Numerous companies and sport teams have realized the brand building benefits of utilizing Facebook (Coyle, 2010; Lefton, 2010; Mickle, 2009), and professional sport teams have embraced social networking (Durrett, 2009). Social media may provide sport organizations an opportunity for a competitive edge by providing a direct and unfiltered communication link to identified fans. This allows sport organizations to directly communicate a specific brand image. Certainly, Facebook represents a fast growing communication tool between sport businesses and consumers. Because it is a relatively new medium, current academic literature and industry insiders have not yet determined the most appropriate use for social media as part of the marketing mix. While current research does not clearly define effective Facebook advertising guidelines in sport organizations, it does clearly note this social medium should be integrated into marketing and brand management strategies (Coyle, 2010; Mickle, 2009). Thus, this case study examined the use of Facebook as a driver of brand image in the National Football League ($n = 32$). This case study will also outline theoretical and practical recommendations for utilizing Facebook to build and maintain brand image.

The content will examine the brand association factors of Facebook content as identified in the sport brand management literature (Funk & James, 2006; Lee, 2010; Miloch, 2010; Richelieu & Pons, 2006; Ross, 2006; Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006, Ross, Russsell, & Bang, 2008). The 11 dimensions of brand association are broadly labeled as keywords such as; brand mark, rivalry, concessions, social interaction, team history, commitment, organizational attributes, non-player personnel, stadium community, team success, and team play (Ross, 2006; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008). The brand association factors outline specific topics sport companies can leverage to increase brand equity. Based on the examination of Facebook content, the following forms of brand communication were identified: video, status updates, notes, and images/pictures. Types of consumer involvement were identified as fan interaction via comments and clicking “like” in response to team status updates or news feeds. The brand image may affect the spectators’ beliefs and attitudes toward a sport team (Funk, Haugtvedt, & Howard, 2000) thus, a determining factor in a fan’s response.

The case study on the NFL will provide valuable marketing implications for brand management. The NFL is unique because most teams utilize a specific marketing team to manage the Facebook page (Durrett, 2009). The results of this Facebook content analysis will add to the current knowledge of social media in sport. In addition, the NFL Facebook content may provide a direction for future research for analyzing online consumer behavior and practical applications of leveraging brand image using social media.