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NEW MEDIA AND THE NFL FAN: DETERMINING THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA
ON TEAM IDENTIFICATION IN DISPLACED NFL FANS

by

Dorothy R. Collins

B.A. June 1995, Lawrence University

B.A. December, 1996, Southwest Minnesota State University

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Requirements for the Degree of

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Approved By:

Stephen Shapiro, Chair

Lynn Ridinger, Member

Yi-Fan Chen, Member

ABSTRACT

NEW MEDIA AND THE NFL FAN: DETERMINING THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA
ON TEAM IDENTIFICATION IN DISPLACED NFL FANS

Dorothy R Collins
Old Dominion University
Committee Chair: Dr. Stephen L. Shapiro

Sports team identification, when viewed through the lens of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), can be seen as a powerful means of maintaining one's sense of self and feelings of belonging as part of a group. In some cases, team identification has been found to be based on one's feelings of connection with the geographic location of that team (Uhlman & Trail, 2012). Furthermore, prior research has shown that bonds of team identification forged in one's youth are particularly strong (James, 2001). The surge of new media options that have appeared in the last decade are changing the way in which sport fans consume sports (Fairley & Tyler, 2012). This in turn is providing a new twist on the conventional understanding that fans must be part of a fan community in order to remain highly identified over time (Hyatt, 2007) by providing opportunities for virtual fan communities. As such, the following research question guides this study: How does current distance from hometown, length of time gone from hometown, use of new media, and feelings of attachment to one's hometown impact levels of team identification with the hometown NFL team? The study also employs a secondary research question that considers the relationship between the difference between attachment levels to hometown and current community attachment and the existence of an NFL market in one's current community, in terms of the likelihood that one will remain highly identified with one's hometown team.

The first research question utilized a multiple linear regression model that was found to be significant, explaining 31.7% of the variance in levels of team identification among non-local NFL fans. The use of social media, the use of Internet streaming, and level of hometown identification were found to be significant variables. RQ2 utilized a 3x2 two-way ANOVA which demonstrated that there was a significant difference in team identification based on differences between hometown and current community attachment.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The surge in new media options over the last decade has greatly impacted the way in which sport fans consume sports. For many people, the costs and distance involved with ballpark and stadium visits have led to a shift in perception about the ultimate sport fan viewing experience, as people take advantage of premium sports channels and other unique ways of viewing the game (Fairley & Tyler, 2012). Social media networks have further pushed the envelope, as fans can now stay connected to other fans, with up-to-the-minute updates from social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook (O'Shea & Alonso, 2011).

As the way in which people consume sports evolves, all major professional sports leagues are facing a decline in ticket sales, despite societal interest in sport being at an all-time high (Hambrecht, Hambrecht, Morrissey, & Black, 2012). According to Hambrecht et al.'s 2012 report, attendance at all major sports (National Football League (NFL), National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association (NBA), and Major League Baseball (MLB)) have declined in the past five years. In order to remain financially successful moving forward, professional teams must learn how to harness these new trends in media-based consumption of sport and turn them into revenue sources. Gaining a full understanding of the ways in which the modern fan consumes sport is critical to maintaining a fan base of highly identified fans.

American society in general continues to show a strong attraction to sport, with more than 70% considering themselves sports fans (Global Sports Media, 2013). Football, with 51% of the population identifying as fans (Global Sports Media, 2013), is the most popular sport in

America, hence the reason this research will focus specifically on NFL fans. Sport media consumption has also shown significant growth in amount of time spent consuming sports, now 8.3 hours per week, an increase of more than 25% since 2011 (Global Sports Media, 2013).

The Global Sports Media Consumption Report (2013) presented a number of statistics related to new media including the following. Fifty-nine percent of those surveyed reported that the way in which they consume sport has changed in some way in the past two years. There has also been an increase in the use of new media options for following sport. For example, in 2013, 25% of sport fans consumed sports using social media, up from only 15% in 2011. (Global Sports Media, 2013). Similarly, in 2013, 63% of sport fans used various online sources, including everything from reading articles to watching games via streaming, a 7% gain since 2011 (Global Sports Media, 2013). The largest jump has been in mobile consumption of sports, with 35% of fans reporting that they are using mobile devices to consume sports, a 14% jump from 2011 (Global Sports Media, 2013, p. 17). In contrast to the new media numbers, while most sport fans are still consuming sports via television, there has been a 2% decrease in the number of sport fans using television (Global Sports Media, 2013, p. 17).

Rapidly changing technology has created a host of new media options that have made a decidedly more attractive sport consumer experience for the out-of-town fan. While it is possible that this trend could have a negative impact on ticket sales, more significant is the tremendous opportunity these new media options offer sport properties to market to fans not living in the geographic vicinity of the team. If fans maintain attachments to their hometown teams in addition to—or instead of—gravitating toward local teams in the area where they currently reside, it will represent a shift in consumer behavior, which has traditionally dictated

that fans must be part of a local fan community (Andrijew & Hyatt, 2009). Until recently, being part of a fan community was based on geographic proximity; however, new media options have made it increasingly likely that out-of-town fans will still feel connected to a fan community, despite being geographically separated from the team.

A high level of team identification is one factor contributing to the continued consumption of sport by displaced fans (Andrijew & Hyatt, 2009). Fan identification with teams is an important concept, from both theoretical and practical standpoints. Previous research has shown that there is a positive correlation between identification and consumptive behavior among sport fans (Fink, Trail & Anderson, 2002). It has also been found that individuals are provided “a sense of belonging to a community at a grass roots level”(Dhurup, Dubihlela & Surujlal, 2010, p. 493) when they are highly identified with a specific team. A sports team can then be understood as a symbol of a community. Because team identification is not a physical attribute, it is possible to maintain such identification, even without the individual being in close proximity to the favorite team. Keeping this in mind, the question of team identification among out-of-town fans warrants further study. In particular, it should be determined whether the advent of new technology that allows easier, more enjoyable consumption of sport outside the local area will lead to the creation of intentional communities of displaced fans who seek to retain ties to their hometowns. If so, this could translate to very practical applications for all sports teams, because highly identified fans are more likely to watch and attend games, buy team-branded merchandise, and remain supportive of the team, even in cases of poor on-field performance (Fink, et al., 2002). As such, if a team can maintain a base of highly identified fans

made up of both those currently living within its geographic area and fans who have moved away, the opportunities for increased economic benefits are magnified.

In order to begin understanding modern sports consumption in order to construct a framework for this research, it is necessary to fully examine prior studies of team identification (Fink, et al., 2002; Shapiro, Ridinger & Trail, 2013), the relationship between proximity and identification (Smith & Stewart, 2007), ways of building community outside the traditional stadium environment (Fairley & Tyler, 2012), the influence of media on sport fans (Phua, 2010; Potter & Keene, 2012), and the ways in which social media can be harnessed to engage the maximum number of fans in the most productive way (Pronschinkske, Groza & Walker, 2012). While there is ample research on all these topics, there is very little, if any, previous comprehensive work specifically examining the way in which the onslaught of media options available today has impacted fans displaced from their hometowns, who desire to remain highly identified fans of teams from their hometowns.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing mobility of the American public, in conjunction with a plethora of new media options for consuming sport, have led to an increased ability for sport fans to remain highly identified with professional sports teams to which they are not geographically connected at the present time. A number of factors including age, gender, distance and time removed from the teams' geographic locale, level of education, household income, and use of new media sources, must be considered when examining this trend. While prior research has shown that being an active part of a fan community is critical to remaining a highly identified fan (Hyatt, 2007), emerging technology has created a new media landscape, which has thereby vastly altered

the way in which a fan community is constructed. As such, there is limited research available to bolster understanding of the consumer behavior and perceptions of the out-of-town fan in this new environment.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine whether new media, in particular social media and Internet streaming media, has changed the very definition of fan community such that it can now transcend the limits of geography and face-to-face interaction. To this end, this research will study the relationship between consumption of new media and fan identification among NFL fans living more than 100 miles from their hometowns. This research will take into account not only demographic factors such as age, gender, economic status and educational level, but also the effects of proximity, time and market size on the level of identification displaced fans demonstrate towards hometown teams. This research will investigate whether there is a positive correlation between consumption of new media and a strong drive to remain highly identified, despite the potential absence of a large physical fan community, instead of, or in addition to, becoming highly identified fans of more local teams.

Research Questions

RQ 1

Is there a relationship between the quantity of new media consumed, current distance from hometown, amount of time since leaving hometown, the level of attachment to one's hometown community, and the level of identification with hometown teams among displaced NFL fans?

RQ 2

Are there differences in team identification based on the difference in identification between hometown and current residence, or by the presence of an NFL team in one's new city of residence?

Significance of the Study

This research will seek to fill a gap in the literature by synthesizing the existing research on team identification, proximity, community building and attachment and media, with new data to evaluate the likelihood that displaced sport fans will be increasingly able to remain highly identified to their hometown teams. Furthermore, there will be a comparison between those living in communities with and without professional sports teams, to see if the likelihood that people will retain their loyalties to hometown teams increases if there is no team in the immediate local area to which they have relocated. Finally, this research will examine the correlation between the distance from hometown that one has relocated and how likely they are to abandon their hometown team loyalty in favor of a local team, based on the level of attachment to both their hometown community and their current residence. This research has the potential to help sport franchises better market to the out-of-town fan, and thereby help teams benefit from the various economic opportunities resulting from such marketing.

Delimitations

1. The scope of this research was delimited to only NFL fans; therefore, fans of different sports or different levels of sport were not included in this study.
2. This research was delimited to displaced NFL fans who use the Internet, therefore fans who do not use the Internet were not included in this study.

Limitations

1. The scope of this research includes only fan identification, and therefore other attitudes and perceptions that are known to have an influence on consumptive behavior cannot be generalized beyond NFL fans who use the Internet.
2. Because this research does not use a random sample and relies on a convenience sample, this study cannot be generalized to include all displaced sports fans.
3. The scope of this research will include only the fan's current level of identification, and will not differentiate between levels of attachment prior to moving from the hometown, nor will it re-examine identification at a later time period.

Definition of Terms

Fan of major professional sports: Fans of NBA basketball, MLB baseball, NFL football, NHL hockey and MLS soccer.

New media: Those methods of sport consumption that require a device beyond conventional TV. Included in this would be social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and chat rooms, Internet streaming options for sport consumptions such as the NFL's Game Rewind or NHL GameCenter, and mobile apps such as WatchESPN and ESPN Bracket Bound (Kwak, Kim & Zimmerman, 2012; Mueller & Sutherland, 2010; Smith & Smith, 2012). Furthermore, included in this are sport-specific, premium packages such as NFL Sunday Ticket, which can be watched on a traditional television, or can (for a considerably lower cost) be watched on mobile or Internet-enabled devices.

Fan Identification: The amount of identification or loyalty a fan has to a particular team, sport, or player, which has been shown to be predictive of past and future sport consumption behaviors in relation to game attendance, willingness to spend money on tickets and merchandise, and loyalty regardless of the team's current win-loss record (Fink et al., 2002).

Hometown: Place in which a fan once lived and views as their place of origin, or place that is significant to their formative years.

Current Community: Place where the fan is currently living.

Displaced fan: Fan living currently more than 100 miles from the team they identify as a fan of, but who were, at some time during their youth geographically connected to the team to which they identify as a fan.

Overview of Chapters

Following this introduction, this research includes a Literature Review chapter, which gives a comprehensive review of the prior research studies on fan attachment, proximity and attachment, and media impact on sport fans. Chapter III is a Methods Chapter, fully defining the way in which data was collected and analyzed, as well as the instrument that was used to collect the data. Chapter III also includes a full discussion of the population and sample, as well as the rationale for that population and sample's selection. Chapter IV includes the results of the data collection, as well as discussion of those results. Finally, Chapter V provides conclusions and recommendations for future research to expand upon this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a significant amount of literature surrounding the issue of consumption of new media and sport fan identification, which will be important for framing the basis for this research. First to be examined will be team identification, specifically as it relates to social identity theory, as well as the factors that drive team identification. Then, the existing research concerning staying connected, as well as the relationship between proximity and attachment, will be reviewed. In addition, the existing literature detailing ways of building sport fan communities outside the traditional stadium environment will be discussed. Finally, what is known from prior research with regard to media and its influence on sport fans, as well as the social media question, will be examined in this section.

Team Identification

The construct of identification is a broad theory that applies to individuals' attachments to various group structures. For the purpose of this research, we will focus on organizational identification—defined as the degree to which an individual defines himself by his connection to a given organization, and the relative importance of that connection within the individual's concept of self-awareness (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). In the context of sport, organizational identification is often called “team identification” or “team attachment” and can be defined as the “extent to which fans are committed to the team and how they are psychologically connected to and involved in the team activities” (Dhurup, et al., 2010, p. 492). When fans are highly

identified, they become united, and depersonalized, which in turn makes them feel as if they are part of a group and gives them a sense of belonging (Phua, 2010).

First developed in the late 1970s by Tajfel (1978), the construct of social identity theory espouses the belief that all human behavior falls on a continuum that ranges from strictly interpersonal to strictly intergroup. Social identity theory is a social psychological conceptual framework that concerns itself with the idea that individuals find their identities through the organizations and groups that they are members of (Andrijew & Hyatt, 2009; Phua, 2010; Tajfel, 1978). This, combined with the level of individual attachment, is both emotionally and value driven, causes the individual to make the values of the group his or her own, thereby creating a situation in which all members of the group share a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Tajfel and Turner concluded that being part of the in-group leads to a positive self-concept, which is the primary reason people engage in intergroup behavior.

Social identity theory, which dictates that both the organizations one is identified with and demographic classifications are significant (Andrijew & Hyatt, 2009; Dhurup, et al., 2010; Fink, et al., 2002; Phua, 2010; Shapiro, et al. 2013), has been found to be a driving force behind individual's attachment to sport properties. Particularly important in this research is the idea that team identification is critical to the consumptive behavior of sport fans. Recent literature says that social identity theory can be considered to be part of the framework that determines whether or not a person will become, and remain attached to a sport property (Smith & Smith, 2012). The existing literature demonstrates that social identity theory is important to team identification among fans (Fink, Parker, Brett & Higgins, 2009). Additionally, sport fans are creating intentional communities outside the sphere of traditional fan communities that center around the

geographical location of the fans (Ferriter, 2009; Smith & Smith, 2012). According to Shapiro, et al. (2013), fan identification has both past and future implications for consumptive behavior of fans, and as such a thorough examination of the forces that contribute to this attachment is critical. Their study, which looks at nine points of attachment on consumptive behavior among college football fans, found that fans were more highly identified with teams than any of the other eight attachment points. The scope of the current research, however, will include only the team and community identification attachment points. Shapiro, et al.'s research did not specify whether the fans were local to the university; however, it can be assumed that a significant portion were local, as students and faculty made up more than 40% of those surveyed.

In a 2010 study of attachment among South African soccer fans, Dhurup, et al. looked at four attachment points for fans: Team, players or coach, sport, and level of sport. This study found that attachment to team outdistanced the other three attachment points by far, making it consistent with earlier research that has found that there is both a distinction between team identification and sport identification, and that there is not necessarily a strong relationship between level of sport identification and specific organizational identification. Some earlier studies found that sport identification explained almost none of the variance (4%) in interest in team (Funk, Ridinger & Moorman, 2004), while in others it had a much stronger (20% variance) impact (Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001). The current research, however, will focus on the strength of the force of team identification as a primary factor that drives fans to retain identification with their hometown NFL team, even after the fan is no longer geographically connected to the NFL team. This effect has been found to be even more

pronounced if the fan was a child when he or she became identified with the hometown team (James, 2001).

Complementing the research on team identification is a 2012 study by Uhlman and Trail that investigates the basis for team identification. A study of season ticket holders for the Seattle Sounders FC found that the most significant cause of team identification is community attachment. Uhlman and Trail state “the strong attachment that the Sounders FC season ticket holders have to the city of Seattle, and that such attachment explains a great deal of why they identify with the Sounders FC” (Uhlman & Trail, 2012, p. 250).

Earlier research therefore supports the idea that while team identification is the best predictor of consumptive behavior among fans, it is community attachment that is the strongest driver of team identification. The earlier research, however, has focused on local fans, and there has been very minimal research involving fans that are not geographically connected to the team, yet maintain a high level of identification with that team. This research seeks to fill this gap in the literature by studying the causes that drive NFL fans to remain identified with their hometown teams even when the fan is no longer physically part of the community that the team represents. Furthermore, this research will contribute to the literature by investigating the extent to which displaced fans use new media options, thereby effectively creating virtual intentional communities, in order to allow them to maintain their sense of community attachment to the hometown itself, while maintaining the social identity that identification with the specific sport property gives them.

Staying Connected: The Relationship Between Proximity and Attachment

The literature indicates that many sport fans are willing to travel to engage with teams and other sport experiences; however, that research has demonstrated such travel is really a way to meet “fundamental fan needs, such as cultural connections, collective identity, entertainment, and excitement” (Smith & Stewart, 2007, p. 175). That said, it is not always possible to travel to see one’s favorite teams due to societal constraints, and it is interesting to investigate the literature attached to fans that are (for a variety of reasons) unable or unwilling to see their favorite teams play in person.

While there is a fairly small body of literature dealing with this specific topic, a particularly interesting study on maintaining team identification without live viewing was done by Hyatt (2007), in which he conducted in-depth interviews of Hartford Whalers fans, a decade after the Whalers relocated to North Carolina and became the Carolina Hurricanes. Results of this study showed that many still consider themselves Whalers fans, despite the Whalers not having played a game in ten years. Furthermore, at the time of the study, the majority of these fans did not have a strong NHL team attachment, do not follow the Hurricanes, and some even reported that the experience of losing their hometown team has left them disinterested in hockey or professional sports altogether (Hyatt, 2007). Furthermore, when the Whalers left Hartford and moved to North Carolina, most fans stopped seeing them as the same franchise, and more than twice as many fans root against the Hurricanes as root for them (Hyatt, 2007). Hyatt’s study examined what happens when a team leaves the fan behind, whereas the current study is looking at the result of a fan leaving the team behind, geographically speaking. What the Whalers study

does seem to suggest, however, is that the team's identity is tied strongly to the community in which it plays, and if one removes that team from the community, its identity is destroyed.

Returning to the question of fans that identify with a team outside their geographic area of residence, a study of NHL fans that identify with teams outside of their local area determined that those fans intentionally segregated themselves from the local NHL fan community, and in more than half the cases they rooted for the non-local team as a strictly independent venture, without any influence from friends or family (Andrijew & Hyatt, 2009). The 2009 article by Andrijew and Hyatt was based on a qualitative study conducted in two parts. The first half of the study was conducted as an extension of Hyatt's earlier research on the Whalers, and the second half was conducted as a follow-up study in 2006. The study found that while the motivation for these fans to root for a non-local team was grounded in a desire to express individuality, these fans still went to great lengths to find a community larger than themselves with which to identify. The original groups of Whalers fans, who were fans before the advent of the Internet, found attempts to connect with other fans as difficult; however, they still found community in small things, such as sharing a fan loyalty with a radio broadcaster. In contrast, the fans interviewed for the follow-up study specifically pointed to the Internet as critical to helping them feel connected and a part of a community. The authors state that "the Internet has allowed fans to eliminate geographic barriers and to connect with one another through such mediums as message boards, chat rooms, and blogs. For two of the eight fans interviewed in the second half of the study, message boards played a significant role in bringing them closer with fans of their respective teams and solidifying their identities" (Andrijew & Hyatt, 2009, p. 168).

In the case of the second half of the study, these fans did not have any ties to the geographic community in which the teams they were rooting for played, and in most cases had no opportunity to see the teams they were rooting for play live (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009). This research demonstrated that while being part of a fan community was necessary for maintaining team identification, physically attending games was not a critical part of constructing that community. As such, the literature must be evaluated to determine if proximity and physical attendance is waning as a way to identify and build community with other sport fans. If it is found that these factors are in fact less important than one might think, then the literature must be evaluated to learn what phenomena are replacing stadium attendance and geographic proximity to the team as key factors in the identification and creation of fan communities.

As discussed earlier, there is significant literature that connects proximity and identification; however, there is also some literature that has found that for new sport properties, vicarious achievement is critical to both establishing a fan base (Lock, et al., 2011; Uhlman & Trail, 2012) and drawing attendance (Brown, Devlin & Billings, 2013; Lock, Taylor & Darcy, et al., 2011; Uhlman & Trail, 2012). There is a decided lack of literature, however, concerning the possibility that this vicarious achievement may encourage fans to change which teams they identify with.

To the contrary, James' (2001) research on identification formed early in life and Hyatt's (2007) research into the impact of a team leaving fans behind both suggest that it is in fact very difficult to change a highly identified fan's allegiance. This applies even if the team has not played in many years (Hyatt, 2007). Andrijiw and Hyatt (2009) also studied the factors that lead to fan identification with non-local teams, even in the presence of a local option, but did not

include any discussion of whether or not such identification changes over time. Prior research has shown that there are social forces which often push fans to initially identify with local teams that are very strong (James, 2001); however, there is not follow-up research to see what happens to these bonds of identification, formed in childhood, after the child has become an adult and potentially left the hometown. As a result, there is a gap in the literature in terms of whether or not social agents such as community, peers, family and school/work environments that were instrumental in helping team identification initially develop, have an effect on changing the “psychological connections to specific teams that are persistent and resistant to change” (James, 2001, p. 233) as time and distance from the hometown team increase.

Ways of Building Community Outside the Traditional Stadium Environment

Traditionally, the in stadium experience was critical to a fan’s sense of community. For example, a 1995 study showed that the for sport fans, being a part of the “celebratory, carnivalesque atmosphere [that] facilitate[s] the communal aspect of consuming” (Holt, 1995, p. 9) was more important than having seats that would provide the best view of the game. As such, some fans were electing to sit in the bleachers, rather than in better seats. This research, however, took place before the boom of technology, when high quality viewing was brought into the home environment and gave fans the tools to create virtual communities in which to share their high-definition fan experiences.

As the costs associated with going to a professional sporting event increase, a larger segment of the population is unable to attend live games (Fairley & Tyler, 2012). Therefore, sport marketers are continually looking for ways to create fan communities, either by connecting fans in person or by connecting them virtually. A recent trend of showing Red Sox baseball

games in Boston area AMC movie theatres was studied to see how those attending the games shown in the movie theatre would rate the experience, in comparison with the more traditional experience of seeing the game in the ballpark. The study found that nearly a third of those interviewed said that viewing the game in the theatre was as good as or better than attending the game at Fenway Park (Fairley & Tyler, 2012).

It is interesting to note that when the Red Sox played the Yankees, one of the most storied sports rivalries in history, a second theatre had to be opened, and about six times as many people attended the showing as attended when the Red Sox played teams with a less intense rivalry (Fairley & Tyler, 2012). This would seem to support earlier literature stating that rivalries create common community and draw fans together, and into the sport viewing experience (Mueller & Sutherland, 2010).

What Fairley and Tyler's (2012) study suggests, however, is that fans are becoming increasingly interested in not only creating a fan community, but in doing so without sacrificing the game experience. The literature consistently supports the idea that as technology gets better, some fans actually prefer to consume sports at home due to the increased control it gives them over the viewing experience (Whannel, 1992). What the home experience cannot do, however, is adequately meet the needs of participating in sport viewing as a social experience, a need which can be met by viewing the game in a "third place," that is a location other than home or stadium (Weed, 2007). Fairley and Tyler found that the cinema setting met the criteria of "common sites for consumption [that] are useful as they promote interactions among fans and spectators and provide a place where individuals can parade and celebrate a shared identity" (Fairley & Tyler, 2012, p. 266). Furthermore, the study found that the fan experience in this case

was enhanced by the fact that there was essentially no out-group, since the only fans attending the showings were Red Sox fans (Fairley & Tyler, 2012). This is relevant to the current study in that the expectation is that while the displaced fan may or may not utilize brick and mortar third place locations to view sport, that fan is still likely to seek a fan community of some sort. The intent of this research is to determine to what extent virtual “third places” will be an adequate substitute for the brick and mortar third place location, particularly as new media options become even more widely available.

Media and Its Influence on Sport Fans

As new media options are a relatively new phenomenon, there is a still growing and changing body of literature on harnessing them. There is already a significant body of literature on the topic of the media’s influence on sports fans (Atkin, Jeffres, Lee & Neuendorf, 2008; Phua, 2010; Potter & Keene, 2012). Prior research supports the idea that the more highly identified a fan is, the stronger both positive and negative reactions stemming from exposure to media coverage of sport figures will be. This trend applies to sport personalities portrayed positively by the media as well as those portrayed negatively (Potter & Keene, 2012). Potter and Keene’s work evaluated subjects at a large university with a strong football following, an example of highly identified fans living in the immediate geographic area of the teams in which they are attached.

The literature also indicates that the use of media drives sport fan self-esteem and helps fans to maintain a high level of fan identification (Phua, 2010). In the case of Phua’s study, media included both new and traditional forms of media—print, broadcast, online, and mobile phones—and the study demonstrated a positive relationship between fan identification and use of

media. Phua describes the relationship between media consumption and fan identification, saying “Mediated sports spectatorship, as a communicative activity, allows sports fans to bond with other like-minded fans, create a positive social identity through positive in-group distinctiveness and out-group derogation, and reinforce their fan experience by letting them more vividly experience their team’s wins and losses throughout the season” (Phua, 2010, p. 199). Other research found a significant difference between mainstream media and user-generated media (e.g., blogs and social networking). Highly identified fans were more apt to rely on mainstream media sources, while user-generated media was more appealing to the casual fan (Kwak, et al., 2010).

Both the aforementioned studies had similar samples—students at large universities who live in the community where the team they are rooting for plays. It is reasonable to suggest that this experience may transfer to fans who are not geographically connected, particularly when one looks at this research in conjunction with that of Andrijew and Hyatt (2009), which found that fans who are displaced from their favorite teams will seek and build fan communities in any way possible. The expanding body of literature on social media and sport fans, as well as the more expansive body of literature on media in general and its impact on sports fans, demonstrates that the use of media causes strong emotional and physical reactions from fans, depending on how highly identified with the subjects of the media coverage they are (Phua, 2010; Potter & Keene, 2010).

The Social Media Question

While the 2010 research by Kwak et al. might suggest that social media is not the holy grail of sport fan identification, the body of literature on new media options is changing, as new

media becomes a vital part of mainstream American culture. Kwak, et al.'s research concluded that media-generated content was more valuable in terms of reaching the highly identified fan; whereas user generated online content (ie., social media) was more appealing to the more casual fan. There is, however, a very limited body of literature on these social media trends, and the research presented here seeks to expand upon the literature on this topic. Most of the existing literature focuses on use of social media sites for institutional marketing endeavors by professional sports organizations, rather than by fan-created and fan-driven sport communities. While certainly there is a connection between the two, the research in this study will endeavor to fill the gap in the literature in regards to how social media can be used by the fans themselves to create an authentic fan community that is not dependent on geography.

That said, the literature shows that social media is growing as a force in sport marketing, with more professional sports teams beginning to take advantage of a combination of traditional marketing tactics and new marketing ideas presented by social networking (O'Shea & Alonso, 2011). Furthermore, that research falls in line with studies that found authenticity is important to the sport fan (Fairley & Tyler, 2012; Kwak, et al., 2010), regardless of setting or delivery, and that user-engagement is critical to effective use of social networking sites to market to sports fans (Pronschinske, et al., 2012). While this research does not speak directly to the building of fan communities, it does speak to the possible impact of social networking on sports fans in general and the teams they support. Pronschinske and colleagues point out that while professional sports team have had a presence on Facebook since 2006, there has not been adequate research into the best way to use Facebook as a communication tool between teams and fans.

As Facebook is not the only social media site popular with the American public, it is important to also consider what the literature says about other social networking sites, for example, Twitter. Though limited, the literature on this topic does indicate that Twitter, through its use of common hashtags as a basis for conversation among fans, has the potential to be influential in terms of team identification, social identity theory and the overall creation of sport communities (Smith & Smith, 2011).

Summary

There is copious research on team identification and the forces that drive it (Dhurup, et al., 2010; Shapiro et al., 2013). We also know that sports teams serve as a symbol of communities, that community attachment is instrumental in the development of identification with local teams (Uhlman & Trail, 2012), and that when such identification is very resistant to change, particularly when it is created early in life (James, 2001). It is also well established that social identity theory is a significant force in the reason behind team identification (Phua, 2010).

Furthermore, there is significant research on the importance of being a part of a fan community for keeping fans highly identified (Fairley & Tyler, 2010; Hyatt, 2007). The literature also explores non-traditional ways of identifying and creating such communities, particularly centering on “third place” locations (Fairley & Tyler, 2010). From this research, one can conclude that the importance of third-place locations for sports viewing is primarily that they serve as a way for people to be part of fan communities and maintain a sense of community attachment, even if they are unable to physically attend live sporting events for the team with which they are highly identified (Fairley & Tyler, 2010). Viewing sporting events in third-place locations allow fans to have a shared social identity with other fans. Furthermore, Andrijiw and

Hyatt's (2009) qualitative study on non-local fans also showed that identified fans will go to great lengths to find or build a fan community, when one is not physically available locally.

Finally, there is no shortage of work done on the impact of media coverage on sport fans. It is again well documented that the more highly identified a fan is, the more powerful media influence is on that fan (Potter & Keene, 2012). Phua also found that the more highly identified a fan is, the more likely they are to use a significant amount of media related to the subject of their identification (2010). While the body of literature on new media options (i.e., social media, Internet streaming, and the use of mobile devices) is still somewhat limited, the research that does exist supports the idea that new media, if used effectively, can be useful in connecting fans not only to teams, but to one another. Specifically, this research will seek to connect the ways in which the media may influence a person's willingness or ability to stay highly identified with a non-local team.

Since it has already been documented that a sense of community is critical, further research on the ways in which new media might be used to create these communities is warranted. There has not been, however, extensive research on the value of new media options, as they become more widely used, across a wider swath of the population.

What has not been closely studied is the relationship between the fan's attachment to the media itself and the effect that attachment has on that fan's level of continued team identification among non-local NFL fans. Phua's study looked at college sport fans that were students at the university being studied, in order to determine if highly identified fans were more likely to use media for information gathering. In contrast, this study is attempting to determine if more media

use will help fans to remain highly identified, when they are not local to the team with which they are identified.

What is also missing from the literature is a comprehensive review of the fan behavior of the highly identified fan that is not local to his or her favorite team. The limited research that is available on this topic has suggested that these fans will go to great lengths to create fan communities (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009) where they are located; a fact backed up by the popularity of the classic third-place location: the sports bar, or in the case of Fairley and Tyler's (2010) work, the movie theatre.

All of these factors, however, speak to the creation of fan communities by bringing people physically together. The literature is nearly devoid of research studying the use of new media options to create virtual fan communities, and whether or not such virtual fan communities will be strong enough to help displaced fans preserve the sense of community attachment that helps them maintain high levels of team identification. This research seeks to fill that gap in the literature by synthesizing the existing research on points of attachment, proximity, community building and media, with new data to evaluate the likelihood that displaced sport fans will be able to use new media options—specifically social media, internet streaming, and mobile devices to increasingly remain highly identified to their hometown teams, despite the hometown teams no longer being geographically connected to the fan. This research will use several factors in addition to new media usage, including distance from hometown, time away from hometown, and levels of community attachment to look at team identification in displaced NFL fans. This research seeks to determine if there is a correlation between the level of attachment to new media options and strength of team identification with a non-local (hometown) NFL team. Furthermore,

it examines whether amount of time away and distance from the hometown has an impact on team identification. Finally, this study considers the impact of level of attachment to hometown community, as well as the market in the current place of residence and the difference in attachment between hometown and current residence have on identification. Because there has been almost no research examining the idea of a “virtual third-place” this is an exploratory study that will seek to determine what factors will be critical to the success of virtual fan communities in creating the sense of community attachment that is required for remaining a highly identified fan.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors driving team identification amongst displaced NFL fans, including current distance from hometown, time since leaving hometown, use of new media, and level of attachment to the hometown community. In addition, this study explored whether a fan's level of identification towards their hometown team differed based on having an NFL team in their current community, and the level of attachment to both their current community and their hometown community. The study's methodology, including research design, sample, data collection procedures, statistical techniques and data analysis will be discussed in this chapter.

Research Design

This quantitative study employed a cross-sectional descriptive design, which measured the level of hometown team identification amongst displaced NFL fans. The study's two research questions employed several independent variables. The first research question used a correlational design to examine both the strength and direction of the relationship between hometown team identification and three categories of new media (social media, internet streaming, and mobile media), current distance from hometown, number of years since leaving the hometown, and level of continued attachment to the hometown community. The second research question again used a comparative analysis of variance to analyze if a difference in

hometown team identification existed based on the existence of an NFL team in a fan's current community, and attachment to both current community and hometown community.

Population

The population being examined in this study was adult Americans who identify as fans of the NFL and live more than 100 miles away from their hometown (displaced fan), with "hometown" defined as the town they most strongly identify with their formative years. This population would be likely to mirror the overall body of NFL fans, and thus be skewed to include more men (57%) than women (43%) (Global Sports Media, 2013). Fan demographics of all NFL fans suggest that on average, about 80% of professional league sports fans are white, with the most minorities following the NFL ("Fan demographics among", 2010). In addition, the demographics of professional sports fans favor the young, with 58% of sport fans being under 45 (Global Sport Media, 3013), though all age groups are represented in a manner consistent with the population as a whole.

Sample

In order to reach a sizeable number of displaced fans, the study utilized an online survey, which was posted to both mainstream social media sites and sites specifically targeting football fans. As such, the study used a non-probability convenience sample that was successful in accessing non-local fans, without the benefit of a list of such individuals. Posting of the survey link on national fan websites and groups was done in order to make every effort to develop a sample that is as diverse and as representative of the general population of NFL fans as possible. The survey was disseminated using social shares by individuals on Facebook, which ultimately accounted for about one third of the responses. In addition, the survey link was also posted to a

wide array of Facebook groups created specifically to target displaced fans of NFL teams.

Finally, being careful to abide by site rules, the survey link was also posted to various social sites that have large discussion boards that focus on user-generated content related specifically to football. The sample for this study was comprised of displaced NFL fans that were willing to respond to the short online survey. Study participants were asked to identify both their hometown and their current city of residence, so distance could be calculated between the two cities, and so respondents could be divided into those who live in a primary NFL market and those who do not.

Internal Validity

Since the design was non-experimental, there was no control group, and the research did not manipulate the group, instead merely drew on the responses of those surveyed. There was only one group studied in this research, that being displaced NFL fans. As the survey asked questions about both fan identification and demographics (age, gender, hometown, do they take advantage of new media, current city of residence), it was easy to eliminate those individuals who did not meet the requirements of the study. The biggest threat to internal validity was the willingness of people to accurately fill out surveys. While every effort was made to ensure a diverse sample of respondents, it is impossible to know if there was some sort of psychological factor that makes people more likely to fill out the survey. Furthermore, since all surveys were conducted online, it is possible that those people responding might be more likely to use new media for the consumption of sports, as those people may be less likely to venture out into the public for sporting events.

External Validity

The decision to seek survey participants from the Internet was in order to provide a sample that was inclusive of a wide variety of sport fans. The potential external validity concern with this technique is that those responding to the survey would be people likely that have easy access to cutting-edge technology. This could potentially be viewed as a weakness in terms of external validity, as some might say that this sample is not representative of the larger community of displaced NFL fans. That said, in light of the fact that in recent years broadband internet, as well as premium satellite and cable options, has come to even the remotest parts of the country, it is anticipated that this is a minor concern, and the sample did in fact reflect respondents from all parts of the country.

In order to ensure external validity, all survey items were taken from established scales measuring team identification, community identification, and attachment to new media. Reliability of all multi-item scale questions was tested using SPSS, to ensure that Cronbach's alpha was higher than 0.7. In addition, face validity was established by a panel of experts. The panel included three sport management professors with expertise in fan behavior, identification, and media use.

Instrument

This study used a data collection instrument that had three sections, with a total of 32 questions. The first section covered questions about identification, and asked participants to identify his or her favorite team, as well as three questions each about team identification, hometown identification and current community identification. These questions used a seven-item Likert-type scale that asked participants to rate their level of identification between strongly

disagree (1) and strongly agree (7) and are part of the Points of Attachment Index initially created by Robinson and Trail (2005).

The second section covered demographic information, including age, gender, level of education, household income, hometown, current residence, and time since leaving hometown. Finally, section three asked nine questions, also using a seven-item Likert-type scale, concerning level of use and attachment to social media, Internet streaming, and mobile media. These questions were adapted from Phua's (2010) study on media use and esteem, which summed the responses to the media use measures and were determined that $\alpha = .79$. As such, it can be said that the scale was found to be reliable, based on scores from Phua's sample.

Variables

Dependent Variable

Team identification is the dependent variable for both research questions posed in this study. Team Identification, is operationally defined as "the extent to which fans are committed to the team and how they are psychologically connected to and involved in the team activities" (Dhurup, et al., p. 492). This variable was measured using scales adapted from a portion of the Points of Attachment Index created by Robinson & Trail (2005). This measurement scale uses a seven-point Likert-type scale with respondents being asked to rate their reactions to several statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Robinson & Trail, 2005). Robinson and Trail's PAI had seven subscales. For the purpose of this research, only two of the subscales were used: the team identification index and the community attachment scale. The study originally using the scale demonstrated good internal reliability for all seven scales (with α ranging from .69-.85) and good construct reliability (AVEs= .48-.68). Specifically, this study

found Cronbach's alpha to be $\alpha=.85$ and $AVE=.68$ for team identification and $\alpha=.84$ and $AVE=.65$ for community attachment. Subsequent research using the PAI demonstrated similar evidence of reliability. For example, Woo, Trail, Kwon and Anderson's (2009) use of the PAI demonstrated similar evidence of reliability in regard to team identification ($\alpha=.88$ and $AVE=.69$), and did not consider community attachment. Similarly, Shapiro, et al.'s (2013) study demonstrated $\alpha=.90$ and $AVE=.752$ for team identification and $\alpha=.93$ and $AVE=.93$ for community attachment.

Independent Variables

The two research questions employed eight independent variables. The first three independent variables looked at various types of new media use, which can be defined as media sources that either rely on primarily user-generated content, or involve the use of the Internet or wireless technology. In order to measure these variables, an adaptation of Phua's (2010) media-use measures, which employed a 7-item Likert-type scale and studied the use of both new and traditional media. Phua's media-use measures section included 12 questions, with three questions each about print, broadcast, online and mobile media, were used. The questions for each media section asked how important use was (rated on a 7-point scale ranging from not important to very important), how often the media was used (rated on a 7-point scale ranging from not often to very often), and whether the user would feel out of touch without using the media (rated on a 7-point scale from not at all to very much). Phua then summed the responses to all the media-use measures to create a single media-use index, which was found to have good reliability ($\alpha = .79$). For the purposes of this research, broadcast and print media were not used, and the

online media category was split to specifically ask about social media use and Internet streaming use. Mobile media use was not altered. The first three variables can be defined as follows:

1. Use of social media: The frequency with which one uses social media, including sites such as Twitter and Facebook, fan forums, and blogs to follow favorite teams, as well as the importance that one attaches to such use.
2. Use of Internet streaming: Frequency and importance respondent attached to using Internet streaming and online viewing of NFL games.
3. Use of Mobile Media/Device: Frequency and importance respondent attached to using mobile devices to follow hometown NFL teams.

The study also examined the following variables, defined below.

4. Distance from hometown: The distance in miles that a person is currently living from his or her hometown.
5. Number of years displaced: The number of years since a person initially left his or her hometown.
6. Hometown Community Attachment: The level of attachment that respondent feels to his or her hometown community. This was measured using a scale adapted from a portion of the Points of Attachment Index (Robinson & Trail, 2005). This measurement scale uses a 7-point Likert-type scale with respondents being asked to rate their reactions to several statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).
7. Current Community Attachment: The level of attachment that one feels to the place where they currently reside. This was measured using a scale adapted

from a portion of the Points of Attachment Index (Robinson & Trail, 2005).

This measurement scale uses a 7-point Likert-type scale with respondents being asked to rate their reactions to several statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

8. NFL Market: Whether or not the respondent's current community is within 75 miles of an NFL team.

Procedures

The research questions were examined through the result of a one-time questionnaire that was available on the Internet. Survey participants were recruited through the use of Email, social media sites, and fan forums. The survey used established scales to measure both attachment to new media and team identification, in order to establish a possible correlation between new media, time, distance and community attachment and NFL team identification, among non-local fans. Participants were not compensated for their participation in any way. The survey was posted using SurveyMonkey. Initially, it was posted to Facebook and shared repeatedly, and was also posted to a variety of fan-specific groups, most of which were tailored to displaced fans. In addition, the survey was posted to various fan sites that were for the most part tailored to general NFL fans. The survey first became available December 7, 2013 and remained open until February 18, 2014.

Data Analysis

RQ1 was evaluated using a multiple regression model, which examined the influence of three forms of new media (i.e., use of social media, use of Internet streaming, and use of mobile media/devices), distance from hometown, number of years displaced, and current level of

hometown community attachment. Correlation coefficients were used to evaluate initial relationships between the variables of interest. By creating a linear regression model, it was possible to gain understanding of the various factors that influence team identification in non-local fans. The model was tested for linearity, independence, normality, and equality of variances, which should all be assumed when multiple linear regression is used. Through the use of descriptive statistics and statistical tests for normality, it was determined that these assumptions were not violated. Furthermore, the results indicated that there were no multicollinearity issues in the regression equation.

In order to study RQ2, a 3x2 two-way ANOVA model was used to determine if there were differences in hometown team identification based on the presence of an NFL team in a fan's current community and the difference between levels of hometown community attachment and current community attachment. In order to analyze this variable, the difference was found between hometown community attachment and current community attachment, and a categorical value was created to identify positive, neutral or negative hometown attachment. Positive hometown attachment is defined as hometown community attachment being equal to 1.0 or more on the Likert-type scale higher than current community attachment. Neutral community attachment was designated for those people that reported between a -.99 and .99 difference between hometown community attachment and current community attachment. Finally, those designated as having negative hometown attachment demonstrated a difference of equal to or greater than one unit on the Likert-type scale, in favor of the current community.

The ANOVA model was tested for the assumptions of normality and independence, as well as homogeneity, using Levene's Test, and no violations were found. In addition, the

assumptions of a continuous dependent variable and two categorical independent variables, and no significant outliers were also found to be true. Both main effects of NFL market and attachment difference between hometown and current community on team identification were examined, as well as the interaction effects between the two independent variables and the dependent variable. Subsequently, Tukey's test was also performed to identify any post-hoc differences between the positive, neutral, and negative community attachment groups.

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

The results of the data analysis were determined using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0). First, basic descriptive statistics will be presented, followed by the findings of the multiple regression model and the 2x3 two-way ANOVA model. The study's two research questions were answered using these statistical techniques.

Descriptive Statistics

As discussed earlier, this study examined the relationships between hometown team identification and the following independent variables: use of social media, use of Internet streaming, use of mobile devices, distance from hometown, number of years displaced, hometown community attachment, current community attachment, and NFL market. Seven hundred and eighty nine people attempted the survey, 347 of whom met the study requirements as displaced NFL fans. After examinations, some responses were eliminated due to lack of completion, leaving 328 usable surveys and 318 fully complete surveys. This represents a 41.6% response rate.

As expected, study participants reported a high degree of identification with the hometown team, with a mean score of 5.870 ($SD=1.209$) out of a possible 7. The mean of the hometown attachment scores was calculated to be somewhat lower, at 4.602 ($SD = 1.563$).

Amongst the media-use questions, results showed that people were most attached to social media, with the mean of 5.244 ($SD = 1.726$). Use of Internet streaming was only slightly lower, with a mean score of 4.903 ($SD = 1.992$). Finally, the mean of attachment to mobile

devices was the lowest of the new media usage measures at 4.194 ($SD = 2.274$). The number of miles from the hometown was found to range from 100 to 7123 miles, with a mean of 1105.230 ($SD=983.40$). The number of years displaced ranged from 0 to 48, with a mean of 31.167 ($SD=190.504$).

Table 1: Descriptive Characteristics for Continuous Variables

Variables	N	Min-Max	M	SD
Mean of Team ID Scores	318	1-7	5.870	1.209
Mean of Hometown ID scores	318	1-7	4.602	1.563
Mean of Attachment to Social Media scores	318	1-7	5.244	1.726
Mean of Attachment to Internet Streaming scores	318	1-7	4.903	1.992
Mean of Attachment to Mobile Devices Scores	318	1-7	4.194	2.274
Number of years since leaving hometown	318	0-48	31.167	190.504
Miles between Hometown and Current Residence	318	100-7123	1105.230	983.840

The study also involved several categorical variables. The difference between the level of identification with the hometown and level of identification with the current residence was

calculated, and responses were divided into three categories based on how much difference was reported. The largest group of people, 39.9% (N= 131) reported neutral community attachment. One hundred and ten individuals (33.54%) reported negative hometown attachment. Finally, 87 people (26.52%) reported positive hometown attachment. Values and category definitions are listed in Table 2.

Furthermore, a categorical value of whether or not a respondent currently lives in an NFL market was established. Of 328 responses to the questions about hometown, 151 (46.04%) of people were currently living in an NFL market and 177 (53.96%) of people were not currently living in NFL markets.

Table 2: Descriptive Characteristics for Categorical Values

Difference between hometown identification and current residence identification	Is current city an NFL market	N	%
1.0 to greatest value Positive Hometown Attachment	Yes	41	12.50%
	No	46	14.02%
	Total	87	26.52%
-.99 - .99 Neutral Community Attachment	Yes	57	17.38%
	No	74	22.56%
	Total	131	39.94%
Lowest to -1.0 Negative Hometown Attachment	Yes	53	16.16%
	No	57	17.38%
	Total	110	33.54%
Total	Yes	151	46.04%
	No	177	53.96%
	Total	328	100%

Preliminary Analysis of Research Question #1

Multiple linear regression was used to examine factors that influence team identification for displaced fans. In this model, there were six independent variables studied: use of social

media, use of Internet streaming, use of mobile media, distance from hometown, number of years away from hometown, and level of attachment to one's hometown.

Correlations

In order to evaluate the first research question in this study, preliminary correlational analysis of the continuous variables was conducted. Pearson correlations were examined for team identification and all continuous variables. There were two continuous variables that showed a weak, but significant positive correlations with level of team identification. There is a weak positive correlation between hometown identification and team identification scores ($r=.281, p<.05$) and between use of mobile media and team identification ($r=.298, p<.05$). There were two continuous variables that showed a moderate positive correlation with team identification: use of Social Media ($r=.517, p<.05$) and use of Internet streaming ($r=.480, p<.05$). The final two continuous variables—number of years since leaving the hometown and miles between the hometown and current residence—were not significantly correlated with level of team identification. The correlations for the continuous variables considered in RQ1 are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Pearson Correlations for Level of Team Identification

Variables	<i>R</i>	<i>P</i>
Hometown Identification	.281	<.001
Attachment to Social Media	.517	<.001
Attachment to Internet Streaming	.480	<.001
Attachment to Mobile Media	.298	<.001
Years Since Leaving Hometown	.027	.318
Miles Between Hometown and Current Residence	.017	.382

The relationship between level of team identification and all the independent variables was then examined by way of a regression analysis. The regression model was found to be significant, overall [$F(6, 311)=24.1, p<.001$], explaining 31.7% of the variance in team identification. Of these six independent variables, the model found three be significant: level of hometown identification ($\beta =.128, t(317), p<.015$), attachment to social media ($\beta =.316, t(317), p<.001$) and attachment to Internet streaming ($\beta =.230, t(317), p<.001$). Table 4 below shows the regression coefficients for each variable.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Variables	Unstandardized B	Beta	t	Sig
Hometown Identification	.099	.128	2.574	.011
Attachment to Social Media	.221	.316	4.649	<.001
Attachment to Internet Streaming	.140	.230	3.654	.000
Attachment to Mobile Media	.017	.032	.571	.568
Years Since Leaving Hometown	.000	-.032	-.671	.503
Miles Between Hometown and Current Residence	-5.632	-.046	-.958	.339

Preliminary Analysis of Research Question #2

For RQ2 a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was developed to examine the relationship between the difference between attachment to hometown and current community and the impact of living in an NFL market on team identification. Table 5 shows mean comparisons of level of team identification with the difference between hometown and current residence attachment, and whether or not the current city of residence is an NFL market.

Table 5: Mean Comparisons in team identification based on community attachment and NFL market

Difference in identification between hometown and current residence	Is current city an NFL market	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.0 to greatest value	Yes	6.033	.194
	No	6.058	.183
-.99 - .99	Yes	5.959	.165
	No	5.941	.145
Lowest to -1.0	Yes	5.503	.171
	No	5.567	.165

ANOVA findings showed a significant difference in team identification between fans with stronger hometown community attachment, neutral levels of attachment, and stronger current community attachment ($F=4.984$, $df=2$, $p=.007$). The group with the positive hometown community attachment had the highest level of team identification. Post Hoc results showed that there was a significant difference between the group with positive hometown attachment and the group with negative hometown attachment ($p=.013$). There was also a significant difference between the group with neutral community attachment and the group with negative hometown attachment ($p=.029$). There was no significant difference in team identification based on the existence of an NFL team in a fan's current community, nor was there a significant interaction between hometown-current community attachment differences and the presence of an NFL team in a fan's current community.

Discussion

Team Identification and New Media

While there is significant literature on team identification, the literature is very limited within the context of new media and displaced fans. However, as new media options grow in number, accessibility, and popularity, it is becoming an increasingly relevant topic for sport fans and sport properties alike. While it is known from prior research that fan identification is key to game attendance and keeping revenue streams healthy (Robinson & Trail, 2005; Shapiro, et al., 2013), and that media has a significant impact on fan identification (Phua, 2010; Potter & Keene, 2012), there is very little literature that examines direct connections between new media sources and fan identification. While there have been studies looking at new media specifically, they focus more on the organizational benefits of using new media to market to fans (O'Shea & Alonso, 2011) than on the degree to which these new media sources are driving the maintenance of high levels of team identification. Furthermore, there is a decided gap in the literature when it comes to the displaced fan, as even what does exist on non-local fans (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Smith & Stewart, 2007), does not look specifically at people who were once geographically tied to the team they support. As such, the non-local fans discussed in these studies do not have the same social agents connected to the team they follow as do the displaced hometown fans studied in this current research. Therefore, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature not only by looking specifically at new media's role in fan identification, but also by doing so within the context of the displaced fan.

This study demonstrated that new media use accounted for a significant portion of the variance in team identification, which demonstrates that it is becoming increasingly important, and shows it to be more even more significant than prior studies on general media use have found (Phua, 2010). The new media question has been divided into three subsections: Social media, Internet streaming, and use of mobile devices. These three different types of new media will be discussed individually in the following subsections.

Social Media.

Use of social media was one of the three independent variables examined in RQ1 that were found to be significant. Respondents reported a high level of use of social media, and so it can be concluded that social media use has a significant impact on level of team identification with hometown teams among fans living 100 miles or more from their hometowns.

Since social media is, by definition, a medium that has been created with the intent of providing a virtual environment for connecting people to one another based on common bonds, this finding seems to be in line with earlier research that suggests that being part of a fan community is critical to maintaining high levels of team identification (Andrijew & Hyatt, 2009; Fink, et al., 2002). While there is a limited amount of research that looks comprehensively at new media use, this result does support some of that prior research. For example, Phua (2010) found that online media in general had more impact on fan identification than any other type of media. In addition, it has been found that social media is an effective relationship marketing tool to reach fans, and the significance of social media would also support that conclusion (O'Shea & Alonso, 2011).

However, given that the mean level of attachment among fans studied was 5.870 on a 7-point scale, and that these fans are clearly using social media, these results appear contradictory to the findings of Kwak, et al. (2012), that found highly identified fans preferred mainstream media sources to user generated media for sport consumption. Since none of the prior research that looked at new media focused on displaced fans, it is altogether possible that social media becomes more important when the traditional fan communities created by geographic proximity are stripped away.

This research also indicates that social media venues could be on their way to providing yet another new, virtual third-place location, which is arising out of a need for more creative ways for fans to feel as though they are able to both follow their favorite team and feel connected to a larger fan community. This idea supports the research of Fairley and Tyler (2010), which found viewing baseball games in local movie theatres provided a suitable replacement for the stadium environment in terms of feeling as if one is part of a fan community.

Internet Streaming and Team Identification.

The regression model also demonstrated that the use of Internet streaming has a significant impact on level of team identification. The frequency with which fans used Internet streaming, and the importance which they attached to its use, were only slightly less than for social media. While there is a scant amount of research into non-local fans and identification, this finding seems to support the central idea that in order to be a fan of a non-local team, it is absolutely critical that a fan be able to, in some way, follow the games (Andrijew & Hyatt, 2009). Andrijew and Hyatt found that people would go to whatever means necessary to follow non-local teams with which they are highly identified; therefore, it is not surprising that Internet streaming,

and with it the accessibility of games it brings to fans outside team's traditional markets, has become a force that is contributing to high team-identification scores among non-local NFL fans.

Internet streaming, which is becoming increasingly similar to traditional broadcast media in that its primary purpose is to show games, turned out to be the second most important factor in terms of media use in both this research and Phua's (2010) study. Interestingly, while Phua grouped all online media together, he found that among the four types of media studied, broadcast media had the second most significant impact on fan identification. If one considers Internet streaming to be the broadcast media of the future, this research appears consistent with Phua's results.

Use of Mobile Media and Levels of Team Identification.

Fans reported a lower level of use of mobile media, and while the study did demonstrate that there is a positive, significant correlation between use of mobile media and team identification scores, use of mobile media was not found to be significant within the regression model. Based on the results of this study it can be concluded that use of mobile media does not have a significant impact on level of team identification in non-local fans. There is very limited research on the use of mobile devices and team identification; however, this result is consistent with the little research there is. For example, Phua (2010) found that use of mobile devices had less impact on fan identification than did either online media or traditional broadcast media.

Interestingly the results of the questions about use of mobile media were extremely polarized, with more than 60% of respondents rating their use of mobile media as a 1 or a 2 or as a 6 or a 7. As mobile media is the newest of these technologies, mobile media does not yet appear to have a significant impact on level of team identification. There is very little research

on the role of mobile media and team identification; therefore, this issue warrants further study, in particular as smartphones capable of being used to follow sports become more affordable and widely available.

Number of Years Displaced and Miles Away from Hometown and Team Identification

The research did not show a relationship between team identification and either the number of years displaced or the distance from hometown one currently lives. There is not a large amount of literature on non-local fans and team identification; however, there is literature on the strength of bonds of team identification formed early in life, particularly in childhood (James, 2001). In light of James' research, it makes sense that identification with hometown teams did not fade strictly as the result of how far from the hometown one currently lives, or how long ago fans relocated. According to James, social factors, for example familial ties, which are unlikely to be broken by mere time and distance are driving forces in the initial development of team loyalty. This research, by clearly demonstrating that the number of years displaced from the hometown as well as number of miles one goes from the hometown are not significant factors in reported level of team identification, supports James' findings. With new media options making it more convenient to follow the results of one's hometown team and remain part of a community of like-minded fans without ever leaving the comfort of one's living room, it seems likely that this trend will intensify in the future. Furthermore, because sports are so close to the forefront of American culture, as this trend intensifies, sport consumption is likely to be a leader in a fundamental shift in what it means to connect with others, as society moves away from the importance of geographic proximity as the critical factor in defining what it means to be a community.

Hometown Identification and Team Identification

Hometown identification was the only independent variable that was considered in both research questions. In general, it was found that people do retain a fair degree of identification with their hometown communities. This study to the conclusion that among displaced fans, level of hometown identification is a critical factor driving level of team identification with the hometown team.

In RQ2, hometown community attachment was considered in comparison with current community attachment, with their difference captured via a categorical variable. Respondents who had stronger attachment to their hometown community had higher levels of team identification, compared to those who had stronger attachment to their current community. Additionally, respondents who had neutral levels of attachment between hometown and current community had higher levels of team identification compared to those with stronger attachment to current community.

While the literature is lacking in work specifically on non-local fans, there is a considerable research that this result supports. First, if team identification is considered in terms of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), it is not surprising that the more highly identified one is to the hometown community, the more highly identified one will be with the hometown team. Furthermore, this result supports a study that found identification with the city of Seattle was the number-one driving factor in establishing a fan base for the Seattle Sounders FC (Uhlman & Trail, 2012). Considering James' (2001) finding that social agents, like family and friends, are drivers of early-life team identification, it is unsurprising that if one

remains highly identified with the hometown—likely where many of those social agents are or were—one will continue to associate those factors with the hometown team, and that will keep the level of team identification high for these displaced fans. In fact, about 85% of respondents surveyed reported that their level of identification with the hometown team has either remained the same or increased since leaving the hometown, thus suggesting the conclusion that hometown team identification is inextricably linked to a desire to remain connected to “home” and the social agents that were likely factors in the initial development of the identification with the hometown team.

From this, it can then be concluded that becoming attached to one’s current community is not in and of itself detrimental to one’s level of hometown team identification, unless it causes a decline in one’s level of attachment to the hometown itself. If instead attachment to current community rises without a decline in attachment to the hometown community, hometown team identification is preserved. The clear implication of this for sport properties is that when attempting to connect to displaced fans, it is important to do so in a way that continues to foster not only identification with the team, but attachment to the hometown community as a whole.

The Relationship Between Current Residence Being an NFL Market and Team Identification

The final independent variable was the categorical variable examining whether or not the respondent’s current city of residence is an NFL market or not. This variable was not found to be significant in the ANOVA model. From this result, it can be concluded that moving to an NFL market is no more likely to decrease one’s level of team identification than moving to a place that does not have its own NFL team. While there is not a body of literature specifically on

this topic, in light of the work of James (2001), it is not surprising that this variable did not have a significant influence on the level of team identification among non-local fans. Prior research has strongly supported the idea that team identification is forged as the result of human desire to connect with others. From Tajfel and Turner's (1986) work on social identity theory to James' findings highlighting the importance of social agents in the development of identification, to Uhlman and Trail's (2012) finding about the critical relationship between community identification and team identification, it is clear that team identification is not the result of an individual merely choosing to support a sport property because it is convenient. What little research there is on non-local fans, for example Andrijew and Hyatt's (2009) work on non-local hockey fans, found that even when an individual chooses to root for a non-local team out of a desire to achieve individuality, they will still seek out a community of other fans. As such, it is not surprising that people's level of identification with their hometown team did not decrease just because there was a more convenient option that was more geographically desirable. With new media options now making it easy for the displaced fan to not only follow the hometown team and to actively watch games and connect with other fans around the globe, there is little motivation for people to change alliances just because there is another team nearby. To do so would require the highly identified fan both to change his team alliance and to let go of the social agents, such as family and community, that are driving the high level of attachment to the hometown team.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine possible factors affecting hometown team identification among displaced fans. Two research questions were considered in this research. The first research question utilized a multiple linear regression model to examine the influence of social media use, use of Internet streaming, use of mobile devices distance from hometown, number of years displaced, and hometown community attachment on team identification for displaced fans. The regression model was found to be significant, explaining 31.7% of the variance in levels of team identification among non-local NFL fans. The use of social media, the use of Internet streaming, and level of hometown identification were found to be significant variables. Use of mobile media was positively correlated with team identification, but was not significant in the regression model. Number of years displaced and number of miles between hometown and current residence had no significant relationship with team identification.

RQ2 examined the whether differences in team identification existed based on differences between hometown and current community attachment and the presence of an NFL team in a respondent's current community. The ANOVA results demonstrated that there was a significant differences in team identification based on differences between hometown and current community attachment. Post Hoc testing demonstrated significant differences between people with positive hometown attachment and those with negative hometown attachment, as well as between those who had neutral community attachment and negative hometown attachment.

The ANOVA results also demonstrated that the presence of an NFL team in the current residence of a displaced fan did not have a significant impact on team identification. In addition, the interaction effect between difference in hometown and current community attachment and the presence of an NFL team in the current community was not found to have a significant effect on hometown team identification.

This study fills a gap in the literature by looking specifically on team identification amongst non-local fans, particularly in light of the changing ways in which people consume sport, as the result of new media options. This research has the potential to help professional sports teams better understand the forces that drive continued team identification amongst fans that are no longer geographically connected to the hometown team. As new media options have allowed an easier, richer experience for these fans, one can expect there to be a growing number of non-local fans. Therefore, it will be important for professional teams to understand how to reach these distant fans and keep them highly identified, even if they are not in a position to be physically attending games. This expands upon prior research that has consistently found that highly identified fans are more likely to spend money on sport-related items (Shapiro, et al., 2013).

Suggestions for Future Research

With such a limited amount of literature, both regarding the non-local fan and regarding new media options and their impact on the non-local fan, more research on this topic is warranted. First, a future study should explore whether or not there would be a difference in responses if the study were to be conducted face to face, either at live sporting events or at third-place locations such as sports bars.

It was, at least somewhat surprising to note that time and proximity had no significant impact on team identification with the hometown team amongst displaced fans. While the world has grown smaller and it is therefore conceivable to imagine that proximity would be less important than it might once have been, it is somewhat incredible that the number of years people had been displaced did not eventually cause some sort of decrease in identification with hometown teams. As such, in the future it would be fruitful to evaluate whether or not there is a significant relationship between the amount of time away from one's hometown, whether or not there is an NFL team in the current city of residence, and level of team identification.

The use of mobile media sources warrants further study, due to the fact that it was not found to be significant, due largely to the more polarized results of questions. In light of this, a follow-on qualitative study of this topic might be valuable to professional teams, in order to help them hone strategies for using these new technologies in ways that are the most effective for keeping fans highly identified without frequent access to the traditional stadium environment.

In addition, this research could be repeated, looking at highly identified fans of other sports, to determine if these results are unique to football, or if other sports, for example baseball, which has many more opportunities for viewing in a season, would produce different results. Similarly, this research could be repeated looking at people who have never had a geographic tie to their favorite teams, or at those who changed team loyalty from the time they were young

Although limited in scope, this research fills a gap in the literature both in terms of the study of non-local fans, and in terms of new media and its impact on team identification. As new media becomes more and more prevalent in mainstream society, it will become increasingly important for professional sport franchises to understand how to reach displaced fans, for whom

trips to the stadium are not the ultimate experience for connecting with their favorite team. By thoroughly understanding the factors that keep these displaced fans highly identified, professional sport franchises will be able to learn how to best meet their needs for identification and continue to rely on these fans as a source of revenue.

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APPENDIX A

Sport Fan Questionnaire

SPORTS FAN ATTACHMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire has been designed to help a graduate student at Old Dominion University write a master's thesis on the relationship between new media options in regards to professional sports viewing and social media trends. We appreciate your help with this project. Thank you for your time.

Section 1: Identification								
I consider myself an NFL fan		Yes					No	
I consider myself a fan of the following NFL team								
Measures of Team Identification								
Being a fan of (NFL) football team is very important to me	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree	
I am a committed fan of (NFL) football team	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree	
I consider myself to be a "real" fan of the (NFL) football team	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree	
Measures of Community Identification--Hometown: For the purposes of this research, hometown is defined as the town which you identify as the a place you resided where you formed your first loyalty to an NFL team								
I feel connected to numerous aspects of my hometown community	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree	
I feel that I am part of my hometown community	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree	
I support my hometown community	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree	
Measures Community Identification—Current Residence:								
I feel connected to numerous aspects of my current community	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree	
I feel that I am part of my current community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree	

I support my current community as a whole.	strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 strongly agree
Do you feel that your level of attachment to your hometown teams has declined, increased, or remained the same since leaving your hometown?	Declined			Remained the Same		Increased		

Please briefly explain why or why not you believe this has or has not occurred.

Section 2: Demographics

Age				
Gender	Male		Female	
Household Income	<\$25,000	<\$50,000	<\$100,000	>\$150,000
Highest Level of Education Completed (circle)	GED/HS 2- year degree Bachelor's degree Graduate or Professional Degree			
Hometown (City, State)				
Current Residence (City, State)				
Year in which you relocated from hometown				

Section 3: Attachment to New Media

Use of Social Media

How important is it for you to log onto the Internet (blogs, messages boards and social networking sites) to find out about the hometown NFL team during football season.	1 not important	2	3	4	5	6	7 very important
How often do you log on to the Internet (blogs, messages boards, and social networking sites) to find out a bout the hometown NFL team during football	1 not often	2	3	4	5	6	7 very often

season.								
Will you feel out of touch if you are not able to log on to the Internet (including blogs, messages boards and social networking sites) to find out about the hometown NFL football team.	1 not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 very much	
Do you feel social media helps you to feel connected to your hometown NFL team and be a part of the fan community? If so, please briefly explain how.								
Use of Internet Streaming								
How important is it for you to log onto the Internet (web sites for live or on demand viewing) to find out about the hometown NFL team during football season.	1 not important	2	3	4	5	6	7 very important	
How often do you log on to the Internet (web sites for live or on demand viewing) to find out about the hometown NFL team during football season.	1 not often	2	3	4	5	6	7 very often	
Will you feel out of touch if you are not able to log on to the Internet (web sites for live or on demand viewing) to find out about the hometown NFL football team.	1 not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 very much	
Do you feel using internet streaming helps you feel connected to your hometown NFL team and a part of the fan community? If so, please briefly explain how.								
Use of Mobile Devices								
How important is it for you to use your mobile phone (including Internet access, text messaging and PDA apps) to find out about the hometown NFL team during football season.	1 not important	2	3	4	5	6	7 very important	
How often do you use your mobile phone (including Internet access, text messaging, and PDA apps) to follow the latest news, statistics, and scores by the hometown NFL football season.	1 not often	2	3	4	5	6	7 very often	
Will you feel out of touch if you are not able to use your mobile phone (including Internet access, text messaging, and PDA apps) to find out about the hometown NFL	1 not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 very much	

team during football season.							
Do you feel using a mobile device helps you feel connected to your hometown NFL team and a part of the fan community? If so, please briefly explain how.							