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Impact of Professional Sports' Twitter Content on their Fans

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Abstract

Professional sports organizations have begun to utilize social media to create an online community for fans. These organizations have partnered with companies to create monetary value for the team and the companies, which has led sponsorship from traditional advertising in the arena or venue of the professional sports organization to their team's Twitter account. I investigated how fans of the professional sports organization recognized sponsored content on the organizations' Twitter pages concerning the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI). I then compared the sponsored and organic contents' interaction rates to see if there were similarities or differences between those rates. The interaction rate for professional sports organizations' organic content was found to have a higher rate than sponsored content, and fans did not identify sponsors included in the content. Instead, the fans identified the team or athletes comprised in the content. I conducted a content analysis with the help of four axiomatic positions related to CTI. The axiomatic positions of CTI I used to help identify fan identity were identities that have both content and relationship levels of interpretation and have individual, social, and communal properties. Also, identities are codes expressed in conversations and define membership in communities and have semantic properties representing core symbols, meanings, and labels. I found fans do have a follower identity, but a sponsored post does not impact that identity. Therefore, fans looked at the content for face value and did not notice the sponsors.

Keywords: professional sports, Twitter, communication theory of identity, fans, sponsors

Impact of Professional Sports' Twitter Content on their Fans' Identity

Professional sports organizations bring a community of people together to believe that "this is their team," thus strengthening a sense of local and national pride by taking on the ownership and allegiance to their local team. During the 2014 World Cup, FIFA reported 200,000 tickets sold to Americans to support the U.S. Men's National Team. Fans of the Seattle Seahawks consider themselves the 12th man of the team. They wear shirts to games that say the 12th man, and they also fly a 12th man flag above the Space Needle every home game (Depta, 2019).

Social media also reveals how a country or a city can support their favorite teams by creating a community online. This is by the sports team sharing live updates on games, news, and other social media worthy postings to their fans. The professional sports organization begins to create a virtual community and foster engagement between fans online and their favorite sports. Virtual communities foster engagement because they "understand consumer needs and motivations," "promote participation" among the community, and "motivate cooperation" (Porter et al., 2011).

As Porter et al. (2011) point out, customers will contribute "in virtual communities to meet social and psychological needs." The needs will come from information, relationship building, social identity or self-expression, helping or aiding others, enjoyment, status or influence, and belonging. Thus, leading to members of the virtual community creating high-quality content, encouraging connections to be made among members, and creating a pleasant experience.

Once this virtual community is cultivated on professional sports organizations' social media for fans to engage with one another and the team's content, branding can take effect.

Branding in sports can be considered the logo, team colors, and anything associated with the team. For example, even the team's sponsors regard it as part of the brand. Sponsorship and branding can come together in sports to create an identity on social media. "Branding is the way a company or business enterprise is personalized in the consumers' minds" (Mohammad, 2018). Branding can be from a post that includes a sponsor to a photo on social media with a sponsor's logo. This is because the public has grown weary of seeing advertising frequently and including imagery like a logo or tag will not seem like a full form of advertising (Jacobson, 2017).

Professional sports organizations see this as an opportunity to gain revenue and pair up with sponsors to create content paid for by the sponsor and shared with the team. Nufer and Buhler (2011) stated that sponsors and sports organizations are to be purely transaction-based. That meant the team would receive revenue, and the sponsor will have the logo or name somewhere in the team's facility. Now, the transaction is more interactive or co-branding between the team and the sponsor. Frederick and Patil (2010) found in their 2011 study that "innovation and creativity seen as the most important core synergistic brand values" and sponsoring teams gives the most significant utility to those "invested in a co-branding relationship."

Since there is little research on fans' identities, my study investigates fans and their interaction with their favorite professional team, explicitly concerning sponsored content. The two types of content I focused on in this study: Organic and sponsored. This study's organic content is content produced by the sports organization without including a sponsor's logo or being tagged in the content's text. Also, Organic content is free with no monetary value backing it (Cooper, 2020). Sponsored content in this study was defined as content, including the sponsor's logo or tagged in the post on Twitter. In 2017, Nielsen Sports completed a year in sports review

which stated teams, like the Golden State Warriors, were creating added value to their content by adding sponsors logos and tags to their social media posts. There was a 50% social media uplift and TV exposure for teams when they added a sponsor to their content. My study will address the following research questions:

- How do the interaction rates of content with sponsors compare to the interaction rates of content without sponsors on professional sports team social media?
- How do replies differ on posts of professional sports teams, especially related to individual, social, and communal properties, when a sponsor is included versus posts with no sponsor? In other words, how does having a sponsor on a post impact follower identity as exhibited through online replies?

The Twitter feed of the 2018-19 season for two teams with the highest follower count from each league will be approached with a mix-method analysis for this study.

Literature Review

Creating communities is a part of the professional sports landscape, and at the center of these communities are their social media platforms like Twitter. Twitter has been dubbed second screening media for many users, which "refers to the habit of people using social media on a mobile device while consuming other types of media" (Copp, 2019). Sports fans use Twitter to add to their viewing experience. 60% of fans have a higher engagement on Twitter while second screening a sporting event (Murphy, 2018).

Additional aspects used on these platforms are fandom, relationship marketing, and brand management. Fandom can be broken into subcategories when looking at professional sports. These subcategories are fan motivation, fan loyalty, and fan engagement. Relationship marketing is when the professional sports organization and the fans are tied together due to the marketing

tactics set in place by the professional sports organization (Olenski, 2013). Fans see this as a way that the organizations are trying to connect with them on a level that other organizations do not. Relationship marketing ties the fans and the team together by marketing tactics implemented by the team. Brand management is how the brand is being perceived in the marketplace and is retaining its value it has created over time. If the brand is in good standing in the marketplace, then there is nothing to worry about and to keep going, but if the brand is not in good standing, there has to be a reevaluation of the brand management being done (Kenton, 2018). Here I review I will also review the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) as it is applied to this study along with fandom, relationship marketing, and brand management more in-depth to give better insight into the world of sports.

Fandom

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines fandom as "the state or attitude of being a fan." While Cambridge Dictionary defines fandom as "the state of being a fan of someone or something, especially a very enthusiastic one." Sports vie off of fans and the fandom they create around their teams. Fandom is large among collegiate-level sports, and the subsequent studies investigated fandom on this collegiate level. They indicate that fans can change their identity during a crisis to support the team, stop following the team, or cease to identify with the team when participating in a sporting event. Fans cease to identify with a team because the stigma of being a fan during a scandal is worse than not being associated with the team. However, when the team is doing well, it is advantageous for an individual to take on a fan's identity.

Brown and Billings (2013) conducted an analysis of the University of Miami athletic department's tweets and fans during the Nevin Shapiro incident. Shapiro, a booster for the team, provided scholarships to athletes that included benefits not permitted by the National Collegiate

Athletic Association (NCAA) and led to an investigation. The content analysis looked into the University of Miami's fans as the research setting; 75 fans that followed the University of Miami and a systematic sample of all collected tweets offered a final sample that included 425 tweets. The research set was looking into how the fans interacted with the incident in the athletic department. The study found the University of Miami's tweets fluctuated during the crisis, and so did fans based on the identity they possess with the team.

Instead of content analysis, Yoon et al. (2017) analyzed a college baseball game by having fans participate in a survey. The researchers found that what attracted fans included the following: the excitement of the game, entertainment and enjoyability of the game; the logo design; who the coach and team management is; is there is a tradition (a history of winning or a favorable reputation of the team and college); and if the success of the team reaches postseason and wins a league championship. The findings showed that there is daily use of Twitter, and during the games that led to a positive effect on the team and found fan loyalty if the team was a fan's favorite team.

Fans connecting with other fans constitute an identity that allows the professional sports organization to build a network of fans online. The online network will enable fans to connect and discuss the games, athletes, or overall organizations outside the stadium. Stavros et al. (2014) found that fans use Facebook to interact with their favorite team and the team's broader fan base.

Hwang et al. (2015) focused on social TV engagement during the 2014 Olympics based on social presence, channel loyalty, and commitment. This resulted from the influx of professional sports fans' use of social media during sports events. A survey of viewers investigated three types of social media engagements: functional, emotional, and communal. The

findings show that communal and functional engagement is positively associated with social media and television presence (Hwang et al., 2015).

Facebook is a platform where many people can connect with others. Facebook and Twitter are domains for fans to form connections based on their passion for a team or many teams. On Facebook with football (soccer) clubs, Fan engagement is what interested Vale and Fernandes (2018). This study aimed to find what drives engagement and motivation to interact with sports clubs on social media. Vale and Fernandes (2018) studied the top five Facebook pages of football teams in Europe by conducting an empirical study of fan engagement. The findings stated that fans that like the pages are both men and women between the ages of 18 and 25 years old and that they are following one of the top three teams researched in this study. The study also found that these fans were mostly college students, they felt empowered contributing on the Facebook page, and it provides an option of self-expression on the Facebook page (Vale, 2018).

Relationship Marketing

Many teams' goal is to keep fans engaged and foster a connection for more than one transaction. Relationship marketing is how teams encourage this connection. This form of marketing fixates on the customer's emotions and how to take those emotions to create a bond between the consumer and the brand (Olenski, 2013). This section will discuss how relationship marketing and sports foster the relationship between fans and the brand. The studies in this section will dive into advertising, strategic sponsoring, and fan-engagement based on relationship marketing to fans in a sports landscape.

Fans relate to teams based on what is on television, social media, and traditional advertising. The fans see themselves as an extension of the team and their favorite athletes

(Simons, 2015). Fans seeing them as an extension of the team leads to a foundation for relationship marketing between the team and its fans. For this study, relationship marketing and the relationship with fans is vital to the interactions with posts on their social media platforms. The following studies will help define the relationship marketing between fans and their favorite professional sports organizations.

Strategic sponsoring in professional sports can relate to relationship marketing. The organization creates a plan to foster a relationship between the organization and the fans. Demir and Söderman (2015) were interested in sponsoring as an investment, relation, and animation. These findings were through the approach of studying literature or a literature review based on sponsors and teams. They looked into the three models as strategies overall and found that animation strategy leads to activations during an event as necessary to brand identification. Demir and Söderman (2015) found investment strategy led to philanthropic deeds and a competitive advantage against other sponsors. Lastly, they discovered that the relation sponsoring strategy created alliances and deal-making based on either organization's needs.

Demir and Söderman focused on sponsoring as an investment, relation, and animation; Filo (2015) created a strategic, operational, and user-focused study for sports and social media in connection to relationship marketing. The method used in this study was a literature review based on sport management journals. Findings from the literature review showed user-focused groups were motivated sports fans on social media, operational social media users used social media on a day-to-day basis, and the brand's strategic use of social media.

While a literature review can give some insight into relationship marketing, Yoshida et al. (2014) discovered a way to measure and conceptualize sports fan engagement in a professional setting by using questionaries. Two studies include the measurement that

conceptualizes sports fan engagement. The studies defined fan engagement in a sports context with validity and reliability to the results and seeking out the antecedents and consequences of fan engagement. Team identification leads to fan engagement by creating a legacy of the team. The legacy of a team can relate to championships, athletes, or rich history. These identifying factors lead to the fan base's engagement and possibly can lead to a functional relationship marketing model.

The functional relationship of the marketing model examines the relationship between professional marketing organizations and their consumers. Bee (2006) analyzes relationship marketing looks at compliance, identification, and internalization in six different categories for each. By focusing on compliance, identification, and internalization strategies, the findings shared values lead to a more committed relationship and identifying with a winning team is more dominant.

Brand Management

Brands embrace the core values of what a company is trying to uphold. When brands implement brand management, it is to preserve the reputation it has fostered over time. Brand management is a marketing tool to "help increase the perceived value of a product or service" (Roberts, 2019). Sports utilize brand management for preserving the image or value created for their teams and brands. Sports are facing difficulties managing their brands with the world on social media. Scandals are harder to keep under wraps like behaviors of their star athletes, something wrong said by a manager or coach, or an owner not making the best decision for the team. When the brand is at stake, so is the monetary value associated with the brand and its sponsors (Glover, 2017). This section will discuss sports and brand management, corporate social responsibility, co-branding relationships, and athletes' Twitter use.

Sheth (2010) uses corporate social responsibility in professional sports, and it is defined by if the professional sports organization is doing right by the fans, team, and community. This means conducting in a professional and charitable manner when necessary. Sheth (2010) looks into corporate social responsibility by piloting a mixed-methods approach with a quantitative analysis questionnaire and a content analysis for a qualitative approach. It found that treating employees ethically, supporting social causes, and donating funds to a nonprofit is essential for corporate social responsibility.

In New Zealand, there is a co-branding relationship of the country and the up and coming professional sport of football, soccer, by focusing on the professional football teams' marketing and communication strategies in New Zealand. Frederick (2010) conducted a content analysis was used, as well as a survey to gather their data. The content analysis examined newspaper articles and websites on football in New Zealand and analyzed the mission and value of the brand. The researchers surveyed the most popular football teams and their sponsors in New Zealand. The findings showed that there was joint brand equity between the sponsor and the team they are sponsoring. The results also stated that the top "core synergistic brand value in a co-branding relationship" is the sponsors and the teams' innovation and creativity.

There was a study conducted was a content analysis of professional athletes' tweets on Twitter. The study created a codebook to analyze these tweets by the athletes. The researchers placed the tweets into six categories: interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, fanship, and promotional tweets. Findings concluded that most tweets were interactivity, and the second-highest was a diversion, but fanship had the fewest tweets out of the six categories studied (Hambrick, 2010). In contrast, researchers Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015) created a study to look at sports brands on social media by conducting a content analysis of the Twitter

page of Liverpool Football Club. The researchers found that Liverpool Football Club emphasized product-related posts in the off-season, and during the season, the club focuses on match content.

Communication Theory of Identity

For this research, I will use the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to guide this study. CTI is a "communicative approach to identity." This theory focuses on the "mutual influences of communication and identity." This leads to conceptualizing "identity as communication rather than seeing identity as a mere product of communication or vice versa." The theory has "four loci or frames of identity" that are "personal, relational, enacted and communal" (Jung, pg. 266, 2004).

Each identity can be "considered independently for analytical purposes but are not really separate from each other." The four identities each have their definition. Personal is the self-image or concept of an individual. Enacted is the performance or "expressed identity" of an individual (Jung, pg. 266, 2004). There are four facets define relational:

1. Individual creates "his / her identity partially by internalizing how others view his / her."
2. "Individual identifies him/herself through his / her relationships with others,"
3. "Identities exist in relationship to other identities."
4. "Relationship … can be called a unit of identity," (Jung, pg. 266-267, 2004).

Lastly, the fourth identity is communal. It is how the individual deals with the identity as a whole or a collective. "The communal layer transcends individual and is a characteristic of the group or collectivity" (Jung, pg. 267, 2004).

"CTI has 10 common axiomatic positions… The basic overarching propositions further define identity and are;" (Hecht, 2005)

1**. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties.**

2. Identities are both enduring and changing.

3. Identities are affective, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual.

4**. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation.**

5. Identities involve both subjective and ascribed meaning.

6. Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities.

7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.

8. Identities prescribe modes of appropriate and effective communication.

9. Identities are a source of expectations and motivations.

10. Identities are emergent. (Hecht, 2005)

For this study, the axiomatic positions that are most relevant to this study are one, four, six, and seven. This is due to the research based on a social media platform, Twitter; fans are the subject of the analysis. The codebook will help determine the interpretation of the replies in the study. Also, I will focus on the symbols in the study, like sponsor logos and tags included in the tweets.

I will use CTI to look at how organic and sponsored posts on professional sports social media are interacted with by their fans and how they react to the posts, whether positively, negatively, or neutrally. This theory will help me see if the corporate-sponsored posts receive equal, less, or more attention than organic posts and if their interactions are higher than organic posts and vice versa. The axiomatic positions that I will be focusing on in this study will also

help look into how professional sports teams' posts can contribute to the fans' identity based on their replies or replies on the sponsored posts.

Twitter and Identity Development

Carron uses CTI in their study*; I Tweet therefore I am: An interview Study of Identity Development and Portrayal of Twitter Users Utilizing the Communication Theory of Identity*. This study was to "gain insight into the ways that individuals develop and portray their online identity on Twitter." Carron utilized interviews and asked open-ended questions to participants about their use of Twitter (Carron, 2013). Carron's goal was to determine what strategies Twitter users utilize for their online identity and how it can help understand the frames of identity associated with the online identity.

The results of the study were four themes concluded for the first research question. These themes were "Reflection of the Self, Acknowledgment of the Audience, Purpose of Twitter as a Means to Stay Updated and/or Update Others, and Comparison to Other, Social Networks." These themes led the Twitter users in the study to conclude that their Twitter profile was "a reflection of their own identity," the user was "conscious of an audience" and "representing the seeking of information and the presentation of information" (Carron, 2013).

Carron found the second research question's themes in this study were applied within the capacity of CTI. Carron (2013) determined the themes in the analysis "were seen to operate within the personal, the enactment, the relationship and the communal frames of CTI." This further leads to the understanding of the online identity portrayal. Then identity gaps are used to illustrate the stresses of online identity characteristics (Carron, 2013).

Student Athletes and CTI

CTI is also in studies about student-athletes' usage of Twitter. Nichols (2015) purpose of their research is to "understand how six freshmen student athletes on a high profile team (men's basketball) from a major Midwestern university used Twitter to interact with their team members, university students, and fans of their respective sport." The study uses qualitative methods and CTI to lay the framework for research.

In this study, Nichols uses CTI to connect the "different roles high profile student athletes and student athletes on a high profile team take on." These roles are as follows: "1) university student, 2) university athlete, and 3) teammate" (Nichols, pg. 13, 2015). Nichols used an interview approach to the subjects and analyzed their tweets to identify any themes. The study posed three research questions to help identify themes for student athletes.

Nichols (2015) wanted to determine the roles the participants adopt using Twitter throughout their freshman year if the tweets show how the participant interacts with the other community members and if their Twitter use showed a distinction between their freshman year's different roles. Nichols found a difference for those tweeted as their adopted persona like a teammate, university student, and university athlete. University students found to tweet about "struggles living on their own for the first time and academic themed tweets." University athletes tweeted about "athletic success failures, practices, and personal work." While teammates tweeted a shoutout to other teammates "and love and appreciation for teammates," but when the competition was closer, the tweets from the athletes were "exclusively university athlete and teammate roles driven" (Nichols, pg. 48, 2015).

Research question two was looking into what the tweets from university athletes, university students, and teammates say about their interactions with their communities throughout their freshman year. In the analysis, Nichols (2015) found that the individuals found

their identities throughout their interactions on Twitter. An example of this is that university athletes who tweeted during the regular season took on the student role and the athlete role based on who they were interacting with on Twitter. If they were tweeting during a competition or tournament, it would be a full university athlete persona or teammate persona tweeting, not a student.

The research question's findings are on analyzing and comparing tweets from six participants' Twitter use. The participants were high profile student athletes and student athletes. Nichols (2015) found the high profile student athletes remained high profile student athletes even after their season was done, while student athletes took on a student persona when their season was done.

CTI: More than Identity

The two studies have shown that CTI can help recognize the identities taken on by personas on social media. Nichols mainly focused on university student athletes and university students. Gaps in Nichols' study can be it didn't look into students in campus groups and compared them to the student athletes. While in Carron's research, it took a broader look into personas on Twitter. Carron's study had many facets to look into, but no set group was analyzed, like in Nichols' study.

CTI lays a foundation for sponsored posts on social media with the connection to brand management, relationship marketing, and fandom for the proposed study. While this theory lays the groundwork for the proposed research's premise due to the function, it fits into sponsored and organic post interactions on social media. The three facets of professional sports organizations help create the research questions needed to conduct the study.

Research Questions

For this study, I will be looking into sponsored and organic content to see if fans have varied reactions to this content on professional sports organizations' social media. The first research question will help determine if sponsored content has a more significant interaction rate than organic content from their fans on Twitter. I will evaluate this question through statistical tests by comparing the data from various professional sports teams of their organic and sponsored content. Sponsored and organic content will be identified if there is logo that is not the teams' or facility where they play or a tag (@username) is included in the post (see Figure 3). This will be identified by clicking on the link that Web Data Research Assistant will provide with the data collection to confirm that the post is either sponsored or organic content. What will be excluded is the television and radio partners because the television or radio partner maybe the league partner that the team is a part of. Research question one is as follows:

RQ1: How do the interaction rates of content with sponsors compare to the interaction rates of content without sponsors on professional sports team social media?

After determining the differences in sponsored and organic posts' interaction rates, I will investigate if fans' identity is affected by sponsored content due to the fans' responses or replies on sponsored and organic content from the professional sports organization. I will collect fan responses and determine the type of response through qualitative content analysis. I will investigate fans' interactions on professional sports organizations' Twitter accounts to see if this is a positive or negative interaction based on replies. I will determine the interactions through a qualitative content analysis approach. I will use data collected from replies to sponsored and organic posts of each team in the study to determine if there is a positive or negative interaction

and if the sponsor posts' replies compare or contrast to the organic posts' replies. Research question two is as follows:

RQ2: How do replies differ on posts of professional sports teams, especially related to individual, social, and communal properties, when a sponsor is included versus posts with no sponsor? In other words, how does having a sponsor on a post impact follower identity as exhibited through online replies?

Method

This study is a mixed-methods approach. I analyzed professional sports organizations on Twitter through statistical tests and a qualitative content analysis. The programs I used are Web Data Research Assistant and IMB Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The professional sports organizations in this study are the most followed team from each sports league. The leagues I have chosen are the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Hockey League (NHL). I used the two top followed teams from each league in this analysis. The NBA teams I found are the Los Angeles Lakers with 8.56 million followers and the Golden State Warriors with 6.48 million followers. For the NHL, the Chicago Blackhawks with 2.48 million followers and the Pittsburgh Penguins with 1.83 million followers.

I collected the data from the 2018-19 season for the NBA and NHL using Web Data Research Assistant. This data will be only collected from the regular season and will not include pre-season or postseason. The time frame I chose for this study was October – November 2018 and February – March 2019. I decided on this time frame because the October – November timeline will be at the beginning of the seasons, while February – March will be towards the end of the seasons. I determined the data sets an average of 48 games per basketball team and 53 games per hockey team during each time frame.

The data I collected for the statistical tests will be from the top 10 liked sponsored posts from October – November 2018 and the top 10 liked sponsored posts from February – March 2019 for each team. Then, I collected the top 10 liked organic posts from October – November 2018 and the top 10 liked organic posts from February – March 2019 for each team. Each team has a set of 20 sponsored posts and 20 organic posts to compare. There is a total of 80 posts of organic content (see Figure 1) and 80 posts of sponsored content to analyze (see Figure 2).

I collected data for the qualitative content analysis based on the first reply from each of the 80 sponsored and 80 organic posts from each teams' data from the statistical analysis. There will be a total of 160 replies to analyze. I created a codebook (Appendix A) to guide this analysis.

I chose the leagues and teams because they have 82 games in the regular season, and each leagues' season starts in October and ends in April. Merriman-Webster dictionary defines a regular season as "the schedule of official games played or to be played by a sports team during a playing season." I did not include preseason and postseason due to the limitation that not all the teams may have made it to the postseason, and the preseason may not have the same amount of games for each league. Also, data can skew in the postseason may have more likes, replies, and retweets due to the team's progression to the finals due to an increase of support from fans during that time.

The teams I selected were from each league by having the two largest followings out of the other teams in their league. The data I collected from each team is their organic and sponsored content, as I stated previously.

The data I collected and analyzed from Twitter answered the research questions I have presented previously in this paper. I looked at the retweets, replies, and likes. A retweet is when

the content is shared on another user's profile. A like is a count of how many people physically clicked like on the content, and a reply is when a user replies to the content. The data from Twitter was skimmed through Web Data Research Assistant and then entered into SPSS to analyze the interaction rate between organic and sponsored posts. I utilized the Web Data Research Assistant gathered the data in a clean and formatted excel file that includes the count of replies, likes, and retweets and the date, the sponsor, and the content of the tweet. SPSS is a service that analyzed the data statistically to determine the difference or similarities between the posts. For the content analysis, I created a code book to look at the fans' replies in relation to sponsored and organic content. The code book (Appendix A) determined whether there are positive or negative replies based on the codebook, to see if a sponsored is recognized, and compare the replies on the sponsored content to the replies an organic post receives. The content analysis will take a qualitative approach.

Data Analysis

The data was collected using Web Data Research Assistant from the Twitter pages from the selected teams from the designated timeframe, as mentioned previously. I cleaned the data collected using the top twenty sponsored and top twenty organic posts for each timeframe. This was done by clicking the link of each post to determine if it met the criteria to be a sponsored or organic post. After I cleaned the data, I then input it into SPSS for the first research question. I conducted an independent t-test on the data to compare the retweets, likes, and replies to compare the organic and sponsored content's interaction rate.

Next, I collected the second research question's data, which was pulled from the reply section of each tweet. The replies I pulled were the first direct reply for each tweet. If the response was only emojis, only a gif, video, or image, or tagged reply (an @username) with no

other text, I excluded from this study and went to the next direct reply. A reply is the direct reply to the tweet and not in a thread to another reply to the tweet collected (Worthy, 2020). Data analysis for the second research question was a qualitative codebook analysis. A code was assigned to each reply using the codebook produced for this study (Appendix A). I determined a code by if the post impacted follower identity through online responses. I conducted intercoder reliability for this study. I pulled 25% of my data to be coded and compared. Then by using the Holsti Method, it was found there was 92.5% intercoder reliability.

Results

After the statistical tests were conducted on the data for RQ1, it was found of the 80 organic content interactions had a greater average than the 80 sponsored content interactions. The organic content interactions included likes ($M = 13281.25$, $SD = 11180.567$) as seen in Table 1, replies ($M = 157.78$, $SD = 182.819$) as seen in Table 2, and retweets ($M = 3900.84$, $SD = 4251.658$) as seen in Table 3. The sponsored content interactions included likes ($M = 2662.50$, $SD = 1940.532$) as seen in Table 1, replies ($M = 40.28$, $SD = 46.426$) as seen in Table 2, and retweets ($M = 755.35$, $SD = 1338.271$) as seen in Table 3, as well. The independent t-test showed that there was a significant effect for likes, $t(158) = 8.370$, $p = .0$ (see Table 4). Replies, also, had a significant effect, $t(158) = 5.572$, $p = .0$ (see Table 5), and retweets had a significant effect, $t(158) = 6.312$, $p = .0$, as well, (see Table 6).

From the analysis conducted for RQ1, I determined that organic content receives a higher interaction rate than the teams' sponsored content. The organic posts that received a higher number of likes, retweets, and replies include photos or videos of key players or former players. The sponsored content either featured game recaps, final scores, or starting lineups, and that may

have affected the interaction rate due to being before or after a game when the fan was not second screening the game.

Examining RQ2, I conducted a qualitative content analysis with the codebook created for this study. The replies could have more than one code if the response fell into more than one category based on its content. The sponsored content and organic content replies were collected and analyzed. The top three categories from the codebook that appeared the most frequently for sponsored content were positive event /game mentions or observations (PEM), positive team-related mentions (PTM), and negative team-related mentions (NTM). There were 16 PEM replies, 31 PTM replies, and 19 NTM replies. Each of these codes relates to CTI with axiomatic positions of 1 (identities have individual, social, and communal properties), 4 (identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation), and 7 (identities have semantic properties that express core symbols, meanings, and labels). While for organic content replies, the top three codes were PTM, NTM, and direct acknowledgment of content (DAC). There were 38 replies coded as PTM, 15 replies coded as NTM, and DAC had 16 replies coded. Between sponsored and organic content, two of the top three codes in each data set were PTM and NTM. Table 7 shows the codes used for this study.

Fans did have a larger positive reaction to teams than negative. There were more PTM replies and NTM replies for all content on professional sports organizations' Twitter pages. These codes being the largest categories as well gives insight into fan identity. It shows that fans are willing to support their team and those associated with them, like athletes and coaches. While the NTM code showed, fans were critical of the team with a bad play during the game or when their favorite player or the team's star player was not starting the game. This shows that fans are passionate about their team overall. The identity of the fan shows through their team.

The axiomatic positions from CTI to identify the fan are associated with the top two codes, PTM and NTM. The sponsored and organic content replies show that fans' identities are interpreted on a content and relationship level. Fan identity has social, communal, and individual properties. These fan identities also have semantic properties that express through core symbols, meanings, and labels. The symbols that were associated with these tweets were emojis. Some replies included emojis in the analysis. Emojis express the emotion that the fans were trying to convey in their response. These emojis allow the proper code to be applied to the reply being examined. As seen in Table 8, The emojis seen the most were the heart (of any color), the smiling face with heart eyes, and the thumbs up.

These frequently seen emojis allowed me to determine a positive or negative connotation with the fans' reply tweet. These emojis typically indicate a positive intent or affirmation. In my analysis, I applied this to the content analysis when determining codes. When a positive emoji like a heart was attached, it led to a positive code, and if there was a negative emoji, like a sad face with a tear, it led to a negative code. There were very few negative emojis in the data collection. For example, there were only two tweets of person facepalming recorded. Face-palm or face-palming is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as irritation, embarrassment, doubt or shame and thus leading to a negative association. Only having a small number of recorded negative emojis there was not enough to include in Table 8. An example of a positive tweet with one of these emojis from this analysis is, "@StephCurry30 is still the best shooter ever □□ □□□" by @ neishamacey. This tweet uses both hearts and thumbs-up emojis. I determined it was positive by the use of those emojis and the context of the tweet. The tweet says the athlete, Stephen Curry, is the best shooter who uses a positive affirmation of best leads. This is to be coded PTM, and the emojis further solidify the positive code. When I saw these three emojis,

shown above, were used the most, I determined that fans were more likely to be positive towards the team than negative. I also concluded this by how the positive codes did outweigh the negatives at the end of the analysis.

What was different from the previous set of positive and negative codes to the next group is the ratio to positive to negative for sponsored content replies. I created this code set to be positive event/game mentions or observations (PEM) and negative event/game mentions or observations (NEM). PEM had 16 replies associated with the code, while NEM only had three responses. There was 81.25 % more PEM than NEM towards sponsored content, which concludes that fans identify positively with events and games rather than negatively. This positive association with events typically was related to wins from the team and ending the event on a high note. An example I found was "I could put Mike Lange'sLange's "Heeeeeeeeeeee shoots and scores!" on a loop and fall asleep to it every night. It is the most soothing, reassuring sound I have ever heard," by @KevinHussey4. This tweet complimented the public announcer for the game and has positive affirmations throughout the tweet, like soothing and reassuring. While NEM was associated with a bad play in the game that led to a loss or not making the playoffs, which is not surprising because that can be considered a common frustration of fans. An example of NEM from the data set is "Somehow... someway... only 3 points out of a PLAYOFF SPOT!! HOW!?!?" by @PatKetza. I realized the fan was not happy that their team did not make it to the playoffs, which leads to a negative, and the playoffs are an event that leads to the code NEM. The difference I deemed for PEM and NEM regarding the organic content data set is there were only 12 replies coded with PEM and three responses coded with NEM. Both sets of content had the same number of coded responses. This was due to the top tweets from each team were analyzed, and those tweets typically consisted of games being won and not being

a loss. NEM was usually in relation to a poor game presentation or a bad play made in a game. Thus, leading to more positive feedback to the games or events than negative.

Fans had more positive responses to events and games, and they did identify themselves as a fan or as a part of the team in the data. The code fan identification as a fan (FIF) had no replies, and fan identification as a team member (FITM) had three replies related to sponsored content. A great example of fans expressing themselves as a part of the team is by @Andy_n_di, "Remember we just beat Columbus twice lately so they will come out really hungry. We have to make sure we match that level or urgency and determination! This game is important for us. Let's go pens!!!" This fan used the term we to include themselves as a part of the team. At the same time, organic had four replies as FITM and two as FIF. Though these were lower than the other codes, the fan identification does provide insight into how some fans identify themselves when associated with the team.

The axiomatic positions associated with the FIF and FITM codes were 1 (identities have individual, social, and communal properties), 4 (identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation), and 6 (identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities). The positions of 1 and 4 were discussed previously, and the axiomatic position of 6 identifies fans as a part of a community, and they will express themselves in conversations as part of those communities like being a part of a team or as a fan of a team. Though there was a small number of reply tweets coded with FIF and FITM, it shows a small number of fans have identified themselves as fans or as a part of the team.

Axiomatic positions are associated with the positive fan to fan conversation (PFF) and negative fan to fan conversation (NFF). These positions are 4 and 6 and what is interesting from the sponsored code set was there were only two replies associated with PFF and none associated

with NFF. Also, with organic content replies, there was only one PFF and no NFF codes. This was possibly due to what data was collected. The data collected was the first reply to either the sponsored or organic content. Since it was the first reply, the author would have to initiate the conversations with another fan by tagging them. During the analysis, other fans would respond to the r collected reply tweet. Still, those were not included in this analysis due to not meeting the data set criteria. If those tweets were included, there would have been more than two positive fan to fan conversations in the data set. Fans, instead, recognized the content directly than interacting with other fans.

Instead of a fan to fan interaction, fans interacted with content directly or indirectly. When it came to the organic content, fans had a direct acknowledgment of content or DAC. As I mentioned previously, DAC was in the top three codes of the organic content reply data set, but only one reply tweet was coded as an unrelated response to content (URC). Apart from the organic content replies, the sponsored content replies data set had 13 reply tweets associated with DAC and URC had three reply tweets. The URC was determined if the reply had nothing to do with the content or the team that presented it. The DAC showed fans were more concerned with when the game started, ticket sales, merchandise, or starters. The axiomatic positions associated with these codes are 1 and 4. These positions lead to fans' identification with communal properties like concerns about games starting. There is an interpretation level when the replies are not directly related to the original organic or sponsored tweet. Fans did not affect their identity when responding to organic content because of their direct or unrelated acknowledgment of the content. Furthermore, fans showed no effect on their fan identity by sponsored content of professional sports organizations on Twitter due to their direct acknowledgment of content and the unrelated response to content.

The codes positive sponsor related observations (PSO) and negative sponsor related observations (NSO) were not applied to the 80 sponsored replies included in this analysis. I did not record PSO or NSO for organic content replies since organic content does not include sponsorship components. I conclude that fans do not recognize the content provided by teams with a sponsor attached. This analysis and RQ2 are trying to identify sponsorship impact on fan identity. Still, this code set and the sponsor code set, NSO and PSO, do not show if fans recognize the sponsor or if the sponsor affects their identity.

Discussion

The study was to examine if there was an impact of sponsored content on fans. The interaction rates of the organic content were higher than the sponsored content on team Twitter pages. I determined this by using SPSS. Then, I decided that fans did not have their identity impacted by sponsored content on the content analysis teams' Twitter pages. This study contributed to a Communication Theory of Identity by applying the theory to social media and sports. Previous studies looked at the impact of social media on student athletes and how their identity changed from their first year to their last social media (Nichols 2015). In relation to CTI, I noticed how there was limited research on professional sports' fan identity leading up to my study. My study added the fan identity to CTI research. For example, I saw some studies based on identity within religion and identity within addictions rather than sports and identity. Hetch et al. (2006) had a study that focused on Jewish American identity and analyzed the show Northern Exposure to see how group identity was represented in a collective setting. Another study was about young adult smokers and the identity gaps that could be associated with them. Stanley (2016) conducted focus groups and individual interviews to identify these gaps and found gaps in all identity layers: communal, relational, personal, and enacted. Both of these studies used

qualitative analyses like my study. By contrast, the method I used for this study was a qualitative content analysis with codes to help break down the axiomatic positions within the communication theory of identity.

The Communication Theory of Identity or CTI allowed me to understand the codes used in my content analysis by the axiomatic positions I associated with each code. There were four axiomatic positions used in this study:

1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties.

4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation.

6. Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities.

7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.

These positions allowed each code to be defined further to understand the true identity of a fan. I learned that CTI and the axiomatic positions applied to the codes showed that all of my codes had both a content and relationship level of interpretation. There was a relationship value to each reply tweet coded, as well. The relationship I saw was a fan of the team. The fan was a part of the group, whether they stated or not, because their interacting with a tweet showed they were establishing that relationship with the team.

Establishing a relationship with the team was conducted by the fandom of the individual and the team's brand management. In my study, the fan showed their identity through the replies they had shared with the team. Stavros et al. (2014) studied fan interaction on Facebook while my study pertained to Twitter. My research has added to fandom and fan interaction on another social platform, Twitter. Similarly, when Fredrick (2010) found a co-branding effort to maintain

a brand between a sponsor and a professional sports organization, my study can relate to this. My research can expand into the theoretical contributions on how the brand management between a sponsor and a professional sports organization by learning that fans do not directly notice the sponsor on its social media. The fans' identity does not pick up the sponsors, but it also does not pick up the brand management or co-branding between the sponsor and professional sports organization.

Fans featured their identity on social media towards their teams by using digital self-presentation online. They had a "digital self," projected a "digital likeness," digitally associated "as a new form of possession," and reorganized in "linear narrative structures" (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Fans want to make themselves noticed and noticed by the team. A brand, team, and individual have different values when it comes to their presentation of themselves online. Fans or individuals consume the product or content digitally from their teams and then leads to the fan having ownership in the digital landscape (Schau & Gilly, 2003). My study's theoretical contribution to the digital identity or digital self is how the fan establishes and owns their identity online. The fan identities created online leads to the fans' creating a relationship with the teams they follow. The contribution based off my research, of fans owning their identity online is by portraying it positively to their favorite team. The connection of identity is established through the fan interactions on the team content. The established fan connections are likes, replies, and retweets related to this study, and this contributes to the theoretically by fans creating their identity through these interactions.

Relationships between fans and the team were established throughout my study based on the axiomatic position of content and relationship applied to all codes. The relationships created between fans and the team, I concluded that fans do have a follower identity based on the

axiomatic positions. Although, fans did not let their identity be affected if including a sponsor in the tweet. The fans recognized the team, players, or game first and foremost before having something else in the content. I realized that fans did not outright identify as a fan, like saying "I am a fan of that player" or "I am a fan of this team," but instead used their interaction of replying to a team's tweet to show they are a fan.

The interaction of replying to a tweet to show a fan was supported by the emojis they used. The emojis I gathered from this study were more positive than negative. Emojis are used to create a personality within which they are associated and help depict non-verbal communication missing from face-to-face interactions (McShane et al., 2021). The findings revealed another theoretical contribution are the missing interactions that would be created by face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication allows individuals to express their true emotions towards a situation (Venter, 2019). Instead, my findings stated fans use positive emojis to interact with the professional sports organizations' content. The fan identity was contributed to by the emojis that were used. The emoji used by fans would alleviate identifying if their reply was positive or negative. The fan identity would then be established through their use of emojis in their replies to the sponsored or organic content created by the professional sports organization.

In relationship marketing studies, the fan identity was not included in relation to sports. Simons (2015) discussed how fans saw the team as an extension of themselves, and teams used this to their advantage regarding relationship marketing. The study that I conducted shows the effects of relationship marketing after marketing is brought to the fan. The fans showed a positive identity towards their team in their replies to create that relationship. The studies I have mentioned previously, in the literature review and above, focused on identity and relationships,

but not as a sports fan or using social media, especially Twitter. My study does focus on this and will add how fans identify with the content on social media. Thus, it can lead to more studies on sports fans using the Communication Theory of Identity and relationship marketing to broaden the research.

This study can lead to more research, but there were some things that I did not consider when designing this study. First, I did believe fans would recognize sponsored content. I did think there would be a couple of replies, at least two to three, that would notice a sponsor included somewhere on the post and mention that sponsor, but that did not happen with my data set. I determined that fans did not change their identity based on the content in front of them because there no data recorded that had fans recognize the sponsored content using the PSO and NSO codes. Since this was a content analysis and not an interview with fans or survey, I do not know if they genuinely recognize sponsored content. When I formed the research questions, I had the assumption there would have been some impact on fan identity if a tweet includes a sponsor. If this study were expanded further, I would suggest conducting a survey, focus groups, or interviews with fans to determine if there may have been some identity change with fans when a sponsor is included in a post by a professional sports organization.

Additionally, I did not consider the sample size. I thought the sample size of 160 reply tweets total, including sponsored and organic, would have been large enough to see if fans did recognize sponsors. It did not show that but did reveal that fans' identity was not affected. Lastly, I should have considered other leagues in this study, like the National Football League and Major League Baseball. It would have diversified the data more and allowed recommendations to be better suited for the sports and sports communications field professionals.

This theory allows me to make recommendations to professionals in the area of sports and sports communications. The advice I would make is to use sponsors. Based on this study, fan identity does not change, and sponsors would have their logo or tag seen without affecting the fans negatively or positively. The sponsor would be neutral on the professional sports organizations Twitter. I determined fans care more about the team than the sponsor. If a sponsor were attached to a tweet, then fan focus would be on the team and not why a sponsor is attached to the content. Another recommendation based on my research, is that content is taken for face value and not if a sponsor was added to the content. A sponsor will not deter fans, so it would be fair to sponsor content. Lastly, sports organizations should use sponsors to help boost the monetary value behind the content; if a sponsor gives the organization money towards a sponsorship, use it to increase social media posts to receive more traction to the page.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

My study's limitations were due to the data sets that I created for it. The data sets were in a set timeframe based on the 82 games in each season, and the timeframe I concluded was October to November of 2018 and February to March of 2019. This timeframe was not the full season and did not include the preseason and postseason data. The data set was only 160 tweets total of organic and sponsored content for the interactions' analysis on SPSS. If a future study were conducted on the interaction rate of sponsored and organic content, I would suggest pulling data from the whole season, including preseason and postseason. I would recommend this because it will allow adequate data to be pulled and analyzed that sponsors and the professional sports teams can use to see if what content is receiving a higher interaction rate. Also, future studies can determine whether if organic content does receive more interactions than sponsored.

The data set I chose for the reply tweets analysis was only 160 replies, and they were the first reply from each tweet. The data was limited because I was pulling each reply tweet by the parameters set for my research. I eliminated reply tweets that only included emojis, gif, video, photo, or a tag with no text to offer some context for the reply. Therefore, leading to me pulling the next tweet with some text or verbiage to be analyzed. There were also only 12 codes created for the codebook. Most of the codes I made were either in a positive or negative connotation. The positive and negative codes allowed data to be either positive or negative as a result. The codes could have been expanded further to create more neutral or dive further into fan identity analysis.

There were no television partners included in this study. I decided to exclude television partners because the television partners could be the league's partner and not the teams. Also, the clips used from a television partner would be used for organic content.

For future studies on fan identity using the communication theory of identity, I would suggest expanding the codebook to dive into fan identity more based on all the axiomatic positions associated with the communication theory of identity. I would also suggest expanding the data set by double or triple the 160 reply tweets initially collected. Instead, it would be 320 or more. The data expansion would allow the analysis into fan identity and see if sponsors do affect the fan identity when replying to sponsored content on professional sports organizations' Twitter pages.

Conclusion

Fans create an identity when choosing a professional sports organization as their favorite team. The fans further their identities when interacting with the teams on their social media like Twitter. Professional sports organizations pair up with sponsors of their team to create content

paid for by the sponsor and shared by the team along with the organizations' organic content. Fans come together on social media to follow and support their favorite teams and professional sports organizations see this as an opportunity to gain revenue. My study analyzed fans interactions and responses to professional team content. My analysis results state that fans do not let their identity be tampered by sponsored content, but we do not know if fans see the sponsor and ignore their inclusion or not acknowledge it. The fans if they saw the sponsored content. In my study, I learned that teams use sponsors' content, but it does not affect the fan identity in the replies. Fan identity is created by the interactions they choose to do and what they say in response to professional sports organizations' posts.

The organic content interactions were higher than sponsored because fans were and probably still are more inclined to interact with content that does not have a sponsor attached. Fans are not seeing sponsors on the court, rink, or field, but on social media, as well. The sponsor has been a part of their fan identity since before social media. Fans look at the social content for what it is like a fair play, their favorite player, or the game's score. They are a positive influence on the Twitter posts they interact with rather than a negative. In the end, the fan identity will always lie with the team and not the sponsor.

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Figures and Tables

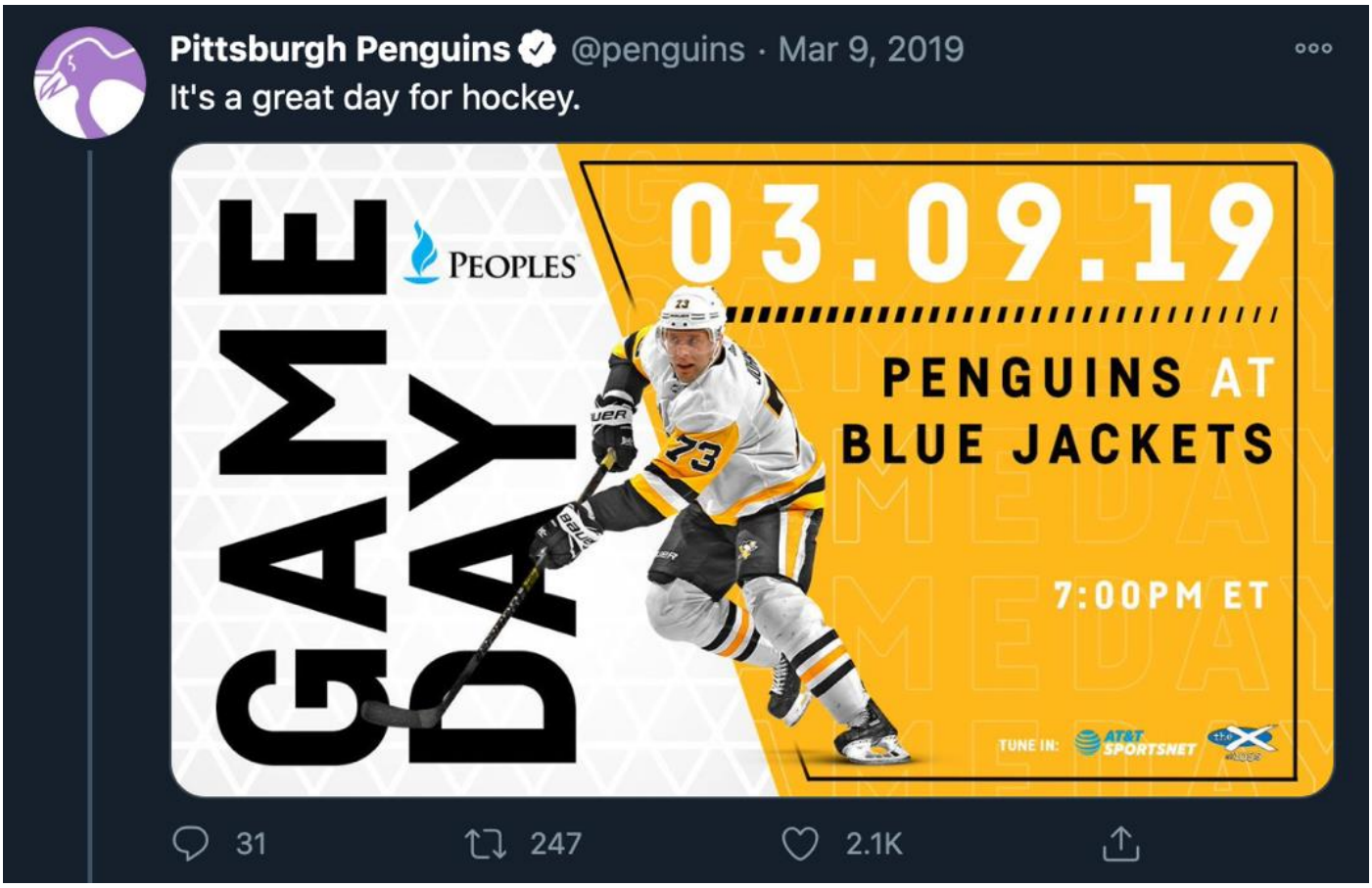
Figure 1

Organic Post Example

Note. This post does not include a sponsor tag or logo.

Figure 2

Sponsored Post Example with Only a Logo



Note. This post does include a sponsor. There is a logo, Peoples, next to the game day text.

Figure 3

Sponsored Post Example with a Logo in Graphic and Tag in Text

Note. This team includes a tag of a sponsor in the text, e.g. @Verizon, and the sponsors logo in the bottom right corner of this video.

Table 1

Likes on Organic and Sponsored Content

Group Statistics

	Team	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Likes	ORG	80	13281.25	11180.567	1250.025
	SPN	80	2662.50	1940.532	216.958

Note. The interactions collected for this data was based on the posts with the most likes.

Table 2

Replies on Organic and Sponsored Content

Group Statistics

	Team	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Replies	ORG	80	157.78	182.819	20.440
	SPN	80	40.28	46.426	5.191

Note. The interactions collected for this data was based on the posts with the most likes.

Table 3

Retweets on Organic and Sponsored Content

Group Statistics

	Team	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Retweets	ORG	80	3900.84	4251.658	475.350
	SPN	80	755.35	1338.271	149.623

Note. The interactions collected for this data was based on the posts with the most likes.

Table 4

Independent T-Test for Likes on Organic and Sponsored Content

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Likes	Equal variances assumed	30.745	.000	8.370	158	.000	10618.750
	Equal variances not assumed			8.370	83.755	.000	10618.750

Note. The interactions collected for this data was based on the posts with the most likes.

Table 5

Independent T-Test for Replies on Organic and Sponsored Content

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Replies	Equal variances assumed	21.034	.000	5.572	158	.000	117.500
	Equal variances not assumed			5.572	89.147	.000	117.500

Note. The interactions collected for this data was based on the posts with the most likes.

Table 6

Independent T-Test for Retweets on Organic and Sponsored Content

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Retweets	Equal variances assumed	27.030	.000	6.312	158	.000	3145.488
	Equal variances not assumed			6.312	94.502	.000	3145.488

Note. The interactions collected for this data was based on the posts with the most likes.

Table 10

Codes for Content Analysis

Category	Fan Identification as a Team Member	Fand Identification as a Fan	Positive Team Related Mention	Negative Team Related Mentions	Positive Sponsor Related Observations	Negative Sponsor Related Observations
Code	FITM	FIF	PTM	NTM	PSO	NOS

Category	Positive Event / Game Mentions Observations	Negative Event / Game Mentions Observations	Positive Fan to Fan Conversation	Negative Fan to Fan Conversation	Direct Response to Content	Unrelated Response to Content
Code	PEM	NEM	PFF	NFF	DAC	URC

Note. This is a modified version of the codebook. To see full code book please reference Appendix A.

Table 11

Frequently Seen Emojis

Frequently Seen Emojis in Replies to Professional Sports Organizations' Twitter Content		
Hearts	Smiling Face with Heart Eyes	Thumbs Up
		

Note. These were the most frequent seen emojis throughout the content analysis.

Appendix

Appendix A

Codebook for Impact of Professional Sports' Twitter Content on their Fans' Identity

Category	***Code***	***Description***	***Related Axiomatic Positions***	***Example Phrases or Words in Association***	***Example of Tweet***
Fan Identification as Team Member	FITM	A tweet where a fan identifies as a member of the professional sports organization. The fan will consider themselves apart of the team rather than a fan of the team.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 6. Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities.	"I am apart of the LA Lakers!" "The Warriors are my team!"	"Lets Get It Done" - @DummyPain
Fan Identification as Fan	FIF	A tweet where a fan identifies as an admirer of the professional sports organization.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 6. Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities.	fan, admirer, lover, enthusiast, devotee, addict supporter, follower, backer, expert, connoisseur, aficionado, buff, junkie, etc.	"I'm so proud of him Loudly □□" - @nhlguentzel

Positive Team Related Mentions	PTM	A desirable connotation in a phrase or sentence, in this case a tweet, to make an upbeat or encouraging statement towards the team. An association to the professional sports organization that is associated with team, team staff, management, front office and ownership. A fan states the team affiliated and mentions them in a reply to the original tweet posted by the professional sports organization.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.	Positive phrases: Good, Great, Awesome, First-class, Superior, Excellent, Accomplished, Skilled, etc. Players example: Patrick Kane, LeBron James, Sydney Crosby, Kris Latang, Jonathan Toews, Stephen Curry Coaches examples: Steve Kerr, Luke Walton	"Congrats Kaner. Magnificent year and career." - @Billdog61
Negative Team Related Mentions	NTM	An undesirable connotation in a phrase or sentence, in this case a tweet, to make damaging or unenthusiastic statement towards the team. An association to the professional sports organization that is associated with team, team staff, management, front office and ownership. A fan states the team affiliated and mentions them in a reply to the original tweet posted by the professional sports organization.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.	Negative phrases: Bad, Sucks, Awful, Corrupt, Cruel, Shameful, Shameless, Terrible, Inferior, Faulty, Poor, Rude, Unruly, Harsh, Trouble, Stale, etc. Players example: Patrick Kane, LeBron James, Sydney Crosby, Kris Latang, Jonathan Toews, Stephen Curry Coaches examples: Steve Kerr, Luke Walton	"Play Lonzo for Zero minutes!" - @kats_inthehat

Positive Sponsors Related Observations	PSO	A desirable connotation in a phrase or sentence, in this case a tweet, to make an upbeat or encouraging statement towards the sponsor. A sponsor is a brand that is affiliated with the team based on a nominal value that is given to the team for brand placement with the team, their arena and their social media / website. A fan recognized the brand and mentions the brand in a reply to the original tweet posted by the professional sports organization.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.	Positive phrases: Good, Great, Awesome, First-class, Superior, Excellent, Accomplished, Skilled, etc. Sponsor examples: Bud light, Budweiser, Honda, Toyota, etc.	
Negative Sponsors Related Observations	NSO	An undesirable connotation in a phrase or sentence, in this case a tweet, to make damaging or unenthusiastic statement towards the sponsors. A sponsor is brand that is affiliated with the team based on a nominal value that is given to the team for brand placement with the team, their arena and their social media / website. A fan recognized the brand and mentions the brand in a reply to the original tweet posted by the professional sports organization.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.	Negative phrases: Bad, Sucks, Awful, Corrupt, Cruel, Shameful, Shameless, Terrible, Inferior, Faulty, Poor, Rude, Unruly, Harsh, Trouble, Stale, etc. Sponsor examples: Bud light, Budweiser, Honda, Toyota, etc.	

Positive Event / Game Mentions or Observation	PEM	The desirable discussion of an event or game that occurred based off the tweet by the professional sports organization.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.	Positive phrases: Good, Great, Awesome, First-class, Superior, Excellent, Accomplished, Skilled, etc. Venues: PPG Paints Arena, United Center, Staples Center, Chase Center Game related: plays, passes, bench, lines, etc.	"I can hardly wait □□ Open doors at 6 or a lille earlier? □□□□□□□□" - @MessmerAlex
Negative Event / Game Mentions or Observation	NEM	The undesirable discussion of an event or game that occurred based off the tweet by the professional sports organization.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.	Negative phrases: Bad, Sucks, Awful, Corrupt, Cruel, Shameful, Shameless, Terrible, Inferior, Faulty, Poor, Rude, Unruly, Harsh, Trouble, Stale, etc. Venues: PPG Paints Arena, United Center, Staples Center, Chase Center Game related: plays, passes, bench, lines, etc.	"nah im good" - @dank_titaz
Positive Fan to Fan Conversation	PFF	A desirable mention of a fan from another fan, in a tweet, that will create or continue a favorable discussion based on the original tweet from the professional sports organization's Twitter.	4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 6. Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities.	Positive phrases: Good, Great, Awesome, First-class, Superior, Excellent, Accomplished, Skilled, etc.	"@Hockeygoalie35 how long is he going to be good though? □" - @bingboopers

Negative Fan to Fan Conversation	NFF	An undesirable mention of a fan from another fan, in a tweet, that will create or continue an unfavorable discussion based on the original tweet from the professional sports organization's Twitter.	4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. 6. Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities.	Negative phrases: Bad, Sucks, Awful, Corrupt, Cruel, Shameful, Shameless, Terrible, Inferior, Faulty, Poor, Rude, Unruly, Harsh, Trouble, Stale, etc.	" @DevonBirdsong No. Nope. I have zero idea what you're talking about." - @jollyrogerwilco
Direct Acknowledgement of Content	DAC	Reply from fan recognizes the literal meaning of the content based on the tweet. The reply is neutral in connotation and the fan is responding to the content in the tweet, but not recognizing a sponsor, event, or team in a positive or negative light. This is typically done when asking about when the game is going to start, sales of tickets, etc. or can be a question, as well.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation.	"What is the score of the game?" "Do the doors open at 5:30 PM or 6:00 PM?" "This is good content."	"do you have a list of the games being broadcasted nationally?" - @abbigael_
Unrelated Response to Content	URC	Reply from fan recognizes the literal meaning of the content based on the tweet. The reply is neutral in connotation and the fan is responding to the content in the tweet, but not recognizing a sponsor, event, or team in a positive or negative light. This is typically done when asking about when the game is going to start, sales of tickets, etc. or can be a question, as well.	1. Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. 4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation.	If the post is about highlights for the game then the response maybe asking about starts for the next game, what time the game weeks from now is, why a coach made a decision, random numbers or emojis. The response has no correlation to the original text.	"82-0" - @1jodiegucci