' preferences in order to develop online brand community strategies to meet those needs. In turn, this builds strong(er) relationships with consumers, fostering brand loyalty.

Previous research has examined consumers' motives for participating in online communities. Shang and colleagues (2006) found that gratification came from the perceived value of being a member of the online community. Other factors for participation include (1) *purposive value*, which refers to purpose, such as seeking

or finding information; (2) *self-discovery*, engaging in social interaction to obtain resources and knowledge; (3) *maintaining interpersonal connectivity* refers to social support and relationships; (4) *social enhancement* is related to the value of the status the user has within the online community; and (5) *entertainment*, which is the fun of playing or interacting with other users (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). Smith (2010) found that consumers often use Twitter to connect with a community of supporters of a common cause because it offers them the opportunity to publicly declare their involvement; although this study looked at support for disaster relief efforts and not sports teams, the evidence indicates that users are often more interested in belonging to a community than simply communicating their own views. Marketers and advertisers have an opportunity to tap into these user motivations within online brand communities.

Previous research suggests that the gratifications consumers seek from digital media and social media include information gathering/sharing, entertainment, a platform from which to promote or discuss brands and connect with others (c.f., Chen, 2011; Stassen, 2010, Naaman, Hila & Gravano, 2011; Johnson & Yang, 2009), but no studies have examined motivations for black sports fans more specifically. For example, Quan-Haase and Young (2010) found consumers use Facebook for a variety of gratifications, including killing time, affection, fashion, problem sharing, sociability, and information. Similarly, Park, Lee, and Valenzuela (2009) found that using Facebook Groups produced four gratifications: socialization, entertainment, information seeking, and status-seeking behavior. Learning about events, posting about social functions, and feeling connected were cited as important uses and gratifications by Raake and Bonds-Raake (2008). Rafaeli, Hayat, and Ariel (2009) looked at motivations to contribute to Wikipedia, and defined three categories: getting information, sharing information, and entertainment. Waters and colleagues (2010) found that sports fans are especially active in seeking out information online because of their loyalty and dedication to the team. Other studies such as Mahan (2011) have shown that immediacy is particularly important to sports fans who value real-time updates. However, these studies suggest uses and gratifications of social media sites vary significantly. Therefore, the following research question is posed specific to SHC attendee social media usage:

**RQ2: How do attendees at the SHC utilize digital and social media before and during the event?**

This research will expand on this existing literature by exploring how social media is used among African American sporting event patrons and what gratifications they seek from using related platforms. Further, as social media becomes more popular to the general public, it is important that practitioners understand these users and improve the way they engage these consumers. The current research will help practitioners in both of these areas.

## Methods

### Participants and Context

Given the exploratory nature of this investigation, the use of a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) event such as the Southern Heritage Classic (SHC) in Memphis was deemed appropriate as the research setting. HBCU events such as the Classic have been noted to attract an extremely passionate consumer base (Armstrong, 2001), providing an ideal environment to examine the brand loyalty in a social media usage context.

HBCU event attendees, many of whom have no formal HBCU affiliation, regularly make a concerted effort to participate in the ethnically and culturally relevant experiences associated with HBCU events (Armstrong, 2001). Moreover, a case has been made that HBCU event attendees perceive the actual game as only one part, and often a relatively small part, of a larger social and cultural event (Armstrong, 2002).

### Instrumentation

The survey instrument for this exploratory study was designed to elicit relevant data on (1) respondent digital and social media usage in general terms (e.g., during a day off from work, at an event like this) as well as the context of the Southern Heritage Classic; (2) motives for using digital media and social media in the context of the Southern Heritage Classic; (3) respondent event involvement; and (4) respondent demographic characteristics. The level of event involvement item, specifically event personal meaning and importance, were drawn from McQuarrie and Munson's (1987) involvement scale. The questions on uses and gratifications employed an abridged and modified form of the Web Motivation Inventory (Rodgers et. al., 2002) and drew upon the media choice model as described by Thorson and Duffy (2006).

### Sampling/Data Collection Procedures

Similar to the methodologies previously used to obtain a broad sample in research involving HBCU event patrons (Armstrong, 2001, 2002; Drayer, Irwin & Martin, 2011), survey team members employed an intercept-style format and were randomly positioned throughout the event grounds (stadium, parking lots, tailgate areas, etc.). A diverse research team comprised of twelve previously trained White and Black males and females approached respondents, introducing themselves and describing the research project, which was funded by event organizers. Each survey was administered via a face-to-face interview, providing enhanced clarification of survey item content as well as accuracy of response. No response incentive was provided and a rejection rate of less than 2% was realized. Research team members returned 500 completed surveys, with 442 deemed usable for further analysis. Next, two one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) were run to compare main effects of attendees usage of social media versus traditional

and other new media by sex and age. To accomplish this, the researchers then separated out attendees who indicated they used Facebook and Twitter in order to compare these attendees to those who used other forms of tradition and new media (including traditional media, Internet, and website) to gather information about the SHC. Specific to Facebook and Twitter, 13.2% of attendees used these mediums as their primary method for gathering data on the SHC.

## Results

The sample was comprised almost exclusively of Black consumers (94%). Respondents were veteran SHC attendees: 82% had attended at least one prior event, and on average were attending their eighth SHC. While almost all respondents (88%) participated in game-day tailgating activities, a majority (60%) of the respondents attended the football game. Fifty-one percent of the respondents were female, and slightly less than half reported annual household income in excess of \$50,000 (48%) with an average age of 38. As revealed in Table 1, the respondents are experienced social media users, spending almost 2.5 hours on an average day using Facebook and Twitter.

**Table 1**

*Daily Social Media Usage, Time on Facebook and Twitter (in minutes)*

|                          | Facebook | Twitter |
|--------------------------|----------|---------|
| During a typical day off | 90.2     | 56.95   |
| At an event like this    | 38.65    | 21.94   |
| At this event            | 27.88    | 12.26   |

## Research Question 1

RQ1 investigated what attendees used digital and social media as their primary means of gathering information about the SHC leading up to the event, including e-mail, the website, and Facebook, Twitter, and Foursquare. To answer this question, frequency and cross tabulation data in SPSS 22 were used. As seen in Table 2, more than one-third of the respondents collectively cited digital media as their primary source of event information, equaling the use of traditional media sources (radio, TV, and newspaper) as well as word of mouth. A majority of those citing e-mail as their main source of SHC information were over 35 years of age and previously attended 10 or more SHCs. During the week prior to the event, respondents accessed SHC social media outlets almost four times daily (3.6).

Meanwhile, most of those citing Facebook at their main source of SHC information were 35 years of age and younger and attending their first SHC. Likewise, this group spent 55 minutes on Facebook while at the SHC. Additionally, this

**Table 2***Main Source of Southern Heritage Classic Information*

| Source            | Frequency |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Word of Mouth     | 26.3%     |
| Radio             | 13.4%     |
| Email             | 12.7%     |
| TV                | 8.9%      |
| Website           | 8.5%      |
| Facebook          | 8.2%      |
| Other             | 5.6%      |
| Twitter           | 4.7%      |
| Internet searches | 4.7%      |
| Newspaper         | 4.2%      |
| Direct mail       | 1.6%      |
| FourSquare        | 0.0%      |

group indicated they spent 116 minutes on Facebook in a typical non-work day. A majority of those citing Twitter as their main source of SHC information were 21 to 27 years of age, had attended the event four times or fewer, and spent 17 minutes on Twitter at the SHC. This group indicated they typically spend 119 minutes daily on Twitter.

Following previous work by Clavio (2011), demographic attributes of attendees using social media to gather information about the SHC were compared to attendees using other traditional media (i.e., newspaper, magazine, television, etc) and other new media (i.e., Internet/web site, email). To investigate this question, participants that indicated they used Facebook, Twitter, or Foursquare as their primary medium for gathering information about the SHC were compared to all other attendees. In total, 58 attendees reported using one of the three mediums to gather information about the SHC.

A one-way ANOVA in SPSS 22 was performed to determine if men and women differed in their use of social media versus other forms of media to gather information about the SHC. The one-way ANOVA found no significant differences, showing that there was no difference between men and women in their use of new media versus traditional media to gather information about the SHC. Another one-way ANOVA was used to test whether differences existed among age groups, and a significant main effect was found,  $F(5, 357) = 4.93, p < .001$ . Post hoc tests using a Bonferonni adjustment revealed that attendees under the age of 18 ( $M = 1.71, SD = 0.46$ ) were more likely to use social media to find information about the

SHC than 45- to 54-year-old attendees ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.17$ ). Further, 18- to 24-year-old participants ( $M = 1.72$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ) were more likely to use social media to find information about the SHC than both 45 to 54 ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.17$ ) and 54 and up ( $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 0.26$ ) age groups.

## Research Question 2

Frequency data in SPSS 22 was used to answer RQ 2, which investigated the different ways that SHC attendees utilized social media at the event. As Table 3 indicates, attendees had a variety of motivations for using social media during the game. Attendees reported three main motivations for using social media during the SHC: (1) Entertainment, (2) Connectivity/Socializing with Others, and (3) Information Seeking. Entertainment purposes was the most identified motivation, as 52% of participants said they used social to have fun, and 47.9% used it to pass the time during SHC events. Connectivity, or the desire to connect with and/or share information with others, was the second most common motivation, with 46.1% of attendees saying they used social media to discuss the game or events with others, 45.9% saying they used it to share their opinion about the event/teams/institutions, and 44.2% saying they used it to get to know other people attending the event. Finally, information seeking was the third motivation attendees identified, with 44.3% using social media to get news or information about the game, and 38.2% using it to get information on players/teams. Further, 34.6% of attendees indicated they would use social media during the event to get information about sponsors.

## Discussion

The current study investigated how attendees of the SHC utilized social media leading up to and during the event, offering unique insight into the digital behaviors of a demographic group of increasing relevance to marketers. Attendees of the event were generally likely to use digital media and social media leading up to the event, as nearly one fourth of participants indicated they did so to gather information about the SHC. Further, attendees using Facebook and Twitter to gather information tended to be younger. When asked their likelihood to purchase products from sponsors of the SHC, digital media users reportedly were more likely to do so than traditional media users. Regarding uses and gratifications, the current study found that attendees used social media for (1) entertainment purposes, (2) to connect with others, and (3) to find information about the game, players, and event. This discussion will address the theoretical and practical implications of the current study, while identifying areas for future research.

However, this study is not without limitations. Fans may have difficulty estimating their own level of social media use and may lack accurate self-awareness of their own motivations in doing so; and in some cases their social media use at the game could be determined as much by the availability of a strong cellular signal than actual intention.

## Theoretical Implications

The current study adds to the theoretical literature on social media in two ways. Perhaps the most important contribution to theory is the current study's use of primarily African American participants. In particular, the current study asserts that a sample made up almost exclusively of African American social media consumers are similar to the findings of Clavio (2011) in that younger people are more likely to use social media to consume a sport product than older fans, regardless of sex. Further, the current study was conducted at an HBCU athletic event, whereas participants in Clavio (2011) used social media to follow their favorite teams. This also adds to the social media literature by illustrating that attendees may choose to follow an event using social media rather than just a favorite team. Future study should investigate participant differences for using social media based on race and whether they are following a favorite team or a specific sport event.

The current study also adds to the uses and gratification literature along with the brand communities literature by detailing how African American attendees at a HBCU event utilize social media to engage with each other and the teams at an event. Specifically, attendees in the current study identified three main reasons for using social media during the SHC: (1) Entertainment, (2) Connectivity/Socializing with Others, and (3) Information Seeking. This is consistent with prior research (Chen, 2011; Dholakia et al., 2004; Johnson & Yang 2009; Naaman et al., 2011; Park et al, 2009; Raake & Bonds-Raake, 2008; Rafeali et al., 2009; Stassen, 2010). Further, the two most frequently cited uses and gratifications of social media use in the current study, having fun and passing the time, address personal motives frequently associated within sport consumption, enjoyment and involvement (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007).

Perhaps most interesting, due to the unique opportunities afforded by social media within the context of sport, is that four of the next five most frequently cited items yield the communal environment highly desired by event producers. As other brands like Harley Davidson (McAlexander et al., 2002) and Apple (Muniz O'Guinn, 2001) have found, consumer engagement within online brand communities can easily be translated to in-person attendance of events, purchase behavior, and overall support for the brand. Further, the fact that fans had attended multiple SHC games displays a degree of brand loyalty, which is consistent with Thompson & Sinha (2008), and digital media users' preferences to purchase sponsors from SHC sponsors is consistent with Algesheimer et al. (2005) and Thompson & Sinha (2008). While data from the current study is primarily descriptive in nature, it lends support to existing theory and warrants further investigation.

## Practical Implications

This study offers important insights for sports marketers seeking to use social media to build brand awareness and team loyalty and drive event attendance

among African Americans. In the case of the SHC, consumers actively participated in social media, engaging with other fans, seeking and sharing information, and ultimately creating bonds related to the brand. Young people and first-time event attendees, critical to growing the fan base, were the most likely to rely on social media as a key source of information about the event, validating the return on investment for marketers using these still relatively new tools.

This study confirms that information about sporting events and the desire to connect with other fans are among the motivations for using these social media sites, indicating that marketers seeking to reach diverse audiences should develop strategies to distribute information about the event on social media sites. The high use of social media documented here reinforces national studies showing high levels of Twitter use among African Americans (Pew Research, 2013). Further, e-mail is also far from dead as a valuable digital information source and should remain part of any comprehensive marketing strategy; older veteran fans were especially likely to say they relied on it for information. This confirms findings by Clavio (2011) that also found high levels of e-mail use among college football fans, but noted that use of traditional media such as newspapers was on the decline among younger fans, making the need to find new avenues to reach the next generation all the more important.

Brand communities were created in relation to the SHC by fans in order to exchange information about the event. Facebook and Twitter made sporting event information easily accessible to fans and also provided an opportunity for immediate feedback, and organizers should use these forms of media to advertise before, during, and after the event. Further, marketers may consider live contests encouraging fans to use a particular hashtag, or upload pictures to Facebook, for example. Previous research indicates that this multi-tasking is not associated with distraction but rather greater engagement with the event and advertising messages (Solutions Research Group, 2007). Sports marketers should embrace social media as a way to facilitate conversation among fans and use it to enhance public relations efforts. Additionally, a larger percentage of participants indicated they attended tailgate parties around the game than the actual game itself. This is also an area where future study is warranted to determine if the SHC is unique in that attendees do so for the social benefits outside of the game rather than just the on-field action by itself. For this reason, event organizers may want to expand their social media presence to include people attending events surrounding the game and providing an outlet for attendees to discuss their social interactions outside of the stadium or arena.

Sports marketers should seek to cultivate brand communities that encourage consumer interaction. Moving beyond the simple distribution of messages, marketers should capitalize on the motivated consumers engaging with others who share similar feelings about the brand; previous research has shown that interactivity drives greater enjoyment than just passively reading sports-related information

(Mahan, 2011). By sharing experiences via Facebook and Twitter, consumers are building emotional relationships with the brand and thus becoming brand loyal. Engagement with the brand reinforces the relationship and transforms consumers into brand ambassadors who make brand recommendations to others. Also, the more fans perceive themselves to be part of a close-knit group sharing similar interests, the more likely they are to behave in ways consistent with perceived group norms, which in the case of sports often involves event attendance, memorabilia purchases, and a stronger sense of identification with the team (Madrigal, 2000).

This research also reveals that the interactive nature of digital technologies allow fans to develop stronger brand communities, which previous research shows can be an important antecedent to purchase behavior and loyalty (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Nearly half of fans cited connecting with others as one of their motivations for using social media at the game, including discussing the game, sharing their opinion or getting to know other fans. By using social media in this way, fans are publicly expressing their loyalty to the team or event, thereby fostering stronger feelings of emotional attachment and functioning as marketers themselves as word of mouth is among the most powerful of marketing tools.

The sheer volume of social media use during the game also makes it clear that fans are ripe for engagement by savvy marketers, especially if, over time, cellular service at large public events improved. This study expands on previous research showing burgeoning "second screen" social media activity among fans watching games on television (Sterling, 2012; Holtz, 2012) and shows that even those attending live events were also heavy media multi-taskers. It is not simply enough for fans to be at the game; as this research shows, fans want to engage with others about the game. They want to be active in the event, or in the least, have a voice. There is opportunity here for targeted advertising, especially on mobile devices.

The findings on motivations for social media use at the game as described in Table 3 thereby offer considerable promise for event managers interested in using social media as a brand community-building tactic. Most notable is the total volume of respondents favorably responding to the set of items. This is likely due to coupling social media with sport content, particularly among passionate fans. Marketers and advertisers should further explore consumers' levels of brand loyalty and how brand communities affect purchase behavior.

Armed with these findings, event management can launch a variety of tactics to stimulate the desired uses and gratifications. Capitalizing on contemporary fascination with sports trivia coupled with the passionate, veteran fan base, event managers are encouraged to create interactive contests testing users' expertise as well as giving awards for posting content. It is clear that fans want to be part of the conversation, and in some regard, the sports brand. Fans take pride in their sports teams, and social media can transform fans into brand ambassadors. Additionally, marketers may use brand communities and advertisers to formulate online

brand strategy by listening and observing consumers within the online community. Marketers will face challenges capturing the increasingly divided attention of fans in a fragmented media landscape, but this study shows that it is key to be on all the platforms fans are using as more traditional media usage declines.

Future research should seek to understand what specific features of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter yield value to marketing and advertising efforts. Additionally, it must be understood what role the consumer expects the brand to take within the community, and what specific function advertising might serve. Future research should also explore the differences between brand-sponsored communities and consumer-generated communities, and the differences (if any) word of mouth has on participants' brand loyalty.

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