

The Effect of Social Media Use on Pro Sports Team Fan's Buying Habits

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my friends, family, and everyone that has helped me along the way to get to this point in my life. I would not have been able to do any of this without your support.

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Abstract

This study focused on the effects of social media use on professional sport fan's buying habits. Previous research has shown a positive connection between social media use and purchase intentions (Hutter et al., 2013), and found that sports fans in particular change their buying habits based on social media use and connections with their favorite teams on social media (Achen, 2016, & Moyer et al., 2015). This study aimed to provide current research on this connection between the buying habits of professional sports fans and their social media use, while looking to include data from multiple different sports and social media platforms. An online survey was administered to fans who follow professional sports teams on social media and have bought a product of those teams within the past year. Major results of this study found that there was generally a positive relationship between social media use and buying intentions, as more people were likely to buy team's products because of promotional content on social media, and those who used/interacted on social media more were also more likely to buy team's products. Data wasn't conclusive however, as social media use did not seem to affect purchase frequency or price range, and different products had different results in buying behavior. Results from this study build off of past research in that consumers and fans are more likely to purchase products due to social media use and interactions with brands/teams. Further research is needed with a larger data set including more participants and in-depth questions on social media and buying habits as well as differentiations in product types.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become extremely popular in the past decade and is dominant in the current communication world. Due to this rising popularity, many businesses and organizations are looking to harness this new tool to promote their brands and connect with potential consumers. This is no different within the sporting world, with many different leagues and teams looking to use social media to their advantage (Achen, 2016). “Understanding how consumers interact with sport brands on digital platforms is of increasing importance to the sport industry” (Watanabe et al., 2016, p. 207), leading many sports teams to look into exactly how to influence their social media follower's habits and opinions, as well as how different followers use their social media and how they perceive certain messages and content.

One of the most important aspects in these teams' social media strategies is their marketing. Leveraging social media to better market to consumers is extremely relevant to these organizations, and researching how to best connect with consumers is a top priority for many. Aiding in this research and strategy is a method of social media marketing known as relationship marketing. Relationship marketing is an approach in which “relationships can be built if organizations use social media to engage customers with their brand” (Rishika et al., 2013 as cited in Achen, 2016, p. 248). Furthermore, “relationship marketing is an ideal framework for driving use of and examining social media marketing in sport” (Williams and Chinn, 2010 as cited in Achen, 2016, p. 248). In other words, these teams are building even stronger

relationships with their fans and consumers through this approach, albeit the bond between fans and their favorite teams is usually already a strong one. This being said, teams are always looking to draw in more fans and consumers, as well as understand these consumer's behaviors, and more specifically their buying habits. It has been researched that the buying habits of consumers can be both predicted and affected by social media use (Achen, 2016; Hutter et al., 2013).

Due to this research, many organizations inside and out of the sports industry are looking to both examine and influence their consumers' buying habits through the use of relationship marketing on social media, along with furthering connections with these consumers. This can especially be seen in the professional sporting world, with a large emphasis being placed on social media marketing, and many teams trying to profit off of relationship marketing. Fans are always looking to engage with their teams with social media giving another platform to do so, and it seems that teams can take advantage of this and expand their profitability through the influence of these fan's buying habits. These teams are aiming to get the fan to buy more in both quantity and frequency, with ticket sales, merchandise, and other venue amenities being the most targeted (Achen, 2016).

Even with the previous research showing the effectiveness of this social media marketing, there is still much to be discovered, as "the effects of social media campaigns on consumers' perception of products and brands as well as the effects on purchase decisions have yet to be better understood" (Hutter et al., 2013, p. 342). The lack of concrete evidence and further research is especially glaring within the realm of sports teams and fans, specifically

dealing with the connections to buying habits. The purpose of this study is to find the influence of social media use on professional sport team fan's buying habits.

Statement of the Problem

With the explosion of social media onto the scene both as a new communication platform and marketing tool over the past decade, many sports teams and leagues jumped on the chance to be a part of this new phenomenon and have been capitalizing on this marketing opportunity. However, as with any new platform, there were still many questions and no real consensus on how to best utilize this tool (Achen, 2016). Sports brands have since been trying to understand how consumers use social media and how to tweak their marketing strategies based on these usage habits. It has been a difficult task for these brands to try and gauge how best to implement their social media marketing, especially with the growing plethora of social media platforms available to users and the ever-changing usage habits by their targeted consumers (Watanabe, et al., 2016). With this, many organizations and sports teams have looked for guidance and solid evidence on how to best implement these strategies and influence their fans, but have recently had a tough time finding this guidance or evidence in these areas. Most of the recent research on fan's buying habits and social media usage influence came from 2016 or even before (Achen, 2016; Watanabe et al., 2016), and is generally outdated. With social media evolving so rapidly, even research from four years ago is growing outdated and is not representative of the current market landscape, thus not giving these companies and teams much to work with for their current social media strategies or insights into their fan's buying habits. Along with this recency issue, there is the problem that previous research seems to be very limited in coverage of platforms and

teams looked at. Many seem to only choose one social media platform to study, typically Facebook, and tend to only look at one team or sport, limiting the relevance and applicability of their studies (Achen, 2016; Hutter et al., 2013; Moyer et al., 2015; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Watanabe et al., 2016). With a lack of recent research in this area along with the limited scope of this research, there seems to be a significant gap in what teams and organizations can look to for substantial guidance in their social media marketing strategies.

Delimitations

Over the course of this study, there were choices made that limited the results and information obtained and can be classified as delimitations. Firstly is the choice of what questions were included in this study. There were few questions on the general buying habits and social media use of the participants (for example how long people spend on social media within a certain timeframe, or how often they buy sports products in general). This was done to keep the answers of participants concise and create data that gave answers on the connections between social media use and buying habits right away instead of having to dig for it. There could have been these baseline questions put in but it would have significantly increased the time to complete this study (within an already short time frame) and have created a longer survey for participants to complete with more complex data to analyze. Within the questions as well were the qualifying questions that limited the survey to people that have bought a product of a professional sports team within a year, as well as people who followed a professional team on social media. The time frame of a year was chosen as this narrows the participants down to those who have recently purchased a product and thus their answers would be relevant, however, a different time frame could've been chosen, but this one was deemed the most relevant and

reasonable. The choice of professional sports over other leagues was chosen as this provided a wide range of data but also aimed to disclude any possible discrepancies with purchases of minor leagues or other teams, as this could have skewed that data with the possible drastic differences in social media use and buying habits people could have with different levels of sport. The overall qualifying questions were chosen to limit answers to relevant participants who would have meaningful answers towards the goal of this study, without discluding a wide variety of answers. Another delimitation would be the methods of distribution. The chosen methods did not include every form of communication or even social media platform but were done to get the widest range of responses within reason. The selected social media platforms were chosen to distribute as they had the most users of diverse demographics and were simple to access (whereas Snapchat and Instagram, for example, have smaller ranges of demographics and are harder to post a link such as a survey on). These methods also limited the scope of participants as it was distributed to a particular network of followers and connections, who could share it to others, but still limited the reach and was not completely random. This was also done to get a sample that was diverse and fit within a category of sports fans who buy products and use social media. It could have been distributed in a way that included more communication outlets or in a way that was more random, but the possible participants may have not been as concise as hoped, and it is nearly impossible to include all communication outlets.

Limitations

Along with the delimitations, there were also limitations that were outside influences on how this study was conducted and what results were obtained. First, was the overall participation in the study, as 79 total respondents started the survey but only 52 finished it and gave viable

answers past the informed consent page. This could be due to the setup of the survey having two qualifying questions and then an informed consent page to start, which may have led some to think that they were done with the survey after two questions, or it may have been the fault of participants for just dropping out of the survey. A final limitation with participants would be their honesty in answering the survey. If they chose randomly or in a certain way to represent themselves, this could skew the accuracy of the results when applying to how these participants would act in a real-life scenario. Next was the time limits placed on this research and survey, as it was a two-semester project to write but there was only one semester to complete the survey, analyze the results, and complete the research. This is why the period of data collection only lasted a couple of weeks, to gain as many results as possible within a short period of time. Along with this was the unfortunate timing of the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic that occurred right in the middle of analyzing results and caused the end of the semester to be moved online. This led to a higher difficulty in completing the treatment and analysis of the data as well as the overall research done here, as it had to be done remotely in a quarantined scenario. Finally, a limitation was the lack of diversity in respondents, as they were all white/caucasian, and a majority of them were male (73%) and young (18-25 years old). This could lead to biased answers, but once again was most likely due to the methods of distribution to a particular network of followers/connections.

Significance of the Problem

Due to the popularity of social media, there has been a need to analyze it and understand exactly how this communication outlet is used. This research is especially important to brands, who look to better understand their consumer's social media habits, and how to best tweak their

marketing strategies towards these habits (Wantabe et al., 2016). Along with this, these brands attempt to analyze social media marketing campaigns to try and get an advantage in both building relationships and selling to their consumers. With spectator sports making over \$30 billion in revenue a year in the United States alone, it is clear that there is a large economic benefit to these sports teams and their fans (Achen, 2016). Along with this, there are tens-of-millions of these fans that follow their teams on social media and consistently use it to interact with these teams, affecting their buying habits in the process (Achen, 2016). Due to such a large amount of revenue being generated and this amount partially being influenced by social media, teams, companies, and sport managers, in general, would no-doubted be interested in gaining as much relevant data under this area as possible.

However, there has been a lack of recent research on sport fan's social media use and buying habits, with buying habits being one of the least studied connections to social media use, even though it is a sought after and important aspect that brands, especially within the sporting industry, are vying for (Achen, 2016). Along with this, as said before, there has not been much significant research done that covers more than one social media platform, team, or sport at a time (Achen, 2016; Hutter et al., 2013; Moyer et al., 2015; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Watanabe et al., 2016). With platforms such as Twitter and Instagram emerging as staples in the social media landscape, it is especially concerning that past research does not take this into consideration and only provides insight into older popular sites like Facebook (Watanabe et al., 2016). This lack of research leads to gaps in what brands and teams can analyze and put together towards their social media marketing strategies as well as what they know about fan's buying habits. New research is needed to cover a wider array of social media platforms and sports to

obtain more significant data on fan's buying habits and how they are affected by social media use.

Hopefully, new research would provide a more complete and current view into the social media use and buying habits of fans. Taking into consideration newer platforms such as Twitter and Instagram as well as seeing the current market trends is needed for sports teams to make accurate decisions on how to market on social media. Looking into multiple teams and even across sports would provide a greater sample size and aid in gaining a greater understanding of fan's social media use and buying habits throughout entire leagues and sports. This data is especially beneficial to sport marketers and social media managers, who can use this to pinpoint target markets more accurately, see trends in their fan's buying habits and create better relationships with their fans through social media. In total, this updated research would most likely provide a better, more tailored social media experience for fans, help maximize potential revenue and sales for teams, and mediate a better relationship between the two.

Research Question

How Does the Use of Social Media Influence Professional Sport Team Fan's Buying Habits?

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated before, the rise in usage of social media over the past decade has provided a new and unique opportunity for brands and specifically sports teams, to connect with their consumers and provide greater marketing strategies. It is known that social media has an effect on consumer's routines, especially when it comes to their buying habits, and that brands can be effective in influencing these habits through social media marketing. Sports teams are now looking to find further evidence on how to improve their social media presence and marketing to create better relationships with their fans and hopefully influence them to buy more from their brand. Finally, there is still much to be discovered in this area due to the relative newness of social media, thus why more research must be done with the eventual goal of aiding both brands and consumers in navigating this landscape. The literature review is divided into the following sections: a) social media & marketing, b) relationship marketing, and c) fan's buying habits & connections to social media use.

Social Media & Marketing

Social Media's Rise in Usage

Social media is a relatively new tool for communication that has become increasingly popular over the last decade. There have been a plethora of social media platforms that have been adopted by the general public as "mainstream" and are increasingly being used as a main mode of digital communication in their daily lives (Hutter et al., 2013). Youtube, Twitter, and

Facebook are all examples of popular social networking sites that are commonly used around the world and have become staples in today's communication landscape. The birth of these social media platforms in the early 2000's changed communication as we know it, as cited in Pronschinske et al., (2012) "the meteoric rise of... usage has been evidenced since 2009, which marked a turning point in terms of how people use the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). For the first time in history, the number of people communicating via social network sites (SNS) outpaced the number communicating through email (Nielsen Media, 2009)" (Pronschinske et al., 2012, p. 221).

Today, people are able to connect instantly over the internet, communicate with millions of others with the click of a button, share content, and create their own user-generated content to spread across the globe for anyone with an internet connection to see. This is a substantial shift as well in terms of the dissemination of information, with consumers no longer being stuck in a passive role, now with the opportunity to produce content and share information easily themselves. Williams & Chinn (2010) discuss how this newly available technology changed the consumer-producer relationship, stating "...consumers of all demographic groups are increasingly literate with social media and have significant advancements in technology at their fingertips" (p.422). They further this by discussing how social media gives consumers more power over what information they see and how producers deliver their content (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Lipsman, Mud, Rich, and Bruich (2012) add to these points by looking specifically at the marketing aspect, in which they find that "social media have emerged to redefine the digital media landscape and, in the process, have changed the way we think about the dissemination of

marketing messages” (Lipsman, et al., 2012, p. 41). The authors further discuss how social media has undoubtedly changed how people communicate and this spills over into the marketing aspect of social media as well (Lipsman, et al., 2012). It is a complex environment that is still evolving and being followed considerably by big brands and teams. Many look to use social media to create successful marketing strategies and gain an advantage over competitors in their field, especially with how effective it is as a marketing tool.

Social Media as a Marketing Tool

Social media has recently been realized as an effective marketing tool, so much so that many brand's marketing focuses have shifted toward social media as one of their main strategies. Li-Chun Hsu (2019) states that “the effect of the Internet and social media on consumer behavior has recently begun to outweigh the effect of traditional marketing strategies. Therefore, numerous enterprises have begun to use social media to communicate with brand users, and social media has become the optimal tool for brand marketing” (Li-Chun Hsu, 2019, p. 106). Lipsman, Mud, Rich, and Bruich, (2012) had previously found something similar in that “brands increasingly are interested in establishing a social presence and engaging with their fans, helping shape their customers' experiences, and even leveraging their voices for greater marketing impact” (Lipsman et al., 2012, p. 41). There are many facets that can be used under social media marketing, as “marketers are using SM as a medium to implement a variety of marketing communication elements such as news updates, sales, advertising, public relations, internal communication, and relationship marketing” (Abeza et al., 2017, pp. 325-326).

Due to the utility and breadth of social media marketing, it is being used across many different industries, including the sports industry. “...Many sport teams have both extended and

repositioned their marketing efforts through this... medium... given the value of social media, reframing existing marketing strategies to include [Social Networking Sites] in marketing, communications, and brand-management practices has become the norm” (Pronschinske, et al., 2012, p. 221). Furthermore, this shift in marketing strategy is commonplace now, as professional sports teams and leagues have adopted an increasingly strong presence on social networking sites and place great emphasis on implementing major marketing strategies through social media while tapering their marketing efforts in traditional media (Pronschinske et al., 2012).

Sports teams also realize that social media marketing provides opportunities to connect with consumers and their fanbases, to try and further bolster their marketing efforts, as further mentioned by Pronschinske et al. (2012) “given the availability and usage of social network sites, professional sport teams are drawn to this medium as a way to reach new and foster existing fan relationships” (Pronschinske et. al., 2012, p. 221). This is supported by Meng, Stavros, & Westberg (2015) in that “the ubiquity of social media provides sport organizations with opportunities to communicate with fans and as a result, potentially strengthen team identification” (p. 199). Sports teams are now heavily involved in all aspects of social media, trying to boost their marketing and connect with fans, which is not surprising considering the success and effectiveness provided through it.

Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing

“The growing importance of applications like Facebook, Youtube and others in consumers’ lives has an increasing influence on their communication habits” (Hutter et al., 2013, p. 342). This increased usage and subsequent influence on consumer’s lives and habits are a major reason as to why social media marketing has become so effective. This is supported by

Abeza et al., (2013), as “[social media] empowers consumers, it also presents attractive opportunities for businesses, including opportunities for marketers to communicate directly with consumers” (p. 124). This direct communication and empowerment are important aspects as to why social media marketing is effective. Consumers have the ability to dictate how they’re marketed to, create their own content, and have direct contact and interaction opportunities with brands (Abeza et al., 2013).

This is a major reason why social media marketing has surpassed traditional marketing and media strategies as the new “norm”. Talih et al., (2017) found that “social media advertisements are stronger than traditional media advertisements, owing to the fact that they enable people to deal with their friends and other real people. In the past, advertisements focused on the properties and benefits of the product, but nowadays social media advertisements have customized content in order to leave maximum impression on every single user” (Talih et al., 2017, p. 365). The authors build on this by saying “to measure social media advertisements and to determine the reach of the advertisements to the target audience is also easier than other advertising channels... the profile of the target audience can be clearly revealed. At the same time, the number of clicks on the advertisements demonstrates the target audience’s interest in the advertised product and brand.” (Talih et al., 2017, p. 366).

These extra insights help brands and teams gain valuable information about their consumers and help better target their audiences. The brands also gain a greater reach to more available consumers and spread their messages more efficiently to those who they want to receive them. This is further supported by Lipsman et al. (2012) in that “the... research indicates that an approach that is instead focused on the audience of branded content on social

platforms—namely, audience reach and frequency—can unlock a much better understanding of the true impact (and, therefore, value) of those impressions” (p. 41). They continue by saying “this approach is more favorable because it allows brands to focus on marketing activities that drive scale within audiences of interest. Additionally, it provides brands the opportunity to understand the profile of those audiences reached with various types of content and to begin to understand the impact of that content exposure” (Lipsman et al., 2012, p. 41).

In addition to understanding their consumers more, these brands are able to connect better with these consumers and aim to create loyal customers out of them. As stated by Watanabe, Yan, & Soebbing (2016), “the recent growth in social networking sites has allowed organizations from a variety of industries to create stronger ties with their customers through these platforms” (Watanabe et al., 2016, p. 209). This closer connection is commonly sought after by brands and is frequently seen in the sporting industry as well, with many teams trying to connect with their fans. These connections can be successfully built through a specific and popular marketing strategy known as relationship marketing.

Relationship Marketing

Defining Relationship Marketing

There is no single definition of relationship marketing, but rather a collective understanding of what this marketing method is. Pronschinske et al. (2012) define relationship marketing as “all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges” (p. 222), adding that “relationship marketing refers to developing long-term relationships with organizational stakeholders” (p. 222). Abeza & O'Reilly (2014) provide a similar definition in that relationship marketing “is about building a two-way

collaborative relationship through communication... and interaction (referring to a two-way or reciprocal ongoing exchange of content) between organizations and their stakeholders” (p.104). This definition was also built off of prior research by Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid in 2013 in which they found relationship marketing to be “a process of identifying and establishing, maintaining and enhancing and, when necessary, also terminating relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all parties are met; and this is done by a mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises” (p.121). Synthesizing this information in basic terms, relationship marketing is all marketing in which the relationship between the company and the stakeholders is the main point of focus, aiming to create two-way communication and foster relationships between the two, which social media can be especially helpful in achieving.

How Social Media Can be Used to Foster Relationships

With the definition of relationship marketing in mind, it is important to acknowledge the process behind this. “Social media has been widely touted by the popular media as an ideal tool to develop and sustain positive relationships between an organization and its stakeholders through the creation of dialogue” (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014, p. 103). The effectiveness of social media in creating and sustaining these relationships is what has drawn companies into using it consistently. Social media is also a useful tool in managing these relationships and strengthening them through the ability of consistent two-way communication, thus why “organizations are increasingly focusing their marketing efforts beyond creating a single exchange in building long-term relationships with their customers” (Abeza et al., 2013, p. 120). Building off of this, Abeza, Seguin, O'Reilly, and Nzindukiyimana (2017) state that “as a process, building a

long-term relationship requires communicating and interacting, and thereby engaging in dialogue with customers so that relationships are established, maintained, and enhanced on an ongoing basis” (p.326). This dialogue and communication is made simple and done effectively through social media and is another reason why relationship marketing is done abundantly through this medium. Finally, relationship marketing’s effectiveness in building customer relationships is especially appealing to sports organizations and their fans, as “the increased importance of customer retention is driving sport marketers to embrace relationship marketing” (Kim & Trail, 2011, p. 57).

How Relationships Built Through Relationship Marketing are Beneficial

Relationships built through relationship marketing are beneficial not only to the companies and organizations but also to the consumers as well. These relationships are multifaceted in their use, as they are good for “generating further business and ultimately profit. [They are] also designed to contribute to strengthening brand awareness, increase understanding of consumer needs, enhance loyalty, and provide additional value for consumers” (Williams & Chinn, 2010, p.423). This is especially relevant in the sporting industry, with the relationship between teams and fans being significant to the success and profit of the team, as Williams and Chinn (2010) state, “many sports organizations have embraced relationship-marketing approaches... and recognize that their consumers are highly involved” (p. 423). This high involvement is seen within social media use as well. The benefits of relationship marketing also extend to the consumers in that “...marketers communicate, listen, address customer needs and desires, and maintain and enhance their particular fan base” (Abeza et al., 2017, p. 330) and

“identifying the needs of valuable customers... also reduces the cost of serving them over time, which translates into enhanced profit” (Abeza et al., 2013, pp. 121-122).

Relationship marketing coupled with social media allows fans to interact more directly with their teams, have more personalized marketing experiences, and have more significant input in how their teams operate. Abeza et al., (2017) also say this “enables sport marketers to go beyond short-term ticket sales and develop meaningful, beneficial relationships that are proactive, interactive, and enduring” (p.326). Finally, these relationships are beneficial to the profits of teams and can be influential in the purchase habits of consumers involved. Williams and Chinn (2010) point out that “sports organizations rely on repeat purchases of tickets and promotional merchandise and seek to retain loyal consumers, strategic relationship-marketing practices that strengthen these behaviors may have the potential to provide significant competitive advantages” (p.423). The benefits of relationship marketing are seen to a great extent in the sporting industry, with the management of connections between fans and teams, and is a reason why it is so commonplace in team's marketing strategies.

Relationship Marketing in the Sporting Industry

As said previously, the influence of relationship marketing on consumers is prevalent especially in the sporting industry, with the connection between fans and teams being the focal point. Teams tend to be concerned with how to best manage their social media to reach fans and potential consumers most effectively, with the challenge being how they “can strategically manage their social-media presence to gain a greater understanding of new technologies and their roles in relationship marketing” (Haugh & Watkins, 2016, p. 278). “Most professional sport

teams devote considerable time and resources to cultivating relationships with their fans... teams and leagues have become proactive in brand management and embraced relationship marketing” (Pronschinske et al., 2012, pp. 221-222). This is mainly due to innovations in technology, developments in sport marketing research, and increased information on sport and entertainment. (Pronschinske et al., 2012). These teams are looking to have highly engaged and identified fans through “new and interactive experiences. Through these virtual spaces, teams can communicate directly with fans” (Meng et al., 2015, pp. 199-200). These highly identified and engaged fans are the ones who consistently follow and consume content and products/services from these teams, spread information/referrals on these teams, and who make it known to others that they are fans (Meng et al., 2015). With this, there are “extensive advantages attributed to highly identified fans, including the positive financial impact for sport organizations”, because of this, “sport managers should actively facilitate opportunities to engage with fans to strengthen their commitment. The potential for enhancing relationships through social media is particularly promising for sport managers in the current competitive environment” (Meng et al., 2015, p.199). With these relationships, teams can also look to influence their fans through the use of social media and relationship marketing.

The Use of Relationship Marketing in Influencing Consumers in Sport

The relationships built through relationship marketing not only create stronger bonds between brands and consumers and benefit both parties, but they also have the potential to influence the buying habits and perceptions of consumers. “In particular, sport organizations seek to build relationships that will enhance fan loyalty to help build the brand... customers, in

this case fans, may then become long-term and enthusiastic advocates with whom lasting relationships can be maintained” (Williams & Chinn, 2010, p.431). This advocacy typically includes purchase referrals, or the fans putting out positive information on the team that leads to others being more likely to purchase from that particular team in the future (Abeza, 2016; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Along with these, relationship marketing can also directly affect consumer's buying habits, as “if customers are engaged in a relationship with an organization, they are likely to be familiar with the services offered, which reduces the perceived risks associated with future purchase choices” (Abeza et al., 2013, p. 122). Along with this, seeing more content on social media from specific teams and interacting more with those posts has also been found to influence how willing the fans are to purchase as well as how likely they are to purchase from that team (Achen, 2016). In total, the relationships fostered through social media are useful to teams and brands in influencing their consumers buying habits, creating positive advocacy and loyalty.

Fan's Buying Habits & Connections to Social Media Use

Buying Habits of Fans & Relationships

There are many factors that can influence the buying habits of fans or the tendencies of these fans to purchase products related to their teams or sport, with relationships and social media interactions being two major ones. Relationships are a notable mediator of consumption habits and buying intentions within not only the sporting industry but the general retail industry as well (Kim et al., 2011). Fans who have greater quality relationships with a team “ will increase team related behaviors, including team related media consumption” (Kim et al., 2011, p.

580). These team related behaviors and consumption extend to a variety of purchases including tickets, licensed merchandise, and brand product extensions, which further the relationship the fans has with their team through identification as found by Kim et al., (2011) in that “one of the major reasons people wear team licensed merchandise is to make their relationship with the team publicly known and validated” (p.581). These product extensions also include interactions at games such as concession and team store purchases, promotions, and in-game entertainment, all of which influence fan relationships, aggregating over time to form the fan's complete relationship with the team (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Furthering this, “fans who identify with a team invest larger amounts of time and money on team paraphernalia and watching the team play” which shows again how buying habits and the relationship to a team are influenced by and build off of each other over time for fans (Fairley et al., 2015, p. 58). This spending of money also influences how a consumer responds to communications from a brand, as “customers with a larger pecuniary investment will exhibit a greater response to the firm's relationship building communications through social media than will customers with lower financial investments” (Rishika et al., 2013, p. 111), once again furthering the connection between consumer (fan) buying habits, spending, and their relationships to teams and brands. As noted before, these relationships are influenced through social media and especially relationship marketing, leading to fans buying more in quantity and more often, as well as influencing others around them in their purchase intentions and attitudes towards those teams (Achen, 2016; Abeza et al., 2013).

Social Media's Influence on Buying Habits

Relationships have a notable influence on fan's and consumer's buying habits and these relationships can be curated and molded through social media. As mentioned previously, relationship marketing is a tool used by brands and teams to manage these relationships, as they can "meet relationship marketing goals through social media, especially if these channels are used to enhance relationship value. Specifically, relationships can be built if organizations use social media to engage customers with their brand" (Achen, 2016, p. 248). Furthering this, "organizations that choose to utilize social media channels to connect with consumers have the opportunity to engage in two-way communications and interactions that may impact customer relationships and buying behavior" (Achen, 2016, p. 247). Achen's 2016 study examined social media use amongst pro sports fans and the influences on their buying habits. This study found that social media (specifically Facebook) had "significant effects... on purchase and referral intentions as mediated by relationship quality" as well as "a significant, positive direct effect... to intentions to purchase" in professional sport fans (pp. 261-262). Achen (2016) additionally found that more frequent social media use by fans led to higher intentions to "purchase tickets and merchandise" as well as more "customer recommendations and strong word-of-mouth" (pp. 261-262). Moyer et al., (2015) had previously found similar results when analyzing professional baseball fans and teams social media use, where there was "a positive relationship between team identification and use of the team's Facebook page as well as to team related purchases" (p. 31).

Outside of these studies, there has been much research on social media's influence on customer behavior and buying habits, with many brands and companies vying for this type of data over the last decade. Hutter et al., (2013) found that online marketing and communications present "new challenges and opportunities for companies as purchase decisions are increasingly

influenced by social media interactions. People rely more than ever on their social networks when making those decisions” (p, 342). These decisions can be affected by both the brand itself and other consumers. Other consumers can influence these decisions through “product reviews” and “online recommendations of other consumers” that “highly impact purchase decisions” (Poturak, & Softić, 2019, pp. 19, 38). Brands influence these decisions through their own social media posts and marketing, as “customer participation in a firm’s social media efforts leads to an increase in the frequency of customer visits” (Rishika et al., 2013, p. 108). This participation is “greater when there are high levels of activity in the social media site and for customers who exhibit a strong patronage with the firm” (Rishika et al., 2013, p. 108). In total, social media use and the relationships built through it have been found to influence consumer’s buying habits and affect their overall consumer habits as well, which is why brands are looking to use social media in an attempt to influence these habits in their favor (Kumar et al., 2016).

Why Teams Are Trying to Influence These Habits

Teams look to influence fan’s buying habits through social media to benefit themselves in a variety of different ways. Firstly, teams look to boost relationships with fans on social media due to the fact that sport consumer-team relationship quality is a major predictor of licensed merchandise consumption” (Kim et al., 2011, p. 581). Building better relationships with fans lead to increased licensed merchandise sales which are “a substantial source of revenue for sport teams and leagues; licensed merchandise also helps sport organizations communicate their brand identity with their fans” (Kim et al., 2011, p. 581). Next, not only are merchandise sales impacted by these relationships and social media, but “marketing designed to increase fans’ identification with a team will lead to higher levels of patronage... and higher levels of associated

product consumption” (Fairley et al., 2015, p. 58). This higher level of patronage comes through more attendance at games and ticket sales, in which “increasing attendance is one of the most important objectives for sport organizations. Relationship quality has been linked to positively influencing purchase intention and actual purchases” (Kim et al., 2011, p. 579).

The same study done by Kim et al., (2011) had overall findings that supported the notion that social media and relationships highly impacted sport consumer's habits, as “relationship quality with the team explained 56% of the variance in intention to attend games, 75% of intention to consume sport media, and 66% of intention to purchase licensed merchandise” (p. 576). These findings were also supported by subsequent research completed by Achen (2016) in which ticket sales, merchandise sales, and purchase referrals were all affected by social media use and the fan's level of relationship with their team, all of which are seen as important factors in a team's financial success, as well as their popularity and reputation with fans and consumers. These factors add up to why sport teams and marketers see social media and the strategies used within as substantial to their current success and why they are pursuing further research and data collection in this field.

Summary

Social media has become a very commonly used communication tool that is becoming increasingly utilized not only by consumers but by brands as well. These brands look to social media marketing as a way to connect with potential consumers, promote themselves, and attempt to influence their consumer's habits. The relationships built through social media are important to these brands as well, who use relationship marketing to impact these in their favor. It has been

seen that social media and the relationships built through it can influence consumer's buying habits, affecting not only what they buy, but the frequency and quantity of it, as well as the buying habits of other consumers around them. This trend can especially be seen within the sporting industry, with teams looking to influence their fan's buying habits and build better relationships with them through social media. Although there has been an abundance of research previously done on this topic, there have not been many recent studies done and with social media continuously evolving, the data available to these teams and marketers is outdated and becoming less relevant. Along with the recency issue, many previous studies have limited scopes of research, only looking at single platforms, teams, or sports. New studies are needed to fill this gap, thus leading to the purpose of the following study, which is to find the effect of social media use on pro sports team fan's buying habits.

Chapter Three

PROCEDURE

Statement of the Problem

Due to the fact that social media has an effect on consumer's buying habits, sports teams and brands are attempting to influence these habits through social media marketing and are constantly looking to improve their social media presence and marketing. However, there has been a lack of recent research on this topic along with a limited scope of this research, with only singular social media platforms and teams/leagues being included in studies. This leads to a significant gap in guidance for teams to use in their social media marketing strategies. In an attempt to fill this gap, the following research will examine fan's social media use, buying habits, and how the two affect each other.

Source of Data

Participants were gathered through a few different methods which included the social media platforms of LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as by email and text messaging. The use of these methods to distribute the survey was meant to give access to more potential

participants as well as people who would match the criteria needed to take the survey, as most were followers of sports or connections within the sporting industry. The sample aimed to include followers of professional sports on social media who buy products of their favorite teams and were over the age of 18.

Instrumentation

This study used an online survey method to collect data on sport fan's social media use and buying habits. The online survey method was used as it allowed for self-reporting on personal areas of interest/habits only the respondent would know, was simple and easy for respondents to use, was easier to distribute and reach respondents, and allowed for quick analysis of the data. The survey was conducted through the online survey site, KwikSurveys, and asked questions about the respondent's sport fandom, social media use, buying habits, and demographics. It started with two qualifying questions to make sure that the participants matched criteria that would lead to the best possible data set. Those questions were "I have been a follower of at least one professional sports team's social media account within the last six months, yes or no?" and "I have purchased products related to a professional sports team before (tickets, merchandise, apparel), yes or no?". These questions were followed by an informed consent page, which (if qualified) then led to the actual survey questions. There were 18 questions in the survey that were designed to collect data and analyze trends in how social media use influences the buying habits of these fans. The questions were broken into a few different sections, first, the effects of seeing general or promotional social media content on fan's buying habits pertaining to a category of sports products, which were tickets, apparel (such as hats, jerseys, etc.), or general merchandise (such as keychains, posters, etc.), then the respondent's

social media habits, followed by the consumer's buying frequency and price ranges, and finally finished with the demographics of the participant. These questions allowed for the collection of data on the respondent's typical social media use and buying habits when pertaining to sports teams, and then gauge whether or not the two were connected or influenced by each other.

Procedure

The survey was designed with the goal of finding the effects of social media use on these fan's buying habits and was published as an online link through the KwikSurveys website. The link to the survey along with a brief explanation of what it was about were sent out through the social media platforms of LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as by email and text messaging to possible participants. The explanation made it clear that this was meant only for professional sports fans on social media and also included a brief estimate of how long it would take to complete. The survey was opened on February 27th and closed on March 8th, with a reminder to complete it sent out through the same communications channels on March 6th. It finished with 79 total respondents, the data of which was then sorted and analyzed, and will be presented in the next section.

Chapter Four

RESULTS

This survey was made to collect data on the effects of social media use on professional sports team fan's buying habits. As previously stated, the survey contained questions on the buying habits and social media use of professional sports fans, as well as questions connecting these two aspects. The survey was open for 10 days and gathered 79 responses, which lead to the following data.

Participants

Out of the 79 respondents, 63 made it past the qualifying questions, with 10 not following a professional sports team's social media account in the past 6 months, 2 having not bought products related to a sports team before, and an additional 4 deciding not to complete the survey past that point. 52 respondents made it past the informed consent page, with 2 responding "no" to the page and another 9 people deciding not to continue with the survey. These 52 respondents would continue out with the rest of the survey and would give the only complete

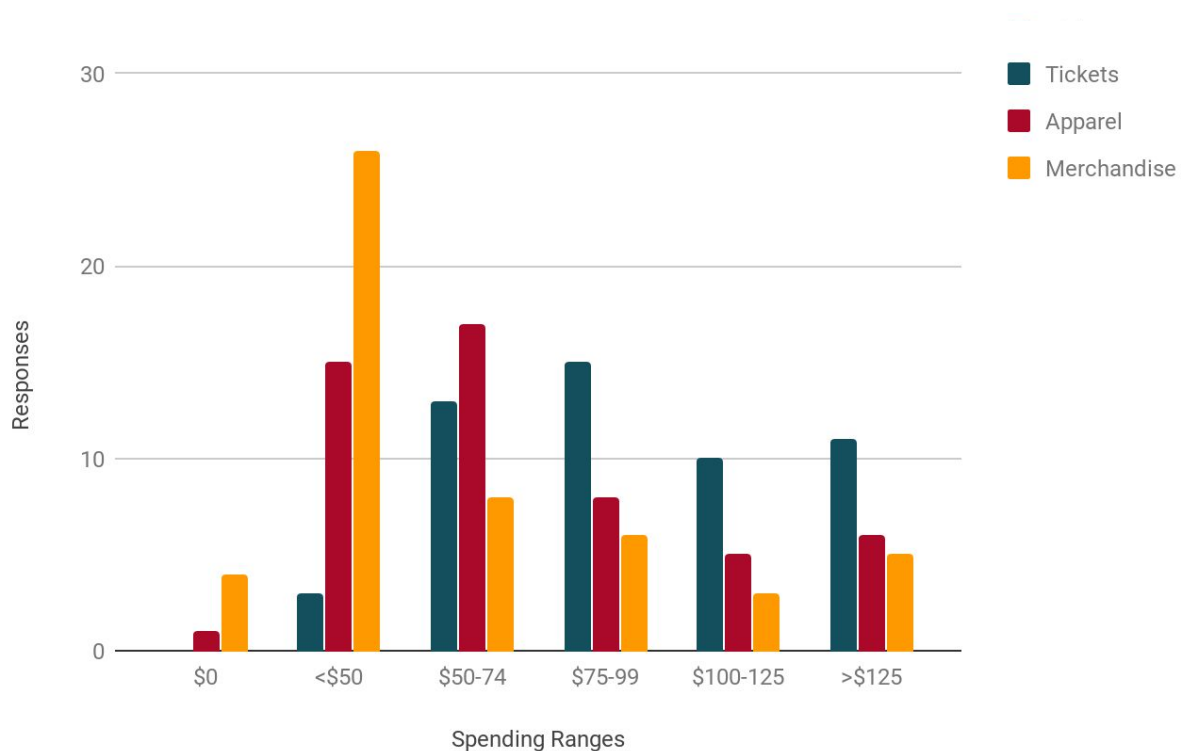
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answers that will be used for the data in this study. Out of the 52 participants, 62% were in the 18-25-year-old range, 4% were 26-35, 2% were 36-45, 17% were 46-55, and 15% were over 55. The age range here is clearly on the younger side, with 66% being 35 or under. The ethnicity of all 52 participants was white/caucasian, while 73% were male and 27% were female.

Firstly, data pertaining to the spending ranges of fans on the three main product categories is broken down below. The questions asked how much fans would be willing to spend and had ranges of no money at all, <\$50, \$50-74, \$75-99, \$100-125, and >\$125.

Figure 1: Fan's Spending Ranges on Different Products



When it came to tickets, no one would not spend any money on them, 5.77% were under \$50, 25% were in the \$50-74 range, 28.85% in \$75-99, 19.23% in \$100-125, and 21.15% would spend greater than \$125. The spending on tickets was fairly evenly spread out within the ranges

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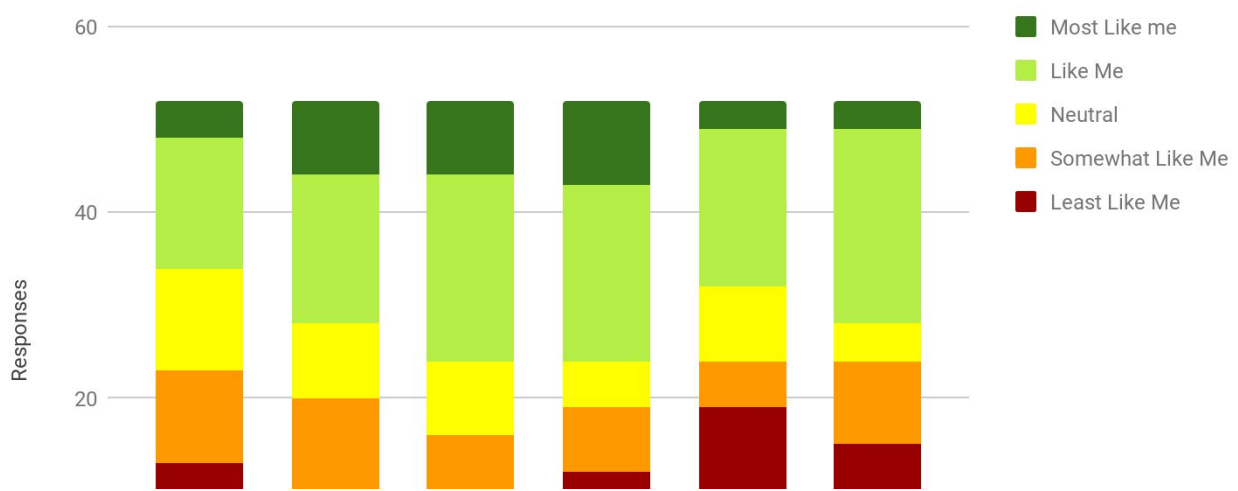
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of \$50-125+, but few people would only be willing to spend under \$50 on a ticket. With apparel, it was somewhat similar to tickets with many people spread out within the \$50-125+ range, however, more would be only willing to spend under \$50 (28.85%) and a few wouldn't want to spend money on apparel at all (1.92%). 32.69% were in the \$50-74 range, 15.38% in \$75-99, 9.62% in \$100-125, and 21.15% would spend greater than \$125. Finally, with merchandise, a majority of people would only want to spend under \$50, with exactly 50% of people responding in that range, but not many wouldn't spend any money at all (7.69%). Among the rest, 15.38% were in the \$50-74 range, 11.54% in \$75-99, 5.77% in \$100-125, and 9.62% would spend greater than \$125.

Buying Habits

Next, the data from the first six questions pertaining to purchase type (apparel, merchandise, and tickets), and social media content seen (promotional or general) is examined. The figure below shows the results from these questions, each having the same scale from “least like me” to “most like me”, gauging the fan’s likelihood of purchasing those certain products after seeing general (such as score updates) or promotional social media content from their favorite sports team.

Figure 2: Likelihood of Product Buying Based on Social Media Content Seen



There are a few notable pieces to these results. Firstly, when it comes to both tickets and merchandise, fans were more likely to buy those products after seeing promotional content, rather than general content. This is seen through more people responding positively to promotional content (tickets and merchandise both had 46.15% of their responses in the “like/most like me” categories), than compared to general content (tickets had 34.62% while merchandise had 38.46% of responses in the “like/most like me” categories). Apparel, however, had different results where people responded equally positive to both promotional and general content, with 53.85% of responses each in the “like/most like me” categories, while at the same time, people responded more negatively to promotional content over general content, with 36.54% being in the “somewhat/least like me” categories for promotional and 30.77% of responses in those categories for general. Within the percentage differences in responses to promotional versus general content, tickets had the greatest difference, with 11.53% more positive responses (in the “like/most like me” category) for promotional content over general, while merchandise had 7.69% more positive responses in the promotional category, while apparel was even in both categories. Finally, when it came to the overall likelihood of buying in response to social media content, people were least likely to buy tickets, with 59.61% of total responses being in the “neutral, somewhat, or least like me” categories, while merchandise had 57.69% of total responses in these categories and apparel had only 46.15%.

Social Media Habits

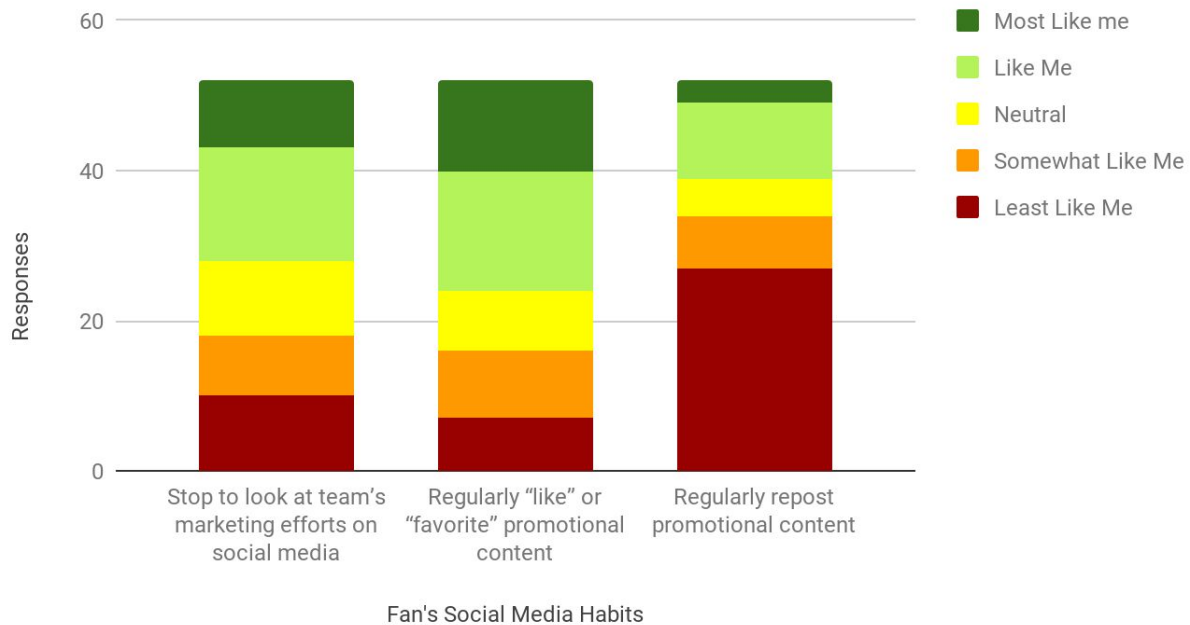
The following are the results and comparisons from the social media habits section, including three questions, on the awareness, liking/favoriting, and reposting of promotional

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content from teams. Each question had the same scales as the previous six, going from “most like me” to “least like me”.

Figure 3: Fan's Social Media Habits Regarding Promotional Content

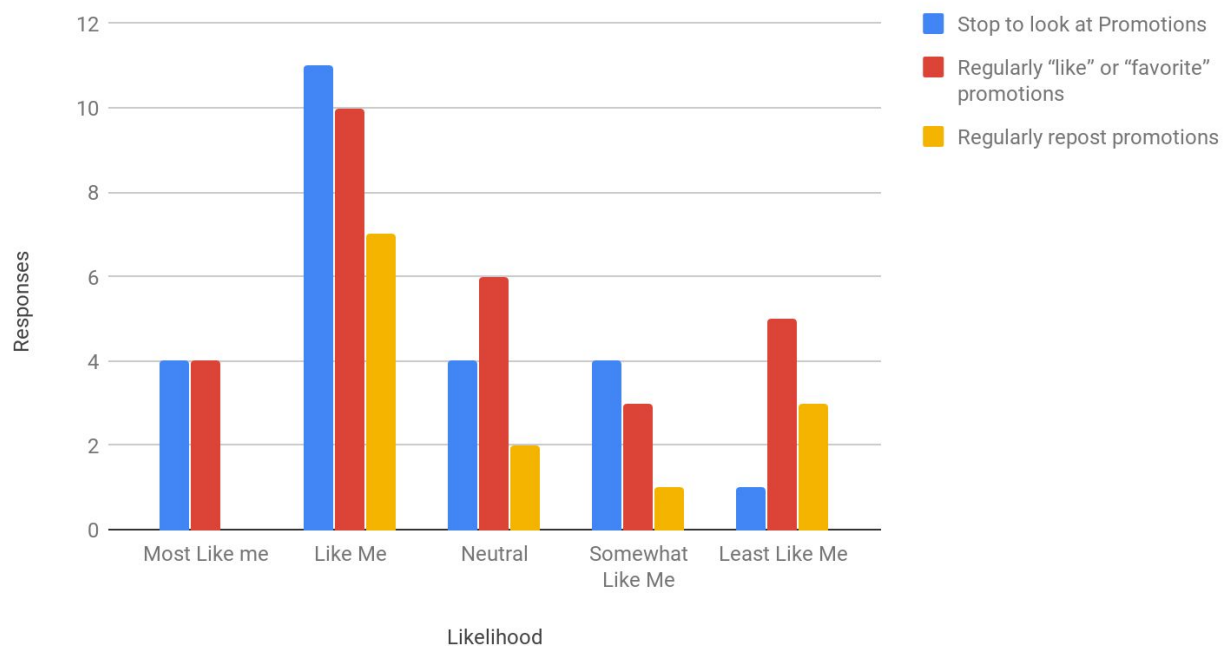


The data shows that people are more likely than not to both stop to look at a team's marketing efforts on social media, and regularly “like” or “favorite” promotional content from those teams. This is seen in the 46.15% of people responding “like/most like me” compared to 19.23% “neutral” and 34.62% “somewhat/least like me” for stopping to look at team's marketing efforts, while 53.85% of people responded “like/most like me” compared to 15.38% “neutral” and 30.77% “somewhat/least like me” for regularly “liking” or “favoriting” promotional content from team's social media. The result was quite the opposite for reposting promotional content, with a majority of people (65.38%) responding “somewhat/least like me” compared to 9.62% “neutral” and 25% “like/most like me”.

Buying Habits Based on Social Media Use

Next, there will be a comparison looking at respondents who were likely (like/most like me) to look at, like/favorite, or repost promotional content and how they answered the previous three questions on buying products after seeing promotional content. Figure 4 shows that most fans who are likely to engage with promotional content are also likely to buy tickets after seeing such content.

Figure 4: Fans Who are Likely to Engage with Promotional Content's Probability of Buying Tickets Due to Promotional Content

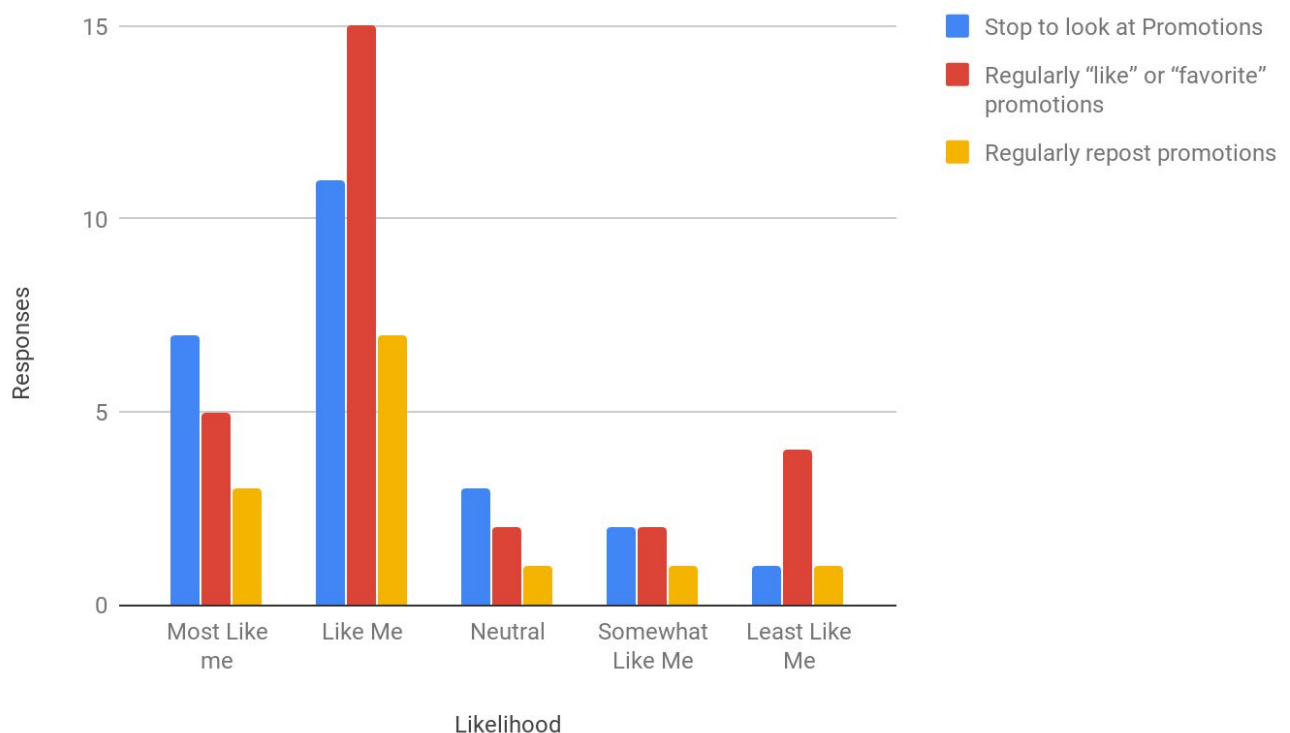


People who were likely to stop to look at promotions were also more likely to buy tickets after seeing such promotions, with 62.5% responding "like/most like me", while 16.67% were neutral and 20.83% responded "somewhat/least like me". At the same time, 50% of people that

are likely to regularly “like” or “favorite” promotions responded “like/most like me” compared to 21.42% neutral and 28.57% “somewhat/least like me” for buying tickets after seeing promotions. Finally, people likely to repost promotional content were also likely to buy tickets after seeing promotions, with 53.85% responding “like/most like me” while 15.38% were neutral and 30.77% answered “somewhat/least like me”.

Following this, the same respondents that are likely to engage with promotional content will be looked at in regards to purchasing apparel after seeing promotions.

Figure 5: Fans Who are Likely to Engage with Promotional Content’s Probability of Buying Apparel Due to Promotional Content



Results in Figure 4 show that most fans who are likely to engage with promotional content are also likely to buy apparel after seeing such content. People who were likely to stop to look at

promotions were also more likely to buy apparel after seeing such promotions, with 75% responding “like/most like me”, while both the neutral and “somewhat/least like me” categories had 12.50% of responses in each. People that are likely to regularly “like” or “favorite” promotions responded 71.43% in the “like/most like me” categories compared to 7.14% neutral and 21.43% “somewhat/least like me” for buying apparel after seeing promotions. Finally, people likely to repost promotional content were also likely to buy apparel after seeing promotions, with 76.92% responding “like/most like me” while 7.69% were neutral and 15.38% answered “somewhat/least like me”.

Lastly, the same respondents that are likely to engage with promotional content are examined in relation to purchasing merchandise after seeing promotions.

Figure 6: Fans Who are Likely to Engage with Promotional Content’s Probability of Buying Team-Related Merchandise Due to Promotional Content

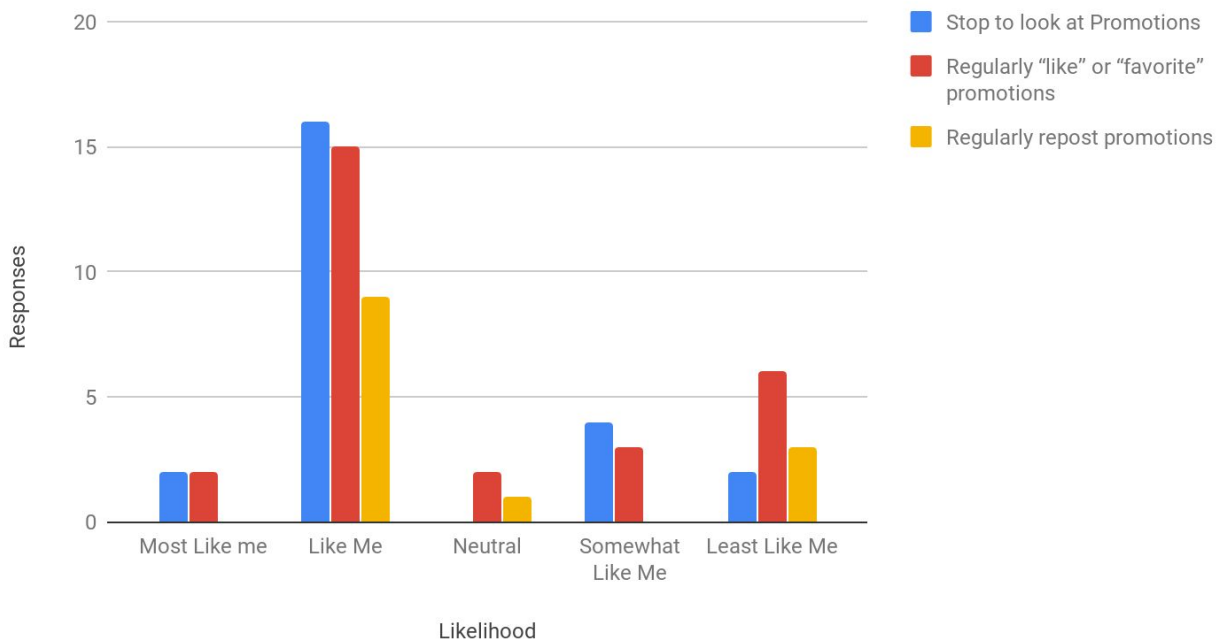


Figure 5 shows that most fans who are likely to engage with promotional content are also likely to buy merchandise after seeing such content. People who were likely to stop to look at promotions were also more likely to buy merchandise after seeing such promotions, with 75% responding “like/most like me”, while none responded neutral and the remaining 25% responded “somewhat/least like me”. People that are likely to regularly “like” or “favorite” promotions responded 60.72% in the “like/most like me” categories compared to 7.14% neutral and 32.14% “somewhat/least like me” for buying merchandise after seeing promotions. Finally, people likely to repost promotional content were also likely to buy merchandise after seeing promotions, with 69.23% responding “like/most like me” while 7.69% were neutral and 23.08% answered “somewhat/least like me”.

Following this, data on the buying frequency of fans after seeing promotions was collected in three questions, with a range of weekly, monthly, yearly, once every few years and never for each of the three product categories of tickets, apparel, and merchandise.

Figure 7: Fan's Buying Frequency After Seeing Social Media Promotions

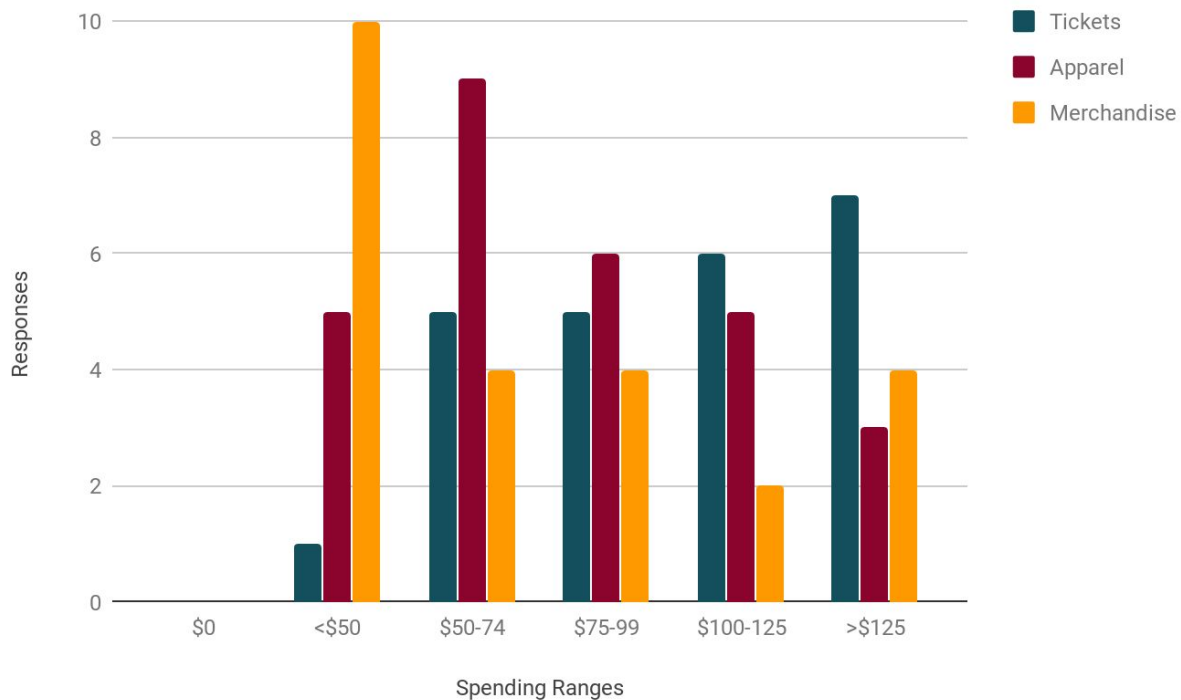


As Figure 7 shows, each category was very similar in buying frequency, with no consumers buying on a weekly basis, and most buying years at a time or not at all. Tickets had no one buying on a weekly basis, 5.77% of people buying on a monthly basis, 42.31% on a yearly, 26.92% once every few years, and 25% of fans had never bought tickets after seeing a social media promotion from their team. Apparel had no one buying on a weekly basis, 7.69% buying on a monthly basis, 38.47% yearly, 26.92% every few years, and 26.92% had never bought apparel after seeing a social media promotion. Finally, no one had purchased merchandise on a weekly basis, 11.54% purchased on a monthly basis, 26.92% yearly, 21.15% every few years, and 40.38% had never bought merchandise after seeing a social media promotion from their team. Tickets and apparel were extremely similar with most fans buying yearly and every few years, whereas merchandise had almost no one buying it after seeing social media promotions, and the few that do are on a year-by-year basis.

For a final comparison, the data from respondents who were likely (like/most like) to purchase each category of product after seeing promotional content on social media are matched up with the spending ranges of that same product.

Figure 8: Fans Likely to Purchase Products After Seeing Promotions on Social Media's

Spending Ranges on Those Same Products



The spending ranges here are very similar to the overall spending ranges, as most people were willing to buy tickets at the \$50 or above range (95.83%), with the most being in the >\$125 range (29.17%), most people willing to buy apparel in the <\$50-125 range (89.29%), with the highest amount being in the \$50-74 range (32.14%), and a majority of people (41.67%) being only willing to stay under \$50 for buying merchandise.

Summary

The data collected shows numerous trends of how fan's habits change with different factors, specifically in regards to product type and social media content type. There is evidence on the influence of social media in buying habits, especially when it comes to promotional

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aspects, but there are also some discrepancies and unique findings within the same data. The next section will go in-depth on these different influences and analyze these outcomes to see how influential social media use is.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

With the rise in usage of social media and the increasing knowledge of its effects on consumers and their buying habits, it is unsurprising that many brands, including sports teams, are looking to bolster their social media presence and marketing strategies. However, there has been a lack of guidance on how to go about this in recent years with very few relevant studies being put out with wide ranges of data on the effects of social media use on sports fan's buying habits. This study aimed to fill this gap through a variety of questions on these effects spanning across all professional sports and social media platforms. To obtain this data, an online survey containing 18 questions on social media use and buying habits, along with subcategories of product types, social media post types, spending ranges, and buying frequency was sent out across social media and other communication platforms. Data was analyzed after being converted into percentages and the categories were all compared and contrasted to determine the results and any connections to be made. The following section will discuss these results along with possible connections and a comparison to previous research results.

Buying Habits

When it comes to buying habits of sports fans, it is known that promotional content, especially online and on social media, can influence fan's buying habits positively (Achen, 2016). The results of this study, for the most part, support this in that fans were more likely to

buy tickets and merchandise after seeing promotional content (specific advertisements) on social media, over general content (such as score updates) from their favorite teams. This was seen in the fact that tickets and merchandise both had more positive responses in the promotional content category over general content, with 46.15% of their responses in the “like/most like me” categories for promotional, while tickets had 34.62% and merchandise had 38.46% of responses in the “like/most like me” categories of general content. Achen, (2016) had similar results when looking at fan engagement on NBA Facebook pages, to where more interactions with posts (especially promotional ones) lead to greater purchase intentions for those fans, showing a positive correlation between promotional social media content and buying habits of fans. These results also align with Hutter et al., (2013), as brand's fan page engagement positively impacted fan relationship and purchase intentions, where brands putting out more social media content and increasing fan interaction lead to better relationships with their fans and higher intentions to purchase products. Finally, within the same results, Talih et al., (2017) support this notion, as social media advertisements were found to positively affect consumer's purchase intentions.

Next, when looking at the overall likelihood of buying in response to social media content, the likelihood of each product category provided similar results to that of Kim et al., (2011). The results of this study showed that people were least likely to buy tickets, with 59.61% of total responses being in the “neutral, somewhat, or least like me” categories, while merchandise had 57.69% of total responses in these categories and apparel had only 46.15%. This aligns with the results of Kim et al., (2011), as fans were least likely to have their purchase habits of tickets change based on interaction with the team while licensed merchandise was much higher in this regard (they included apparel in this), and consuming sports media was the highest

category (not included in this study). The results are similar in that fan's purchase habits of merchandise were more likely to be changed by interactions with the team (such as social media promotions) than tickets are.

Although there was a lot of supporting evidence towards past studies in the realm of buying habits, this study also had some contradicting results as well. When it came to fan's responses to promotional social media content, apparel had different results compared to the tickets and merchandise categories. In terms of positive responses, general and promotional content were equal, with 53.85% of responses each in the "like/most like me" categories. Not only was promotional equal to general in positive responses, but it had more negative responses than general as well, with 36.54% being in the "somewhat/least like me" categories for promotional and 30.77% of responses in those categories for general. This goes against the findings of Achen, (2016), Hutter et al., (2013), and Talih et al., (2017), in that promotional content did not have a greater effect on buying habits for apparel.

Finally, when looking at the results in buying habits that challenge past studies, although there was a clear difference between promotional and general content in terms of positive reaction for two of the three product categories, those two categories still had over half their responses in the bottom three likelihood categories of "neutral" "somewhat like me" or "least like me". This may point to social media content as a whole not having that much of an effect on consumer buying habits, once again going against the findings of Achen, (2016), Hutter et al., (2013), and Talih et al., (2017).

Social Media Habits

When discussing the social media use habits of fans, there has been research that shows that brands can better connect with fans through social media (especially promotional content) and bolster their marketing strategies based on their fan's social media use habits (Hutter et al., 2013). Results from this study support that promotional content reached these fans and also influenced their social media habits as well. Firstly, the data showed that people were more likely than not to both stop to look at a team's marketing efforts on social media, and regularly "like" or "favorite" promotional content from those teams, with 46.15% of people responding "like/most like me" compared to 19.23% "neutral" and 34.62% "somewhat/least like me" for stopping to look at team's marketing efforts, while 53.85% of people responded "like/most like me" compared to 15.38% "neutral" and 30.77% "somewhat/least like me" for regularly "liking" or "favoriting" promotional content. These results aligned with the findings of Hutter et al., (2013) and Moyer et al., (2015), where teams that put out more promotional content on their social media found that fans were more interactive with the social media page and had greater brand awareness and identification with the team (awareness in stopping to look at promotional posts and identification in liking/favoriting those posts).

However, when it came to reposting promotional content, there was quite a difference in the results, with a majority of people (65.38%) responding "somewhat/least like me" compared to 9.62% "neutral" and 25% "like/most like me". This challenges the results of Moyer et al., (2015) in that there were certain aspects of promotional posts that fans would not relate to or interact with. This does, however, support the same findings of Hutter et al. (2013) who found

that there was a certain point where fans are not receptive to promotional content (annoyance) and will not share this content with others. The results overall showed that people did want to identify more with these teams and were responsive when it comes to promotional content, but there was a clear line where this becomes a moot point and that seems to be the idea of reposting such content and sharing it to their followers/community around them.

Buying Habits Based on Social Media Use

Finally, when looking at users who frequent their team's social media pages and content, it was clear that their buying habits of products related to those teams are influenced by their social media use. This was found through the results of this study as well as past studies (Kumar et al., (2016), Poturak, & Softić, (2019), and Rishika et al., (2013). Firstly, when it came to people who were likely to engage in their team's promotional social media content, they were also more likely to purchase products from their team due to promotional social media content. This was observed in this study's data, where people who were likely to stop to look at promotions, like/favorite, and repost promotions were also more likely to buy tickets (62.5% positive), apparel (75% positive), and merchandise (75% positive) after seeing such promotions. This supports results from Kumar et al., (2016) and Poturak, & Softić, (2019) in that brand-generated social media content (such as promotions) have a positive effect on consumer's purchase habits.

Next, there was data that also went against past studies (Rishika et al., 2013) when looking at the buying frequency and price range of fans likely to purchase after seeing social media promotions. When analyzing the buying frequency of fans likely to purchase products

after seeing social media promotions from their teams, it was very similar to the general population of answers, with no one buying on a weekly basis, very few on a monthly, a majority on a yearly basis, and a few on a few year/never basis for tickets and apparel, and no one on a weekly basis, few on a monthly, some on a yearly/few years, and most in the “never had bought” category for merchandise. These findings were dissimilar to what Rishika et al., (2013) had found, as they determined that fans who were more engaged with brand's social media content were also more likely to purchase said brand's content more frequently, whereas the data obtained in this study did not show a change in buying frequency of this segment of fans when compared to the rest of the respondents.

Along with the results of the buying frequency of these fans being different from those in Rishika et al., (2013), the purchase price range trends were also different. The results indicated that the fans who were likely to purchase products after seeing social media promotions had similar price ranges as the general population (in this case the rest of the respondents). These fans were willing to buy tickets at the \$50 or above range (95.83%), with the most being in the >\$125 range (29.17%), most people willing to buy apparel in the <\$50-125 range (89.29%), with the highest amount being in the \$50-74 range (32.14%), and a majority of people (41.67%) being only willing to stay under \$50 for buying merchandise. This was unsurprising, as most fans would spend more money on products worth more in general (merchandise being the least and tickets being the most). These results, however, differ from Rishika et al., (2013) as their results indicated that fans who were more engaged with brand's social media content were also more likely to spend more on that brand's products.

Summary

This research provided a few insights into the effects of social media use on the buying habits of professional sports team fans. It seems that most of the data points to there being a positive relationship between social media use and buying intentions, as there is a positive reaction to promotional content, with more people buying the team's products because of it. There are, however, a few contradictions in this study where fans were not as likely to buy or show positive buying habits depending on the product or social media content type. With the data both supporting and contradicting past research and results not being completely concise, it can't be said for sure that there's a significant effect of social media use on these professional sports fan's buying habits, but there was a decent amount of evidence to show some connection between the two in a positive manner. The data also provided insights into how fan's buying habits change based on social media content type and product type. This would make it seem that social media marketing strategies should be based on product type and a multitude of other possible factors for these teams to best market to their fans, which should be further looked into. The next section will discuss these result's implications as they pertain to society as a whole and the field of sport management.

Chapter Six

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Social media has become a major communication platform over the past decade and thus has been integrated into the marketing strategies of many different brands and companies, especially within the sporting industry. With this, many sports organizations and brands attempt to bolster their social media marketing campaigns to try and get an advantage in both building relationships with their consumers and influence their buying habits. However, there has been a recent lack of relevant guidance in this area in terms of research on fan's buying habits and social media use, as most research is from 2016 or before and is generally outdated. Along with the recency issue, the previous studies typically have a limited scope of research, with very few social media platforms and sports looked at. Many seem to analyze only one social media platform and team or sport and very few take into consideration buying habits, limiting the relevance and findings of their studies (Achen, 2016; Hutter et al., 2013; Moyer et al., 2015; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Watanabe et al., 2016). This lack of research leads to gaps in what brands and teams can analyze and put together towards their social media marketing strategies as well as what they know about fan's buying habits. New research is needed to cover a wider array of social media platforms and sports to obtain more significant data on fan's buying habits and how they are affected by social media use, to not only help sports brands and teams but to also help sport marketing as a whole and create more tailored and enhanced social media experiences for fans.

This study aimed to generate the needed new and updated research, covering any social media platforms and teams, giving a broader scope of research, looking more into buying habits, and providing recent data. The study looked to answer the research question of “how does the use of social media influence professional sport team fan’s buying habits” and was conducted using an online survey method through the website KwikSurveys. The survey contained 18 questions about the respondent’s social media use, buying habits, and demographics, which were broken into a few different sections pertaining to types of social media content, category of sports products, respondent’s social media habits, buying frequency and price ranges. These questions allowed for the collection of data on the respondent’s typical social media use and buying habits and then gauging whether or not the two were connected or influenced by each other. The survey was distributed over the social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, as well as by email and text messaging, and gathered 79 total responses, 52 of which were viable. The results from these responses point to there being a positive connection between social media use and buying intentions. Results showed more people buying team’s products because of promotional social media content and that fans who interact more on social media were more likely to purchase products as well. Although there is quite a bit of data to support these results, there are some discrepancies as well. It was found that those who interacted more on social media did not have much change in their buying frequency and price ranges. It was also found that the different products of tickets, apparel, and merchandise yielded different responses in terms of buying habits and not all of these products had a fully positive response in buying habits due to social media use. Overall, results showed a mostly positive connection between

social media use and buying habits, along with differences in these buying habits based on product type.

The results of this study give recent and relevant data with a wide scope of research to the sporting industry, in an attempt to aid in the creation of better marketing strategies towards professional sports fans. Sports marketers can look at how different product categories and social media post types yield different buying responses from consumers, as well as what these consumers' overall habits are and how to best influence these habits through social media. However, as previously mentioned, there are limitations and delimitations of this study that come with these results. Firstly within the context of the respondents, there were only 52 viable answers, which is a small sample size when trying to generalize these findings to sport fans. These respondents were also restricted to being social media users over the age of 18 who follow a professional sports team and have bought a product of theirs in the past year. This was done to restrict it to relevant responses but could have been expanded to include more possible data. The respondents also were majorly white, male, and young, which once again limits the general applicability of these results. When it came to distribution, the survey was sent out through a limited number of communication channels and to a specific network of people, which also limits the total responses and generalization of the results. Finally, there was a short time limit placed on this research and survey, as it was confined to an academic calendar, with only one semester to complete the survey, analyze the results, and finish the research, thus why the survey only lasted a couple of weeks and the overall data was limited. Even with these limitations, there is a good amount of data that can be useful to sport teams and marketers to better understand how to use social media to positively influence their fans buying habits, as well as data on the

social media usage and buying habits of fans within different product and social media post types.

This research should be furthered to include more available data to sports teams and marketers and build off of these results. To do this, there should be a greater time span and amount of data collected to ensure more generally applicable results to the sport fan population as a whole. Having a more diverse and larger sample size would no doubtedly help this. Along with this, the qualifications of who the survey could be taken by (possibly minor-league fans included) and how the survey was distributed could be expanded to include additional data and results. Finally, expanding the survey to cover more general social media habits and buying habits along with more in-depth research on different product types would benefit future studies greatly and could provide sport marketers with even more valuable data. Continuing this type of study is important to create relevant information towards the advancement of social media marketing within the sporting industry. Providing this information will help sports teams and marketers mold their strategies and social media content to more effectively connect with their fans and create better experiences for both parties.

This research was successful in answering the research question in that fans are more likely to buy sport team products after seeing promotions on social media and those who interact more on social media are more likely to buy products, both mediated by product type. Although results aren't completely conclusive and application to the general population is limited, this research provides relevant data and insights for current sports marketing strategies of professional sports brands and teams. Hopefully, future research can build from this and continue

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to provide meaningful information on this topic in an attempt to keep up with the ever-changing social media environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Electronic Survey Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted as part of a course requirement for SM 490: Senior Thesis. The purpose of this study is to gather information on the effects of social media use on the buying habits of professional sports team fans. This will be accomplished through surveying followers of professional teams on social media who have purchased products related to teams before. If you decide to take part in this study you will be invited to answer the questions in the following electronic survey. The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete. There are no risks or discomfort anticipated in participating in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop at any point during the process. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the persons listed above who are conducting the study or attending the class presentation. If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures you may contact the faculty sponsor/investigator, Dr. Katie Kilty at kkilty@endicott.edu, or 978-232-2453.

3* I am at least 18 years old and have read the above information and agree to participate in this study.

A	Yes	B	No
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Appendix B: Survey

The Effects of Social Media Use on Professional Sports Fan's Buying Habits

Please answer the following questions to continue to the survey.

1* I have been a follower of at least one professional sports team's social media account within the last six months

A	Yes	B	No
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2* I have purchased products related to a professional sports team before (tickets, merchandise, apparel).

A	Yes	B	No
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Survey - The Effects of Social Media Use on Professional Sports Fan's Buying Habits

Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability. There are 18 questions, each are multiple-choice and are all required to complete the survey.

4* I have purchased tickets after seeing general content (such as score updates) on social media from my favorite teams.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

5* I have purchased apparel (any apparel related to the team such as shirts, hats, jerseys, etc.) after seeing general content (such as score updates) on social media from my favorite teams.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

6* I have purchased team-related merchandise (any non-apparel merchandise related to the team such as posters, keychains, pennants, etc.) after seeing general content (such as score updates) on social media from my favorite teams.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

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7* I have purchased tickets after seeing promotional content (specific advertisements) on social media from my favorite teams.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

8* I have purchased apparel (any apparel related to the team such as shirts, hats, jerseys, etc.) after seeing promotional content (specific advertisements) on social media from my favorite teams.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

9* I have purchased team-related merchandise (any non-apparel merchandise related to the team such as posters, keychains, pennants, etc.) after seeing promotional content (specific advertisements) on social media from my favorite teams.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

10* I stop to look at team's marketing efforts on social media when I see them.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

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11* I regularly "like" or "favorite" promotional content from my favorite team's social media page.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

12* I regularly repost promotional content from my favorite team's social media page.

A	Most like me
B	Like me
C	Neutral
D	Somewhat like me
E	Least like me

13* I purchase apparel of my favorite team in response to social media promotions (any apparel related to the team such as shirts, hats, jerseys, etc., select the one that best applies).

A	Weekly
B	Monthly
C	Yearly
D	Once every few years
E	I have never bought apparel in response to social media promotions

14* I purchase tickets to my favorite team's games in response to social media promotions (select the one that best applies).

A	Weekly
B	Monthly
C	Yearly
D	Once every few years
E	I have never bought tickets to a game in response to social media promotions

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15* I purchase other merchandise related to my favorite team in response to social media promotions (any non-apparel merchandise related to the team such as posters, keychains, pennants, etc., select the one that best applies).

A	Weekly
B	Monthly
C	Yearly
D	Once every few years
E	I have never bought merchandise in response to social media promotions

16* I am willing to spend __ on a ticket to my favorite team's game.

A	I would not spend money on tickets
B	<\$50
C	\$50-74
D	\$75-99
E	\$100-125
F	>\$125

17* I am willing to spend __ on a piece of apparel for my favorite team.

A	I would not spend money on apparel
B	<\$50
C	\$50-74
D	\$75-99
E	\$100-125
F	>\$125

18* I am willing to spend __ on merchandise of my favorite team.

A	I would not spend money on merchandise
B	<\$50
C	\$50-74
D	\$75-99
E	\$100-125
F	>\$125

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19* I am __ years old.

A	18-25
B	26-35
C	36-45
D	46-55
E	Over 55

20* My ethnicity is __ (select all that apply).

A	White/Caucasian
B	American Indian or Alaskan Native
C	Asian or Pacific Islander
D	Black/African American
E	Hispanic/Latino

21* My gender is __.

A	Male
B	Female
C	Other
D	I prefer not to answer

Thank you for completing this survey.

Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey. Your answers will provide beneficial information to this thesis.



CREATE YOUR OWN FORM