A Qualitative Analysis on the Features of National Football League Official Pinterest Accounts

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Pinterest is a social networking site (SNS) used to bookmark websites with a visual image on a user’s profile. This action is known as a pin. Users can then create different collections of pins, or boards, to illustrate what a real-life bulletin board or pinboard would look like. This leads to the ability to share or repin what others find attractive as well (Carr, 2012).

Between 2011 and 2012, Pinterest grew to over 20 million visitors. This growth catapulted Pinterest to the third most-used SNS in the United States (Morgan, 2013; Wallace, 2013). In the publishing world, Pinterest recently tripled the traffic publishers received compared to Twitter, and second only to Facebook. The circulation that Pinterest now drives to publishers is more than Twitter, LinkedIn, Reddit and Google+ combined (Fiegerman, 2013). It has been estimated that one in five women are visiting and using Pinterest, and within the economy as a whole it is estimated that one in four consumers prefer Pinterest to other SNSs. The make-up of Pinterest is that 83% of its users are women and 62% of total users are between the ages of 18-49 (Wallace, 2013). The activity within Pinterest gets more detailed with the buying habits showing 32% of its visitors purchasing clothing and fashion.

When dissecting the items pinned, 70% of Pinterest visitors gravitate towards cooking and recipe pages. The opportunity for brand awareness and involvement is vast considering Pinterest is the leading driving force behind consumer traffic to websites and blogs. This is evident from the data showing Pinterest to be the leading source over Facebook and Twitter for users following a retailer’s website (Wallace, 2013).

Major League Baseball (MLB), Major League Soccer (MLS), the National Basketball Association (NBA), the National Football League (NFL), and the National Hockey League (NHL) all have official Pinterest accounts representing their respective league. The organizations within these leagues also show Pinterest activity with 100% of MLB teams, 74% of MLS teams, 90% of NBA teams, 81% of NFL teams, and 87% of NHL teams having official Pinterest accounts.

Support for social media’s ability to leverage itself onto the NFL’s Super Bowl was displayed with registered social media posts during last year’s power outage reaching close to 48 million between Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites (SNSs) (ESPN, 2013). League representatives within the NFL claim that 44% of the NFL fan base is now female. (Dosh, 2012). Further support for professional sports attracting the attention of females is shown by a 2010 professional sports poll finding that there is a significant female fan base following the MLB (41%), NBA (36%), MLS (40%) and NHL (41%) (“Fan demographics among,” 2010).

The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) is a theoretical framework used to describe the fan of a sports team path to allegiance. The PCM is sectioned off into four distinct levels: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance. The concept is to follow the path an individual or fan might take to reach a point in their life where allegiance, loyalty, or commitment is reached towards a team from social situation interactions (Funk & James, 2001; Funk & James, 2004; Funk & James, 2006).

Awareness can be deemed the moment in time when an individual is introduced to a sport. This awareness takes shape through psychological characteristics of the extrinsic features in socializing agents and media (Funk & James, 2001). This can be stimulated from the relationships made with friends or the existing attraction to certain media outlets (Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012). The next level of attraction can come from the psychological characteristic features that directly or indirectly have to do with the sport or team. These motives have the possibility of being social-psychological and demographic-based, but the main indicator is that the individual is attracted to a ‘favorite’ team.
The purpose of this study is to examine Pinterest from an NFL league perspective and evaluate the features therein, and also see if socializing factors are among the features. These features can be interpreted as efforts of the NFL creating awareness and attraction through Pinterest to its fan base. Two initial research questions will be addressed once coding has been completed:

RQ1: What are the features of NFL Pinterest accounts?

RQ2: Are there socializing agents present within the features of NFL Pinterest accounts?

The methodology used will be guided from Grounded Theory (GT) method “to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data” (Martin & Turner, 1986, p. 141). The benefits of GT within the information systems community involve increasing the interest for future exploration and knowledge of the subject (Jones & Alony, 2011). This nonresponsive investigation avoids the possibility of being obtrusive.

Preliminary research indicates that 26 of the 32 NFL franchises possess Pinterest accounts. These accounts, along with the league’s official account, will comprise the sample (N=27). Two coders, working independently, will be used for this study. Plans for direct data collection from the authors will be compiled from the NFL teams with official Pinterest accounts due to the information being observed directly by the investigators. The content analysis will consist of coding the account’s features within pins, boards, who the team is following, and number of followers the team has acquired. The two coders will conduct a constant comparison method on the 27 accounts to find the features within the accounts. Records between the two coders will be compared after theoretical saturation has been achieved. The two coders will then make a scholarly comparison of the uncovered categories to other socializing agents in social media and sport communication literature.