2-27-2014

Understanding the Relationship Between Social Media, Fanship, and Behaviors in Collegiate Athletics

Kurt A. Wirth

The Rochester Institute of Technology

Department of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Understanding the Relationship Between Social Media, Fanship, and Behaviors in Collegiate
Athletics

by

Kurt A. Wirth

A thesis submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication and Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:

February 27, 2014

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of
Kurt A. Wirth presented on February 27, 2014

_____

Patrick Scanlon, Ph.D.
Chairman and Professor of Communication
Department of Communication

_____

Tracy Worrell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Communication
Department of Communication
Thesis Advisor

_____

David Neumann, Ph.D.
Professor of Communication
Department of Communication
Thesis Advisor

_____

Rudy Pugliese, Ph.D.
Professor of Communication
Director, Communication & Media
Technologies Graduate Degree Program
Department of Communication

Table of Contents

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA, FANSHIP,
AND BEHAVIORS IN COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

Name: Kurt A. Wirth

Department: Communication

College: Liberal Arts

Degree: Master of Science in Communication and Media Technologies

Term Degree Awarded: Spring Semester 2014 (2135)

Abstract

This study is a survey-based examination of social media's relationship with identity and behavioral intentions in the area of collegiate athletics. Based on social identity and organizational identity theories, this study focuses on the role that social media can play in the development of individuals' attitudes and the behaviors that result from them. In doing so, the study becomes one of the first to analyze this relationship and provides a benchmark with which to help develop future studies. Findings show significant correlations between the consumption of an athletic program's social media campaign, level of self-identity with that program, and likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors among the sample.

Keywords: social media, self-identity, communication, behavior, survey

Understanding the Relationship Between Social Media, Fanship,
and Behaviors in Collegiate Athletics

A unique aspect of the field of communication is the impact that technology and its

adoption can have on the evolving knowledge of its researchers. From the "magic bullet" to

"uses and gratifications," complete sets of knowledge regarding the effects of mass media have

had to be academically altered or adapted in order to continue the quest for understanding in the

field due to technological innovations. One such innovation is social media, which is still

maturing and ripe for research into its relationship with the attitudes and behaviors of its

audience. Steps toward understanding this relationship will help those in the field of

communication academia establish a foundation of knowledge about an emerging medium as it

evolves.

Social media has seen an explosive growth since its birth over ten years ago. With this

communication development, many individuals, corporations, and organizations are adjusting to

the shift toward interactive and expanded two-way communication, learning how to leverage this

new and powerful medium. Simply put, social media is "Word of mouth on digital steroids"

(Qualman, 2011, p. xxi).

Corporate America is currently adjusting to the social media platforms available, many

leery of its usefulness and risks (Korn & Kwoh, 2012). Understanding, and eventually

harnessing, social media is both a challenge and an opportunity for academia and organizations

alike. Quickly growing out of its infancy, this medium seems to reward those who understand it

and employ it effectively with increased marketing impact.

Qualman (2011) notes that companies across the nation are already seeing significant

impacts on brand recognition and organization-friendly behaviors from employing social media,

a phenomenon this study investigates. Some social media campaigns that have successfully increased brand awareness include a campaign by Ford Motor Company for the European-sold Fiesta; the campaign increased brand awareness to 60 percent, surpassing brand awareness for many competing vehicles that had been on the market for several years. Other high-profile examples of social media's impact include Pepsi's reinvention of its brand, President Barack Obama's successful social media grassroots campaign, the birth of the Tea Party, and BBC's innovations in reporting the news through social media platforms. "People referring products and services via social media tools are the new king" (Qualman, 2011, p. xxii). Marketing has become a powerful arena for the two-way application of social media.

Though some corporations and organizations are beginning to experiment with these platforms, this study would stand as one of the first to empirically record social media's relationship with the consumer's behaviors. Previously, Lukach (2012) found a significant relationship between two of the variables of this research, exposure to a social media campaign and self-identity with an organization, within collegiate athletics. This thesis will expand upon this existing research by adding a variable for behavior, expanding the research instrument, and by featuring a sample at a different university. Very little research has attempted to connect consumer attitudes and social media use to behavior, though the link between attitudes and behavior in relation to an organization has been investigated (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 103.) The following research will measure the relationship of social media with the attitudes of its consumers and "program-friendly" behaviors such as donations and athletic event attendance in collegiate athletics.

Research on social media contributes a relatively substantial amount of knowledge to a growing segment of the field of communication and can provide a benchmark with which to help develop future studies. The academic community now has the ability to follow a paradigm shift in the way society communicates from its onset, monitoring and noting its evolution throughout. This study is one of the first of those investigations. The research herein will also add to the growing understanding of mass media as a whole and its relationship with its audience's attitudes and behaviors.

Exploring the possibility that a collegiate athletic department's social media campaign, defined by a specific set of objectives, will lead to higher attendance and more donations to the department requires investigating three relationships. These relationships between social media exposure, identity with an athletic program, and current or intended behavior will be measured closely within this study to find any potential correlations.

Literature Review

An individual perceives him or herself and his or her role in the world through a process known as self-identity. This self-identity includes collective identities, or identities formed through interaction with a group, and role-identities, or identities related to association with other individuals (Heise & MacKinnon, 2010). These identities are formed through psychological introspection and social interaction and can impact a range of issues from an individual's attitudes toward him or herself and those around them to the level of obedience to social norms (Heise & MacKinnon, 2010). This study features self-identity and explores if it can be affected by organizations and, if it can, whether that constructed self-identity can still shape behaviors.

Organizational Identity Theory

Albert and Whetten (1985) examined the tendency for individuals to construct multiple self-identities within the context of an organization. Organizational identity can be best understood to be a person who finds himself or herself as intertwined with the fate of the group (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and the development of an individual's or group's "sameness" within a changing, dynamic environment (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987). In short, organizational identity theory suggests that individuals not only compare themselves to other individuals in order to create a self-image, but to organizational entities, and that these comparisons can impact behaviors. This phenomenon can be seen in casual conversation with statements like "I'm a Coke kind of person" and mass judgments on others based upon consumer choices. The difference in the way a Facebook user and a Myspace user is perceived suggests this level of identity with an organization, predicting that consumers will interact more with the organization with a "culture" that is seen to be more desirable.

Previous research supports the link between a high self-identity value and a likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors, or those that are beneficial to an organization. Mael and Ashforth (1992) investigated and found evidence that self-identification with a college or university directly affects "making financial contributions, willingness to advise one's offspring and others to attend the college, and participating in various school functions" (p. 103). These program-friendly behaviors are correlated with a strong self-identity with the organization, and suggest that as the ease of forming the self-identities grows, so, too, will the likeliness of the behaviors. Due to the development and structure of social media and its highly-visible users, participating users can become members of a growing base of fellow interactors more easily,

making the creation and confirmation of these self-identities comparably simple to facilitate. These identities address not only categories, suggesting the individual is a part of the organization, but also address beliefs and motivations. When an organization's beliefs and motivations can converge, the organization's social media campaign has an increased chance to influence the attitudes and behaviors of its audience.

Social media platforms provide an opportunity for individuals to establish identities with organizations. Lukach (2012) found evidence that interacting with a social media campaign from an organization such as a university athletics program positively impacts an individual's level of identification with the program. If this connection is confirmed on a broad scale, it would help confirm organizational identity theory and suggest its strong influence on the role of social media in the process of individuals identifying with organizations.

Researchers have argued that organizational identity is not separate but contained within social identity (Mael & Ashforth, 1989). These identities with organizations can become so strong that the individual's sense of self, or self-identity, can be affected by the behaviors of the organization. In the case of this study, this phenomenon would explain the emotional investment and visceral reactions of individuals with high self-identity with a collegiate athletics team based upon its success or failure. The link between exposure to an organization, or its artifacts, and self-identity suggested by organizational identity theory provides support for a hypothesis that an organization's social media campaign, as an artifact and extension of the organization, is related to an individual's self-identity with that organization.

Social Identity Theory

Collectivism, the belief that society is or should be centered on the interdependence of its individuals, is diametrically opposed to individualism, featuring the importance of the individual over the group. The battle between the two in modern society had swayed in favor of individualists by the early 1900s (Hogg & Williams, 2000). The evolution of social identity theory, an effort to explain the development of self-identities within the context of comparisons to others, was born out of an effort to introduce a modern collectivistic perspective into academia (Hogg & Williams, 2000). The theory also relies heavily on in-groups, suggesting that individuals that perceive themselves to be in the same group tend to make decisions based upon one another (Ahmed, 2007).

Social identity describes an individual's sense of self as arising from his or her identification with groups and his or her perception of how others in that group perceive him or her (Tajfel, 1974). This constructed identity can then play a role in decision making for the individual, from group selection and interaction to every day choices such as product consumption. Borrowing on the concepts of symbolic interaction theory, social identity theorizes that brands and their products are ascribed an identity by consumers and these consumers then make their decisions on whether to interact with them based upon how those identities match their own (Schlenker, 1978).

Social identity theory dictates that the consumer makes consumption choices based largely upon the products' symbolic meanings (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). For example, an individual complimented on his or her taste in clothes develops a self-identity as fashionable as a result. That individual will then choose clothing in the future based upon how fashionable he or

she determines products to be (Wright, Claiborne, & Sirgy, 1992). For this study, a consumer would be an individual whom would either donate money to the college's athletic department or attend an athletic event. These consumers, the theory suggests, become subconsciously linked to the athletics program through artifacts (Hogan, 2010). Social media, subsisting of many types of artifacts including pictures, posts, and comments, creates an identity through an organization's self-presentation on the chosen platform. A relationship could thus be measured between an individual's interaction with the social media artifacts and his or her self-identification with the athletic program.

Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011) grant further credence to the concept of attitudes affecting behaviors relating to social media. The researchers coined the concept of COBRAs, or consumers' online brand-related activities, and probed the motivation behind them. Self-identity was found to be both a major motivation and sub-motivation for both interaction and social media integration. Through posts, shares, retweets, and other forms of feedback, the two-way communication possible on social media platforms is a contributing factor into users' contributions to the brand's image.

Social Media in Athletics

Two-way communication, the proverbial engine of social media, magnifies the impact of social identity and organizational identity. Various athletic departments across the United States have begun to take the lead in the social media arena by increasing the exposure and identity of their respective programs. One of the most compelling cases of this social media adaptation is within the realm of American collegiate athletics. As a case study, Mississippi State University (MSU) ranked 29th nationally in the fall of 2011 by StudentAdvisor.com, a website dedicated to

improving perspective for students choosing a university, for social media usage. The school

simultaneously saw an unprecedented increase of both football game attendance and donations

from boosters. Leading the Southeastern Conference from 2006-2011, MSU saw a 99.9 percent

increase in donations (Pennington, 2012) and has sold out a school-record 21-straight football

games (Goldfarb, 2012). Be it coincidental or related in some way, the timing of this massive

improvement in fan involvement coincided with a proactive effort on the part of the MSU

athletic department, including increased social media outreach. Setting a now nationwide trend,

Mississippi State was the first to place a Twitter hashtag on its end-zone, doing so against rival

University of Mississippi in a nationally-televised matchup.

Cases like that of Mississippi State suggest decision-makers in the area of collegiate

athletics are taking social media seriously as a marketing tool. A study performed by the College

Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) examined the perceptions of social media by

its members. These field experts collectively claimed to spend approximately 11-25 percent of

their time on the job using company social media platforms while 38 percent agreed or strongly

agreed that social media changed the way their organization handled external communications,

versus 37 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (Stoldt, n.d.).

As social media platforms grow and become better understood, they have become used

on a wider basis in communications and marketing efforts. A perceived connection between

interaction with social media campaigns and increased consumer involvement has led many

athletics marketing executives to invest time and money in this emerging form of marketing.

Rothschild (2011) investigated the perceptions of social media held by Sports and Entertainment

Venue (SEV) managers. The research found that 62 percent of SEV managers reported to have

staff dedicated specifically to social media and 55 percent claimed to be proficient or an expert in social media. Additionally, 57 percent claimed to have a defined social media strategy and the study "found [a] significant number of SEV managers are making strides to 'effectively harness this marketing intelligence' found in social media marketing efforts" (Rothschild, 2011, pg. 47).

This research coincides with that of CoSIDA in that the percentage of relevant professionals in athletics finding relevancy in social media is hovering around the halfway mark. The research following will investigate the correlation of these efforts with individuals' self-identities with a private university in the northeastern United States and the behaviors, or intended behaviors, of those individuals.

Hypotheses

While athletics marketers have already begun to utilize social media to reach consumers and studies have implied that a positive relationship exists between the frequency of interaction with an organization's "artifacts," an individual's identification with the organization (Hogan, 2010,), and likeliness to engage in organization-friendly behaviors (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) this research will investigate those relationships in detail as well as their relationships with one another. Connections have already been made between interaction with social media from an organization and self-identification with that organization (Lukach, 2012) as well as between attitudes toward an organization and behaviors friendly to that program (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 103,). This study explores whether those connections exist within the realm of collegiate athletics and is among the first to investigate the relationship between all three variables.

Based upon these theories and findings, the researcher is led to hypothesize the following:

- H1: A positive relationship exists between an individual's level of interaction with a collegiate athletic program's social media campaign and the level of self-identification with that athletic program that the individual reports.

- H2: A positive relationship exists between an individual's level of interaction with a collegiate athletic program's social media campaign and the individual's likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors.

- H3: A positive relationship exists between an individual's level of self-identification with a collegiate athletic program and the individual's likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors.

Method

Procedure

In order to determine the nature of the relationship between the study's three variables, (a) exposure to a collegiate athletics program's social media campaign, (b) level of self-identity with that program, and (c) likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors, a 24-question survey was dispersed to students, faculty, staff, and alumni of a large private northeastern university. This study utilized a convenience sample of 259 respondents to reflect as accurately as possible the attitudes, behaviors, and intentions of the university's students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

The survey was dispersed in various classroom settings as well as online via a popular school-specific website. These methods sought to increase the representativeness, diversity, and number of responses of the sample to improve validity. Though selecting only those associated with one university limits the scope of the findings, the research was structured to support similar

studies throughout the United States that could further add to the understanding of social media

and its impacts.

Participants

The research includes responses from 259 of the university's students, faculty, alumni,

and staff. Of those, 86% reported to be current students, 8% alumni, and 5% faculty/staff.

Slightly over half of the respondents were male, 58%, and the average age of participants was 22

years old. Approximately 6% of those surveyed reported to be a current or former university

athlete and 83% own a smartphone.

Measures

The study involves relationships between three variables: (a) an individual's self-reported

exposure to a social media effort by a collegiate athletic program, (b) the strength of identity that

these individuals feel toward that collegiate athletic program, and (c) how likely the individuals

say they are to engage in behaviors friendly to the featured collegiate athletic program. For the

purposes of this study, program-friendly behaviors are represented by attending athletic events,

encouraging others to attend athletic events, and donating to the school's athletic program.

Exposure to the program's social media campaign as the independent variable is intended

to determine the degree to which an individual has been exposed to a social media campaign by

the athletic program for his or her school or alma mater. This was examined with three questions:

(1) "I regularly see social media posts from official RIT Tigers athletic social media

accounts."

(2) "I regularly follow official RIT Tigers athletic social media accounts."

(3) "I regularly interact with official RIT Tigers athletic social media accounts."

These items were examined for internal consistency (α =.86). All of these questions were

measured using a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The full

questionnaire can be found in Appendix B. The survey included several questions that mirrored

those from the Sports Spectator Identity Scale (SSIS) but were adapted to include interaction

with social media.

Level of identity with the athletic program, as a dependent variable, determines the

degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic program of his or her school or alma

mater. This was examined with seven questions, including "I see myself as a fan of the RIT

Tigers" and "I think often about RIT Tigers athletics." These items were written to reflect a

predicted higher sentience with the program when a higher level of self-identity exists (Elliot &

Wattanasuwan, 1998). The questions were examined for internal consistency (α = .92). All of

these questions were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7

(*strongly agree*). The full questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix B. The scale included several

questions that mirrored those from the SSIS but were adapted to include interaction with social

media.

Likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors, as the final dependent variable,

determined the likeliness that an individual reports he or she engages in behaviors friendly to the

athletic program for his or her school. The behaviors that were measured are: (a) donating money

to the athletic program of his or her school or alma mater, (b) attending athletic events involving

his or her school or alma mater, and (c) encouraging others to attend athletic events involving his

or her school or alma mater. These were measured by four questions, including "I attend RIT

Tigers athletics events as often as I can" and "I am likely to donate to RIT athletics now or in the

future." These questions were influenced by the suggested likeliness for those with self-identities highly influenced by an organization to interact with it and relay that self-identity to others (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The items were examined for internal consistency (α = .87). All of these questions were measured using a Likert 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix B. One further question asks for the participant's social media use outside of the context of his or her school or alma mater and provides a measure for exposure to the school's athletic social media campaign by light social media users.

The second half of the survey involves demographic information; measures were included for distance from campus, smartphone ownership, and access to the internet at the participant's home. A question was included to inquire about the distance of a participant's current residence from campus in order to explore whether this factor could bias the responses to questions that analyze willingness to attend athletic events. Questions involving the ownership of a smartphone and home access to the internet were included to investigate whether either of these factors could bias a participant's interaction with social media.

Results

The first hypothesis was that a positive relationship exists between an individual's level of interaction with a collegiate athletic program's social media campaign and the individual's level of self-identification with that athletic program. A Pearson coefficient was calculated examining the relationship between participants' exposure to an athletics program's social media campaign (M = 2.33, SD = 1.53) and participants' level of self-identification with that athletics program (M = 3.37, SD = 1.52). A moderate positive correlation was found, r (251) = .615, $p <$

.01, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. A participant is more likely to self-identify with the athletic program as his or her exposure to the program's social media campaign is increased, and less likely as exposure is decreased.

The second hypothesis was that a positive relationship exists between an individual's level of interaction with a collegiate athletic program's social media campaign and the individual's likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors. A Pearson coefficient was calculated for the relationship between participants' exposure to an athletics program's social media campaign ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.53$) and participants' likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.66$). A moderate positive correlation was found, r (254) = .601, $p <$ .01, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. A participant is more likely to engage in program-friendly behaviors as his or her exposure to the program's social media campaign is increased, and less likely as exposure is decreased.

The final hypothesis was that a positive relationship exists between an individual's level of self-identification with a collegiate athletic program and the individual's likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors. A Pearson coefficient was calculated for the relationship between participants' level of self-identification with their school's athletics program ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.52$) and participants' likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.66$). A strong positive correlation was found, r (252) = .846, $p < .01$, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. A participant is more likely to engage in program-friendly behaviors as his or her level of self-identification with their school's athletics program is increased, and less likely as self-identification decreases.

Discussion

Research in the field of social media is time-sensitive, as the medium is rapidly transforming how both individuals and organizations communicate. The various platforms available through social media have fundamentally reshaped how individuals project themselves (Hogan, 2011), how businesses relate to one another and their consumers (Qualman, 2011), and have introduced novel risks to society (Makandeya, 2012).

The effect of these emerging media has also been felt in collegiate athletics. Examples like that of Mississippi State have prompted athletics marketers to adjust their efforts in an attempt to strengthen their audiences' fanship and, by extension, encourage them to donate money to the programs and attend athletic events (Stoldt, n.d.). Academic research has begun within the past couple of years on the topic and has found a relationship between exposure to a university's athletics social media campaign and the individual's self-identity with the program (Lukach, 2012), while other studies have suggested a link between level of self-identity and organization-friendly behaviors (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 103).

The present study includes all three variables and establishes a significant positive relationship between an individual's exposure to a university's athletics social media campaign, the individual's level of self-identity with that program, and likeliness to engage in program-friendly behaviors. The relationship between self-identity and program-friendly behaviors was stronger, perhaps biased by the clutter of the study's focus on two-way relationships. To explore whether a social media campaign exposure has a direct, one-way influence on either of the remaining variables, an experiment could potentially clarify the strength of its influence.

The findings of the present study support those done at other universities (Lukach, 2012) and in reference to the effect of identities' effect on behaviors (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 103). This provides further evidence of a relationship between behavior and attitudes supposed by theorists. This study's finding of a significant link between all three variables also strengthens the relevance of organizational and social identity theories in modern culture. As the media through which individuals can communicate and share experiences expand, so too do their self-identities seem to develop around the groups to which they are associated. This growing breadth of information could be subconsciously overwhelming individuals and intensifying their need to find common bonds, as they instinctively do (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987). Through social media, an organization's artifacts provide an increasing array of channels through which individuals can identify themselves with it (Hogan, 2010).

In the over-arching struggle between individualism and collectivism, the era of interconnectivity is showing that groups and associations with others undoubtedly play a role in individuals' self-identities. Research such as the present study suggests a clear link between an individual's association with a group and his or her relation to the rest of society through attitudes and behaviors. This plays an important role in the fundamental academic understanding of how humans relate to their society and to others as well as how we define our role within a system.

Ultimately, the study provides to the academic community in two ways. First, the findings confirm previous theories such as social identity and organizational identity theories as well as previous research. The projections of both social identity and organizational identity theories were consistent with the study's findings by way of an organization and its artifacts

influencing self-identity, further confirming the suspected link between consumption and self-identity. The study also supports research from researchers like Hogan, Lukach, Mael, and Ashforth into the interconnectedness between interaction with an organization, self-identity, and behavior. Secondly, the study joins in the early stages of academic understanding of what relationship social media has with its audience and what role it may have in the construction of self-identities and behaviors.

Limitations and Future Research

This field of study is potentially restricted by an emerging definition of social media and how interactions with it can be grouped together as in-group interactions. Once that definition is more clearly established, investigations can narrow to what role interactions such as posts to social media accounts, reposts, and so on can have within it. Understanding the impact on self-identity of specific interactions within a group would lend clarity to the role of both social identity and organizational identity theories.

As one of the first to explore the impact of social media on attitudes and behaviors in the realm of collegiate athletics, the findings of this research are naturally singular and require further investigation. By grouping the results found from this study to others similar to it, a deeper examination involving a larger number of similar studies would be a logical next step toward a fuller understanding of the medium. Further research similar to the present study undergone at various collegiate institutions across the country would add to the value of the findings of each. Other types of research could help establish a direct cause and effect relationship. This could include experimentation involving before and after effects of exposure to social media.

Similar to the work of Lukach, this study is limited most by its scope. By administering the instrument only to alumni, students, faculty, and staff at the chosen university, the sample is defined as a convenience sample and not intrinsically relatable across the spectrum of all universities in the United States. While the nature of the sample as one of convenience limits the potential assumptions based upon its findings even at the university, more findings like those in this research would assist in uncovering exactly what effects social media campaigns have on their audiences. As the pool of universities at which this type of research is done increases, so too does the reliability of the data.

Additionally, any survey brings with it a risk of inaccurate results due to the intrusiveness of the instrument. Self-reporting is inherently a less reliable form of data gathering than some others, including experimentation. Further refining of the instrument and the possible inclusion of an experimental element would help to ensure the accuracy of the data which is accumulated.

Conclusion

Research and understanding into the relationship of social media with its audience, due to the benefits of technology, is developing faster than research into mass communication media before it. With studies like this on social media surfacing just a few years after its emergence, researchers will be able to create an early benchmark against which to measure and compare future studies. Understanding what relationship social media has with its audience will prove vital not only to researchers, but to those who wish to most effectively use it. The present study is further evidence that social media is a powerful platform on which to influence a target public's attitudes and behaviors, and is a continuation of previous studies on the effects of social media.

The findings of the present research also suggest that social media is a platform on which members of a group can help construct and confirm the attachment of their identities to an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Through fan pages and other forms of interactive, two-way media, it seems that organizations can now heighten that tendency to take advantage of its effects on the members' attitudes and behaviors. It is now becoming evident that the emerging medium of social media provides a platform which individuals use to define themselves and their relationship with their surroundings, and that these identities can predict the individuals' behaviors.

References

Ahmed, A. M. (2007). Group identity, social distance and intergroup bias. *Journal of Economic*

Psychology, 28(3), 324-337. doi: 10.1016//j.joep.2007.01.007

Albert, S. and Whetten, D. A. (1985). 'Organizational identity', in B.M. Staw and L.L.

Cummings (eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. **7**, JAI Press, Greenwich,

CT, pp. 263-295.

Allen, B., Tompkins, P., & Busemeyer, S. (1996). Organizational Communication. In M. B.

Salwen & D. W. Stacks (Eds.), An integrated approach to communication theory and

research (pp. 383-388). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, Inc.

Cheney, G. and Tompkins, P. (1987). Coming to Terms with Organizational Identification and

Commitment. *Central States Speech Journal, 38*(1), 1-15.

Claiborne, C. B., Sirgy, M. J. and Wright, N. D. (1992). The effects of product symbolism on

consumer self-concept. *Advances in Consumer Research, 19*, 311-318.

Cohen, A. (1960). Attitudinal consequences of induced discrepancies between cognitions and

behavior. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 24*(2), 297-318.

Elliot, R., & Wattanasuwan, K. (1998). Brands as symbolic resources for the construction of

identity. *International Journal of Advertising*, *17*(2), 131-144.

Goldfarb, D. (2012). Big second half leads MSU to homecoming win. Available from

http://www.wtva.com/news/local/story/Big-second-half-leads-MSU-to-Homecoming-

win/e7bFTeltLUGLBHRAjxc-YQ.cspx

Heise, D. R. & MacKinnon, N. J. (2010). Self, Identity, and Social Institutions.

Basingstoke, Hampshire, GBR: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hogan, B. (2010). The presentation of self in the age of social media: Distinguishing

    performances and exhibitions online. Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society, *30*(6),

    377-386. doi:10.1177/0270467610385893

Hogg, M. A. & Williams, K. D. (2000) From I to we: Social identity and the collective self.

    Group Dynamics: Theory, Research and Practice. *4*(1), 81-97.

    doi: 10.1037/1089-2699.4.1.81

Korn, M. & Kwoh, L. (2012). 140 characters of risk: some CEOs fear Twitter.

    The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved from http://online.wsj.com/news/articles

    /SB10000872396390444083304578018423363962886

Lukach, J. (2012). *The relationship between fan identification and student utilization of social*

    media in a NCAA division I university. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from etd.ohiolink.edu.

Mael, F. & Ashforth, B. E. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *The Academy*

    of Management Review, 14(1), 20-39.

Mael, F., & Ashforth, B. E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the

    reformulated model of organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,*

    13(2), 103-123.

Markandeya, V. (2012). Computer scientist warns of social media manipulation in U.S. election.

    Available from http://spectrum.ieee.org/telecom/internet/computer-scientist-warns-of-

    social-media-manipulation-in-us-election

Muntinga, D., Moorman, M., & Smit, E. (2011). Introducing COBRAs: Exploring motivations

    for brand-related social media use. *International Journal of Advertising, 30*(1), 13-46.

Pennington, J. (2012). Examining the SEC's budgets over a six-year span. Available from

http://www.mrsec.com/2012/05/examining-the-secs-budgets-over-a-six-year-

span/

Qualman, E. (2011). Socialnomics: How social media transforms the way we live and do

business. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Rothschild, P. C. (2011). *International Journal of Event and Festival Management, 2*(2), 139-

150. doi:

10.1108/17582951111136568

Scheufele, D. A. and Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The

evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 9–20. doi:

10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00326.x

Schlenker, B. R. (1978). Attitudes as actions: Social identity theory and consumer research.

Advances in Consumer Research, 05, 352-359.

Stoldt, G. C. (n.d.). The impact of social media on college athletics communications. In *Cosida.*

Retrieved February 6, 2013, from

http://www.cosida.com/media/documents/2012/7/Social_media_impact_2012_Stoldt_stu

dy.pdf

Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behavior. *Social Science Information 13*(2), 65-

93. doi:10.1177/053901847401300204

Wigmo, J. (2010). *Social media marketing: What role can social media play as a marketing

tool?* (Bachelor Thesis). Retrieved from

http://www.informationslogistik.se/data/files/Publikationer/Kandidat/Informationslogisti

k/2010/Examensarbete_EdvardWikstr_m_JohanWigmo.pd

Appendix A

Cover Letter

Student, Alumnus, or Faculty:

My name is Kurt Wirth, I am a graduate student at Rochester Institute of Technology and I am examining the role social media has within the realm of collegiate athletics. I am inviting you to help expand knowledge in this field by participating in the following research study and completing the following survey.

The survey will require approximately five to ten minutes to complete. Participation is strictly voluntary and confidential. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. All participants in this research will be kept completely anonymous and confidential.

The data collected will provide useful information regarding what purposes, if any, social media can serve for collegiate athletic departments. The researcher will be the only person with direct contact to the individual surveys and will collect the data to present it en masse to his advisor in order to assemble his Master's thesis. This thesis will be presented, with all data being anonymous, to a thesis committee upon its completion. All data will be kept in a secure location and digitized anonymously on a password-protected computer.

There are no expected risks or benefits associated with participating in this research. You may cease participation at any point and you will not be penalized or rewarded for doing so.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at the email listed below or the RIT Department of Communication at 585.475.6649.

Thank you in advance,

Kurt Wirth
kxw2219@rit.edu

Thesis Advisor: Tracy Worrell
585-475-2298 or tracy.worrell@rit.edu

Appendix B

Survey

Impact of Social Media on College Students, Faculty, and Alumni

Introduction: This survey will require approximately five to ten minutes to complete. Participation is strictly voluntary and confidential. Please answer these questions as honestly and completely as possible and return it to the proctor.

Directions: Please answer the following questions based on how you feel about RIT Tigers athletics. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, simply be honest in your responses. All questions are optional and you may opt out of any you wish not to answer.

For the following questions, consider *social media* to be defined as platforms such as, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Instagram, etc. *Interaction* should be defined by, but not limited to, posts, likes, shares, ReTweets, replies, etc.

(Circle the option that most accurately identifies your behavior or attitude)

---

1. I regularly see social media posts from official RIT Tigers athletic social media accounts.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
                              1   2   3   4   5   6   7

---

2. I regularly follow official RIT Tigers athletic social media accounts.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
                              1   2   3   4   5   6   7

---

3. I regularly interact with official RIT Tigers athletic social media accounts.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
                              1   2   3   4   5   6   7

---

4. I regularly use social media.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

5. It is important to me that the RIT Tigers win their athletic competitions.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

6. I see myself as a fan of the RIT Tigers.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

7. I think often about RIT Tigers athletics.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

8. While viewing/listening to RIT Tigers athletic events, I feel strong emotions.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

9. I tend to understand the reason why RIT Tigers Athletics coaches make certain decisions in athletic events, such as which players start, choosing plays, etc.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

10. When the RIT Tigers lose athletic events, I experience negative emotions and/or behaviors.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

11. When RIT Tigers athletic events are broadcast, I closely follow them.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
          1   2   3   4   5   6   7

12. I attend RIT Tigers athletic events as often as I can.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
          1   2   3   4   5   6   7

13. I often encourage others to attend RIT Tigers athletic events.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
          1   2   3   4   5   6   7

For the following two questions, provide your answers assuming money, time, and location were not a factor.

14. I am likely to donate to RIT athletics now or in the future.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
          1   2   3   4   5   6   7

15. I intend to attend RIT Tigers athletic events in the future.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
          1   2   3   4   5   6   7

16. Are you...

Male   Female

17. What is your age?

18. What is your race?

African American   Asian   Caucasian   Hispanic

Middle Eastern   Native American   Other:_____

19. What is your highest level of completed education?

< High School   High School   Professional/Technical Degree

        Bachelor's Degree   Graduate Degree

20. What is your association with RIT?

Current Student   Alumnus   Current Faculty/Staff

        Former Faculty/Staff   Other: _____

21. How far, in miles, do you currently reside from RIT's Rochester campus?

22. Are you an athlete that competes in official RIT Tigers athletics?

Yes   No

23. Do you own a smartphone?

Yes   No

24. Do you have access to the internet where you currently reside?

Yes   No

This concludes the survey. Thank you sincerely for your time!