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FANSHIP DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND NEWER MEDIA

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For those who love to follow sports, this is a great time to be a sports fan. Thanks to advances in technology, lucrative transmission rights contracts and a responsive fan base, sports are available 24/7 throughout the year on an ever-expanding number of platforms. Sports fans can and do follow the action across platforms, their use driven by love of sport rather than loyalty to outlet. When a fan's favorite team is battling for the World Cup or vying for a Super Bowl victory, he or she will seek out media content wherever it is available. Yet, in both obvious and subtle ways, platforms matter and can shape the nature of the reception experience. In this chapter, we will examine sports fan use of traditional and newer media platforms and how these platforms influence uses and responses to mediated sports content. Traditional media platforms include broadcast, cable, and satellite television and radio, as well as hard-copy based newspapers and magazines. Newer media platforms include computers, mobile based technologies and the Internet. Sports content extends beyond games and matches and includes pre- and post-game shows, sports journalism (e.g. ESPN's *SportsCenter*), as well as outlets for sports statistics and fan commentary.

Platform use is both complementary and competitive. In at least four ways, it is complementary. First, consumption of sports media is not a zero sum game: Fans spend more time following sports than they did before and now follow sports using multiple platforms simultaneously (Gregory, 2010). Fans are encouraged to do that when sportscasters urge viewers to check the network's website, Tweet, or turn to the network's Facebook page for information while they continue to watch the game. From the network's perspective, this keeps viewers involved and more likely to stay with the contest, even if the match-up or action on the field is not particularly exciting. Second, sports content varies across platforms in non-competitive ways. Fantasy sports fans, for example, watch NFL games on TV yet turn to online sites for player statistics that TV play-by-play announcers do not have time to provide. Third, mobile technology platforms permit fans to follow games when they are not at home, at a sports bar, or near an available TV. At the same time, these platforms provide additional "eyeballs" for advertisers trying to reach an increasingly elusive target audience. Finally, online and mobile platforms provide fans with sports content when games are not aired.

Within content domains, scholars have documented complementarity in news consumption (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Long-standing interest in a topic area like sports often leads fans to turn to traditional *and* newer media for sports news and increases overall sports news consumption. Yet, in at least three ways, platform use is competitive as well. First, as most of us ruefully acknowledge, there are only 24 hours in each day. Fans have a finite amount of time for sports, even when wedged into work or etched out of sleep. Second, platforms fight for – and often have to split – the fan’s attention. Many sports fans use two screens while following action on the field – although multitasking such as this comes at a price (Bowman, Levine, Waite and Gendron, 2010). Learning decreases and it takes longer to complete tasks when attention is diverted or split across activities such as, with sports, watching a game, checking statistics online, and texting a friend. Finally, networks, websites, and social media outlets like to trumpet their triumphs and proclaim they are Number One in any form of usage – be it total users, amount of use, frequency of use, or first source turned to. Collectively, they spend tens of millions of dollars promoting their product so that fans turn to them for sports. However, it is difficult for ratings companies like Nielsen to track the ways in which fans simultaneously use traditional and social media to follow sports. We do not expect spending constraints to have media displacement effects suggested by McCombs (1972). Sports fans seem quite willing to purchase media hardware, reception and connectivity services – and to buy into fantasy leagues – to stay in touch with sports.

Platform factors that influence the reception experience

While they may have favorites, fans routinely turn to a variety of electronic and print outlets to follow sports and offer their own points of view. Fans are likely to prefer some platforms over others based on their intended use (e.g. large-screen TV to watch live sports; Twitter for updates as a game transpires; websites for fantasy league statistics) although we know of no study documenting this. Nonetheless, we expect fans to quickly, routinely – and perhaps subconsciously – consider a series of factors that lead them to select one platform from the rest, factors that are likely to maximize the value of their experience. In this section, we will describe a series of non-orthogonal factors likely to come into play as fans select platforms. These factors are also likely to influence how fans respond to sports.

Locus of control

With traditional media, content developers and distributors control the message and the timing of its distribution. NFL games on television illustrate how this works. In accord with transmission rights agreements, NFL games are aired on specific networks at predetermined times; are covered by play-by-play announcers, color commentators and sideline reporters selected by the networks; showcase establishing shots, close-ups and replays determined by network producers; and are interspersed with advertising and promotional messages paid for by marketers and selected by the networks. In turn – and with four small caveats that follow – viewers tune in when the games air and watch the externally determined product. With remote control and record devices in hand, viewers do have a modicum of control. They can mute the sound and, instead, listen to their team’s announcer call the game on the radio; they can easily skip non-programming content by flipping channels; and, if they dare, they can record the game and watch it later at their convenience. Those who pay for special satellite packages are not bound by the game selected for their market.

In small and larger ways, newer media share or hand control to users, to fans of the content

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– in our case, to sports fans. Fans who watch games streamed on their computers often have the ability to pick the vantage point / camera angle they prefer. Internet websites encourage fan input, at times without any content filtering mechanisms in place. Blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts give fans free reign to express themselves and, in the process, develop loyal – and at times large – fan bases.

Traditional media content providers and distributors recognize a central liability associated with the control they exert: If potential users are disinterested in the sports fare presented, they'll turn elsewhere for programming and content that better suits their interests and needs. To counter this, providers now offer multiple channels. In the United States, ESPN is the clear leader, offering at least seven distribution channels (ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN News, ESPNU, ESPN Classic, ESPN Films, and ESPNDeportes). Diversification such as this will attract and keep users but it still falls short of providing the sense of agency users have with newer and more interactive media. Furthermore, while new media producers have multiple options when it comes to content creation (e.g. message boards, forums, games, apps), traditional media producers can only rely on programming to satisfy their audiences' needs.

Level of interactivity

Traditional media feature a one-way flow of communication. Circulation figures and program ratings data do provide critical feedback but these are delayed and have more immediate value on the revenue, rather than programming or content, side of the ledger. Calls to station personnel and letters to newspaper and magazine editors offer a limited avenue for feedback. These feedback loops may represent a release valve for those steamed by the content but they do little to shape the content that follows or the pre-set overall agendas of those producing the content. Newer media are inherently interactive and increasingly are called out for use when traditional media outlets need (near) immediate audience feedback. Rafaeli (1988) noted that interactivity empowers users and increases the consumer's level of control. Indeed, new media allow users to become participants, not just consumers of mediated content. Widely popular programs like *American Idol*, *Britain's Got Talent*, and the Netherlands' *Big Brother* integrate audience calls and texts into their decisions; televised sportscasts routinely ask viewers to vote, using mobile technologies, on the top plays and players of the week. Even ESPN's annual sports awards show relies heavily on fan voting to determine the winners. On their own, newer media outlets solicit and expect input. Reader reactions to online columns quickly number into the hundreds; online fan forums hosted by NFL clubs routinely generate thousands of comments each week during the season. Countless fans turn to mobile phones and Facebook sites to tweet, text, or type in their reactions to games while they are being played. In short, newer technologies provide fans with an outlet to express themselves and shape the conversation or, at a minimum, to "lurk" and observe what others have to say.

Temporal constraints

As suggested earlier, traditional media outlets operate with hard and fairly inflexible boundaries. Sportscasts and games start at predetermined times; all pre-programming preparation has to be complete when the opening video is rolled and the announcers are cued. Regularly scheduled sports news programming (e.g. *SportsCenter*, *ESPNNews*) also start with on-the-hour and half-hour start times. Newspapers and magazines have fixed deadlines that demand final copy as well. Newer media feature more flexibility. Websites like ESPN.com continuously rotate story headlines and can be updated as often as warranted. There are no temporal

constraints to fan reactions on web-based forums although there is likely to be a cyclical pattern to such responses. Newer media offer anytime/all-the-time convenience that fits with contemporary, overscheduled life. Yet, temporal constraints may be less important with sports than with most entertainment content. With few exceptions, sports contests air as they are being contested; the games are unscripted, the outcomes unknown as the games unfold. One reason fans watch sports is because they enjoy the suspense associated with not knowing what will transpire. As a result, sports are watched live and represent “appointment” viewing, where fans set their schedules to coincide with game times dictated by the networks and leagues. Sports programming is the programming genre least likely to be time-shifted (Nielsen, 2012). Ironically, fans unable to watch the game live at its appointed time – and hope to watch it later – are better off not using social media like Twitter and Facebook, where the outcome of the game is likely to be widely disseminated and discussed among users and friends.

Fidelity

Consumer electronic devices are simultaneously getting larger, smaller and more faithful to the images they convey. Televisions, computers, tablets, and mobile phones offer a dizzying array of size and picture quality options. Consumers are bombarded with information about pixels, screen size, surround-sound options, and whiz-bang componentry such as 3-D. Fidelity is still an important reason why people spend money to see a movie at a movie theater, with debates existing over the quality of true 70 mm IMAX versus digital IMAX (Scietta, 2011). Fidelity appears to matter with sports, too, especially with the games themselves. Marketers certainly think so, witness large-screen and 3-D television set promotions and sales prior to major sports events like the Super Bowl (Chang, 2012).

For the most part, fidelity is strong across platforms. Newspapers lag behind here. For those without cable or satellite, TV (and radio) signals can be frustratingly fuzzy. The same is true for those reliant on wireless technology for laptop and other mobile communication technology. Despite Verizon’s campaign of “Can you hear me now?” commercials, weak (or dead!) wireless spots curtail fidelity. Broadly speaking, these are the exceptions rather than the rule. Nonetheless, an element related to fidelity still may influence platform selection as we will see with the next factor.

Screen size / presence

Millions of people still go to movie theaters to watch newly released films at least in part because sitting in a darkened space in front of a huge screen, surrounded by sound, significantly enhances the experience. This is especially the case with movies where the action sweeps across the screen and the sound score is rich and fully integrated into the film. Researchers describe the phenomenon of complete focus on content and a feeling of ‘being there’ as presence (Bracken, 2005; Lombard, Reich, Grabe, Bracken and Ditton, 2000; Reeves, 1991). Sports programming can fully engage and engulf fans, too, especially when the contests are taut and the outcomes important. Sports programming is a key factor driving the sale of large-screen high definition television sets (Keating, 2006). Fans want large-screen TVs so they can immerse themselves in football, basketball or other sports action that highlights movement, sound, and spectacle.

Presence is less likely to occur with smaller screens as well as screens with lower resolution quality. Viewers experience more presence when viewing higher quality content and content on a larger screen (Bracken, 2005; Lombard, Ditton, Grabe and Reich, 1997). Even among

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sports fans, the salience of screen size and the immersive experience associated with it should vary across exposure settings. Here, programming content and gratifications sought are likely to trump screen size. Watching pre-game prognostications, gathering post-game statistics – actually, anything other than watching actual sports – is not likely to require big screen technology. And, for those on the go, any screen may do.

Accessibility

In this context, accessibility incorporates proxemics, availability, finances, and cognitive demands. Users turn to and value communication technology that is by their side, available for use, affordable, and easy to use. Traditional media fare well here with television illustrating this point: Large-screen HDTV sets are reasonably priced and are in two-thirds of households across the land (Winslow, 2011); remote control devices require almost no training and are easy for everyone to use; signal coverage is virtually universal. Yet, television sets are clunky and hard to transport. Those on the go who want to watch sports have to turn to public locations (e.g. sports bars) or smaller screen technology to get their fix. Newer media are portable and often no more than an arm's length away: cell and smart phones are in our pockets (for some, under pillows overnight, too); laptops, notebooks, and tablets conveniently fit into pocketbooks, attaché cases and backpacks. Yet, mobile technology is beyond the means for many who want these products but cannot afford the initial cost or monthly carrying charge for the convenience or downloading and streaming speed they provide. Geographic location may also factor into access and speed. Finally, users have to learn how to take maximum advantage of their features and, in addition to paying for apps, have to learn how to download and fully utilize those features as well. Not everyone has the cognitive capacity – or willingness – to do so.

Accessibility issues may divide sports fans along demographic and socioeconomic lines. Older, less educated, less affluent (and more risk-averse) fans may be more likely to turn to traditional media for sports consumption. Their counterparts may be more likely to incorporate newer media into their patterns of mediated sports usage.

Fanship and the reception experience

In common parlance, the term sports fan is used quite loosely. And, when asked, most Americans say they are sports fans (Gallup, 2009). We see fanship as a multidimensional concept, one that incorporates knowledge, affect, and behavior (Gantz and Wenner, 1995). While one may be a fan of a player, a team, a league, or a sport, fanship entails more than merely attending a game or watching it on television. Fans know sports, keep track of the standings, care and root for players and teams, carve out and spend considerable time following sports, and put their money where their heart is by going to games, purchasing player and team paraphernalia, and participating in fantasy leagues. Fanship actually runs along a continuum from those who could not care less about sports (and cannot quite understand why anyone would!) to others whose lives revolve around sports. Most everyone is likely to pay attention to megasport events such as the Super Bowl and the World Cup (Eastman, Newton and Pack, 1996). These events routinely draw the highest television ratings of the year, easily surpassing the ratings for any other programming. Ratings diminish for less prestigious sporting events, with those on the lower rungs of the fanship continuum dropping from the ranks of viewers. For purposes of this discussion, we will use the term fan to describe those on the high side of the continuum (described by others as avid fans; ESPN, 2009; Wann, Friedman, McHale and Jaffe, 2003) and non-fans as those on the low side.

There are two critical differences between fans and non-fans relevant to this discussion. First, fans are much more likely to watch televised sports because they are deeply interested in following the action (Gantz and Wenner, 1995). They care, root, want to know who is going to win, and expect to integrate the game in activities and conversations with others. Non-fans may find the outcomes interesting but they are not truly vested. Instead, they are more detached emotionally when they approach the set, are more likely to watch because their friends and families are watching, and more likely to *not* give a second thought to the game when it (finally!) concludes. In short, fans and non-fans approach sports with different motivational structures and expectations.

The second relevant difference is that for non-fans, contact with mediated sports is likely to start and end with watching the game itself. They have better things to do – almost *anything*, really. The opposite is true for fans: Watching games represents the tip of an iceberg's worth of activity associated with following sports. Fans turn to television because it offers the games and matches they want to watch. But, fans also want to gather, share, and create information; they want to understand, prognosticate, and pontificate; they want to express glee, indignation, and sadness. For all this, they also turn to newer media.

Fanship and traditional media

With good reason, television has dominated the mediated sports environment for decades. It offers live sports with production values and practices designed to maximize – and maintain – viewer attention and interest. At the same time, televised sports extend well beyond the games and matches themselves. Indeed, it may be that television features more hours of programming about sports (e.g. pre- and post-game shows, sports newscasts and magazines, sports fiction) than of the sports themselves (Brown and Bryant, 2006). It is difficult to determine which of the remaining traditional media fans turn to next. Newspapers provide extensive daily coverage of local professional, collegiate, and high school teams. The sports section in *USA Today*, for years the nation's mostly widely circulated daily newspaper, was deliberately designed to appeal to sports fans across the country. Radio often features home team announcers for games aired on that medium. Sports talk radio has become a widely used format that attracts an otherwise hard-to-reach audience that advertisers covet. Sports magazines continue to draw audiences of fans. Yet, no single outlet across these platforms draws the numbers that TV routinely attracts. In Britain, 18 million watched the 2010 World Cup Final on television whereas Britain's most popular daily newspaper, *The Sun*, had a readership of 7.8 million the same year. US viewership of the 2012 NFL divisional championships averaged 53 million while *USA Today's* print circulation hovered around 1.6 million and circulation for *Sports Illustrated*, the nation's best-selling sports magazine, rested at 3.2 million. Few sports talk radio stations are rated in the top five within their markets, a function of narrow niche and use of AM rather than FM channels.

As is the case with any genre of content, there are a variety of reasons why audiences follow mediated sports. These include uses germane to the content as well as those for which any genre of content would suffice. Not surprisingly, almost all of the research on audiences and mediated sports focuses on television. Raney (2006) nicely summarized that work and identified affective, cognitive, and behavioral / social sets of motives driving consumption of mediated sports. In this section, we will cover three clusters of uses of traditional media and discuss how traditional media shine or may fall short in light of newer media.

Entertainment and eustress

Even though enjoyment varies on the basis of loyalties and game outcomes (see the disposition theory of sports spectatorship; Zillmann, Bryant and Sapolsky, 1989), fans attend to sports contests because they truly enjoy following their favorites. Fans actively root for – or against – players and teams. They relish the anticipation and suspense associated with unknown outcomes and revel when their side scores a touchdown or goal, makes a key defensive stop, knocks the ball out of the park, or hits nothing but net on a last second, game-winning three-pointer. Rooting comes from the heart and the brain: It is physiologically and affectively exciting. Because television captures the details, nuances, and intensity of every play with startling clarity, fans turn to it to watch games and matches as they unfold. They want to see athletes, coaches, and spectators experience “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.” For fans, following sports is a visceral experience that television facilitates. Television provides the fidelity and presence fans expect; no other medium comes close. And, since fans want to watch the action as it occurs, factors that might otherwise work against television in today’s digital, newer media environment (e.g. locus of control, interactivity, temporal constraints) are likely to carry little weight. Radio is the only other traditional medium that delivers play-by-play entertainment and eustress value. While it does not quite as easily offer presence, good radio play-by-play announcers are able to describe the action in ways that fans can easily visualize. Beyond that, the intimacy of listening to radio may help listeners feel connected to the action in ways traditional or online print platforms cannot.

Learning

Fans are veritable warehouses of information about players, teams, and leagues. Many have crammed in so many facts, figures, rules, and statistics it seems they worship the deity of sports data. Sports knowledge helps viewers understand the games and matches they watch but it also provides social currency during and apart from following the action on TV. The widespread popularity of fantasy sports has elevated the value of sports knowledge and is used by fantasy sports players to draft athletes for their teams, make trades during the season, and make game-by-game decisions as they arise.

Televised games routinely sprinkle player statistics and personal data. Sportscasters use these factoids and tidbits to provide perspective – and, when the games aren’t close, to keep fans tuned in. Pre- and post-game shows as well as daily sportscasts are filled with player and team statistics as well. Yet, because television is a visual and fleeting medium, fans who crave data also are likely to visit print platforms which feature more detailed data about each contest and athlete. Hard copy print platforms like newspapers and magazines may end up on the losing side of the ledger for fans who want immediate, continuous, and fan-directed access to sports data. Newer technologies have much more to offer here, including databases designed for information-obsessed fans, and are increasingly turned to by those fans (Otto, Metz and Ensmenger, 2011). Use of these interactive platforms also points to an increasingly well-informed and information-savvy fan base (Block, 2012).

Group affiliation, companionship, and sense of personal identity

Most fans watch games and matches at home. For some, it is a deliberately solitary experience: They want to completely focus on the action. Many watch with family members or friends, a mix of happenstance and planning. Co-viewing patterns in the home vary by gender and age

(ESPN, 2009); compared to men, women are more likely to view sports with others. Married couples see televised sports viewed as a shared experience that plays a small but positive role in their relationship (Gantz, Wenner, Carrico and Knorr, 1995). Watching televised sports at home by oneself is unlikely to provide companionship (even though having the set on makes the home feel less empty). However, for those who are watching alone at home, it is now easy to share the experience with others using newer media technologies; many viewers routinely text friends about their excitement – and their personal take – on the action (Gantz, Fingerhut and Nadorff, 2011). Fans who seek the communal roar – and rowdiness – of stadium attendance but want to spare themselves the costs and hassles of going to games turn to sports bars. Every city has them; it is great business for bar owners and an ideal setting for fans who want to be surrounded by those who share loyalty to a team.

In and of itself, television as a content delivery platform does not provide group affiliation, real companionship or the sense of identity that sports offer fans. Instead, because viewing can be so easily shared, sports on television afford the *opportunity* for fans to feel they are part of a larger group. It may be one reason why young adults enjoy watching televised sports at bars – along, of course, with the chance to imbibe and let loose.

In two ways, radio may more directly offer listeners companionship and group affiliation as well as let them establish and share their identity as sports fans with others. First, and at its best, radio is an intimate medium. Sportscasters behind the microphone have the ability to make listeners feel that the play-by-play and commentary are directed to them. Moreover, many radio sportscasters are permitted to be partisan. Over the years, the best sportscasters become extended members of the listeners' families. Listeners develop parasocial relationships with these announcers (more on this later) and may feel an important sense of connection whenever they tune in. The second way focuses on radio as an interactive medium. Sports talk radio features highly knowledgeable and decidedly opinionated hosts who share their views, field phone calls and banter with those who call in. Because it is radio, these shows promote a sense of intimacy – the hosts and listeners are in it together. Audiences listen to talk radio for information, excitement – and companionship (Armstrong and Rubin, 1989). Many who call in are regulars known by the hosts; regular callers develop and cultivate their own radio-based identity. Newer media provide more interactive technology and permit users to much more fully develop their identities as sports fans. Yet, sportscaster skill, coupled with the intimacy of radio and the immediacy of sportscaster–fan repartee, is likely to keep fans listening.

Off-line print media vehicles offer little here. Newspapers feature letters to the editor but few get published each day. Even fewer relate to sports. Online, though, newspapers and magazines encourage feedback for all to read.

Fanship and newer media

Newer media allow fans to *extend* their fanship in different and meaningful ways. Newer media complement and supplement traditional media. At least right now, they do not replace watching games and matches live. Many fans turn to newer media screens while watching sports on TV so they can follow multiple games at the same time. Here, though, we would like to focus (a) on the ways in which fans use newer media platforms to create content and (b) on the networks and websites that fans access for existing sports content online. So, for example, fans use their mobile phones to 'check in' on Facebook and other social media applications, reporting their location at a sports stadium or arena as well as a sports bar; they use notebooks and tablets to access team and fantasy websites before, during, and after games; when in transit or simply not near a TV, they turn to their mobile phones, tablets and notebooks to catch the latest

scores. In this section, we will describe five ways that fans make use of newer media to create a richer, more fulfilling fanship experience.

Digital self-expression and identity

Newer media create an environment where sports fans can convey and widely disseminate their support for teams and athletes not possible with traditional media. Using the networked device of their choice, fans can share their anger over an official's call, cheer for an 80-yard touchdown run, or berate a coach for poor play-calling. In fantasy leagues, team managers "talk smack" by disparaging the opponent's line-up or performance and gloat when their team fares well. Fans who use message boards do so to exchange information and interact with fellow fans (Clavio, 2008). Sports message board users bask in the reflected glory (BIRG) of their team after a win, all the while disparaging opponent teams (End, 2001). Fans, of course, can express themselves in the privacy of their dorm rooms, apartments and homes or in the company of other revelers at sports bars. Newer media simply extend self-expression to countless others and provide an extra dose of satisfaction for those who want and like their voices widely heard.

Social networks allow users to create representations of themselves and connect with others (Boyd, 2004). Fans establish their own digital identity and then use social networking sites, fantasy leagues, fan boards and forums to share their online identities and narratives. They become active agents by joining fan groups on Facebook, creating user profiles in team forums, and generating avatars in their fantasy leagues. Some fantasy players go to great lengths to create their managerial personas by uploading pictures, crafting clever team names, and earning and adding trophies to their profiles. In these activities, the focus of media production and consumption shifts from broadcast-centered to emerging digital fan networks (Hutchins, 2011). Fans use websites and message boards to both associate and identify with their team (End, 2001).

Extended fanship networks

With the advent of the World Wide Web, people were able to connect across distances and time zones in ways previously unseen. However, it took the arrival of digital social networks to create and facilitate social interaction in a truly massive and nearly boundless way. From online dating websites to massive game environments, social networks connect people across the globe. Team websites, sports boards and forums, and fan blogs connect fans and amplify their networks as well as their fanship experience. Social networks such as these give fans the feeling that they are keeping in touch with other fans (Hutchins, 2011). Team and athlete Facebook pages created by "super fans" have steadily gained in popularity among users; in 2012, the NFL Green Bay "Packers Everywhere" page boasted 17,000 likes (Broughton, 2012). Major cities have long featured and hosted team bars where groups of loyalists would gather to watch their favorites in action. Now, with Facebook pages and Twitter feeds, these establishments reach fans that would have not been privy to their locations in the past. Business networking sites provide lists of these bars and direct team fans to a singular location to watch their favorite teams play. Sites such as these connect fans, extend fanship networks – and are good for the bottom line of sports bars, too.

Information expertise

From statistics to insider analyses, fans have access to an ever-increasing amount of information about their favorite players and teams. For those so inclined – many fantasy sports players

fit here – fans can use new media to develop specialized information expertise. Here, fans control what they know, how much they know, and the means by which they acquire that information. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube continue to grow as primary sources of information for sports fans (Broughton, 2012). Each of these platforms features extensive search capabilities where fans can tailor their information-gathering experience to their individual needs. Instead of receiving sports information from newspapers, magazines, and broadcast networks, fans select and consume specific sports data online, including extensive statistical information (analytics, sabermetrics), player salaries, contracts, and labor disputes (Block, 2012). It seems reasonable to conclude that fans using online sources will be better informed than those limited to traditional media outlets, with knowledge differences even greater between fans and non-fans. Although it has not been tested with sports, the availability of sports information databases is likely to extend the knowledge gap between fans and non-fans, perhaps making it more difficult for members of these two groups to fully enjoy watching sports together.

Parasocial interaction

Athletes, teams, sportswriters, announcers, and reporters use newer media to interact, expand, and inform their social networks. This creates the opportunity for fans to connect with their favorites and heroes. Parasocial interactions are one-sided relationships where one member knows a great deal about the other, but the other does not (Rubin and McHugh, 1987; Perse and Rubin, 1989). These often occur between celebrities and their fans, thanks to television programs and celebrity magazines that, with or without the stars' blessings, provide fans with intimate details of their lives. New media have opened the doors for celebrities, including those associated with sports, to reveal personal and at times intimate information about their daily lives. Sports fans, especially teenagers and minorities, interact with teams, leagues, and players through social networks instead of using traditional media sources (Broughton, 2012). Many have their own Twitter feeds and often respond to fan updates, providing an experience of pseudo-engagement with the player. According to *tweeting-athletes.com*, over 7,000 athletes have active Twitter accounts. Furthermore, all NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL teams have Twitter accounts and social media policies for their employees and players. These fan-to-sport interactions showcase the intricate and interactive aspects of newer media; fans are not just interacting with each other, but with their beloved players and teams as well.

Competitive ambitions

The world of fantasy sports has created a way for fans to engage in competitive activity that also serves as an expression of their fanship. Fantasy sports turn fans into managers who exert control over their rosters and line-ups. Interacting with the user interface and other players involved, fantasy users are able to stoke their competitive juices in a game-like environment that utilizes the teams and players they love.

Farquhar and Meeds (2007) described three distinct groups of fantasy sports players: casual players, skilled users, and isolationist thrill-seekers. Fantasy sports players participate for both competitive and social identification purposes (Lewis, 2012). Those who play enjoy the camaraderie of participating with their friends and with those they have gotten to know through fantasy sports leagues. They also use fantasy leagues as a vehicle of self-expression as league interfaces offer message boards and live chats during player drafts. But, fantasy sports players also compete to win and, even if there is no money in the pool, revel in victory. Fantasy sports

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leagues allow able and less-able bodied fans to simultaneously satisfy their competitive impulses and enhance their enjoyment of following real life games.

Fantasy sports players need information to make smart managerial decisions. It now appears that participation in fantasy football increases overall media consumption (Dwyer and Drayer, 2010): Fantasy players turn to traditional and newer media outlets for game results and statistics about their fantasy teams – and also watch the games live on TV. Televised sports producers understand this and have taken measures to seamlessly transition their broadcast content for new media applications. The networks that air NFL games provide fantasy updates during games. Cable and satellite companies carry special channels devoted to providing statistics and score updates. Direct TV's Red Zone Channel was created as part of its NFL Sunday Ticket package to provide live television coverage of NFL teams once they cross the 20-yard line. Those who participate in fantasy football use specialized channels like this to get updates in real time about the status of current players and as a scouting tool for picking up players (Swingle, 2009).

Final thoughts

Fans follow sports because it adds a dimension of enjoyment, excitement and meaning to their lives. They turn to sports as a way of connecting with the larger world and creating an identity in that world that is shared and valued by others. Traditional media, led by television, will continue to be prominent providers of sports content. Smaller screen technologies cannot compete with the presence, immediacy, and encompassing spectacle that modern HD and 3-D TV offer for game and match coverage. Down the road, smaller screens (embedded, for example, in eyeglasses) may be able to provide presence but the intimate nature of the experience will fall short on the social dimension of watching sports. At the same time, fans are likely to make increased use of newer media for news, insights, analysis and fantasy games – and for the opportunity to share their voice with like-minded others. Having grown up with accessible, interactive technology, younger fans may lead the charge here. They also may be the first to discard or – perhaps more appropriately – not even consider traditional, non-interactive platforms for sports news. In all, the attributes associated with traditional and newer media coupled with the expected cognitive and affective outcomes associated with exposure point to continued widespread use of one-way and interactive media platforms for sports.

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