

The Relationship of Online Sports Site Participation with Fan and Commentator Self-Identities

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Abstract

This research explored the process of how National Football League (NFL) fans who interact with and participate in sports-related news and information sites on the Internet negotiate their self-identities as fans and commentators. This research examined the interaction that 10 male participants have as fans and commentators with sports-related information. To determine whether a participant's identity as a fan or commentator will or will not change over the course of the study, the researcher used a baseline questionnaire, a log to track interactivity, and a second questionnaire. While there was not a significant change in fanship or commentatorship overall, participants felt their identity as a fan or a commentator decreased in some areas.

I. Introduction

As traditional media give way to digital media, particularly the Internet, consumers are beginning to live increasingly hybrid lives where the real world and the digital world interact. "In this world, online and offline identities may overlap and interdigitate, erasing prior boundaries in social, cultural, linguistic, political, and economic domains" (Jordan, 2009, p. 181). This world is also a place where identities are shaped by physical experiences and digital interaction, so one's existence is practically shared between the real world and the Internet (Jordan, 2009). This study will examine significant aspects of user interactivity: why and how Internet users participate in the flow of ideas about a topic, and how their participation relates to identification, both online and off. More specifically, this research will aim to explore the process of how National Football League (NFL) fans who interact with and participate in sports-related news and information sites on the Internet negotiate their self-identities as fans and commentators. In this research, a fan is an individual who achieves some level of satisfaction from and has some level of commitment to the NFL, specific teams, or specific players. A commentator is an individual who observes NFL football or learns sports-related information and then interacts with that information by creating or joining a conversation about it online. As a fan interacts with sports-related information, his or her identity change as a fan or a commentator will be measured by a numerical or observed increase or decrease.

Research was conducted by examining a set of 10 male NFL fans' interaction as both fans and commentators with sports-related information online from April to November 2010. The researcher used a baseline questionnaire, a log to track interactivity, and a second questionnaire to try and determine identity change over time. Results show that while there is not a significant change in fanship or commentatorship overall, there are specific areas in which participants experienced a change in identity as a fan or a commentator. Furthermore, the researcher was able to discover factors that can increase, decrease, or either increase or

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decrease a participant's level of interactivity, which can ultimately affect his identity change.

Since media are constantly evolving, the way people use media must change accordingly. Thus, it is important to understand how media interaction affects specific types of consumers. While this research could be applied to any type of niche consumer, this study focuses on NFL fans. People's views of the world are shaped by their highly mediated lifestyles, so researchers must discover how consumer changes will result in societal changes. Here, the researcher will better understand identity change in one consumer group. Change is what makes it important to become familiar with a world where people act as both producers and consumers of information, which can be difficult in a constantly shifting landscape (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Current research shows that there is a link missing between the concepts of media use and social identity. Therefore, the relationship between NFL fans' content creation and identity change is important for people to understand how highly mediated lifestyles change attitudes and alter self-perception. The first step to filling in that missing link, in terms of this research, is to understand existing literature on topics such as online interaction, sports fandom, and content creation.

II. Literature Review

While many researchers have studied the Internet in terms of interactivity over the past decade, it was not until 2002 when McMillan addressed the need to narrowly define and operationalize the concept. After examining website interaction, McMillan created a Measures of Perceived Interactivity scale to "enable researchers to examine relationships among perceptions of interactivity and other key new media variables" (McMillan, 2002, p. 39). Her scale measures likeness to real-time communication, interactivity speed, and controlled engagement. In practice, the scale is used to determine a consumer's level and reason for interactivity (McMillan, 2002).

One specific method of online interaction is to engage in user-generated media (UGM). While most people enjoy the ease and control of participating in UGM, there are a variety of reasons why they choose to do so. UGM is used to fulfill a variety of needs, such as information gathering, mood management, and entertainment. People also use UGM to interact with content and other people and to engage in self-expression by creating home pages and blogs. Each of these reasons for participating in UGM is substantial, yet they are interdependent (Shao, 2009).

Researchers Flanagin and Metzger (2001) agree that a consumer's ability to retrieve information, offer information, and engage in conversation on the Internet is significant. They claim, "Media once considered to be low in social presence and need gratification now appear to be considered rich multi-function channels...[The] Internet is the multidimensional communication technology used to fulfill well-understood needs in novel ways" (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001, p. 175). The

Internet has become a medium that caters to consumer's communicational and informational needs. As researchers have investigated the methods people use to meet their needs, they have often sought to apply a popular mass communications theory known as uses and gratifications.

Ko, an expert on the theory, writes, "Uses and gratifications theory is considered a psychological communication perspective that focuses on individual use and choice by asserting that different people can use the same mass medium for very different purposes" (Ko, 2005, p. 58). Through his investigation of the Internet, Ko also sees it as a medium that requires and delivers more interactivity than traditional media. People have various motivations for interactivity and demonstrate different behaviors through it, but it is certain the interaction will lead to a change in attitude (Ko, 2005). The kind of change depends on many factors, but to understand the change, it is first important to specify the type of consumer and interaction taking place.

Sports Fans as Internet Users

Sports fans are a type of consumer known for actively engaging in their favorite team and seeking gratification through the use of information. To define a sports fan, Hunt (1999) begins by stating three potential reasons for being a fan—basking in reflected glory, information processing, and/or attachment as it relates to the self. These reasons lead Hunt to the process of breaking sports fans into five categories. Temporary fans do not particularly identify with one team or sport. Local fans are bound by geographical constraints in the sense that they are a fan of a team because of their birthplace or current location. Devoted fans identify

with a specific team and are loyal to that team despite its performance. Fanatical fans show a high degree of fan-like behavior and go as far as using their favorite team as one method of self-identification. However, dysfunctional fans use their favorite teams as their strongest means of self-identification. Their identities depend on the success of their teams (Hunt, 1999). Fink (2002) furthers this argument by finding motives for being a sports fan that also affect identification, since motives lead to consumer behavior. Her study of collegiate fans shows that eight motives relate to fan identification: vicarious achievement, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, social interaction, drama/excitement, escape, family, and quality of physical skill (Fink, 2002).

Once people are labeled as sports fans and their motives are understood, their degrees of fanship must be established. To measure such a concept and understand it as a predictor of fan behavior, Shank (1998) created a scale to find the extent of one's fanship on a cognitive (psychological) and affective (emotional) level. He tested the scale on people ranging from a football coach to a respondent who claimed to have no interest in sports and found that both cognitive and affective involvement have an effect on one's level of fan behavior (Shank, 1998).

As previously stated, one type of behavior sports fans engage in at different levels is self-association with their favorite teams. Fans might use the Internet to publicly display that identity.

Mediation expert End wrote, "For individuals whose sport fan identity is an important aspect of their social identity, this use of the [Web] may be a technique for individuals to manage their sport fan identities" (End, 2001, p. 177). However, a fan's identity can change depending on a team's performance. For example, BIRGing, or "basking in reflected glory," refers to the idea that fans think others will see them as successful if they associate themselves with a successful team. Fans also engage in CORFing, or "cutting off the reflected failure," when they want to reduce association with a team that begins to fail (End, 2001).

Identity Change and Online Interaction

With interactivity comes the increased chance that a user's identity could be altered by experience. Kurniawan (2001) focuses on such identity changes in hopes of discovering the effects of developing an online identity. He specifically studies personal websites, which act as self-advertisements. Kurniawan stated, "Individual's interaction is seen as a 'performance' that is shaped by environment and audience...an individual develops [his or] her identity or persona as consequence of interacting with other people" (2001, p. 5).

Furthermore, Van Dijck (2004) explored how online interaction, such as blogging, can affect a user's social norms and cultural concepts, both of which have an impact on identity. He wrote, "Those...practices both reflect and construct new social norms and cultural concepts, such as individual and community, privacy and publicness, experience and memory. In a period of transition, these concepts fluctuate and will continue to fluctuate, but unraveling such complex transformation may help us sort out newly emerging cultural values" (2004, para. 34). While media use does cause these concepts to fluctuate, it is important to understand change.

As this literature reveals, sports fans are known to engage in online interaction to manage their self-identification with sports teams. Today's fans are actively involved in sports-related information by making the move from being passive consumers to being consumers who are also producers. Findings from previous studies, along with the expository overlay from the uses and gratifications theories, have led the researcher to explore the relationship between how sports fans influence their attitudes and self-identification through interaction with online media.

III. Research Questions

While the main goal of this study is to explore the process of how National Football League fans who interact with and participate in sports-related news and information sites on the Internet negotiate their self-identities as fans and commentators, the researcher plans to address the following research questions:

RQ 1. How does the quality and extent of the website participation influence the process of negotiating self-identity as a fan?

This question will help the researcher explore how interacting with and participating in sports websites change the way participants see themselves as fans. The quality of fan participation refers to how much time and effort are put into creating content on the web. It also takes into account techniques like whether or not

fans link to published news articles or information and if they include additional media, such as images and videos. The extent of fan participation refers to how often fans visit a website to create content and how long they spend creating that content.

The process of fans' negotiation of identities refers to the way they might be influenced by participation. To negotiate their identities, fans participate in sports-related news and information websites for an extended period of time and evaluate the way that participation changes them as fans. This process of negotiation may lead fans to change their attitudes and behaviors.

RQ 2. How does the quality and extent of the website participation influence the process of negotiating self-identity as a commentator?

This question will help the researcher explore how interacting with and participating in sports websites change the way participants see themselves as participants in the production of opinion and information. The terms *quality*, *extent*, *participation*, and *negotiation* are defined in the section above. The definitions are the same for this research question. However, the concept of being a commentator has not been defined. In this research, commentators are those who observe NFL football or learn sports-related information and then interact with that information by creating or joining a conversation about it online. To the extent that fans come to believe that their opinions are salient, they should view themselves as commentators. While they are not professional journalists, commentators think their level of participation has earned them a voice.

IV. Methodology

The research for this project was a three-part process that included a baseline questionnaire, an interactivity log, and a second questionnaire. The practice of using qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study, called a mixed-method evaluation design, has proved beneficial. According to Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), the mixed-method approach allows the researcher to verify findings, refine research questions, and constantly consider new areas of research. The combination of methods used in this study, sometimes referred to as *triangulation*, helped to establish a participant's identity change as a fan and a commentator, based on online interaction with sports-related information (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Creswell, 2010).

To begin, the researcher recruited people involved in creating sports-related content online. A recruitment process yielded 10 male participants, all of whom were college students at a private university of 5,000 students in the southeastern part of the U.S. These participants acknowledged an ongoing involvement in fan sites and volunteered to take part in the study. While the researcher did not plan to use all male participants, it was difficult to find females who wanted to participate in a study about interacting with sports-related information. Because participants came from a convenience sample, the results from this study cannot be generalized to the entire population.

Stage One: Baseline Questionnaire

The first stage of the research was to submit a questionnaire to each participant to better understand his identity as a fan and as a commentator. McCracken, a leading U.S. scholar on interviewing methods, says that questionnaires work well with in-depth interviews because they "[establish] channels for the direction and scope of discourse" (1988, p. 24). The questionnaire, created with Survey Monkey (<http://www.SurveyMonkey.com>), consisted of two sets of seven point-scale questions, questions about the participants' interaction time with online information and demographic questions (see Appendix 1). The first set of seven questions is for a fanship scale, while the second set for a commentatorship scale.

Wann and Branscombe (1993) developed the fanship scale, called the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS). It is meant to measure "the degree to which spectators identify with sports teams" (Wann & Branscombe, 1993, p. 1). The scale is comprised of seven questions asking how a participant views his fanship, and how others view it (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). For the purpose of this study, the SSIS was used as the first set of seven questions without being almost unchanged.

While research into content creation is relatively new, no scale was found to measure the degree of a participant's identity as a commentator. To solve this problem, the researcher adapted the SSIS to create the second set of seven questions in Appendix 1 and captured self-reported scores on a respondent's level of

commentatorship. The scale mirrored questions for the SSIS but replaced references to fans by references to commentators.

All participants filled out the questionnaire on the same day during two time slots. It was important to choose a day for participants to fill out the questionnaire when they would not be strongly influenced by a recent sports-related event, such as a big game or news development. As each participant completed his questionnaire, Survey Monkey organized his responses as an individual and within the entire group. The data was analyzed by looking at percentages and frequencies. Surprising findings and emerging themes were also noted. This method allowed the researcher to better understand the fan and commentator identities of the participants at the start of the study, so she could measure identity change at the end of the study.

Stage Two: Interactivity Logs

The second stage of research was to have each participant keep a log of their interactivity for 10 weeks, notably on their experiences in adding their own comments to ongoing online discussions. Coughlan and Sklar (2003) stated, "Another useful preparatory activity is to encourage participants to keep a journal...to reflect on their everyday behaviors, and to formulate a point of view about a design issue by focusing on it as they went about their everyday lives" (p. 133). The logbooks were distributed to participants in August 2010, prior to the start of the NFL season (see Appendix 2).

The participants received logs to start filling out the week of August 30, 2010. Once per week for 10 weeks, they were to fill out one log to describe and comment on their experiences. These 10 weeks were chosen because they fell during the beginning and middle of the 2010-2011 NFL season. Participants submitted their logbooks by October 31. Once the logbooks were submitted, participant responses were coded for recurring themes, steady changes, and surprising elements.

Stage Three: Second Questionnaire

Finally, each participant was asked to complete another questionnaire, which used only questions 2-20 of the first questionnaire.

Again, once each participant submitted his questionnaire, Survey Monkey compiled responses by individual and within the group. After reviewing the responses from this questionnaire, the researcher compared each participant's response with the other participants' to the same initial questionnaire and also compared the group's aggregate responses to the initial questionnaire with those to the second one. Differences in responses, whether an increase or decrease, noted the extent of self-reported changes in identity.

V. Findings

By using a mixed-method evaluation design, the researcher tracked participants' change in self-identity as both a fan and a commentator in the most accurate way that was feasible for this study. The baseline and second questionnaire gave a snapshot of each participant's identity and habits at the beginning and end of the study, and the logs helped participants track their online interactivity for a period of time between questionnaires. By operationalizing the research questions using this methodology, it was ensured that all research objectives were met. The findings are presented in chronological order.

Stage One and Three: Baseline and Second Questionnaires

Participants completed the first questionnaire in April 2010. The data were immediately collected and available to the researcher using Survey Monkey. Findings from the baseline questionnaire are listed in the second column of Table 1 and Table 2 below. Participants completed the second questionnaire in November 2010, after submitting their interactivity logs. Findings from the second questionnaire are listed in the third column of Table 1 and Table 2 below.

After collecting data from both questionnaires, means of responses from corresponding questions were compared to find change in a participant's answers. The change in answers directly relates to a change in a participant's identity and habits, which is significant to the purpose of this study. The table below lists a question that appears on both questionnaires, the mean of answers from the baseline questionnaire, the mean of answers from the second questionnaire, and numerical changes between the two numbers.

Table 3 shows the amount of time the participants spent interacting with sports-related information online per day and per week.

Table 1. Fanship scale

Question	Baseline	Second	Change
How important to YOU is it that your favorite team wins?	6.70	6.30	-0.40
How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of your favorite team?	7.00	6.20	-0.80
How strongly do your FRIENDS see YOU as a fan of your favorite team?	6.00	5.70	-0.30
During the season, how closely do you follow your favorite team via ANY of the following: a) in person or on television, b) on the radio, c) television news or a newspaper, or d) the Internet?	6.90	6.30	-0.60
How important is being a fan of your favorite team to YOU?	6.20	6.20	0
How much do you dislike the greatest rivals of your favorite team?	6.50	6.00	-0.50
How often do YOU display your favorite team's name or logo at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?	4.70	4.40	-0.30
Fan Scale: average of 7 rows above	6.29	5.87	-0.42

Table 2. Commentatorship scale

Question	Baseline	Second	Change
How important to YOU is it to share your opinion with others?	6.40	5.80	-0.60
How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a producer or information?	5.20	5.20	0
How strongly do your FRIENDS see YOU as a producer of information?	5.30	5.20	-0.10
How often do you consume sports-related information via ANY of the following: a) in person or on television, b) on the radio, c) television news or a newspaper, or d) the Internet?*	8.00	8.00	0
How important is being a producer of information to YOU?	5.60	4.40	-1.20
How much do you like when your opinion creates disagreement among others?	5.60	6.10	+0.50
How often do YOU talk about sports-related information one-on-one with others or in small groups?	7.60	7.40	-0.20
Commentator Scale: average of 7 rows above	6.24	6.01	-0.23

Note: * This statement is under the Commentatorship scale rather than Fanship scale because the author thought the participants tend to view the media to comment on what is happening.

Table 3. Time spent

Question	Baseline	Second	Change
How many days per week do you interact with sports-related information online?	7 days	6.5 days	-0.5 day
How many hours per day do you interact with sports-related information online?	3.5 hours	3.5 hours	0

When comparing the two sets of numbers, it is important to determine how much of a change is considered statistically significant in this study. In statistics, significance refers to the probability that a change in data is not the result of chance. Therefore, the higher a mean difference between the baseline questionnaire and the second questionnaire, the more likely it is for the answer to that question to be significant. In this study, the researcher used a confidence interval of 95%. A confidence interval is an estimate used to indicate whether data is reliable or not. In applied practice, confidence intervals are usually set at 95%. By performing a paired t-test, a test used to compare means on related subjects over time, the researcher determined the statistical significance. When looking at means from the baseline and second questionnaires, any change at, above 0.60, or below -0.60 is considered significant.

Change in Fanship

When combining all averages from questions about fanship in each questionnaire and comparing them to one another, the change in the scale for fanship was not found statistically significant, except for two areas, as shown in Table 1. Participants reported by a mean change of -0.8, seeing themselves less strongly as a fan of their favorite teams. Participants also reported by a mean change of -0.6, following their favorite teams less often using mediums such as television, radio, and the Internet.

Change in Commentatorship

There was no significant difference the group's overall level of commentatorship between the two questionnaires, except for two areas, as shown in Table 2 above. First, participants reported a mean change of -0.6, showing that it was important to them to share their opinions with others. Participants also reported a mean change of -1.2 on the question of whether producing information was important to them.

Stage Two: Interactivity Logs

Participants maintained their interactivity logs for the first half of the 2010 NFL season, from August to October 2010. Once each participant submitted his qualitative log, the researcher analyzed the entries for patterns of interaction and/or changes in identity. The researcher then created categories to capture participants' concerns and habits. These might help to explain why his level of interactivity increased or decreased, thus affecting possible changes in identity. The categories are listed and explained below.

Urge to Express Opinions

A participant increased his level of interactivity with sports-related information online when he had an opinion to express about a current event. In fact, this seemed to be the most common reason for a participant's online interaction. Expressing an opinion about a current event might be as simple as talking about an upcoming or past game. Participant 10 wrote, "On my blog, I did pregame write ups for each team and then wrote about my reactions when the games were over" (2010). A current event might also refer to a player. In October 2010, the NFL looked into allegations that Brett Favre, a married player, had sent inappropriate texts and voicemails to a New York Jets employee after the website Deadspin posted possible evidence. Later, Favre admitted to some of the allegations. Many participants wrote about this incident in their logs and commented on the fact that it rapidly spread across the Internet. Finally, a current event could refer to an NFL trend. In late October and early November, a few NFL players, including James Harrison and Dunta Robinson, were fined for controversial tackles that caused injuries. Harrison even considered retiring. A few participants wrote about this trend. Participant 9 said, "I discussed why the NFL unfortunately can't care for its players properly while keeping the same rough playing style they've had for so long" (2010).

Interact with Others

Another common reason that a participant increased his level of online interactivity was when he wanted to interact with other fans. That interaction with others could refer to bonding or bashing. Three participants mentioned their interaction with other fans through the creation and maintenance of Fantasy Football teams, which is a virtual competition where fans manage made-up football teams that are comprised of real NFL players. Interaction through Fantasy Football could include a participant arguing with another fan during the draft or taunting him when his team is losing a game. Two other participants referred to the fact that interaction with other fans can lead to bets, whether they are for money or bragging rights. Participant 4 wrote,

“This [New England] Patriots fan was telling me how good the Patriots are, and that they’re just unstoppable. I bet him \$50 that the Patriots wouldn’t make it to the Superbowl. He didn’t want to take the bet. Any Boston fan is all talk” (2010).

Too Busy

However, a participant decreased his level of interactivity with sports-related information online when he was busy with other activities. This seemed to be the most common reason for a participant’s decrease in online interaction. As shown in Table 3 above, the second questionnaire revealed that participants engage in online interaction 6.5 days per week, which was a 0.5-day decrease from the baseline questionnaire. While participants still engaging in online interaction very frequently, there are other activities that sometimes prevent them from interacting. Often times, those activities are related to school. Participants listed activities such as homework, extra curricular activities, and visiting friends as reasons for decreased interaction. Other times, participants were traveling and without access to computers. In some weeks, participants wrote about wanting to talk to other fans offline about sports-related information. Participant 8 wrote, “This week, I preferred interpersonal interaction instead of digital interaction” (2010).

Team’s Level of Success

While other categories specifically explain the increase or decrease of a participant’s online interactivity, some categories can cause a participant’s interactivity to either increase or decrease. For example, a participant’s level of interactivity might vary depending on the current success of his favorite team. Most often, when a participant’s team is doing well, his interaction increases because he wants to talk about the team’s success online with other fans. When a participant’s team is doing poorly, it can have two very different effects. Participant 9 wrote, “This was the first week I started to complain about my favorite team ... because of their poor play. I felt like their struggles made my week online less enjoyable” (2010). In this case, when a participant’s favorite team slumps, he loses interest in online interaction. Decreased interest could lead to decreased interaction. Nevertheless, Participant 10 wrote, “This week my favorite team lost 29-10 to the Tennessee Titans, so I kept posting my reactions to the game... It was a rough weekend to be a Giants fan, but I was still very active online” (2010). In this case, a participant’s favorite team slumped, but he increased online interaction to share his frustration.

VI. Discussion

The following sections are broken down by the concepts of change in fanship and change in commentatorship.

Change in Fanship

The first research question for this study aims to discover how the quality and extent of website participation influences the process of negotiating self-identity as a fan. In conducting a t-test, the change in the scale for fanship was not found significant, except for two areas. “How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of your favorite team?” saw a significant change. This change proves that, from April to October 2010, participants saw themselves less strongly as a fan of their favorite teams. In terms of negotiating self-identity, participants reported being a fan as less a part of their identities than it was at the beginning of the study. Regarding another question, “During the season, how closely do you follow your favorite team via ANY of the following: a) in person or on television, b) on the radio, c) television news or a newspaper, or d) the Internet?” respondents showed a change in their responses, participants following their favorite teams less closely via such mediums. In terms of negotiating self-identity, a participant’s identity as a fan might decrease if his interaction with sports-related information decreases.

When coding the logs, the researcher found two categories related to decreased interaction. The first is related to a change in interaction depending on a team’s level of success. While fans use the Internet to publicly display and manage their identity as a fan, End (2001) claims an identity can change depending on a team’s performance. When a participant’s favorite team is doing well, he might “bask in reflected glory,” but when his team is in a slump, he might “cut off the reflected failure” (End, 2001). In their logs, many partici-

pants report being upset by their favorite team's performance this season. If a participant's favorite team frustrates him, he might engage in CORFing and decrease his interaction. Therefore, when his quality and extent of interaction are decreased, a participant's identity as a fan also decreases.

The second category is related to a change in interaction when a participant is too busy. Participant 5 says, "I don't have a lot of time to interact or watch football when I have guests staying with me. Oh, well ..." (2010). In this case, the participant does not seem upset by the fact that he does not have time to watch sports or interact with sports-related information online. If a participant's identity as a fan were unchanged, he would probably be upset by his decreased interaction. Throughout the course of the study, participants reported interacting with sports-related information for an average of 3.5 hours per day. That is a lot of time that a participant might need to spend doing homework or being with friends. In those cases, his identity as a student or a friend might increase, while his identity as a fan decreases. When a participant's interaction with sports-related information decreases, his identity as a fan decreases. This might also be related to Hunt's (1999) definition of different types of fans. Participants could be moving from being a fanatical to a devoted fan. Due to the passionate entries about football in the logs, this change in fanship is probably not due to a decreased interest in the sport itself.

Change in Commentatorship

The second research question for this study aims to discover how the quality and extent of website participation influences the process of negotiating self-identity as a commentator. The change in the scale scores for commentatorship was not found significant, except for two areas. "How important to YOU is it to share your opinion with others?" was the first question in which the answers show a significant change. This change proves that, from April to October 2010, participants saw it less important to share their opinions with others. Sharing an opinion is central to the concept of being a commentator. In terms of negotiating self-identity, participants claim that a central concept of being a commentator is becoming less important to them. Therefore, their self-identity as a commentator is decreased. The second question in which the answers show a significant change in commentatorship is, "How important is being a producer of information to YOU?" Their responses to this question changed more than any other questions, so participants felt most strongly about this change than any other. This proves that, during the course of the study, participants saw being a producer of information, or a commentator, as being much less important to them. In terms of negotiating self-identity, if being a commentator is of decreased importance to a participant, his existing identity as a commentator will weaken.

Again, the first category is related to a change in interaction depending on a team's level of success. If a participant's team is not doing well, he may be too frustrated or embarrassed to share his opinion with others. In that case, he would engage in CORFing and decrease his online interaction (End, 2001). Therefore, when his quality and extent of interaction are decreased due to a slump in his team's success, a participant's identity as a commentator also decreases. A participant might also be too busy to engage in interaction. Participant 8 writes, "Some weeks, I look for information and don't feel the need to voice my opinions" (2010). Here, a participant is busy reading information and does not feel compelled to comment on it. Kurniawan (2001) claims, "An individual develops [his or] her identity or persona as a consequence of interacting with other people" (2001, p. 5). If a participant does not interact with others because he chooses not to comment, he will not develop his identity as a commentator. When his interaction with sports-related information decreases, a participant's self-identity as a commentator also decreases. Finally, Participant 8 says, "This week I preferred interpersonal interaction instead of digital interaction" (2010). In this study, the researcher is looking at the effects that quality and extent of website participation can have on a consumer. If a participant chooses to talk with other fans in person about sports-related information, he is not engaging in website participation. Fans that prefer to engage in intrapersonal interaction, rather than online interaction, become less of a commentator in terms of this study. A participant might still be talking about sports-related information, but his lack of digital interaction leads to decreased self-identity as a commentator.

In terms of this study, a participant's identity as a fan or a commentator was decreased, rather than being strengthened, by interactivity. Though neither a participant's level of fanship nor commentatorship proved to have a significant change except for a few areas, there were ways that the quality and extent of interaction were proven to have an influence on the process of negotiating self-identity. Understanding that influence is important in a society where consumers of media are also becoming producers of information.

In terms of future research, the researcher recommends a larger representative sample that is not

limited to men. This type of sample makes it possible to get a better-rounded perspective of consumer habits. Another recommendation is to ask participants to keep their interactivity logs for a longer period of time and encourage them to be as in-depth as possible with their self-reporting. This would yield even richer findings. Finally, it would be beneficial to research other types of consumers in terms of their online interaction, so the link connecting media use and social identity can become stronger and advance existing research.

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Appendix 1: Baseline Questionnaire

1. Please list your favorite NFL team's city and name.

2. How important to YOU is it that the team listed above wins?

	Not Important						Very important
Choose One	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of the team listed above?

	Not at all a fan						Very much a fan
Choose One	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. How strongly do your FRIENDS see YOU as a fan of the team listed above?

	Not at all a fan						Very much a fan
Choose One	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. During the season, how closely do you follow the team listed above via ANY of the following: 1) in person or on television, b) on the radio, c) television news or a newspaper, or d) the Internet?

	Never						Almost Everyday
Choose One	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. How important is being a fan of the team listed above to YOU?

	Not Important						Very important
Choose One	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. How much do you dislike the greatest rivals of the team listed above?

	Do no dislike						Hate
Choose One	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. How often do YOU display the team's name or logo at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?

	Never						Always
Choose One	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. How important to you is it to share your opinion with others?

Choose One

Not Important very important

10. How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a producer of information?

Choose One

Not at all a producer of information Very much a producer of information

11. How strongly do your FRIENDS see YOU as a producer of information?

Choose One

Not at all a producer of information Very much a producer of information

12. How often do you consume sports-related information via ANY of the following: 1) in person or on television, b) on the radio, c) television news or a newspaper, or d) the Internet?

Choose One

Never Almost Everyday

13. How important is being a producer of information to YOU?

Choose One

Not Important Very Important

14. How much do you like when your opinion creates disagreement among others?

Choose One

Do no like Like very much

15. How often do YOU talk about sports-related information one-on-one with others or in small groups?

Choose One

Never Almost Everyday

16. How many days per week do you interact with sports-related information online?

17. How many hours per day do you interact with sports-related information?
18. How long (number of years) have you been interacting with sports-related information?
19. Which websites do you visit most often to interact with sports-related information?
- 1)
2)
3)
20. Do you do any of the following? (Choose all that apply.)
- Post comments on message boards.
- Post comments to news articles.
- Update a personal blog.
- Live chat with other fans.
- Other

Demographic Information

1. Gender
- male female
2. Age ()
3. Year
- First-Year Sophomore Junior Senior
4. Major ()
5. Home State ()
-

Appendix 2: Weekly Interactivity Log

Date: _____

On how many days did you interact this week? _____ (days)

On average, how many hours a day did you interact? _____ (hours)

Websites Used:

Type of Interaction: (ex: Commenting on news articles, posting on a message board, updating a blog, live chatting with other fans, etc.)

Topics Mentioned in Interaction:

Did you experience any unusual or memorable situations during your interaction this week? Please provide details.

Finals Thoughts?
