Superstar players in professional sports are a crucial factor for attracting fans (Humphreys & Johnson, 2017). However, due to the excessive influence star players have, teams often deal passively with those players’ misbehaviors, and it has been observed that star players are moving from team to team after issuing open trade demands, although they are not FA. Under these circumstances, fans’ trust in their teams and players and their attachment toward the supporting teams may get damaged and weaken.

Fans’ loyalty to a team is composed of attitudinal and behavioral components (Funk & James, 2006), and fan attitudes increase their intentions to repurchase (Park & Kim, 2000). The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) explains the causal relations relevant to this topic, indicating that fans’ identification with teams or players is the key antecedent for fan loyalty (Wan & Branscombe, 1993). In addition, the concepts of trust and vicarious achievement conclusively impact fan loyalty and their identification with teams or players (Wu, Tsai, & Hung, 2012). Previous studies have determined the positive impacts of the relationship between players and fan loyalty, but they have been limited in their analyses of the negative aspects of player, team, and fan relationships. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that a star player’s betrayal behavior or open demands for trade could negatively impact fans’ trust, identification with, or attitudes toward the team or player they support. This study attempts to conduct a natural experiment for such situations by analyzing the social networking service (SNS) reactions of fans via big data analytic methods.

Data mined from Twitter was pre-processed to make it plausible for text analyses. This corpus was then passed through a CountVectorizer with an n-gram range of (1,2). These vectors were used to train support vector machine (SVM), naïve Bayes, and logistic regression models, which were then ensembled to maximize their output for the most accurate results (Danisman & Alpkocak, 2008). The model in the present study was used to classify tweets mentioning “Anthony Davis”—from February to June 2019—into four emotions: surprise, anger, happiness and sadness. The corpus was then separated into fanbases using hashtags from the tweets. Bigram analysis was conducted on the separate fanbases, along with analysis of the emotion count overall and among the individual fanbases.

Tweets from basketball fans were mostly surprised (53.17%) and angry (29.43%) about Davis’s open trade request. Pelicans fans felt more anger (35.49%) than did overall fans, while Lakers fans were more likely to be happy (14.12%) about the request ($\chi^2=462.39$ p<.001). The keywords frequently observed in tweets from Lakers fans revealed their expectations for a new star on their team, such as “next season” or “can’t wait.” Pelicans fans expressed more anger and sorrow, with keywords such as “shaking my head” or “stay with the Pelicans.”

As expected, the results have shown that fans negatively react to the misbehavior of star players, and these emotions can negatively influence fans’ attitudes toward the teams (Nabi, 2006). Further implications will be discussed in the presentation.