Sports Fans and Media Use: Influence on Sports Fan Identification and Collective Self-Esteem

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Sports Fans and Media Use: Influence on Sports Fan Identification and Collective Self-Esteem

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Research on sports fans has demonstrated a positive relationship between fan identification and self-esteem. The current investigation extended previous research by testing media use as a moderator. The author hypothesized that media use would be positively associated with measures of fan identification and collective self-esteem and also moderate the relationship between these 2 variables. This is because media use enhances positive distinctiveness for fans of sports teams, leading to higher collective self-esteem levels because of the ability to get up-to-date information about the team or player they support. Data gathered from student fans (*N* = 203) of a major U.S. west coast university football team confirmed the author's expectations that sports fans' use of 4 types of media—print, broadcast, online, and mobile phones—moderated the relationship between fan identification and collective self-esteem, with online media having the greatest impact on this relationship.

Keywords: social identity theory, sports spectatorship, Internet

Sports spectatorship is one of America's favorite pastimes. Besides attending games in person, sports fans use a wide variety of media including print, broadcast, the Internet, and mobile phones to keep up with their favorite teams and individual players. Print media such as newspapers and magazines allow fans to find out about teams and players. Broadcast media including television and radio enable fans to watch or listen to "live" games when they are not able to attend them in person. Today, major television networks including ABC, CBS, and NBC regularly telecast sporting events in their lineup, and on cable there is an even greater wealth of sports programming on channels such as ESPN and Fox Sports. Add to that the vast number of televised sports played at the professional, college, and high school levels, and the choices for sports fans become virtually endless. As Bryant and Raney (2000) note, "televised sports permeate modern life from the family room to the newsroom and boardroom" (p. 153). With the proliferation of the Internet in the 1990s, sports fans also began to check online for the latest statistics and

other information about their favorite teams and players. A 2008 poll showed that sports fans accounted for 19% of overall Internet users in the United States, and they also spent more time online, engaging in activities such as playing fantasy sports, participating in fan forums, watching streaming video, and shopping for sports memorabilia (Sachoff, 2008). On most popular sports Web sites, there are discussion forums, message boards, news, game updates and schedules, streaming video, live audio, commentary, stats, and more devoted to specific teams and players (Real, 2006). In August 2009, sports Web sites like Yahoo! Sports, ESPN Online, Sports Illustrated Online, and Fox Sports on MSN ranked among the top 25 most-visited sites for Internet users in the United States (Marketing Charts, 2009). In addition, social-networking sites like Facebook now allow sports fans to join team-specific groups and add applications where they can chat with other fans, and microblogging sites like Twitter enable them to send and receive updates about their favorite teams and players. Mobile phones are increasingly popular for these purposes, because fans can log on to the Internet using their phones, send and receive text messages, and use sports apps (e.g., on the Apple iPhone) to keep up with the latest stats and stories about their favorite team.

Mediated sports spectatorship fulfills many functions for sports fans. As pointed out by Wenner and Gantz (1989), sports is a "near universal and nonthreatening conversation topic" (p. 242), enabling fans to establish commonality with other like-minded individuals. Watching sports allows fans to vicariously experience playing the sport and the thrill of competition without the risk of actual physical injury or loss (Raney, 2006). In a study of motives for viewing sports on television, Gantz (1981) found that "to thrill in victory" was the strongest motive. In identifying with teams and players, the line between fantasy and reality is blurred as fans come to see themselves as part of the team, basking in reflected glory after wins and cutting off reflected failure after losses (Cialdini, 2008). Social identification has also been found to affect people's media choices, in that individuals choose to view shows that bolster their identification with social groups important to them (Harwood, 1999). Studies by Hebdige (1981), Lull (1985), and Morley (1992) have also provided support for positive relationships between group memberships and media use.

In the current study I looked at sports fans' use of four types of media—print, broadcast, online, and mobile phones—to examine the relationships between media use, fan identification, and collective self-esteem. By doing this, I sought to determine whether media use has an effect on fan identification and self-esteem and, if so, which among the four types of media has the most significant effect. Although previous studies (Abrams & Hogg, 1988, Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 2000) found that identification positively affected self-esteem, few have tested whether media use influences this relationship. Furthermore, most studies used a personal self-esteem measure, which has been found to be highly unreliable (Hogg, 2003). As such, the current study used a collective self-esteem measure (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). Using social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) as a theoretical framework, I attempted to extend previous research by investigating the influence of the four types of media use on the relationship between fan identification and collective self-esteem.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) has been widely applied to study sports fans' identification with teams. Social identity is the part of an individual's self-concept

deriving from knowledge of his or her membership in a social group, together with the emotional and value significance attached to the membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Through membership in a social group, individuals internalize the values and beliefs of the social group as their own, creating a shared social identity. According to social identity theory, human behavior ranges on a spectrum from purely interpersonal to purely intergroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In an interpersonal interaction, people relate to others as individuals, with no concept of social categories, and one's self-concept is defined by distinct individual cognitions, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions. In an intergroup interaction, however, one relates to others as representatives of one's group, with no concept of individualizing qualities, and one's self-concept is defined by group characteristics. Similarities between in-group members and differences from out-group members are enhanced, and the psychological separation between the self and the group as a whole disappears, resulting in individuals seeing themselves as interchangeable exemplars of their social group.

The central motivation for intergroup behavior is a desire for a positive self-concept, and this is formed and maintained through evaluations of the in-group with reference to relevant out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals are motivated to think and act in ways that achieve positive distinctiveness for the in-group, leading to high levels of intergroup differentiation and out-group derogation. For this to occur, one's group membership must be internalized, the social situation must allow for intergroup comparison, and the out-group should be relevant for comparison (Hogg, 2003). Because people are motivated to achieve and maintain a positive social identity, when joining a social group individuals will come to think of their in-group as being superior to out-groups through positive intergroup differentiation.

Sports Fan Identification

Sports fandom presents an excellent context for the study of intergroup relationships. First, sports fans identify strongly with the team they support, striving to achieve and maintain a positive social identity (Wann et al., 2000). Because most U.S. sports teams represent cities, states, or colleges, fan identification is usually highly enduring (Wann & Schrader, 2000). Second, positive social identity is achieved through intergroup differentiation from rival teams. When a fan's social identity is threatened, that is, when the fan's team loses a game, he or she can employ self-enhancement strategies and self-serving attributions to regain a positive social identity. Third, sports fans experience depersonalization when they are highly identified with a team. Crowd events like games result in highly salient social identities, where people become deindividuated and therefore especially responsive to contextually salient group norms. Team identification unites fans as part of the in-group, providing them with feelings of belonging and solidarity, creating an "us versus them" atmosphere. Fans psychologically become part of the sports team they support, sharing in its glory of winning and agony of defeat.

Sports fans express their affiliations with sport teams in several ways, including public displays of their fandom on personal Web sites, fan forums, and blogs (End, 2001); wearing team clothing (Madrigal, 2000); and following games fanatically throughout the season. Fans' self-evaluations often depend on the successes and failures of the team they support over the course of a season. End looked at fans' BIRGing (basking in reflected glory) and CORFing (cutting off reflected

failure) online, finding that they are more likely to BIRG after the team wins and CORF after the team loses. Highly identified fans are also more likely to make in-group-favoring attributions about the team's performance. These fans also most often rate other in-group members more favorably than out-group members and overestimate their team's number of wins (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann & Dolan, 1994). Highly identified fans also strategically manipulate attributions after a loss to protect their social identity because they are not able to easily switch allegiances (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). An early study by Mann (1974) found that fans of losing teams attributed game outcomes to external factors and were more critical of officials, perceiving plays as dirty. Miller and Ross (1975) found that fans internalized success and externalized failures. According to End, fans provide internal attributions for wins, such as player skills and coaching ability, and external attributions for losses, such as cheating by opponents, referee bias, and bad weather. They also use alternative strategies like blasting (derogating the opposition) and changing the dimension of comparison (e.g., wins over the season) to retain their positive social identity.

Self-Esteem

Social identity theory states that intergroup differentiation is motivated by people's desire to see their social group and, by extension, themselves in a positive light (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The self-esteem hypothesis (Abrams & Hogg, 1988) argues that greater intergroup differentiation elevates self-esteem; hence, individuals with low self-esteem will show greater intergroup differentiation to elevate it. Studies have found that fans' self-esteem varies depending on whether their team is winning or losing, as well as on their identification level with the particular team. Hirt, Zillman, Erickson, and Kennedy (1992) found that fans of winning teams reported significantly higher self-esteem and better mood than fans of losing teams after a game and performed better on unrelated mental- and motor-skills tasks. Murrell and Dietz (1992) examined the impact of intergroup differentiation and self-esteem on team evaluations and found that fans who displayed greater in-group bias had higher self-esteem and evaluated the team more positively. Wann et al. (2000) found that team identification positively affected fans' decisions to present themselves as fans of a team to rival fans. Among these fans, self-esteem significantly predicted how soon they mentioned their fandom. Similarly, in his team identification–social psychological health model, Wann (2006) found that highly identified fans reported higher levels of self-esteem and positive affect. As such, I proposed the following hypothesis:

> H1: Fan identification with a sports team is positively associated with collective self-esteem.

In addition, media use enables sports fans to follow their favorite team closely throughout the season. Through social identification with their favorite team, they come to see themselves as part of the team, joining in its success and failures as if they were their own (Cialdini et al., 1976). As previous studies have found, many fans use media to publicly associate with teams after wins and dissociate from teams after losses (End, 2001). This includes online discussion forums, reading, or watching play-by-play commentaries to make self-serving attributions for a win or a loss, and more. Fans whose team identification is an important aspect of their

social identity therefore use the media as a tool to manage their feelings of self-worth. According to social identity theory, by using distancing tactics (BIRGing and CORFing) and self-serving attributions, fans experience an immediate effect on their self-esteem, helping to maintain or enhance their social image (Cialdini et al., 1976). As such, I proposed the following hypothesis:

H2: Media use to find information about a sports team is positively associated with collective self-esteem.

Even though previous studies (Abrams & Hogg, 1988, Wann et al., 2000) found a positive relationship between fan identification and self-esteem, there has not been any research on whether media use can influence this relationship. Because highly identified fans are more likely to engage in preparatory activities such as reading about the team, following commentaries, and talking with other fans (Gantz & Wenner, 1995) and are more likely to report higher self-esteem levels (Wann, 2006), it should be reasonable to expect that media use can positively influence the relationship between fan identification and self-esteem. As such I proposed the following hypothesis:

H3: Media use to find information about a sports team moderates the relationship between fan identification and collective self-esteem.

Furthermore, as Harwood (1999) pointed out, people's identification with social groups affects their media-use choices. The enjoyment sports fans derive from following their favorite sports teams and players often comes from the creation of drama and suspense (Raney & Depalma, 2006). Mediated spectatorship, including the use of print, broadcast, the Internet, and mobile phones, allows sports fans to engage in the excitement and fervor of the entire sports season, before, during, and after each game. They can follow the latest stats on each team and player, tune in to commentaries by experts, and engage with other fans, all of which add to the enjoyment of identifying with the team. In their study of television sports viewing and fandom, Gantz and Wenner (1995) found that fans engage in preparatory behaviors for the game, including reading about the team, following commentaries, and talking with other fans. With the wide variety of media now available, it should be reasonable to expect that the more highly identified a fan is, the more he or she will use the media to increase his or her enjoyment. As such, I proposed the following hypothesis:

H4: Fan identification is positively associated with media use to find information about a sports team.

Because each of the four types of media (print, broadcast, online, and mobile phones) may involve different fan activities (e.g., sports fans may use the Internet and mobile phones more for interacting with other fans, watch games on television, and read newspaper or magazine commentaries), they may also have different degrees of influence on fan identification and self-esteem. As such, I posed the following research question:

RQ1: Which type of media use has the greatest influence on the relationship between fan identification and collective self-esteem?

Method

The current study used multivariate regression analyses to test the relationships between sports fan identification, collective self-esteem, and media use. An online survey was constructed using Qualtrics.com, with measures for the variables tested. An additional section included demographic variables (age, gender, year in school, parents' annual household income, Greek membership, and ethnicity) that were entered into the regression models as controls. A link to the online survey was sent by e-mail to 300 students at a major U.S. west coast university who were registered users of a mailing list for fans of the school's football team. A total of 203 participants (67.6%) completed the survey.

Fan identification was measured using a modified version of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Six questions measured fans' involvement with and psychological connection to a sports team using 7-point Likert-type scales. These were summed to create an index of fan identification ($\alpha = .73$; see the appendix).

The media-use measure included 12 questions, with three questions for each type of media (print, broadcast, online, and mobile). Seven-point Likert-type scales were used to measure respondents' use of each type of media to find out about the team during football season. Print media included newspapers, magazines, and books. Broadcast media included television and radio. Online media referred to Internet use through personal computers and laptops and included Web sites, forums, and blogs. Mobile-phone media referred to mobile-phone use to access the Internet, text messaging, voice calls, and use of sports apps on PDAs. These were summed to create a single media-use index ($\alpha = .79$; see the appendix).

Collective self-esteem was measured using a modified version of Crocker and Luhtanen's (1990) Collective Self-Esteem Scale. A total of 16 questions, using 7-point Likert-type scales, assessed respondents' collective self-esteem pertaining to the school's football team. These were summed to create an index of collective self-esteem ($\alpha = .71$; see the appendix).

Results

Of the 203 respondents, 89 were women (43.8%) and 114 were men (56.2%). Mean age was 21.5 years. In terms of ethnicity, 105 were White (51.7%), 33 were Asian (16.3%), 27 were Latino (13.3%), 18 were African American (8.8%), and 20 were mixed/other (9.9%). For year in school, 38 were freshmen (18.7%), 46 were sophomores (22.7%), 55 were juniors (27.1%), 54 were seniors (26.6%), and 10 were graduate students (4.9%). In addition, 67 respondents were fraternity or sorority members (33.0%). In terms of socioeconomic status, 75 were from families with annual income between $40,001 and $60,000 (36.9%), 52 were from families with income from $60,001 to $80,000 (25.6%), 34 were from families with income from $80,001 to $100,000 (16.7%), 22 were from families with income greater than $100,000 (10.8%), 18 were from families with income from $25,001 to $40,000 (8.9%), and 2 were from families with income below $25,000 (0.9%). Because all respondents in the study were students, they were asked to provide their parents' annual household income rather than their own (Table 1).

Table 1   Demographic Information for the Sample (_N_ = 203)

	Percent (_n_)
Gender	
male	56.2 (114)
female	43.8 (89)
Ethnicity	
Asian	16.3 (33)
African American	8.8 (18)
Latino	13.3 (27)
White	51.7 (105)
mixed/other	9.9 (20)
Year in school	
freshman	18.7 (38)
sophomore	22.7 (46)
junior	27.1 (55)
senior	26.6 (54)
graduate student	4.9 (10)
Greek membership	
yes	33.0 (67)
no	67.0 (136)
Income:	
$25,000 or less	0.9 (2)
$25,000–40,000	8.9 (18)
$40,000–60,000	36.9 (75)
$60,000–80,000	25.6 (52)
$80,000–100,000	16.7 (34)
more than $100,000	10.8 (22)
Mean age	21.5 years

Multivariate regression analyses were performed to test H1, H2, and H3, with collective self-esteem as the dependent variable. Model 1 included all demographic variables (age, gender, year in school, household income, Greek membership, and ethnicity), Model 2 included fan identification, Model 3 included media use, and Model 4 included the two-way interaction term Fan Identification × Media Use.

In Model 1, significant effects were found for being male ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .06$) and being a member of a Greek organization ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .06$). Male students were significantly more likely than female students to have higher collective self-esteem, controlling for other demographic variables.

Fraternity and sorority members also scored significantly higher on collective self-esteem than non-Greek students, controlling for other demographic variables. Age, ethnicity, household income, and year in school had no significant effect on collective self-esteem. In Model 2, fan identification was positively associated with collective self-esteem ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .11$), holding demographic variables constant, so H1 was supported. Consistent with Abrams and Hogg's (1988) self-esteem hypothesis and Wann's (2006) team identification–social psychological health model, the more highly identified respondents were with the football team, the higher their collective self-esteem. In Model 2, when fan identification was added to the regression the effect of gender and Greek membership on collective self-esteem disappeared. As such, it is possible that male students and Greek members had higher collective self-esteem because of having higher levels of fan identification. As seen in Model 2, when fan identification was held constant, male students and Greek members no longer had significantly greater collective self-esteem scores than female students and non-Greek members, respectively. As such, the male and Greek effect has been mediated by fan identification, controlling for other demographic variables.

In Model 3, media use was significantly associated with collective self-esteem ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .18$), so H2 was supported. Cialdini et al. (1976) and End (2001) contended that sports fans use media to publicly display their associations and dissociations with sports teams after wins and losses, respectively, thereby elevating their self-worth. Consistent with this tenet of social identity theory, in the current study the more fans of the school's football team used the four types of media to find out about the team, the higher their collective self-esteem. In addition, controlling for media use, the effect of fan identification decreased from $\beta = 0.44$ to $\beta = 0.39$. Part of the effect of fan identification on collective self-esteem can therefore be interpreted as resulting from media use. Finally, in Model 4, the two-way interaction term for Fan Identification × Media Use was added to the regression and found to be significant ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .19$). Model 4 explained 19% of the variance in collective self-esteem, an increase of 1% from Model 3 ($F = 6.32$, $p < .05$). Media use thereby moderated the effect of fan identification on collective self-esteem, and H3 was supported (Table 2).

In a separate bivariate regression, fan identification was found to be positively associated with media use ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .11$), holding demographic variables constant, thereby supporting H4. As Gantz and Wenner (1995) stated, fans are more likely than nonfans to use the media to find out about their team before, during, and after a game. In this study, highly identified fans of the school's football team were more likely to use the four different types of media (print, broadcast, online, and mobile phones) to follow the team during football season.

To answer RQ1, the 12 media-use questions were recoded into the four media types: print media ($\alpha = .71$), broadcast media ($\alpha = .71$), online media ($\alpha = .79$), and mobile phones ($\alpha = .77$). Further bivariate regressions revealed that each type of media significantly influenced the relationship between fan identification and collective self-esteem. Controlling for print media, the effect of fan identification on collective self-esteem decreased from $\beta = 0.44$ to 0.39 ($p < .05$, $R^2 = .18$). Controlling for broadcast media, the effect of fan identification decreased from $\beta = 0.44$ to 0.35 ($p < .05$, $R^2 = .18$). When controlled for online

Table 2   Parameter Estimates (OLS Regression) of the Effects of Fan Identification and Media Use on Collective Self-Esteem (*N* = 203)

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender (female = 0)				
male	.11*	.04	.04	.03
Ethnicity (White = 0)				
Asian	−.02	−.02	.01	.01
African American	−.03	−.02	−.02	−.01
Latino	−.05	−.04	−.02	−.02
mixed/other	−.03	−.01	.01	.01
Age	.03	.03	.02	.02
Income	.08	.08	.08	.08
Greek membership	.18*	.05	.04	.04
Year in school (freshman = 0)				
sophomore	.03	.02	.02	.02
junior	.03	.02	.02	.02
senior	.09	.08	.08	.07
graduate student	.02	.03	.03	.03
Fan identification		.44*	.39*	.31*
Media use			.31*	.23*
Fan Identification × Media Use				.28*
df	12	13	14	15
R²	.06	.11	.18	.19
F	3.21	4.67	6.21	6.32

*$p < .05$.

media, the effect of fan identification decreased from β = 0.44 to 0.31 ($p < .05$, $R^2 = .18$). When controlled for mobile-phone use, the effect of fan identification decreased from β = 0.44 to 0.36 ($p < .05$, $R^2 = .18$). Comparing the change in standardized regression weight (β) for fan identification for each media type, the greatest decrease occurred when controlling for online media (a difference of 0.13), followed by broadcast media (a difference of 0.09), mobile-phone use (a difference of 0.08), and print media (a difference of 0.05). Hence, online media had the greatest impact on the relationship between fan identification and collective self-esteem, followed by broadcast media, mobile phones, and print media (Table 3).

Table 3   Standardized Regression Coefficients (β) for Effect of Fan Identification on Collective Self-esteem, Controlling for Four Types of Media Use

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Control variable	Standardized β (identification)	R^2
Collective	Fan		.44*	.11
Self-esteem	Identification			
		Print	.39*	.18
		Broadcast	.35*	.18
		Online	.31*	.18
		Mobile phones	.36*	.18

*$p < .05$.

Discussion

Among the findings in this study, the most important is that sports fans' use of the media to find out about their favorite team moderates the association between fan identification and collective self-esteem (H3). Furthermore, media use has a significant positive effect on both collective self-esteem (H2) and fan identification (H4). As Kassing et al. (2004) stated, through communication, members of social groups participate in the "enactment, (re)production, consumption and organizing of sport" (p. 374). 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. Sports discourse can be both mediated and interpersonal in nature (Halone, 2008). From reading newspaper articles, magazines, and books about the team and players to watching television broadcasts of games; listening to radio commentaries; logging on to sports Web sites, forums, and blogs; playing fantasy sports; and using mobile phones to get the latest stats and updates, sports fans continually engage with their team and players, as well as with other fans. Mediated consumption of sports acts as a socializing agent for these fans, affirming their positive in-group membership and elevating their collective self-esteem. Denham (2004) states that mediated sports spectatorship often reinforces intragroup similarities, especially for White, heterosexual male fans who "came of age in line with dominant, hegemonic constructions of masculinity" (p. 382), which athletes often embody. Based on differing social norms, gender, race, and sexuality, separate readings of texts are possible. As such, sports fans' media use can contribute to their positive social identity construction, as well as their overall level of social well-being, including collective self-esteem.

A second significant finding of the current study is that among the four media types tested, online media had the greatest effect on the association between fan

identification and collective self-esteem, followed by broadcast, mobile phones, and print media (RQ1). Over the past decade, the Internet has been gaining in importance over more traditional media because of the numerous advantages it offers, including its infinite bandwidth and capacity and its ability to transcend both temporal and geographical constraints (Boase & Wellman, 2006). These features of the Internet are especially useful for sports fans because they can log on at any time, from anywhere in the world, to access unlimited information and the latest updates regarding their favorite teams and players, as well as to interact with other like-minded fans. In addition, the Internet now includes "live" streaming of games and commentaries that are simultaneously broadcast on television and cable, as well as online versions of sports news and information reported in newspapers and magazines, thereby subsuming what is offered by traditional broadcast and print media. According to social identity theory, people inculcate the values and emotions of their in-group to create a shared identity and gain part of their self-concept from membership in the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This quest for positive distinctiveness is fulfilled by the numerous types of Web sites catering to sports fans. Online forums and message boards enable fans to publicly display their associations, make self-serving attributions, and employ self-enhancing strategies such as BIRGing and CORFing. League and team Web sites allow them to check the latest statistics and game schedules. On network sites (e.g., ESPN), they can stream videos and instant replays of games. On social-networking sites (e.g., Ballhype, SportsFansLive) and blogs, they can even connect with other fans and send and receive up-to-the-minute news about their favorite team and players. As Mean (2006) states, "sports is a powerful, familiar and highly naturalized discourse that has become more prominent with the extensive rise in media coverage over the past 15 to 20 years" (p. 67). This study suggests that the Internet will continue to grow in importance as a major socializing agent and communication channel for sports fans into the future, superseding traditional media such as broadcast and print.

There are some limitations to this study. First, the study assessed only fans of a college football team. Future studies should include additional sports, as well as professional teams, to establish generalizability. Second, the study did not consider whether fans' media use was different when the team or player they supported won or lost. Future studies should take this into account because media use may vary after wins and losses. Third, the measures in the online survey were self-reported and the study was cross-sectional, so causality could not be established. Finally, the study included only college students, and the survey was administered online. Even though the findings suggest that online media have the greatest impact, this may be because college students are more frequent Internet users than other sports fans. As such, the importance of online media might vary across different fan demographics. Future studies should also take this into account.

Conclusion

Mediated sports spectatorship is highly popular in the United States, so it is important to understand the ways in which media use influences sports fans' identification with teams and players, as well as their attitudes and behavior. Cialdini (2008) suggests that many sports fans are individuals with hidden personality flaws and

poor self-concepts, because they seek prestige from their associations with others' achievements and not through their own achievements. Certain researchers have been concerned with the antisocial aspects of sports fandom, but there are also pro-social benefits to supporting sports teams, such as positive association with measures of social well-being, including collective self-esteem, one of the variables tested in this study. Using social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) as a theoretical framework, this study sought to extend current research on sports fans' strategic use of media to both maintain and enhance their identification with their favorite team. Results indicate that media use is a moderator in the relationship between fan identification and collective self-esteem. Sports fans thereby use media to achieve and maintain their positive social identity through intergroup differentiation from rival teams and manage their feelings of self-worth through associating with a successful team. Of the four media types tested (print, broadcast, online, and mobile phones), online media were found to have the greatest impact on fan identification and collective self-esteem. The importance of the Internet to sports fans in the age of Web 2.0 cannot therefore be understated. Sports fans currently represent 19% of all Internet users in the United States and are also early adopters of new communication technologies (Sachoff, 2008). The implication of the current findings for media professionals, athletic administrators, and sports organizations is that they should consider using online media over other more traditional media types to best reach out to this large and fast-growing segment of sports fans.

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Appendix: Measures for Online Survey

Section 1: Fan Identification Scale

1. How important is it to you that the football team wins a game?

   Not important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Most important

2. How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the football team?

   Not at all a fan   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very much a fan

3. How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the football team?

   Not at all a fan   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very much a fan

4. How important is being a fan of the football team to you?

   Not important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very important

5. How much do you dislike the greatest rivals of the football team?

   Do not dislike   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Dislike very much

6. How often do you display the football team's name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?

   Never   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Always

Section 2: Collective Self-Esteem

7. I am a worthy fan of my school's football team.

   Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

8. I often regret that I am a fan of my school's football team.

   Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

9. Overall, my school's football team is considered good by others.

   Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

10. Overall, my school's football team has very little to do with how I feel about myself.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

11. I feel that I don't have much to offer to my school's football team.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

12. In general, I am glad to be a fan of my school's football team.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

13. Most people consider my school's football team, on average, to be weaker than other schools' teams.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

14. My school's football team is an important reflection of who I am.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

15. I am a cooperative fan of my school's football team.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

16. Overall, I often feel that it is not worthwhile being a fan of my school's football team.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

17. In general, others respect my school's football team.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

18. My school's football team is not important to my sense of what kind of person I am.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

19. I often feel that I am useless as a fan of my school's football team.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

20. I feel good about being a fan of my school's football team.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

21. In general, others think that my school's football team is unworthy.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

22. In general, being a fan of the school's football team is an important part of my self-image.

    Strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree

Section 3: Media Use

Print Media

23. How important is it for you to read newspapers, magazines, and books to find out about the school's football team during football season?

    Not important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very important

24. How often do you read newspapers, magazines, and books to follow the latest news, statistics, and scores by the school's football team during football season?

    Not often   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very often

25. Will you feel out of touch if you are not able to read newspapers, magazines, and books to find out about the school's football team during football season?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very much

Broadcast Media

26. How important is it for you to watch television and/or listen to radio programs to find out about the school's football team during football season?

    Not important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very important

27. How often do you watch television and/or listen to radio programs to follow the latest news, statistics, and scores by the school's football team during football season?

    Not often   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very often

28. Will you feel out of touch if you are not able to watch television and/or listen to radio programs to find out about the school's football team during football season?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very much

Online Media

29. How important is it for you to log on to the Internet (including Web sites, blogs, and message boards) to find out about the school's football team during football season?

    Not important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very important

30. How often do you log on to the Internet (including Web sites, blogs, and message boards) to follow the latest news, statistics, and scores by the school's football team during football season?

    Not often   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very often

31. Will you feel out of touch if you are not able to log on to the Internet (including Web sites, blogs, and message boards) to find out about the school's football team during football season?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very much

Mobile Phones

32. How important is it for you to use your mobile phone (including Internet access, text messaging, and PDA apps) to find out about the school's football team during football season?

    Not important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very important

33. 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 school's football team during football season?

    Not often   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very often

34. 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 school's football team during football season?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Very much

Section 4: Demographic Measure

1. What is your gender?

   (1) Male   (2) Female

2. What is your ethnicity?

   (1) Asian   (2) Black   (3) Latino   (4) White   (5) Mixed/Other

3. What is your year in school?

   (1) Freshman   (2) Sophomore   (3) Junior   (4) Senior   (5) Graduate student

4. What is your age? _____

5. Are you a member of a fraternity or sorority?

   (1) Yes   (2) No

6. What is your parents' annual household income?

   (1) $25,000 or less   (2) $25,001–40,000   (3) $40,001–60,000
   (4) $60,001–80,000   (5) $80,001–100,000   (6) More than $100,000