JMI

Journal of Managerial Issues

SPECIAL ISSUE:
Marketing Brands and Experiences in Sport, Entertainment, Tourism and Hospitality

The *JMI* in Brief

Articles

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Journal of Managerial Issues

Editorial Policy

The *Journal of Managerial Issues* seeks to publish the highest quality business research across the functional areas of business. The *Journal's* emphasis is on empirical work, though conceptual and methodological works are occasionally accepted. The overriding criterion for publication in the *JMI* is the knowledge readers will gain about the theory and practice of business management. The *JMI* is intended to foster research from a variety of business school and related disciplines. As such, the *JMI* is open to, and encourages a wide range of emerging and established methods, approaches, and problem areas within the domain of business research. Articles accepted for publication must present substantive and significant managerial implications.

Articles published are not necessarily the opinions of the *JMI*, the editors, or Pittsburg State University. Statements by authors appearing in the *Journal* are the exclusive responsibility of the authors themselves. Authors are allowed to express their opinions so as to encourage and stimulate a free flow of ideas.

Each paper submitted to the *JMI* is processed as follows:
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3. Each referee provides a careful evaluation of the manuscript, makes a recommendation to the Editor, and supplies comments for the author.
4. The Editor appraises the reviews and makes a decision regarding publication of the article. Every effort is made to obtain prompt reviews and make early decisions regarding publication or suggested revision of the manuscript.

Circulation includes university faculty and administrators, collegiate and public libraries, business executives, and government managers.

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

To maintain a broad scope of issues covered in *JMI*, we encourage the submission of manuscripts in all business and business-related disciplines. Manuscripts should have both an academic and managerial/practitioner orientation, with the former involving a review of the literature, and empirical investigation and/or new conceptual developments. To get a better understanding of the type of articles we desire, you may access them on-line through such full-text databases as ABI/INFORM, Information Access, Bigchalk.com, etc.

The Journal is interested in research which:
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- Tests work-related hypotheses of practical significance.
- Evaluates the results of field experiments and case studies.
- Summarizes and evaluates areas of new understanding.
- Presents new insights into major issues within the field of management and organizations.

Contributions from both the general trend of contemporary scholarship as well as those not following orthodoxy are welcomed.

The *JMI* is directed to both academics and practitioners. It is interested in cultivating a readership of university faculty and administrators, business executives, and governmental administrators.

The *JMI* seeks articles that have direct practical application to business; articles that, though not necessarily applied in nature, would be of interest to both business managers and academics; and those that explore public policy issues related to business. Articles should be scholarly but not overly technical or specialized. It should not be assumed that the readers are completely familiar with the concepts and terminology of a specific subject under study.

The goal of the *JMI* is to disseminate the results of new and original findings of both the academic and the business community, and, of particular importance, to serve as a bridge between them.

Articles published in *JMI* have traditionally come from a wide variety of universities and institutions.

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ARTICLES

R. Douglas Manning, Chris Croft, Stacey A. Hall, Brandon L. Allen, and
George Casper

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) Golden Eagles is an NCAA Division I member institution that participates in Conference-USA. Founded in 1910, the University colors have remained black and gold, but it has had a variety of different mascots/logos over time. In 2003, USM unveiled an updated and modern "rounded eagle head," which soon became its most popular and best-selling logo. In attempting to register its 2003 golden eagle logo with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) as a registered mark, USM faced opposition from the University of Iowa. Iowa claimed that the registration of the USM mark would likely result in consumer confusion as it resembled the registered mark of the Iowa Hawkeye. The purpose of this article is to provide a case study analysis of a trademark infringement case involving The University of Iowa and The Board of Regents, State of Iowa v. The University of Southern Mississippi, as well as present an application of the rebranding theoretical framework to institutional athletics rebranding at USM.
Keywords: athletics rebranding, intercollegiate athletics, patents, sports marketing, trademarks

Benjamin D. Goss, Philip C. Rothschild, and Mikaela M. Hutson

This paper examines the increasingly critical research and practical topic of digital media strategy for sport properties through a detailed analysis of Cialdini's (2008) six principles of persuasion. Best-practice strategies from the communications and marketing industries are used to support theory from principles, and applied tactics are illustrated using select posts from the University of Southern California (USC) Athletics' official athletics and football Facebook page. Recommendations for future studies and sport property practices based upon both empirical literature and practical industry applications are also offered.
Keywords: Facebook, Social, Digital, Media, Marketing

The *JMI* in Brief

   Tailgating is an American football pregame activity prevalent on university grounds and surrounding areas. This research specifically investigates generational differences of game-day tailgating rituals at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) southeastern master level university. Survey data from 753 active tailgaters (Baby boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z) was analyzed using ANOVA procedures. Findings show that tailgaters are mostly motivated by team identification, followed by escape, and spending time with friends. However, generational differences are observed for spending time with family, identifying with the home team, and the desire to attend home games. In addition, in terms of game-day rituals, while the younger generations are more fluid/nomadic in their tailgating locations and engage in drinking games, the older generations stick to the tried and true rituals such as setting up a tailgating spot decorated with team colors and cooking. Implications for teams, universities, and related community businesses are discussed.
   Keywords: Tailgating rituals, cohort theory, U.S. collegiate football, motivating factors, consumer behavior, marketing communications strategy

   Intercollegiate beach volleyball has emerged as the fastest growing sport in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) because of the popularity and the marketability of the sport. Beach volleyball's rich history along with its continued popularity has caused college athletic departments to see the benefits of adding beach volleyball to their department. The attention garnered by beach volleyball at the Olympics has helped in making intercollegiate volleyball a very marketable new sport for women.
   Keywords: Sport Marketing, Intercollegiate Beach Volleyball, Tourism, NCAA

The *JMI* in Brief

  Ismail Karabas, Nik Nikolov, and Brittany Wood

    Social media platforms differ in the extent to which users reveal their identities, as well as users' ability to detect others' identities, both of which could lead to differential effects of social media generated word-of-mouth (eWOM) on actual consumer behavioral responses. Based on prior research on social identification, and relationship orientation of social networks in marketing, the authors examine whether eWOM on identity-focused (e.g., Facebook) and non-identity-focused (e.g., Youtube) platforms impact an objective consumer response variable: motion pictures box office sales. Using social media posts data for 58 randomly selected movie releases across all platforms during the period November 2014 – February 2017, the authors demonstrate that the overall volume of eWOM across all social media is positively associated with movie box office sales. The authors further find that eWOM on identity and non-identity-focused platforms each have a positive effect on sales, and the magnitude of their effect is not significantly different, suggesting that both types of platforms merit attention from marketing managers.

Keywords: electronic word-of-mouth, identity-focused social media, non-identity-focused social media, movie box office sales

An Introduction to the "Marketing Brands and Experiences in Sport, Entertainment, Tourism and Hospitality" Special Issue

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This special issue was developed in collaboration with the 2019 Society for Marketing Advances Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. The theme for this special issue focused on disseminating recent theoretical and empirical work that further contributes to the study of the marketing of brands and experiences in the sport, entertainment, tourism, and hospitality sectors.

In this issue, the articles included represent a variety of topics related primarily to the collegiate sport industry. First, the article "Birds of a Feather Don't Flock Together: Institutional Athletics Rebranding at University of Southern Mississippi" is a case study analysis of a trademark infringement case involving The University of Iowa and The Board of Regents, State of Iowa v. The University of Southern Mississippi. It presents an application of the rebranding of institutional athletics at USM. This case study allows sports marketers to examine a specific rebranding scenario at the NCAA Division I intercollegiate level and the subsequent trademark infringement implications, as well as an opportunity to review relevant rebranding research in the sport management literature.

Second, the article "Applying Persuasion Theory to Sport Properties' Digital Media" examines select Facebook posts for the USC Trojans through an analysis of Cialdini's (2008) six principles of persuasion. It asserts that a sport organization's digital strategy is

an integral part of its communication and marketing plan and provides a practical strategic framework. Sport organizations that effectively utilize digital assets as marketing communication tools to connect with stakeholders generally enjoy competitive brand advantages.

Third, the article "Celebrating Together: Generational Cohort Differences in Game-Day Tailgating Rituals" investigates generational differences of game-day tailgating rituals at a Division I FBS southeastern master level university. Their findings show that tailgaters are mostly motivated by team identification, followed by escape, and spending time with friends. However, generational differences are observed for spending time with family, identifying with the home team, and the desire to attend home games. While the younger generations are more fluid/ nomadic in their tailgating locations and engage in drinking games, the older generations stick to the tried-and-true rituals such as setting up a tailgating spot decorated with team colors and cooking.

The final collegiate sports industry article "Promoting Intercollegiate Beach Volleyball: The Rise of the NCAA's Fastest Growing Sport" discusses how beach volleyball is currently the fastest-growing NCAA sport. The overall interest continues to grow due to past Olympics television coverage, NCAA championship level with national television, and increased scholarship opportunities for female student-athletes. This has allowed athletic departments to add women's beach volleyball as an additional sport, and in doing so, not only helps with more opportunities for women to participate in sports but also helps draw attention to the athletic department. Beach volleyball has also assisted university athletic departments in meeting Title IX regulations.

In addition to the four articles that relate to the collegiate sports industry, there is also one article that focuses on the entertainment section. This article titled, "The Effect of eWOM from Identity and Non-identity Social Media on Movie Sales," examines whether eWOM (social media generated word-of-mouth) on identity-focused and non-identity-focused platforms impact motion picture box office sales. The authors explain that the overall volume of eWOM across social media is positively associated with movie box office sales and have a stronger association with eWOM from non-identity-focused platforms, suggesting that the degree of relationship orientation among users of social media platforms merits more attention by researchers as well as practitioners.

Overall, these five articles examine a wide variety of topics within the collegiate sports or entertainment industries. Marketing topics related to branding, promotion and digital marketing, and consumer behavior changes were discussed. The guest editors hope that these articles spark additional insights and provide future research opportunities.

The guest editors want to thank the Society for Marketing Advances for their support of the development of this Special Issue. In addition, the guest editors thank the authors and reviewers that contributed their time to make this Special Issue happen.

Editor's Note: Special Thanks to Guest Editors –

I would like to thank the guest editors, Drs. Roy, Srivastava, and Edmondson, for giving much of their time and effort to this special issue of the JMI with topics of Marketing Brands and Experiences in Sports, Entertainment, Tourism and Hospitality.

Sang-Heui Lee
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Birds of a Feather Don't Flock Together: Institutional Athletics Rebranding at University of Southern Mississippi

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Abstract: The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) Golden Eagles is an NCAA Division I member institution that participates in Conference-USA. Founded in 1910, the University colors have remained black and gold, but it has had a variety of different mascots/logos over time. In 2003, USM unveiled an updated and modern "rounded eagle head," which soon became its most popular and best-selling logo. In attempting

to register its 2003 golden eagle logo with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) as a registered mark, USM faced opposition from the University of Iowa. Iowa claimed that the registration of the USM mark would likely result in consumer confusion as it resembled the registered mark of the Iowa Hawkeye. The purpose of this article is to provide a case study analysis of a trademark infringement case involving *The University of Iowa and The Board of Regents, State of Iowa v. The University of Southern Mississippi,* as well as present an application of the rebranding theoretical framework to institutional athletics rebranding at USM.

Keywords: athletics rebranding, intercollegiate athletics, patents, sports marketing, trademarks

On July 15, 2015, The University of Southern Mississippi (also referred to as USM and Southern Miss) released the much-anticipated redesign of its athletics logo, replacing the most popular and best-selling logo in the history of USM. The new logo was intended to represent the university, its athletic department, the student body, and alumni. Required to create a new mark as the result of the decision by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) Trademark Trial and Appeal Board in 2011, USM's logo from a 2003 redesign campaign was deemed to be too similar to the University of Iowa (see Figure I). The article aims to provide a trademark infringement case study analysis of *The University of Iowa and The Board of Regents, State of Iowa v. The University of Southern Mississippi,* and an examination of the subsequent institutional athletics rebranding campaign at USM.

Figure I
Comparison of the University of Iowa and the
University of Southern Mississippi logos (USPTO, 2011: 39)

Hawkeyes, 1979   Hawkeyes, 2001   Golden Eagle, USM, 2003
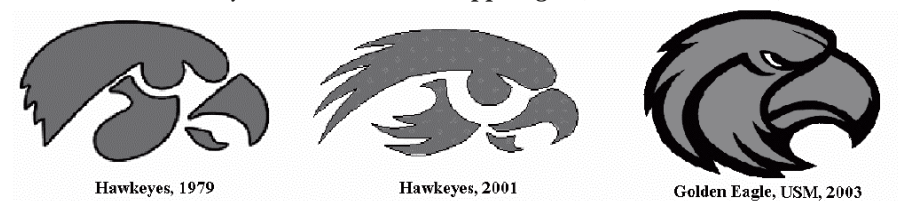
Rebranding Theoretical Framework

Branding is the process of setting a product or service apart from its competitors and involves all facets of a brand, including naming, logos, images, etc. (Kerin and Hartley, 2019). Rebranding is a marketing strategy that involves a change to, or creation of, an organization's name, symbol, logo, and image. This marketing strategy is a widely utilized practice to change the image of a brand in the consumer minds through major or minor changes in both its positioning and aesthetics (Bennett *et al*., 2019). Rebranding occurs with such frequency it has been said to be "ubiquitous in branding practice" (Merrilees and Miller, 2008). In the context of sports teams, rebranding is

pursued for multiple reasons such as the goal to stay competitive and relevant, generate more significant revenues, change trends (demarcate a shift from losing seasons), or simply because a team has relocated and the name/brand must change accordingly (Ahn *et al.*, 2012). Logo redesign in sports franchises has occurred for many reasons and many years, but the ultimate goal is for fans to evolve through the phases of attraction, to attachment, and finally to allegiance (Alexandris *et al.*, 2016). Sport team logos play a significant role in establishing the organizational brand and the subsequent brand image and brand equity (Keller, 2005).

According to Foster *et al.* (2006), sports marketers' concerns are whether the fans will like the new logo, and purchase new team merchandise. A possible explanation for such different reactions to redesigned logos "may be related to the fans' different levels of team identification" (Ahn *et al.*, 2012: 13). Identification levels can classify fans: high, medium, low– those with low team identification may react differently, and therefore changing the logo could attract lower levels of loyal fans (Ahn *et al.*, 2012; Walsh *et al.*, 2010; 2011). Previous studies have reported positive and negative results related to attitudes towards the sports product/organization. Funk and James (2001; 2015) referred to the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) when suggesting that fans in the stage of allegiance are more likely to resist change as those fans possess stronger connections with teams and properties (venue, coach, players, etc.). This could have a detrimental effect on the connection between positively identified fans and their respective teams. Validated by Taghizadeh *et al.* (2015), classifying spectators into a PCM level helps researchers better understand individuals' awareness and involvement. In turn, sport managers can utilize this model to attempt to positively affect fans' levels of participation and loyalty to the team.

Walsh *et al.* (2010) posit that logos are a dominant visual element of brand evaluation (positive or negative) and affect the customers' attitude toward the brand and, in turn, their purchase intentions. A positive brand attitude may lead to increased sales, which is an essential goal of the sports team rebranding strategy. Ahn *et al.* (2012) studied the effect of team identification on fan attitudes and purchase intentions regarding the logo redesign of the Utah Jazz and Golden State Warriors. The researchers reported that brand attitudes of positively identified fans were decreased while those with low team identification were increased. Furthermore, even though the high identification team fans had an adverse reaction, their purchase intentions increased. This could be related to their attachment to the team brand and need to display that attachment (Ahn *et al.*, 2012).

The redesign of a sports team logo is a crucial decision that can significantly affect fan identification, brand loyalty, and future customer purchase intentions. Based on the literature, research implores sports marketers to consider fan satisfaction before making changes to a team logo. Much time and effort must go into an overall rebranding strategy that will integrate the proposed change into marketing and media communications. Within higher education, the branding of a university (and its athletic department) is a critical component, as it has the potential to affect the marketing efforts and message of the institution as a whole (Czekanski and Lee, 2017).

USM Institutional Branding

USM, originally called Mississippi Normal College, was founded by a legislative act on March 30, 1910, as the state's first state-supported teacher's training school

(University of Southern Mississippi, 2016). The earliest athletic team nickname was established in 1924 when they were first called the Normalites followed by the Yellow Jackets (University of Southern Mississippi, 2014a). The school was renamed Mississippi Southern College in 1940. The student body voted for a team name change to the Confederates in 1940-41; the Southerners from 1941-71; the Miners from 1971-72; and finally to the name of the Golden Eagles in 1972 to present. When the Golden Eagles athletic team nickname was finalized, the team mascot was changed from General Nat (named after Civil War General Nathan Bedford Forrest) to the current Golden Eagle costume of Seymour d'Campus – shortened to just Seymour. Though the mascot costume has been updated several times over the years, Seymour is still active and an enthusiastic supporter at USM athletic events (University of Southern Mississippi, 2014b). USM mascots and logos evolved, but the one constant was the school colors, Black and Gold, which were adopted in 1912 after the colors of the "Black-Eyed Susan," a flower prevalent in the local area.

2003 USM Athletic Logo Redesign

The redesign of the USM athletic department logo in 2003 was an effort to develop a new mark to replace its "attack eagle" logo (University of Southern Mississippi, 2015b). USM has had nine different logos for its Golden Eagle athletic team name since 1973 (see Figure II). They have ranged from various types of wings spread "attack" eagles, to "cartoonish" logos, to several that included the "USM" or "Southern Miss" abbreviations within the logo mark (Creamer, 2016). The previous logo had been in existence for ten years, and the desire for a new and fresh logo with a more consistent color scheme was desired (University of Southern Mississippi, 2003). USM alumnus Rodney Richardson, founder of RARE Design in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, designed the 2003 eagle head logo. RARE Design is described as "brand builders, truth-tellers, story discoverers, trusted guides, (and) explorers…" (RARE Design, 2020). RARE Design has led rebranding efforts for other sports teams/organizations including the Houston Texans, Minnesota Timberwolves, Sacramento Kings, Charlotte Hornets, Atlanta Hawks, Memphis Grizzlies, Houston Texans, Minnesota Brewers, New Orleans Pelicans, and NASCAR (RARE Design, 2020). On January 29, 2003, the university marketing and public relations department announced that a new logo had been created for the USM athletic department. The final product was the culmination of nearly a year of research, focus group feedback, defining and re-defining the look, and adding various supportive marketing and branding typefaces and marks.

Figure II
University of Southern Mississippi Golden Eagle athletic logos 1973 to 2003
(University of Southern Mississippi, 2015a)
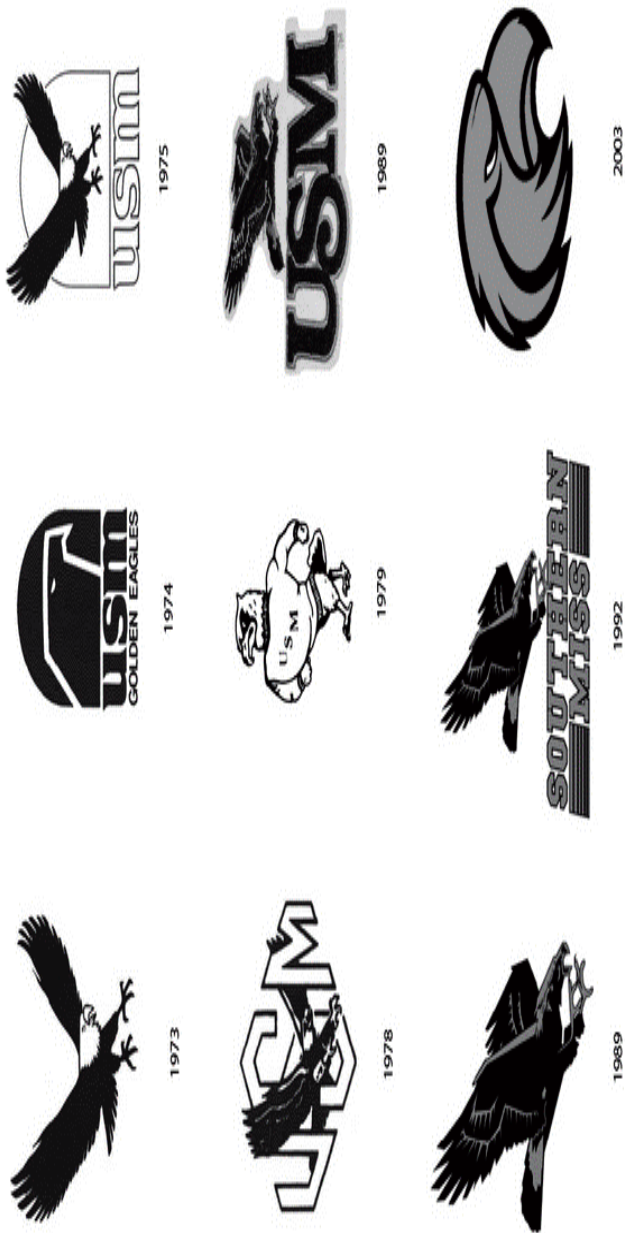
The USM logo unveiled in 2003 was described as classic, modernized, bold, clean, timeless, powerful, distinctive, consistent, progressive, sleek, and fierce. The primary mark was designed to embody the "courage, strength, and pride" of Golden Eagle athletics and establish a classic athletic identity based on the strong tradition at USM (University of Southern Mississippi, 2003). Not only would the logo pay homage to the spirit of perseverance at USM, it was also meant to honor past achievements and present a progressive, distinct, consistent, and solid identity for athletics and the university branding efforts (University of Southern Mississippi, 2003).

Previously at USM, two official color schemes (Yellow Gold and Vegas Gold) were allowed, including a Vegas Gold that was difficult to replicate perfectly in player uniforms and fan apparel. Additionally, the return to a Yellow Gold pays homage to the university's historical roots as this specific color was utilized before 1975 (B. Jones, personal communication, September 5, 2020). According to Lisa Mader, former USM Director of Marketing and Public Relations, the 2003 update alleviated past issues with consistency between the academic institution and athletics, including a consistent gold color (PMS 123) across all facets of university merchandise, communications, and branding initiatives (University of Southern Mississippi, 2003). Southern Miss introduced the new Eagle-head logo in January 2003 as part of a brand-identity campaign that included standard colors, fonts, and logos for its athletics (*The Courier*, 2004). Due to its design popularity, the 2003 eagle head logo established itself as the best-selling logo of all time at USM (B. Jones, personal communication, September 5, 2020). However, it would ultimately become the source of trademark infringement accusations by the University of Iowa (Dickman, 2014).

Athletics Backgrounds

Southern Miss was a charter member of Conference USA in 1996 and has been one of the longest-standing members. The university athletics program has attained national success which includes football leading all-conference members with five conference championships and participation in bowl games 13 out of the last 17 seasons (Southern Miss Football, 2020). The men's basketball team claims the state's first national championship as 1987 NIT Champions. The baseball team has claimed the CUSA championship seven out of the last ten seasons, including 17 NCAA Regional appearances culminated with a 2009 World Series berth (Southern Miss Baseball, 2021). Southern Miss offers 17 intercollegiate sports, including the recent addition of beach volleyball (Southern Miss Athletics, 2018). Southern Miss annual athletic budget is $25.3 million and offers 222 scholarships to male and female intercollegiate student-athletes (Doherty, 2020).

Iowa, a Power 5 member of the Big Ten Conference, offers 22 intercollegiate sports but is currently dropping four sports, including men's gymnastics, men's and women's swimming and diving, and men's tennis due to financial deficits (Weaver, 2020). The Hawkeyes have a proud athletic tradition across its' intercollegiate teams. The football program is in the top ten nationally in most wins in the last five years, and has earned bowl eligibility in 18 of the last 19 seasons (Iowa Football, 2019). Iowa men's basketball program has become regular attendees in NCAA and NIT postseason play during the last decade (Iowa Basketball, 2020). Iowa's annual athletic budget is $117 million and offers 300 scholarships to male and female intercollegiate student-athletes (Batterson, 2017).

There are numerous differences between Southern Miss (a Group of Five member), and Iowa (a Power 5 member). These differences range from conference affiliations and athletic budgets to geographical locations. In January 2003, Southern Miss revealed its new logo, but the logo situation was elevated the following spring. The logo had avoided the radar of Iowa officials until Southern Miss hired men's basketball coach Larry Eustachy in spring 2004. Eustachy was previously head coach at Iowa State University from 1998 to 2003, which is a big rival to Iowa (*The Courier*, 2004). Iowa media coverage of the hiring brought the issue to the attention of Iowa school officials (The Courier, 2004). Iowa spokesperson Steve Parrott stated, "We saw the coverage and saw the hat he was wearing. We don't want to confuse people" (*The Courier*, 2004). Parrott said Iowa wants its logo to be distinctive and pointed to a scheduled basketball tournament between Southern Miss of Conference USA and Iowa in Iowa City that December (*The Courier,* 2004). Due to that occurrence, the University of Iowa formally contacted Southern Miss.

A Case of Trademark Infringement

During the USPTO logo registration process, either the USPTO or a competitor may seek to contest a newly proposed mark due to distinctiveness (Mullin *et al*., 2014). In attempting to register its 2003 golden eagle logo with the USPTO, the University of Iowa claimed that the USM mark registration would likely result in consumer confusion as it resembled the registered mark of the Iowa Hawkeye. Trademark law protects a trademark owners' exclusive right to use a trademark when the use of the mark by another would likely cause consumer confusion as to the source or origin of goods (Cornell Law School, 2020). The Federal Trademark Act of 1946, also known as the Lanham Act, directly relates to sports property marks as it protects against uses of a trademark that are likely to cause confusion, deception, or mistake about its source (Mullin *et al*., 2014; U.S. Trademark Law, 2013). To establish a violation under the Lanham Act for either a registered mark under 15 U.S.C. 15 U.S.C. § 1114, or an unregistered mark under 15 U.S.C. § 1125(a), the plaintiff must demonstrate that (1) it has a valid and legally protectable mark; (2) it owns the mark; and (3) the defendant's use of the mark to identify goods or services causes a likelihood of confusion (Cornell Law School, 2020).

Institutions may also attempt to protect their marks through the Federal Trademark Dilution Act of 1995 (FTDA) as brand dilution may result in source confusion, or blurring, "…the defendant's use of an identical or similar mark or trade name impairs the distinctiveness of the plaintiff's famous mark" (Mullin *et al*., 2014: 404). Although USM argued that the Golden Eagle mark was more complicated than and dissimilar to the stenciled Hawkeye logo, issues related to shape, direction, colors, profile, style, and proportion were presented by Iowa (USPTO, 2011). Iowa asserted there would be a likelihood of confusion if USM were allowed to continue its use of the 2003 logo as it "closely resembles Iowa's previously used and registered marks" (USPTO, 2011: 3).

The Iowa Hawkeye mark had been in use by the university athletics teams for over 30 years and used/sold on an assortment of officially licensed items, including sporting goods, clothing, and novelty items (USPTO, 2011: 11). Known as the "Tiger Hawk," the hawk head design first became a symbol of the university athletics program in 1979 and included three stencil-like sections (Wine, 2009). The Hawkeye mark had been

previously registered with the USPTO (Registration Nos. 1312703 and 1772928), and an updated version of the mark was registered in 2001 (Registration No. 2616009) (USPTO, 2011: 13). Predominant images of the mark include the following registered variations of the Hawkeye (see Figure III), including the "fierce" version (USPTO, 2011: 14). Parrott further stated, "We have had the 'Tiger Hawk' logo for 20, 25 years, and the Southern Mississippi logo seems confusingly similar. We congratulate Southern Mississippi on its taste in logos, but we have contacted Southern Mississippi and asked them to change it because we feel it is too close to ours" (*The Courier*, 2004).

Figure III
Variations of the registered University of Iowa Hawkeye logo (USPTO, 2011: 14)

At the University of Iowa, and in the state itself, there is a long and storied history of being associated with the Hawkeye name and logo (University of Iowa, 2017). As a member of the Big Ten since 1899, the connection with a premier NCAA conference has given Iowa athletic teams "ready access to all the largest media markets" (USPTO, 2011: 13). It was maintained that the Hawkeye logo is easily recognizable due to the media coverage and visibility of the athletic conference, as well as post-season involvement in multiple sports and participation in "major" NCAAF Bowl Games. In addition to the school's website, stadiums, arenas, and events associated with college sports, the Hawkeye logo can be found on various athletics' merchandise for sale from the University of Iowa (USPTO, 2011: 13-14).

As the applicant, USM argued that although its color scheme was similar (black and gold), its mark was unique from those registered previously by the University of Iowa. The USM 2003 golden eagle head (see Figure I) was dissimilar in every way except color, and "color is not claimed in the registrations of record" (USPTO, 2011: 13). USM further maintained that its logo represented an actual eagle with a physiological appearance instead of an imagined stencil-like representation. USM contended, "...the respective marks create radically different commercial impressions" (USPTO, 2011: 29).

United States Patent and Trademark Office Decision
In 2011, the USPTO made its final ruling. In a 2-1 majority decision, the USPTO Trademark Trial and Appeal Board ruled in favor of the University of Iowa, citing "confusingly similar" marks, and there was a likelihood of confusion. Iowa's senior mark (see Figure IV) had been infringed upon as "…the overall similarity in appearance of the marks on the goods, particularly in light of the use of identical color schemes, creates virtually identical commercial impressions" (USPTO, 2011: 34). As the newcomer, USM had both the "opportunity and obligation" to avoid confusion as the senior mark (Iowa Hawkeye) is well known and recognized in the field (USPTO, 2011: 51). In an application of the DuPont Test, the three-judge panel discussed the following seven

factors: (1) likelihood of confusion; (2) renown of the prior mark; (3) relationship of the goods and services; (4) similarity of trade channels; (5) conditions of purchase; (6) similarity of the marks; and (7) number and nature of similar marks in use on similar goods (USPTO, 2011). Due to the likelihood of confusion, the University of Iowa's objection was sustained, and registration of USM's logo was prohibited under Section 2(d) of the Lanham Act (USPTO, 2011: 52):

> We find that the commercial impressions of the marks are essentially the same. Both parties' marks present the head of a bird of prey facing right, and oval in shape. Both contain identical colors. These images are very similar to each other in style and proportion. They both involve a bold profile image of the head of a large bird. That Southern Miss's eagle may be a bit more literal and fierce than Iowa's original Hawkeyes mark does not overcome the overall similarities. Furthermore, [USM]'s argument that its mark is more "complex" while [Iowa]'s marks are stencil-like does not persuade us that consumers will note the difference in the marketplace (USPTO, 2011: 32).

Figure IV
The University of Southern Mississippi and The University of Iowa Logos
(Eisenberg, 2011)

SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
(2003-Present)
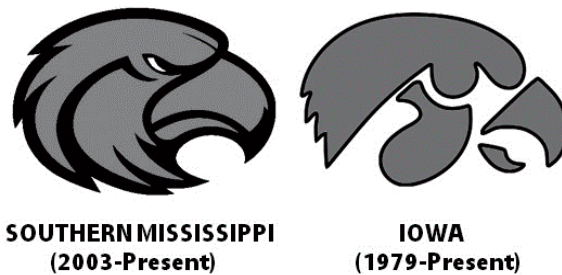
IOWA
(1979-Present)

At the very least, USPTO found that USM did not exercise care in the choice of this particular mark, and virtually ignored concerns and comments about how similar its new logo was to Iowa's marks (USPTO, 2011: 50). This approach to mark development is a far cry from the conventional wisdom that there is no excuse for even approaching the well-known trademark of a competitor (USPTO, 2011: 50). Accordingly, the applicant's standard of care in adopting this particular mark enters into the likelihood of confusion determination herein under the final DuPont factor, and it weighs against the applicant (USPTO, 2011: 50). It is well established that as a newcomer, the applicant had both the opportunity and the obligation to avoid confusion, and one who adopts a mark similar to the mark of another for related goods or services does so at his peril (USPTO, 2011: 50).

Although the University of Iowa (Iowa City, IA) and USM (Hattiesburg, MS) are separated by 824 miles, the USPTO Trademark Trial and Appeal Board determined

that they share the marketplace of NCAA Divison I college athletics merchandise sales in the current technologically enhanced society. USM did not adequately distinguish itself from the previously registered marks of the University of Iowa. Such distinctive factors may have included USM utilizing a different color scheme (<u>not</u> black and gold); a darker shade for the eagle head; an eagle head facing in the opposite direction (left as opposed to the right like Iowa's Hawkeye); and the inclusion of the words "Southern Miss" or "Golden Eagles" below the eagle head logo (USPTO, 2011). Any amalgamation of these differentiating approaches may have bolstered USM's case against Iowa's opposition to its mark:

> There were undoubtedly many ways in which USM could have modernized its primary logo without moving so close to the well-known Hawkeyes marks. For example, even the bird head designs within a composite mark containing the words 'Southern Miss' and 'Golden Eagles'… certainly would have lessened the points of similarity with Iowa's marks (USPTO, 2011: 49-50).

A court will often apply the "likelihood of confusion" test in a trademark infringement suit, an umbrella term for several federal circuits (Misterovich, 2018). Most courts use a group of similar factors to assess confusion and will analyze and weigh each factor to determine if a consumer, in the marketplace context, is likely to be confused by the two marks (Misterovich, 2018). For this reason, the trademark infringement test is highly fact-intensive, and each factor may be accorded different treatment depending on the case (Misterovich, 2018).

Several legal alternatives on both sides of the dispute were available to Southern Miss (Lawyers.com, 2011). On the one hand, USM officials could appeal the decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington, D.C. (*Sports Business Daily*, 2011). However, if Southern Miss appealed to higher courts, there could be further and more extensive damaging consequences. Iowa officials could file a trademark infringement suit against USM, which this hypothetical lawsuit could require USM to cease using the Golden Eagle logo and demand damages, which, under the Lanham Act, could include disgorgement of profits that USM has made from the use of its Golden Eagle logo on clothing and other merchandise (Lawyers.com, 2011). Therefore, a united university decision was made to not move forward on the appeals process.

The USPTO decision ultimately forced USM to begin a rebranding phase in 2011 to create a new logo approved by the USPTO and become a registered mark. Southern Miss Athletics incurred no expenses due to the lawsuit as all legal costs were incurred from university attorneys (B. Jones, personal communication, September 5, 2020). The authors submitted freedom of information (FOI) requests from both universities on litigation expenses in the lawsuit but with no responses.

USM Athletic Rebranding Initiatives

Bennett *et al.* (2019) noted that brands often need rebranding efforts as new competitors enter the category, as current competitors introduce new offerings, or as consumer perceptions and preferences change. Rebranding initiatives can be challenging for "mid-major" universities, as intercollegiate athletics are a critical component of campus life, generate vast exposure for the institution, and play a key role in marketing campaigns in higher education (Lee *et al.,* 2016). In order for USM "…to

achieve sustainable competitive advantage, (the) organization should have a product that is clearly distinguishable from their competitors" (Pinzon *et al.*, 2014: 263). The rebranding includes repositioning, but it also encompasses the act of modifying some, most, or all elements of a brand's identity (name, logo, symbols, etc.) and marketing communication platform (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006; Stuart and Muzellec, 2004; Zhao *et al.*, 2018). While the rebranding of the athletics logo was only initiated because of the USPTO mandate, it allowed USM to assess and make positive changes to its brand.

Ahn *et al.* (2012) mention logo design as a critical element of rebranding, and Smith and Ingram acknowledge that a "strong brand with a relevant identity to particular customers enhances the business' ability to attract customers and earn a profit" (2012: 41). These conclusions are reinforced by Watkins and Lee (2016), given the significant connection between an institution's branding and its marketing efforts. Relevant to the endeavors at USM, the mascot name and eagle head logo, referred to as "visual identity touchpoints," often serves as the image of the university and play a critical role in how internal/external stakeholders view the athletic teams and institution (Watkins and Lee, 2016).

Organizations must carefully consider the cost (time, money, and effort) in developing, designing, and promoting their logo. Although Ahn *et al.* (2012) did not mention a specific period, the research, development, and release of a rebranded logo can be a lengthy process. In the case of USM, the creation and unveiling of the new logo lasted nearly four years, spearheaded by Mr. Brent Jones, former Senior Associate Athletics Director of External Affairs. Numerous stakeholders, including USM, RARE Design, Learfield Licensing Partners, Butler Snow Law Firm, University of Iowa, US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), outside vendors, student/faculty/staff, and fans of USM athletics were included in this lengthy process.

The "identity" held by the Southern Miss fan base is reflected in its brand positioning statement, "Anyone. Anywhere. Anytime." To reaffirm a relevant identity, connected to the past, USM stakeholders were included in the logo selection process. During the selection process, the athletic department gathered feedback from stakeholders by creating a website for fans to express their opinions on two potential logos (see Figure V). The logos were similar in design but had minute differences. For distinguishing purposes, the logos were labeled as the "Dynamic Eye" and the "Traditional Eye." Former USM Athletic Director Bill McGillis stated, "It's a modification of the logo that maintains the character and integrity of the current eagle head logo, but moves it far enough away to be successfully trademarked, and avoid infringement on other institutions' marks" (*The Laurel Leader Call*, 2014).

Figure V
Southern Miss Logo options presented to fans as part of the selection process
(University of Southern Mississippi, 2015)

Southern Miss again utilized RARE Design and Richardson to create the new logo. According to Richardson, "The proposed logo is an evolution of the current Golden Eagle head and not a revolution. There is a significant amount of brand identity and equity in the current logo. The proposed logo pays tribute to the logos that came before it while setting the vision and path of the future of Southern Miss Athletics" (*The Laurel Leader Call*, 2014). Richardson stated, "The Southern Miss brand and identity has been one of the most exciting projects for me because it's one of the nearest and dearest. It's part of me and who I am. I have experienced it, learned from it and grown from it. And to be able to help bring that story to life is tremendous" (Coli, 2017). Richardson revealed, "We said it needed a little more aggressiveness. It needed a little more of that intensity that represents Southern Miss athletics. A little bit of that nasty bunch needs to come back into all that we are doing" (Burt, 2015). Richardson summarized the logo project, "To see this identity come to life, especially on game day when it's on the field or on the court and seeing it on the coaches and athletes and in the stands, that's when we really love what we do. When it's been built the right way and people see it and say, 'Yes, this represents what we're about.' Then we know we've done something right" (Barnett, 2015).

In less than ten days, over 40,000 people visited the website. Data collected from the webpage comprised over 2,500 comments indicating preference given to the "Traditional Eye" (57%) rather than the "Dynamic Eye" (33%), with the remaining ten percentages delegated to "other" (University of Southern Mississippi, 2015b). The data collection follows the conclusions of Ahn *et al*. (2012) to gauge and understand stakeholders' impressions of any visual changes. It also acts as proper brand management by gaining the customers' perspectives in hopes to persuade them to be an advocate for the team (Smith and Ingram, 2012).

Taking the USPTO decision into consideration, the 2015 rebranding campaign at USM presented an eagle head logo with distinct characteristics from the 2003 USM logo and the Hawkeye mark of the University of Iowa. The USM golden eagle logo's rebranding incorporates two-tone characteristics (black and yellow) and a darker shade of yellow compared to the University of Iowa and the 2003 USM logo. Additionally, golden eagle logo shape has changed to constitute a less ovular look (see Figure VI). USM filed for registration of its new mark with the USPTO and received word its trademark was approved on June 30, 2015, as the University of Iowa posted no objections to the new logo. Southern Miss Athletics spent $10,000 on the redesign, which

is extremely low due to the relationship with alumnus Richardson and RARE Design (B. Jones, personal communication, September 5, 2020).

Figure VI
2015 athletics logo of the University of Southern Mississippi
(University of Southern Mississippi, 2015)

On July 15, 2015, Southern Miss and McGillis officially unveiled, "…the successful completion of the trademarking and registering process for the new Southern Miss Golden Eagle logo" (Munz, 2015; Southern Miss Athletics, 2015). As Southern Miss completed its uncertain transition from an attacking eagle to the 2003 rounded eagle head to the "traditional eye" golden eagle head (Munz, 2015), the institution was able to state that it had a registered trademark – an "…approved and authorized new eagle head logo" (Southern Miss Athletics, 2016). McGillis called the alterations "an evolution, not a revolution." It's a modification of the logo that maintains the character and integrity of the current eagle head logo but moves it far enough away to be successfully trademarked and avoid infringement on other institutions's marks" (Munz, 2015). McGillis recognized the many hardworking groups contributing to the new logo, including university staff, legal firms, and RARE Design (Southern Miss Athletics, 2015).

Beyond the initial introduction, the 18-month rollout campaign to update new athletics logos across campus and in the community could begin in earnest – athletic facilities, uniforms, playing surfaces, sponsor signage, the student union, street signs, and athletics merchandise for fans. Overall, Southern Miss Athletics spent approximately $150,000 on rebranding items such as signage and business cards, etc. (B. Jones, personal communication, September 5, 2020). McGillis stated, "that within the next month the entire basketball court will be redone with a new design and the new eagle head "very, very prominently featured." He added that it will take months, maybe even years, to replace all the signage around campus and that the old eagle head may still live on in certain places, saying, "those things represent a heritage" (*The Natchez Democrat,* 2015). Costs for uniforms was unknown and minimal due to most teams attaining new uniforms almost every year (B. Jones, personal communication, September 5, 2020).

Cianfrone *et al.* (2013) state that increased merchandise sales and increased attendance are potential benefits of creating a new logo. According to Kathleen Hayman (personal communication, November 11, 2016), manager of the USM university bookstore, "a tremendous increase in merchandise sales has occurred since the new logo's release. To be fair, some of the increase in sales could be attributed to the football

team." The majority of fans have accepted and supported the logo in her opinion due to the subtle changes from the rounded eagle head.

Through its athletics rebranding campaign, USM hopes to convey institutional knowledge, history, and identity – the ultimate goal is for a new athletics brand to withstand the test of time (B. Jones, personal communication, September 5, 2020). An intercollegiate athletics program can enhance both brand recognition and exposure not only for athletics but also for the academic institution (Czekanski and Lee, 2017). The total cost for the entire rebrand process is unknown due to the cost of the city of Hattiesburg (example, street signs), university logos on signs, and logos on roads (B. Jones, personal communication, September 5, 2020). The lengthy rollout's voluntary nature was meant to be a clever total rebranding that would be participatory and tell the "story" of USM: "Anyone. Anywhere. Anytime." (Southern Miss Athletics, 2005). Furthermore, USM aimed to protect and enhance its reputation by ensuring that only licensed and approved products displaying University trademarks appear before the public through its new licensing program. The program enables the institution to share the benefits derived from the commercial use of these trademarks and outlines acceptable use of marks, colors, and names (Southern Miss Athletics, 2005). USM also developed an Athletics Brand Guideline establishing standards for which all apparel, athletic uniforms, and miscellaneous merchandise would adhere to going forward.

Conclusion

This real-life rebranding activity exhibited learning objectives by expanding anticipated familiarity, recognized comprehension, and their perceived ability to administer rebranding. This new learning project provides students with an experiential research experience akin to what they may encounter in an intercollegiate athletics setting. Additionally, the widespread acclaim of intercollegiate athletics offers a rebranding case inclined to attract broad interest.

This case study analysis of a trademark infringement case involving *The University of Iowa and The Board of Regents, State of Iowa v. The University of Southern Mississippi* presents an application of the rebranding theoretical framework to institutional athletics rebranding at USM. Due to the impending lawsuit from the University of Iowa, the University of Southern Mississippi gained an opportunity to rebrand its' athletics' logo. This case study allows sports marketers to examine a specific rebranding scenario at the NCAA Division I intercollegiate level and the subsequent trademark infringement implications, as well as an opportunity to review relevant rebranding research in the sport management literature that guided USM's mandated rebranding campaign. However, sports marketers must be careful not to oversimplify this successful case study to all situations in which rebranding is an option – specifically, practitioners and scholars should realize the generalizable limitations of this particular case study.

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Applying Persuasion Theory
to Sport Properties' Digital Media

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Abstract: This paper examines the increasingly critical research and practical topic of digital media strategy for sport properties through a detailed analysis of Cialdini's (2008) six principles of persuasion. Best-practice strategies from the communications and marketing industries are used to support theory from principles, and applied tactics are illustrated using select posts from the University of Southern California (USC) Athletics' official athletics and football Facebook page. Recommendations for future studies and sport property practices based upon both empirical literature and practical industry applications are also offered.
Keywords: Facebook, Social, Digital, Media, Marketing

Impacts of Technology on Consumers

From Facebook advertising to Google paid search results, consumers now experience increasingly personalized, data-driven exposure to advertisements, not to mention multiple device and distribution formats (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Ironically, social and digital media now have not only become driving forces behind

enhancing the ways in which live events are experienced, but also have served to fuel live-event ticket sales in the ongoing entertainment market (Kirby, 2016b).

Accordingly, marketing and media managers must not only consider the countless opportunities and threats that social media present, they must also learn to work within the ensuing respective shifts in loci of activity, power, and value, particularly the shift in the relative locus of power from firm to consumer (Berthon *et al.*, 2012). In his book about the embedding of hook cycles into habit-forming products, Eyal (2014) claims that effective action enticement is best understood through the psychological principle of *heuristics*, built by Tversky and Kahneman (1974) upon the work of Simon's (1957) concept of *bounded rationality*, and the Fogg Behavioral Model (Fogg, 2009), created to help design behavior change. Fogg's behavioral model (2009) suggests that the initiation of all behaviors requires three ingredients: sufficient *motivation*; the *ability* to complete the desired action; and the presence of a *trigger*. To increase the likelihood that a behavior will occur, Fogg (2009) maintains that designers should focus on simplicity as a function of the user's scarcest resource at that moment, i.e., designers should identify what the user currently lacks. Fogg (2009) also postulates that every behavior is driven by one of three core motives: seeking pleasure and avoiding pain; seeking hope and avoiding fear; and seeking social acceptance while avoiding social rejection.

Through various media, sport fans develop unique, engaging relationships with sport properties as the proliferation of new media technologies gains an increasingly important role in building communities among sport fans and audiences across local, national, and global contexts, as well as contributing to new relationships between corporations, action sporting bodies, and communities (Thorpe, 2017). Although burgeoning in recent years, research on sport fan engagement remains limited in relation to social media (Vale and Fernandes, 2018). Simultaneously, many marketing/media practitioners who oversee social media operations for sport properties employ few systematic, strategic approaches and thereby fail to develop their media's hook cycle for sustainable, profitable markets (Newman *et al.*, 2013).

The concept of strategic persuasion via technology informs this paper's examination of Cialdini's (2008) principles as applied to digital media, which include a detailed analysis of Persuasion Theory and its application to digital media marketing strategies. Cialdini's (2008) theoretical model will be supported by tactical communications and marketing principles from likability and social validation, and it will be illustrated using posts from the University of Southern California (USC) Athletics official athletics/football Facebook page.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Berthon *et al.* (2012) maintain that the 21st century has created both opportunities and challenges for marketing managers in a dynamic and interconnected international environment. Marketers operate with ever-increasing amounts of data, channels, types and formats of advertising assets, and digital spaces to communicate with consumers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). For consumers, sweeping changes over the last two decades in media devices and distribution have generated enormous amounts of data that impact many aspects of their lives, including personalized exposure to marketing communications (Hendricks and Shelton, 2016; Kotler and Armstrong, 2018).

The Need for Strategic Approaches to Digital Media

To successfully reach these consumers, organizations must skillfully select ideal target markets and determine which digital channels to utilize and which products to offer (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Another challenge for organizations is to cut through the amplified voices from so many democratized digital platforms to reach consumers (Hendricks and Shelton, 2016). This horizontal communications distribution collides with vertical, top-down communications from traditional institutions (including businesses), causing people to inform themselves with their own social contacts (Benkler, 2006). According to Hendricks and Shelton (2016), such collision places pressure on marketers to inform and entertain, thereby creating value for users, which captures and (more importantly) retains their attention. The challenge is magnified when realizing that users decide within ten seconds whether to leave a piece of content, particularly within social media (Eyal, 2014; Hendricks and Shelton, 2016).

Fournier and Avery (2011) claim that organizations too often tactically rush into social media, viewing them as panaceas for traditional brand-building strategies. However, as more marketing activity moves to the digital landscape, marketers are faced with the stark realization that social media were designed for people, not for organizations (Fournier and Avery, 2011). Further, as organizations cultivate social media strategies, specific platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are frequently treated as stand-alone elements rather than parts of an integrated marketing system (Hanna *et al*., 2011).

Despite such fragmentation and pressures, organizations can utilize digital/ micromedia marketing programs and campaigns to effectively reach consumers with highly targeted forms of outreach (Hanna *et al*., 2011). Accordingly, marketers must not only consider the countless opportunities and threats of social media, they must also learn to work within the ensuing shifts of activity, power, and value, particularly the shift in power from organization to consumer (Berthon *et al*., 2012). Modern marketers are thus susceptible to consumers who now directly control powers of networks and influence offered by contemporary media (Berthon *et al*., 2012). Accordingly, Berthon *et al*. (2012) maintain that marketers' main customer-outreach goal has shifted from *telling* to *enticing*, which requires a keen understanding of digital media's *social* elements, the dynamics of networks, the power of the collective, and the wisdom/folly of crowds.

Such a marketing and media communications approach is also vital for sport properties (Newman *et al*., 2013). According to Mullin *et al*. (2014), consistent, marketing-minded leadership driven by a vision and a strategic plan is absolutely necessary in the highly competitive sport industry, where live events are often the core product and a lack of calculated marketing multiplies odds of failure. Mullin *et al*. (2014) also stress that sport properties must combine big-picture, strategic thinking with tactical, detail-oriented execution to achieve marketing success. Thompson *et al*. (2014) further add that a sport property's digital strategy should function as an integral part of its communications and marketing plan. Mullin *et al*. (2014) acknowledge that most sport marketers share this mindset but often miss the mark when determining what fans want and will consume, instead defaulting to *telling* ("build-it-and-hope-they-will-come") rather than *persuading*.

The Three Parts of the Modern Media Landscape

Hendricks and Shelton (2016) identify three categories in the modern media landscape:

- *Earned media*: any channel(s) owned by another entity that creates controlled opportunities for exposure by allowing guests to utilize their platform(s) (e.g., interviews, podcasts, etc.), thereby at least indirectly endorsing guests' content
- *Rented media*: a presence and content controlled by the user but that live on a platform(s) owned by another entity (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- *Owned media*: any channel(s) that are fully possessed and completely controlled by the content producer (e.g., websites, blogs, email lists, etc.) and which are ideally fed organically by the calls-to-action on earned and rented media channels

Hendricks and Shelton (2016) contend that each media type is important and should be utilized as part of an integrated communications strategy. They emphasize these principles:

- Earned media can be challenging to obtain, since access to it rests with gatekeepers who constantly receive requests for access and ultimately control many message deliverables.
- Owned media serves as a place to fully and directly connect with audiences, but it requires time to grow substantially and must be carefully managed and monitored.
- Rented media often becomes the place where communications/marketing succeeds or fails. Its activity must be gauged carefully with big data surrounding its platforms, and outreaches from users/followers must be examined for relationships to be created or built. Further knowledge about the nature of each medium must be understood and practiced for each medium to be a relationship-starter or a relationship-sustainer and have an ultimate goal of persuading users to move from rented platforms to owned platforms.

THE SCIENTIFIC THEORY OF PERSUASION

In light of Hendricks and Shelton's (2016) contention that two of the three types of media (earned and rented) should ultimately funnel users to owned media, logic dictates that such flow must be strategically designed with theoretical support. One principle for designing successful strategic media flow is the science of *influence* or *persuasion*. The recognized seminal work in this science is *Influence: Science and Practice*, originally published in 1984 by Dr. Robert Cialdini, frequently regarded as "the Godfather of Influence" (Influence At Work, n.d.). Originally published in 1984 and currently in its fifth edition (2008), *Influence* earned a listing on *Harvard Business Review's* "Breakthrough Ideas for Today's Business Agenda" and on the best-seller lists of *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*. *Fortune Magazine* lists *Influence* in its "75 Smartest Business Books," while *CEO Read* lists *Influence* in its "100 Best Business Books of All Time."

The six principles of persuasion outlined by Cialdini (2008) impact both researchers and practitioners alike. One specific area of study and practice covers the application of influence principles to digital contexts, particularly in text-based interactions in which communicators are distant from intended target(s) of influence (Guadagno et al., 2013).

In 2005, Guadagno and Cialdini found only three of the six influence principles had been examined in online contexts (i.e., without a face-to-face condition), and results produced contradictory findings. Guadagno *et al*. (2013) later found a dearth of research examining the effectiveness of influence principles in online settings, which prompted them to study likability and social validation (social proof) in an online context. Results revealed social validation affected compliance, but communicator-liking did not. Guadagno *et al*. (2013) acknowledged that one chief limitation of studies on influence in online contexts is the lack of generalizability of results to social media, since prior studies primarily utilized text-based, computer-mediated communication in the methodologies. Guadagno *et al*. concluded, "It is an open empirical question as to whether these results would generalize to other more interactive online technologies such as Facebook" (2013: 58), calling for further research utilizing social networking sites.

AN ANALYSIS OF PERSUASION APPLICATION

This paper will present a detailed analysis of Cialdini's (2008) Persuasion Theory and its applicability to digital media marketing strategies. Theoretical underpinnings of Cialdini's theoretical model will be supported by strategic suggestions from practicing experts in communications and marketing who utilize the principles of likability and social validation, and it will be illustrated using posts from the University of Southern California (USC) Athletics official athletics/football Facebook page. After detailed examinations of the Facebook pages of several dozen major intercollegiate and professional American sport properties, researchers utilized this particular property's Facebook page for the current study because it emerged as the only one found to have utilized each of Cialdini's (2008) six persuasion principles. Posts from the years 2017 and 2018 constitute this analysis, and researchers needed that two-year period to obtain examples from all six of Cialdini's (2008) principles.

The Principle of Liking
"People prefer to say yes to those that they like" (Influence At Work, 2018).
　　Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Liking is based on the idea that people like and comply with others who like them, and they more readily identify with others when discovering similarities between themselves and others. Compliance professionals directly employ the strategy of getting people to like them and forming social bonds of friendship before attempting to gain assent (Cialdini, 2008). Opening this door to assent can also lead to referrals to friends of those friends, which can be replicated in "an endless chain" (Cialdini, 2016: 169). This principle also causes people to actively separate themselves from negative circumstances, events, or people, and Cialdini (2008) cites the widely studied phenomena of BIRGing (basking in reflected glory) and CORFing (casting off reflected failure) of sports fans to illustrate these points, which he pioneered (Cialdini *et al*., 1976).
　　Categories of similarity upon which such bonds are formed (Cialdini, 2008) include:
- *Physical attractiveness*, i.e., the appeal of a person's outward appearance creates a halo effect from that one known positive personal trait which causes affixation; other favorable traits (e.g., talent, kindness, honesty, and intelligence) are subsequently assigned

- *Similarity*, i.e., shared appearances, opinions, personality traits, backgrounds, body language, and/or lifestyles create bonds and positive compliance results
- *Compliments*, i.e., positive estimations, terms of flattery, or claims of affinity
- *Contact and cooperation*, i.e., favorable responses to familiar and frequently contacted elements create conjoined efforts
- *Conditioning and association*, i.e., influencing perceptions of people, places, things, and circumstances based on associations with other elements, positive or negative

Expressing and acknowledging shared similarities creates greater levels of interpersonal comfort and community, which can easily be established on social media sites (Kerpen, 2011; Schaefer, 2014). Hardly a better illustration of Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Liking and at least four of its elements can be seen within the very principle that Facebook uses for its company logo: an action called *liking*, whereby Facebook page owners can create their own online communities by having users express interest/admiration for the page, symbolized by a thumbs-up logo (Frier, 2016). When a person *likes* a Facebook page, s/he expresses a common interest with all other users who also *like* the page and establishes a place within that community (Schaefer, 2014). Facebook's 1.6 billion users *like* content more than 6 billion times a day, which amounts to more than daily Google searches and affects billions of advertising dollars each quarter (Frier, 2016). Widely considered the foremost driver of social activity, these *Likes* alert Facebook to its most popular content and thus drives the content most often shown on users' News Feeds (Frier, 2016). "The value it has generated for Facebook is priceless," stated Brian Blau, an analyst at Gartner, Inc., a technology research firm (Frier, 2016).

This action and medium not only create an instant sense of community when users *like* content, they also provide a self-identified audience of potential customers and gives them a comfortable place to express their opinions about a sport property (Frier, 2016; Newman *et al.*, 2013; Schaefer, 2014). Frier (2016) also labels the *Like* as "a way of creating a connection, even if it's superficial" (para. 32). In 2016, Facebook expanded Facebook users' response options beyond one (*Like*) to six after Facebook researchers compiled and categorized users' most frequent responses to posts. After consulting with sociologists about the range of human emotions, they evolved those categories into six common responses, which Facebook calls *Reactions*: *Like*, *Love*, *Haha*, *Sad*, *Wow*, and *Angry* (King, 2016).

Certain illustrations of the theoretical and functional points of Cialdini's Principle of Liking (2008) can be seen in Figure I, which shows a Facebook post featuring a 1:10 video with Angela Helton, wife of USC head football coach Clay Helton. In the video, Mrs. Helton describes her battle with breast cancer and encourages women to seek mammograms for early detection. This post illustrates the Cialdini (2008) *Liking* principle concept of *conditioning and association*, because it creates a relatable connection to a visible figure of the USC football program based on a commonly known and confronted disease (a negative), as well as hope for survival via early detection (a positive).

Figure I

Facebook post with a video of Angela Helton, wife of USC Head Football coach Todd Helton, discussing her battle with breast cancer and encouraging mammogram testing (mobile version).
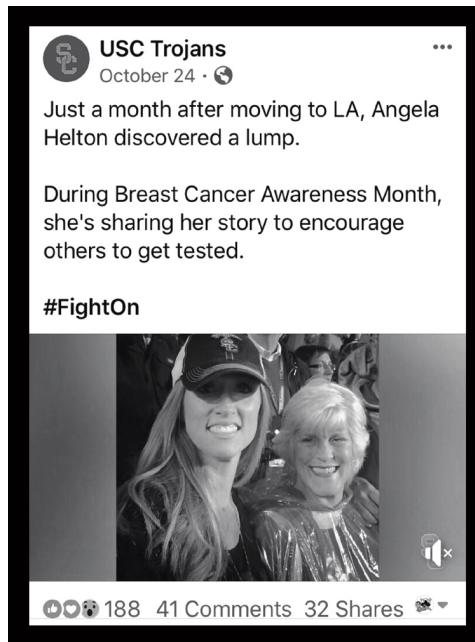
The Principle of Reciprocity

"People are obliged to give back to others in the form of a behavior, gift, or service that they have received first" (Influence At Work, 2018).

Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Reciprocity postulates that people repay in kind what others provide to them and feel obligated to repay favors, gifts, invitations, etc., creating clusters of cooperative, interdependent units. Compliance professionals directly employ this strategy with the free-sample approach, allowing users to not only experience the product to determine if/how well they like it, but also to present the item as a gift, thus triggering reciprocate possibilities (even if the item was unwanted) and doubling chances of receiving something in return, even to the point of unfair reciprocation (Cialdini, 2008). Compliance also can be achieved through concessions, i.e., lowering the level of the initial request to something of a smaller, less significant nature (Cialdini, 2008).

The principle of reciprocity drives at least one major philosophy of modern marketing. Kerpen (2011) maintains that social media sharing (particularly on Facebook) is a highly effective way to create *word-of-mouth marketing*, a.k.a. *buzz marketing*, the highly-valued-yet-enigmatic promotional strategy characterized by Ben Yahia *et al.* (2012). Similarly, Hughes' (2008) research identifies six conversation-starter categories that he labeled as *the six buttons of buzz*, which create awareness, drive traffic, and increase sales and profits:

1. *Taboo*, i.e., topics that are edgy or controversial
2. *The Unusual*, i.e., topics that are unique, distinctive, or outstanding
3. *The Remarkable*, i.e., something done very well/at an extremely high level of quality
4. *The Outrageous*
5. *The Hilarious*
6. *Secrets*, i.e., those kept and/or those revealed

Kerpen (2011) states that buzz-marketing strategy is best facilitated by identifying organizational aspects worthy of discussion, identifying which customers are most passionate about the organization, then giving those customers tools and opportunities to share their stories. Schaefer (2014) asserts that a series of small, meaningful provocations can engender greater numbers of customer connections and increased loyalty levels when conducting business via social media. The primary tools for this, Kerpen (2011) says, are recognition and encouragement, but contests, promotions, and giveaways can also help, along with occasional offline interactions.

As with the Principle of Liking, the medium of Facebook is optimally and inherently primed to utilize the Principle of Reciprocation for sport properties in numerous ways. Along with the previously discussed six Reactions, after each post, Facebook immediately offers users options to leave written comments and to share the post to their own timelines (with the poster's permission). Facebook also displays the total of each kind of Reaction generated, along with comments, and the number of post shares, as seen at the bottom of the post in Figure III.

Sport properties can strategically utilize these Facebook features to generate buzz marketing through techniques such as *ask-to-share*, in which properties appeal to users to utilize the *Share* function to spread the post to their individual pages to be seen by their friends; and *share-to-win* or comment-to-win, in which properties incentivize followers to share the post or leave comments about the post by rewarding them with incentives. Anecdotal evidence exists that qualified Facebook-sharing as a powerful buzz-creator for sport properties. Lisa Bregman, digital and social marketing manager at Wasserman Media Group, says that the videos her team posts on Facebook receive three to ten times the views than when the videos are posted on YouTube, driven largely by the snowball effect from sharing (Nakashima, 2015).

Figure II shows a post that invited followers to guess the name of USC wide receiver Michael Pittman, Jr.'s dog from one of three options. Commenting followers with the correct answer were entered into a drawing for two free tickets to USC's upcoming game with Arizona State University. This post illustrates Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Reciprocity by offering the possibility of major reciprocation (i.e., two free football tickets) for a small action (i.e., comment/guess), as well as Hughes' (2008) buzz buttons of *unusual* (i.e., such content is an anomaly on the USC Trojans Facebook page) and *secret* (i.e., the dog's name can be guessed for a chance to win tickets).

Figure II
A comment-to-win Facebook post inviting USC Trojans followers to guess the name of a player's dog for a chance to win two free football game tickets (mobile version).
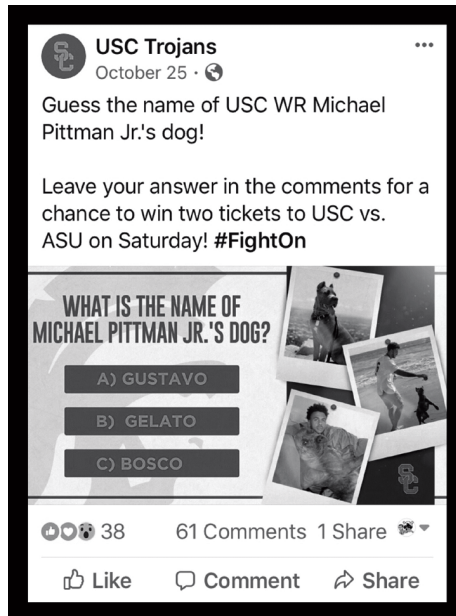
The Principle of Authority

"People will follow the lead of credible, knowledgeable experts" (Influence At Work, 2018).

Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Authority postulates that pressure from an authority can exert strong influence on human behaviors, even to points of frightening levels of compliance. Such a phenomenon is discovered from childhood when advice taken from authorities (e.g., parents and teachers) proves consistently beneficial and rewarding (Cialdini, 2008). With such discovery comes a greater tendency toward blind obedience and automatic actions when apparently-legitimate authority figures provide directives (Cialdini, 2008).

Cialdini's (2008) authority principle can be directly applied to digital media marketing. According to Schaefer (2014), social media users look for clues in their external environments to help them make decisions. The information need not necessarily be true or accurate; it must simply provide an effective impression of authority, which gives brands many reasons to have a strong social media presence (Schaefer, 2014). Another important reason for creating authoritative social media content geared to clue-seeking digital media users is what Kotler and Armstrong (2018) call *ad blindness,* an outcome of technology-driven marketing. As consumers are exposed to more and more sponsored content, their ability to ignore marketing materials (particularly online) has substantially grown, and they have developed the capacity to consciously and subconsciously ignore sponsored ad content (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018).

As a singular communications medium and the largest media entity in history, Facebook has evolved into a multimedia-capable platform upon which a variety of content can be created, propagated, and shared in many forms (Newman *et al.*, 2013; Schaefer, 2014). Clearly, with such a plethora of options and the importance of Facebook as a lifestyle medium, sport properties must adopt the strategic mindset of a marketing and media production business to craft perceptions of them as credible authorities (Kerpen, 2011; Schaefer, 2014). For a sport property, such content could include media that promote the authority of players/coaches, particularly ones with demonstrated experience, honors, accomplishments, and successes. Authority can also be built for a property by showcasing its venue(s), as well as event highlights.

Once distinctive/unique authoritative features of the sport property are identified, they must be strategically shaped into actual content for the property's digital media. Such an approach can be made from several angles, including language and trust development. Regarding language, Lee and Kahle (2016) advocate careful use of linguistics in a property's digital media, because language conveys vital values and emotions that deliver marketing information. Results from a census sample of 114 professional sport teams' Facebook pages by Pronschinske *et al.* (2012) indicate that page attributes which signal authenticity and user engagement help create and maintain a strong Facebook user base. Regarding trust, Bergström and Bäckman (2013) and Motameni and Nordstrom (2014) contend that organizations that build successful online communities create stronger customer trust, which will create one or both of two scenarios: people with existing higher degrees of trust in an organization are more likely to interact with that organization; and/or interaction with an organization will lead to higher degrees of trust and more intimate relationships. In strong media communities, customers feel a greater sense of belonging and will demonstrate greater brand loyalty (Bergström and Bäckman, 2013).

An example of a strategic, engaging Facebook page content can be seen in Figure III, a post congratulating former USC Head Football Coach Pete Carroll on becoming the winningest head football coach in the history of the National Football League's (NFL) Seattle Seahawks franchise. Carroll is only one of three coaches in football history to have won both a Super Bowl (2013-14) and a college football national championship (2003 and 2004) (Willis, 2014).

Figure III
A USC Trojans Facebook post congratulating former USC Head Football Coach Pete Carroll on a milestone win with the Seattle Seahawks (mobile version).

The Principle of Consistency

"People like to be consistent with things they've previously said or done" ("Influence At Work," 2018).

Building upon cornerstone compliance literature from Freedman and Fraser (1966) on the likelihood that individuals would comply with larger requests after agreeing to smaller requests to retain a consistent image, Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Consistency postulates that commitments made in active, voluntary, and/or public ways are more likely to direct future behavior. Influenced by personal and interpersonal pressures, humans have strong desires to be and appear to be consistent with their previous actions and behaviors, as well as to respond in ways that justify their previous decisions (Cialdini, 2008). Thus, Cialdini (2008) says, this drive constitutes a potent weapon of social influence.

The primary persuasion key to developing consistency is generating commitment, beginning with smaller commitments, then building up to larger ones (Cialdini, 2008). A second key is the publicity surrounding such commitments. Whenever one takes a stand that others see, a drive arises to maintain that stand for consistency purposes (Cialdini, 2008). Written public commitments are generally the most effective kind, since they connect to a third persuasion key of commitment: the more effort invested into a commitment, the greater influence exerted on the person making it (Cialdini, 2008). A fourth persuasion key, which Cialdini (2008) labels as more important than the other three combined, involves creating stronger commitment by making it appear to be self-

initiated and free from strong, external pressures, thereby creating a feeling of responsibility (and thus commitment) for the choice.

Building upon the *Like* feature as a smaller-scaled commitment, a Facebook feature that could help sport properties build commitment (particularly to event attendance) is the Create Event tool. Sport properties can create these Events for games, promotional events, broadcasts, etc., and they will be shown in the Facebook timelines of users who have liked the property's page; they can also be found under the "Events" header on the property's main page (see Figure VI) (Facebook, n.d. a). Basic event information (day, date, time, place, etc.) is included, along with a photo, description, details, keywords, links to further information, and a link to ticket-purchasing (Facebook, n.d. a). Also included is a moderated discussion board for user comments and an option to add event co-hosts (Facebook, n.d. a). Events can be market-targeted and boosted with advertising premiums paid to Facebook Ad Manager, and (if applicable) tickets can be sold directly through Facebook or through an existing ticketing partner, e.g., Ticketmaster, Eventbrite, Ticketfly, Spectra, etc. (Facebook, n.d. a). At the bottom of an event post, Facebook will include other similar events that may appeal to the user, thereby expanding an event post's reach even further (Facebook, n.d. a). Many of these features can be seen in Figure IV.

But perhaps the most important three features of Facebook Events (also seen in Figure IV) include the option for users to mark their status for the event as "Interested" or "Going," as well as options to share the event with other Facebook users and/or to other digital media, thereby utilizing virtually every aspect of Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Commitment and Consistency, since these actions can be seen in the Facebook timelines of their friends (Facebook, n.d. a).

Regarding the principle of Consistency, Kerpen (2011) advises marketers to closely examine all available inventory, assets, time, and space available to be promoted inside the Facebook medium, thereby inviting customers to join the conversation while sharing value propositions for liking the organization's page and following it. This becomes critically important for creating engagement opportunities through Facebook Events that will foster commitments to attend and facilitate the ease of ticket sales and other purchases. Kerpen (2011) adds that if an organization can do little things for its social media audience that surprise and delight them, that provide unexpected value, or that cause them to simply smile, the organization will stand out, be remembered, and win the community's business (related to the Principle of Authority as discussed in a previous section). For sport properties, such delights would greatly precipitate and facilitate the likelihood of Facebook Event interest, attendance, and sharing, as well as streamlining any applicable ticket purchase process.

Figure IV
Details of the individual event posting on the USC Trojans Facebook page for the USC versus Cal football game (mobile version).
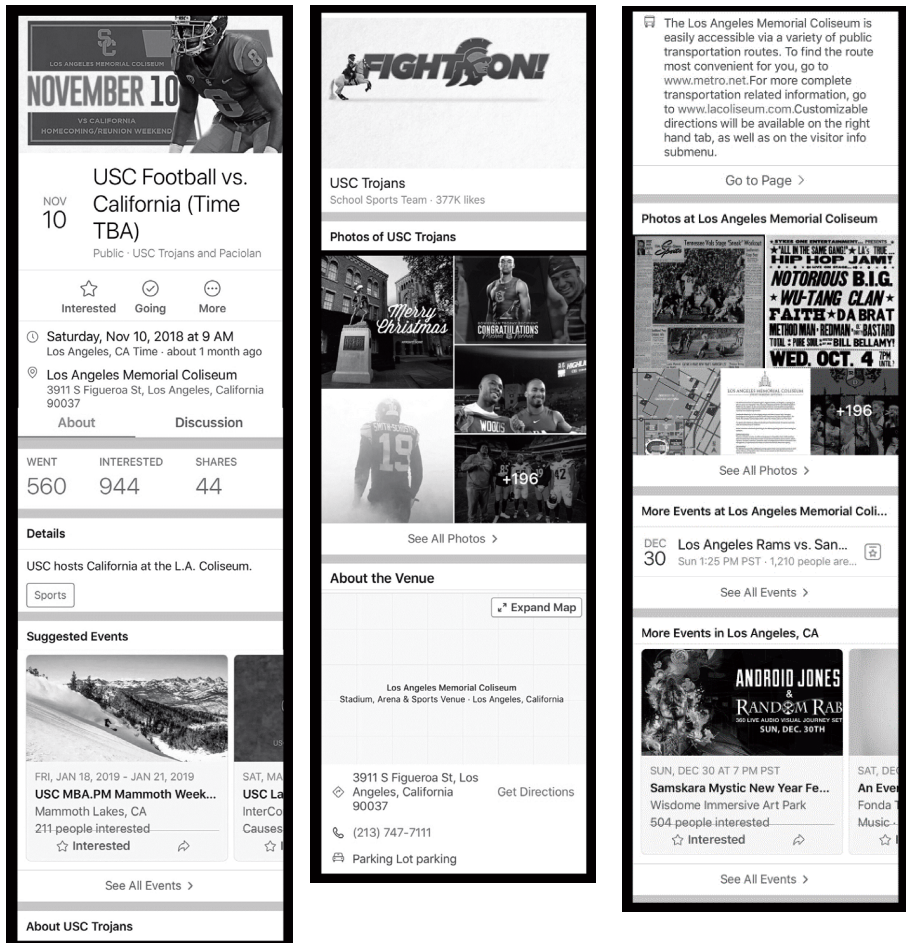
The Principle of Consensus

"Especially when they are uncertain, people will look to the actions and behaviors of others to determine their own" (Influence At Work, 2018).

Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Consensus (also known as the Principle of Social Proof) asserts that people seek to determine what other people think is correct when trying to determine correctness, because humans tend to perceive an action as more appropriate for themselves when others do it. Such judgment becomes a convenient shortcut—called a *heuristic* by Tversky and Kahneman (1974), Eyal (2014), and

Rothschild (2014)—for determining behavior; is multiplied by other similarly minded people; and provides strength, courage, and higher commitment levels (Cialdini, 2008). Cialdini (2008) states that this principle logically operates more powerfully when observing similar individuals more so than when observing dissimilar ones.

Many Facebook features could be cited to demonstrate the Principle of Social Proof (Cialdini, 2008), but three features illustrate it especially well for the purposes of sport property marketing: Check In, Nearby Places, and Tag-a-friend. When creating a post or when interacting with a posted Event (as described in the previous section), users can register their presence at a specific place through Facebook's Check In feature. This process adds geographical data to the post (Facebook, n.d. d; Samsung, 2017). At that time, Facebook friends of the checked-in user can then see the check-in within their timelines, as well as later when they check into places where their friends previously checked in. Closely related to this feature is Nearby Places feature, a portion of the app-based version of Facebook that offers suggestions on places to go when in a certain area. Such recommendations are based on things such as friends' recommendations, check-ins, and likes. (Facebook, n.d. e).

Much like tagging their locations in their posts, Facebook users can also tag friends in their status updates and posts using the Tag People function, which allows them to identify and reference other users (including sport properties and other such commercial or public entities) in photos, videos, and comments (Chan, 2009). When a user tags a friend in her/his status updates, any user who sees that update can visit the tagged friend's profile. The initial user's status update may also show up on that friend's timeline, and the friend will be notified. Also, when a user is tagged in a post, that post could be visible to certain audiences selected by the posting user, as well as friends of the tagged person. Multiple people can be tagged in one post (Facebook, n.d. f). Clearly, the networking effect of the Tag Friends function serves as a highly effective and efficient method to associate various people and groups via Facebook posts, thereby opening many strategic possibilities for property marketers.

Paralleling Cialdini's (2008) Consensus principle, Kerpen (2011) explains the critical importance of Facebook and other social media marketing by asserting that people both consciously and unconsciously follow the lead of others like themselves. Kerpen (2011) illustrates this principle with assorted strategic business examples both outside and inside of social media: e.g., diners choosing crowded restaurants over empty ones; organizations citing quantities of products sold/customers served; and case studies, third-party reviews, etc., as forms of offline social proof. Kerpen conclusively underscores the importance of social proof on Facebook by adding, "Is there any sales or promotional content anywhere on the Web more valuable than the honest words, 'Your friend likes this'?" (2011: 170).

Figure V shows the portion of a Facebook Event that facilitates consensus by showing interactive options for Check In and ways to express interest in attendance (highlighted in Part A, which includes total users expressing interest in attending and which friends are attending); sharing options (highlighted in Part B); and other event-related options (highlighted in Part C). (Note: this figure was taken from another sport property's active event, since the USC Trojans football team did not have any more active or upcoming events for the 2018 season.)

Figure V
Consensus-related options available to users when visiting a sport property's Facebook page, as demonstrated using an Event listing (mobile version). Some personal user information has been concealed for privacy reasons.
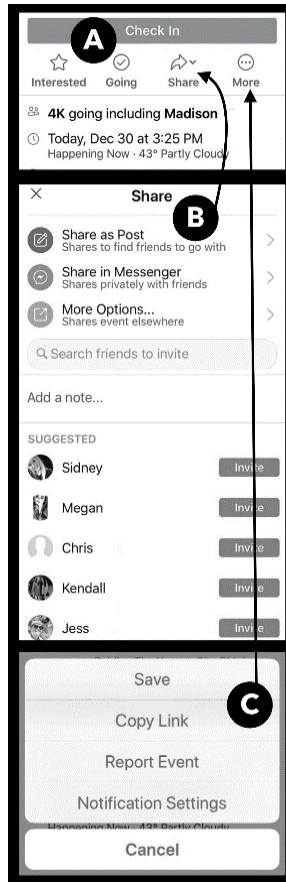
The Principle of Scarcity
"People want more of those things they can have less of" (Influence At Work, 2018).

Cialdini's (2008) Principle of Scarcity proposes that humans value opportunities more when those opportunities exhibit some form of limitation. The notion of potential loss plays a great role in human decision-making; in fact, people may be more motivated by the fear of loss than the potential of gain (Cialdini, 2008). As a rule, if an item is rare or is becoming rare, its perceived value increases in the minds of humans (Cialdini, 2008). Compliance professionals can employ wide-ranging, systematic, and diverse tactics to create scarcity, e.g., limited-number offers, deadlines, and on-the-spot purchases (Cialdini, 2008).

Although several specific Facebook features could be used by properties to create scarcity, two emerge as particularly effective approaches: paid advertising using Facebook Ads, and Facebook Live. In 2012, Facebook intentionally created decline in organic reach of Facebook posts from corporate pages. Manson (2014) states that Facebook's content display algorithm began to limit organic reach of brand pages' content to about 16 percent in 2012, before another round of changes reduced it even more in December 2013. By February 2014, organic reach by brand pages held steady at 6 percent, a decline of 49 percent from peak levels in October 2013 (Manson, 2014). For large pages with more than 500,000 Likes, organic reach hit two percent in February 2014, and Facebook sources were unofficially advising page managers to expect it to approach zero in the future (Manson, 2014). Schaefer (2014) says that because of this algorithm, less than one-fifth of a brand page's Facebook followers will see a typical post.

To counter such decline, brand publishers can utilize Facebook Ads, which boosts the exposure of posts and can highly stratify audience exposure to those posts based on detailed demographics, psychographics, or contact information (Facebook, n.d. b). Facebook also provides brand publishers with various ad formats that can be visually customized by device and connection speed (Facebook, n.d. b). Brand publishers are also furnished with detailed ad reporting tools that record how ads performed with Facebook audiences and how the ads impacted the brand's business (Facebook, n.d. b).

Another Facebook tool that event marketers can use to create scarcity is Facebook Live, which streams video broadcasts to page followers, who can receive notices when a live broadcast begins, respond using one or more of the six Reactions, and leave comments, thus creating dialog opportunities between broadcasters and audiences (Facebook, n.d. c). When the live broadcast is finished, its video can be published to a page for later viewing, if desired (Facebook, n.d. c).

The Principle of Scarcity can easily be utilized by sport property marketers, particularly for event tickets, because a finite number of event tickets exists to sell (Supovitz and Goldwater, 2013). Kerpen (2011) praises the power of social media to catalyze rapid sales transactions: "When you have a limited supply of inventory and need to sell it quickly at a discount, there is no faster or more efficient way to do so than through social media," citing airlines, hotels, and theatres as examples of industries that benefit greatly from this practice. Concurringly, Newman *et al*. (2013) contend that when a sport property uses social media to share benefits exclusively available to followers for a short time, this tactic creates a greater likelihood of response. By providing specific/limited sales, discounts, and/or promotions, customers may feel compelled to seize the opportunity, particularly if rewards are limited (Kerpen, 2011; Newman *et al*., 2013).

As with other Cialdini (2008) principles, many options exist for event marketers to utilize the Facebook platform to create Scarcity. An example is seen in Figure VI, which shows a Facebook post featuring a visually stimulating graphic of then-USC linebacker Uchenna Nwosu and alumnus running back LenDale White. The post promotes an exclusive social media presale of tickets to a home football game against the University of Texas and includes a link to a webpage for purchasing tickets.

Figure VI
A post from the USC Trojans Facebook page, promoting a social media presale for a 2017 home football game against the University of Texas Longhorns.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article echoes Thompson *et al*.'s (2014) assertion that a sport organization's digital strategy is an integral part of its communication and marketing plan and provides a practical strategic framework. Sport organizations that effectively utilize digital assets as marketing communication tools to connect with stakeholders generally enjoy competitive brand advantages in a crowded marketplace (Hur *et al*., 2007; Pedersen *et al*., 2007; Thompson *et al*., 2014). Thus, digital marketing strategy becomes a vital theoretical and practical topic.

Academic Research
Many scholars argue that digital media has become such a prominent business initiative for sport organizations that researchers and practitioners should devote great attention to this under-researched, poorly understood subject (Ballouli and Hutchinson, 2010; O'Shea and Alonso, 2011). This article advances empirical research and highlights the need for further academic inquiry into organizational digital marketing practices in the sport marketplace. It may serve as a primitive initial step in examining the "open

empirical question" posed by Guadagno *et al.* as to whether results of a study involving website content "were generalizable to other, more interactive online technologies such as Facebook" (2013: 58) and answers their call in a basic way for future research on influence in social networking settings. Additionally, the fact that researchers combed through dozens of major-college and professional American sport property Facebook pages before discovering one with content covering all six of Cialdini's (2008) principles, along with the need to examine that page for a two-year period to find use of all six principles, further underscores the need to propagate awareness of these principles for professional practice in the sport industry. Though, indeed a limitation of the study, this fact also points to a clear opportunity for further research.

This article also takes an initial step in filling a research void in relationship marketing within a sport context, per calls from McCarthy *et al.* (2011), Stavros *et al.* (2008), and Thompson *et al.* (2014). Several scholars (O'Shea and Alonso, 2011; Thompson *et al.*, 2014; Williams and Chinn, 2010; and Yin, 2003) further indicate that limited research exists regarding digital media strategies of professional sport organizations' responses to media developments, which this article addresses. This article also extends research in sport organizational communication strategy at the property level, per Thompson *et al.* (2014). Since the Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model was developed by practitioners, further empirical testing and refining of the model might prove beneficial. Future analyses may also examine social media other than Facebook to determine if/how effectively Cialdini's (2008) principles of persuasion can be utilized within them.

Recommendations for Practice

Sport properties must carefully consider and harness the strategic power of digital media. One of its important strengths within sport is its ability to lower barriers to fan access (Cova and Cova, 2002; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002; Pegoraro, 2010), thus aiding sport properties in accomplishing relationship-marketing goals involving brand-building and customer loyalty (Williams and Chinn, 2010). Therefore, sport properties should prominently factor in and utilize digital media to design, develop, implement, and measure relationship-marketing goals. Principles of persuasion should be prominently practiced during this sequence.

Per Hendricks and Shelton (2016), who advise organizations to utilize *earned* and *rented* media to steer users to *owned* media, sport properties can successfully harness digital media to create sales funnels for tickets, merchandise, sponsorships, etc. Modern event marketing practices now should include—even prioritize—use of digital media for ticket sales, which can serve as highly effective, efficient sales tools more so than the traditional, decreasingly effective dialing-for-dollars strategies of most sport property ticket sales departments (Kirby, 2016a; Kirby, 2016b). This article provides a clear tactical analysis of a framework that can utilize digital media to entice users for sales purposes of all kinds.

Sport properties must carefully monitor and evaluate their digital media along a number of fronts. First, they must construct a balanced approach in output quantity and quality by avoiding overwhelming amounts of content, as well as by avoiding content that constantly sells and seldom rewards users with information, entertainment, or inspiration. Second, sport properties must commit to a sustained presence across digital media with strategic planning, financial and managerial support, and data analysis.

Third, sport properties must harness both the unique elements of their brands and the unique elements of each digital medium, resisting the urge to take a one-size-fits-all approach. While these principles may seem obvious, Thompson *et al*. (2014) maintain that many sport properties could escalate and/or improve along these lines.

Finally, sport properties should prioritize steady (even constant) user engagement to fully maximize digital media channels. Thompson *et al*. (2014) found that promotions increased traffic outside competition periods and encouraged likes of the organization's Facebook page, thereby raising awareness and exposure levels, as suggested by Kerpen (2011). Thompson *et al*. (2014) also noted increased engagement from behind-the-scenes content. This article provides examples of several simple, concrete tactics to help accomplish this.

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Celebrating Together: Generational Cohort Differences in Game-Day Tailgating Rituals

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Abstract: Tailgating is an American football pregame activity prevalent on university grounds and surrounding areas. This research specifically investigates generational differences of game-day tailgating rituals at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) southeastern master level university. Survey data from 753 active tailgaters (Baby boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z) was analyzed using ANOVA procedures. Findings show that tailgaters are mostly motivated by team identification, followed by escape, and spending time with friends. However, generational differences are observed for spending time with family, identifying with the home team, and the desire to attend home games. In addition, in terms of game-day rituals, while the younger generations are more fluid/ nomadic in their tailgating locations and engage in drinking games, the older generations stick to the tried and true rituals such as setting up a tailgating spot decorated with team colors and cooking. Implications for teams, universities, and related community businesses are discussed.
Keywords: Tailgating rituals, cohort theory, U.S. collegiate football, motivating factors, consumer behavior, marketing communications strategy

Tailgating is an American pre-game ritual that takes place prior to college and professional sporting events, in particular American football games. It brings fans and spectators together as a temporary brand community that socializes and focuses around a particular team (Bradford and Sherry, 2017). Although some aspects of tailgating have been studied among American football fans (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; Gibson *et al.*, 2002) and Australian Football League fans (Neale *et al.*, 2008; McDonald and Karg, 2014), most articles have been exploratory in nature. The majority of studies have not focused on specific target markets or demographics that may be of interest for a team's fan management in terms of relationship marketing, or for universities in terms of targeting current students, alumni, and local residents by offering valuable game-day experiences. As fan bases of college football is quite age diverse, there is limited knowledge of younger versus older generations' tailgating rituals. In terms of rituals, most research has focused on interviewing highly dedicated tailgaters that have supported a team for multiple years. Collectively extant research has found community, pre- and post-game rituals, and team identification to be important aspects of tailgating (McDonald and Karg, 2014; Gibson *et al.*, 2002). Other motivating factors of interest are feelings of escape and elevated positive feelings (James *et al.,* 2001; Rode and Hardin, 2017). However, limited quantitative research confirm extant findings. Therefore, this study responds to a recent call for larger quantitative studies on tailgating rituals and direct comparisons of "new tailgaters who are younger in age (e.g., current college students) and older more experienced tailgaters" (Drenten *et al.,* 2009: 105). More specifically, this article aims to uncover important differences between generational cohorts' tailgating activities at a midsize southeastern U.S. state university. The literature review begins with an overview of generational cohort theory followed by tailgating rituals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohort Theory

Community and group belonging is prevalent in tailgating. Noble and Schewe (2003) define cohort theory as groupings distinguished through the experience of significant life events that shape behaviors and beliefs. These experiences can be shaped at both the macro level (major moments in history) and micro level (interaction with family and friends). However, this study uses Ryder's (1965: 845) definition of cohorts: "the aggregate of individuals (with some population definition) who experienced the same event within the same time interval." According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are four main generations in the United States: Millennials (Generation Y, about 79.4 million), which is slightly larger than the 75.5 million Baby Boomers (Boomers from here on) and Generation X (Gen X), which is considerably smaller at 65.72 million. Generation Z (Gen Z) is currently estimated at 73.6 million consumers.

Cohorts are important as cultural changes and major global events affect each generation during life stages and development (Parment, 2013). For example, cohorts exhibit differences in the way they view work-life balance and in consumption patterns (Parment, 2013). Boomers who were born between 1946 and 1964 in prosperous times, are now predominantly over the age of 60. They are generally wealthy, in good health, and view the world as improving over time (Wiedmer, 2015). Gen X (1965-1976) was the advent of the "latchkey kids" (Schroer, n.d.). They are generally more pragmatic, more engaged in planning, and assure that their children grow up with parentage.

Millennials (1977 to 1995) constitute the largest group since the Boomers (Wiedmer, 2015). They are more social, more confident, and many emphasize work-life balance (Wiedmer, 2015). They tend to be less independent, more socially conscious, and look for meanings in greater contexts. Finally, Gen Z (1996 to later) is the youngest generation, the Digital Natives, the plugged-in generation that is still being defined. As there is a dearth of literature on older versus younger tailgaters, rituals are reviewed from the perspectives of new versus experienced tailgaters.

Tailgating Rituals

A ritual is "a type of symbolic, expressive activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behavior is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity" (Rook, 1985: 251). Rituals are one of the oldest of human activities and provide identity and solidarity (Neale *et al.*, 2008). Some even posit that rituals are drivers of society and community (Driver, 1996). In a study of 32 American football fans who had consistently tailgated between 5 to 68 years (with an average of 19 years), Drenten *et al.* (2009) found that tailgaters strongly identified with specific rituals. However, the commitment to tailgating rituals differed among fans (Drenten *et al.,* 2009), just as their commitment to teams vary (Mullin *et al.*, 2000). For example, someone who is new to tailgating may just walk around, attend a few games, and not see it as a year-round activity contrary to more seasoned tailgaters (Drenten *et al.,* 2009).

Apter's (1982) reversal theory, used by Drenten *et al.* (2009), suggests that tailgaters' motivation is dual in mode, and sometimes the motivations are seemingly contradictory. The theory proposes that consumer motivation comprises two unique "arousal preference systems:" the *telic* (the pursuit of a goal) and the *paratelic* (where the motivation is towards the sensations obtained during the pursuit). Four basic motives with dualities in tailgating rituals have been identified: involvement (preparation and participation), social interaction (camaraderie and competition), inter-temporal sentiment (retrospection and prospection), and identity (collectivism and individualism) (Drenten *et al.*, 2009). While extant research has highlighted the importance of social interactions with friends, family, and other fans during tailgating rituals (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; James *et al.*, 2001), extant reports on generational differences are limited. An exception is Gibson *et al.*'s (2002) study, which included older University of Florida Gators' tailgating activities as a form of serious leisure activities that leads to collective identity. By interviewing fans with a mean fan duration of over 20 years, they found that tailgaters' family life cycle had a huge influence on their tailgating rituals. Depending on the family constellation, different tailgating activities were planned. These micro-level experiences during family tailgating events shape future tailgating rituals and traditions. In other words, tailgating rituals are formalized by repetition to gain stability and consistency (McDonald and Karg, 2014) and are not easily understood by first-timers. Rituals, therefore, have to be observed over time to be adopted, and participants have to be initiated by more experienced fans/tailgaters/family members that can teach and communicate the proper manner of doing things (McDonald and Karg, 2014).

Watching sports and sharing the responsibility of tailgating preparations are considered family traditions by some, in particular by tailgaters who plan a trip for the sole purpose of tailgating and attending a game as a family (Gibson *et al.*, 2002; Rode

and Hardin, 2017). While sharing a picture of their family, one tailgater in a previous study stated, "We do this together. We've been doing this for the last 35 years" (Kerstetter *et al*., 2010: 40). The time spent tailgating allows for connecting with family members, and bonding over a team event. As current college students often attend college to break away from their parents, figure out life, and "grow up" (Heath, 1968), they are more likely to enjoy tailgating with friends than family members. Some older tailgaters, however, voice their appreciation of making new friends during the tailgating event. They make the effort to invite both fellow and opposing team tailgaters into their temporary dwellings to share food, drinks, and conversations to create camaraderie (Drenten *et al.,* 2009). This study posits older generations emphasize the importance of family while tailgating to create community and togetherness (Kerstetter *et al.,* 2010). Social interaction however, is dual in nature and includes a component of competitiveness in tailgating rituals (Drenten *el al*., 2009). Although competition and rivalry exist among older tailgaters in terms of bigger and more extravagant set-ups, different types of competition exist among younger tailgaters who are more likely to participate in drinking games. Tailgating is a special circumstance for consuming alcohol, where overindulgence is considered acceptable and sometimes even expected as consumers take a "time out" from status quo (Glassman *et al.,* 2010). Most young people choose not to consume alcohol excessively in front of family members, as parents modeling and monitoring behavior normally reduce alcohol consumption in young consumers (Wood *et al.,* 2000). Therefore, it is posited that younger tailgaters emphasize spending time with friends in their chosen rituals (see Table 2). The following is hypothesized:

> Hypothesis 1: The importance of spending time with family during tailgating is stronger for older tailgaters such that Boomers>Gen X>Millennials>Gen Z.
> Hypothesis 2: The importance of spending time with friends while tailgating is stronger for younger cohorts such that Gen Z>Millennials>Gen X>Boomers.

Extant literature shows that some consumers tailgate to escape from their normal everyday routines (Drenten *et al*., 2009; James *et al*., 2001). Escape is defined as "Removal from daily activities or change in daily routine, break from normal schedule" (Rode and Hardin, 2017: 47). For example, Drenten *et al.* (2009: 99) found that "tailgating offered spontaneity and freedom from the controlled conformity of everyday life." Escape is one of the four realms of consumer experience, the intersection between immersion and active participation (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Defining the experience, escape is more than entertainment, as the consumer purposefully participates in the creation of the experience through rituals and has an input into its ultimate resolution. Participation in activities allows for co-creation of the experience. In their survey of RV Tailgaters (mostly age 46 or older), Rode and Hardin (2017: 52) found that tailgaters escape "stress by spending the weekend on a college campus, enjoying family and friends, and watching their favorite team compete for a win." Others have found that performances of rituals can lead to a higher sense of freedom, feelings of love, and participation (Driver, 1996). As Gen Xers and Millennials are in the midst of their working careers (Wiedmer, 2015), they are experiencing more of the daily grind and find themselves "immersed in their work and personal lives" (Rode and Hardin 2017: 52), compared to both Boomers (of which many are retired) and Gen Z (current students), they will therefore experience stronger feelings of escape.

Hypothesis 3: Tailgating as Escape is experienced stronger for younger generational cohorts such that Gen X>Millennials>Gen Z>Boomers.

A sense of belonging or togetherness in a community or something larger than yourself often occurs among tailgaters (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; Gibson *et al.*, 2002; Kerstetter *et al.*, 2010).

For example, rituals help create brand communities centered on specific teams (Bradford and Sherry, 2017; McDonald and Karg, 2014). As newer tailgaters may not have been completely initiated into specific rituals, a lesser team identification and community affiliation may be experienced (Driver, 1996). While Drenten *et al.'s* (2009) study explicates the four dual motives based on interview data, this study expands on involvement, social, and identity aspects of tailgating through quantitative measures. Drawing on the above, this study suggests that tailgaters who are Boomers and Gen Xers have the strongest sense of belonging (i.e., community affiliation), as they are more likely to have tailgated for more seasons.

Team identification is defined as "the sense of oneness with or belongingness to a team" (Matsuoka *et al.*, 2003: 246). Tailgaters who have tailgated for multiple seasons (sometimes decades) and are in a better financial situation to purchase season tickets are more invested both emotionally and psychologically (Mullin *et al.*, 2000) and should therefore experience stronger desire to attend games and stronger team identification. Wann and Branscombe (1990) found that the level of team identification in fans explains the tendency to attend games during nice weather (e.g., fair-weather fans) or "die-hard fans." Having a strong team identification and access to season tickets may explain one aspect of the desire to attend home games. Another aspect could be current students who often receive free game tickets or are eligible to enter raffles for tickets, in which they should also display a strong desire to attend home games and identify with their college team. Involvement in campus activities, such as collegiate sports, ties students closer to the overall campus community (Clopton, 2009).

Hypothesis 4: Older generation tailgaters (Boomers and Gen Xers) will experience higher levels of Community Affiliation such that Boomers>Gen X> Millennials>Gen Z.

Hypothesis 5: Current students (Gen Z) and older generations (Boomers and Gen Xers) will experience higher levels of Desire to Attend Home games such that Gen Z>Boomers>Gen X>Millennials.

Hypothesis 6: Current students (Gen Z) and older generations (Boomers and Gen Xers) will experience higher levels of Team Identification such that Gen Z> Boomers>Gen X> Millennials.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the factors that motivate different generational age groups in their participation of tailgating and the rituals they practice while tailgating before college football games. In particular, the study investigates the differences among **Boomers**, **Gen**eration **X**, **Millennials** (Generation Y), and **Gen**eration **Z** in their motivations, tailgating rituals, and practices. After informal in-depth interviews with twenty-eight informants (tailgaters) and a review of relevant literature, a set of six motivational factors leading to participation in tailgating and nine

ritualistic tailgating behaviors were identified to be included in this study. The six factors that play a role in motivating tailgaters to participate included in this study are: (1) The opportunity to interact socially with **family**, (2) The opportunity to interact socially with **friends**, (3) The opportunity to **escape** from the daily routine, (4) A sense of **identifying** with the team, (5) The strength of **desire** to attend home games, and (6) A sense of **community** affiliation. The first five of these six constructs of motivational factors used established scales. The first three (e.g., family, friends, and escape) were used by James *et al.* (2001), whereas the team identification scale adapted three items from the eight-item Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). The five items that were eliminated dealt purely with professional soccer. The desire to attend home game scales was adapted from Funk and Brunn's (2007) strength of motivation scale. Drawing on Gibson *et al.* (2002), a new three-item scale was constructed by the authors to measure the sixth motivating factor, community affiliation. The nine ritualistic tailgating activity variables identified in the interview data included: (1) Setting up a tailgating spot, (2) Decorating the spot with the home team's colors, gear, and flags, (3) Visiting others' tailgating spots, (4) Playing corn hole, (5) Playing throw and catch football, (6) Playing drinking games, (7) Dancing, (8) Watching pregame sports on TV, and (9) Creating own rituals. Single item rating Likert-scales were used to measure the extent to which each generational cohort engaged in these activities.

Questionnaires were administered via Qualtrics. Seven-point Likert items were used for both multiple-item scales (except for Team identification where semantic differential scales were used) and single-item rating variables with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Reliability analyses showed acceptable levels of reliability with Cronbach's alpha levels above 0.70. See Appendix A for scale items and Cronbach alphas. A convenience sample of over 900 respondents was collected by contacting tailgating fans at various campus locations of a Division I FBS university. The majority of respondents completed the questionnaire on site, others agreed to receive the survey link via email and complete it after the game. This process resulted in 753 usable surveys. The differences in the means of both multiple-item and single-item variables among the tailgaters in the four generational age groups were analyzed by the one-way ANOVA procedure in SPSS using Post-hoc Duncan tests when applicable.

RESULTS

Sample Composition

The resulting sample was evenly divided between females (394; 52.3%) and males (359; 47.7%). Furthermore, the sample included 372 in the Gen Z age group (49.4%), 149 Millennials (19.8%), 131 Gen X (17.4%), and 97 Boomers (12.9%). The Gen Z subsample constituted mostly students attending the university of the home team (299; 80.4%). A reliability analysis was conducted on all six multiple item scales measuring the motives for participating in tailgating. The sample consists mostly of fans loyal to the home team and attend home games on a regular basis (650; 72.1% of valid responses), 583 (71.3% of valid responses) stated that they tailgate with seven or more people, and 221 (27.1% of valid responses) enjoy tailgating more than the game itself. Most tailgaters (651; 79.6% of valid responses) use sites on campus to tailgate, about 85% (648 of 765 valid responses) start tailgating at least two hours before the game, and 384 (50.2% of valid responses) cook on site or bring food from home while a small number (32; 4.2%)

do not eat while tailgating. Alcoholic beverage consumption is common among tailgaters with 460 (60.1% of valid responses) preferring beer while 173 (22.6%) prefer liquor or mixed drinks. Country music is preferred by 259 (33.9%) of the tailgaters.

Table 1
Factors Motivating Participation in Tailgating

Hypothesis	Motivating factor	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers	p-value	Summary of result
H1	To interact with family	3.14[4] (0.62)	3.67[3] (0.64)	5.40[2] (0.47)	5.80[1] (1.13)	0.000*	Supported
H2	To interact with friends	5.72 (0.96)	5.70 (0.87)	5.61 (1.13)	5.58 (0.99)	0.580	Not Supported
H3	To escape from the daily routine	5.58 (0.98)	5.45 (1.12)	5.74 (1.15)	5.67 (1.06)	0.169	Not Supported
H4	Community Affiliation	5.30 (1.22)	5.09 (1.23)	5.24 (1.26)	5.52 (1.06)	0.084	Not Supported
H5	Strength of desire to attend home games	5.39[2] (1.34)	4.90[1] (1.62)	5.03[1] (1.47)	5.20[1,2] (1.31)	0.002*	Partially Supported
H6	Identifying with the home team	6.00[2] (0.81)	5.70[1] (0.93)	5.81[1,2] (0.93)	5.91[1,2] (0.71)	0.004*	Partially Supported

Group means with standard deviations in parenthesis, *Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons (Duncan): Means not sharing the same superscript are significantly different at 0.05.

Factors Motivating Participation in Tailgating

As reported in Table 1, the ANOVA results and comparisons of the motivators to tailgate show different patterns across the four generational cohorts. The opportunity to have social interactions with family as the reason for participating in tailgating exhibits the highest level of significant variation among the means of four generations (F-value = 112.591, p<0.000). Though all four age groups differ from each other in

post hoc paired comparisons with the highest average mean among the Boomers (5.80) followed by Gen X (5.40), Millennials (3.67) and Gen Z (3.14), the desire to spend time with family is much stronger among the two older generations (Boomers and Gen Xers) than the two younger ones, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. (See Table 1 for standard deviations). No significant differences were observed between generations for the opportunity to get together and spend time with friends (F-value=0.654, p=0.580), therefore Hypothesis 2 is not supported. Although *Escape* had the third highest overall mean among all respondents (5.59), there was no significant difference between generational cohorts (F-value= 1.682, p = 0.169), thereby Hypothesis 3 is unsupported. No significant differences exist among the four generational age groups with respect to feeling a sense of community affiliation (F-value = 2.223, p=0.084); therefore, H4 is unsupported. The strength of desire to attend home games (F-value= 5.112, p = 0.002) and identifying with the home team (F-value= 4.532, p = 0.004) exhibit significant variations among the four cohorts as well. Post hoc tests show that Gen Z tailgaters have the highest level of desire to attend home games (5.39), closely followed by Boomers (5.20), and differing significantly from Gen X (5.03) and Millennial (4.90) tailgaters; therefore, Hypothesis 5 is partially supported. The motivational factor that shows the highest scores in all four generational age groups is identifying with the home team. However, the post hoc analysis displays the only significant difference is between Gen Z (6.00), the highest scoring cohort, and Millennials (Gen Y) (5.70), which partially supports H6. While no group differences for Team Identification and Spending time with friends were observed, they had the highest overall group means (5.89, and 5.6) together with Escape, making these three motivating factors the highest of the six for all tailgaters.

Ritualistic Tailgating Behaviors.

As the results show in Table 2, additional analyses compared ritualistic tailgating behaviors across the four generational cohorts. The ANOVA tests show that the four generational cohorts exhibit significant differences in setting up tailgating spots (F-value= 29.972, p<0.000); decorating their tailgating spots with university colors, gear, and flags (F-value=17.931, p<0.000); visiting other peoples' tailgating spots (F-value= 16.119, p<0.000); playing corn hole (F-value=8.707, p=0.000); engaging in drinking games (F-value= p<0.000); dancing (F-value=15.401, p=0.000); and creating their own tailgating rituals (F-value, 3.074, p=0.027). No significant differences were found with regard to throwing/catching football (F-value=2.126, p=0.096) and watching pregame sports on TV (F-value=1.104, p=0.347). Regardless of the significance of differences, the two ritual tailgating behaviors that are relatively more popular among all four cohorts are playing corn hole and visiting others' tailgating spots.

Post-hoc tests reveal similar behaviors among contiguous generational groups. An interesting result from the study has been the similar clustering of behaviors between Boomers and Gen X and clustering between Millennials and Gen Z. Boomers and Gen X show similar patterns when it comes to setting up tailgate spots (5.51, 5.34), decorating tailgating spots with university colors, gear, and flags (5.33, 5.08), visiting others' tailgating spots (5.01, 5.18), engaging in drinking games (3.71, 3.82), dancing (3.99, 4.05), and creating their own rituals (4.74, 4.82). Gen Z and Millennials show similar behavior patterns that are significantly different than the other two generations with regard to visiting other people's tailgating spots (5.90, 5.68), engaging in drinking

games (5.85, 5.53), and creating their own tailgating rituals (4.40, 4.32). As a cluster, Boomers and Gen X are more likely to set up their own tailgating spots and decorate with university colors, gear, and flags when compared with Millennials and Gen Z, who are more likely to visit other peoples' tailgating spots, engage in drinking games, and participate in their own tailgating rituals (Glassman *et al.,* 2010). Gen Z (5.85) and Millennials (5.53) are more likely to participate in drinking games than Gen X (3.82) and Boomers (3.71). Additionally, Millennials and Gen Z have higher levels of agreement with not tailgating if there was a campus-wide ban on the consumption of alcohol (5.05, 4.80) than Gen X (3.57) and Boomers (3.39). For standard deviations, see Table 2.

Table 2
Ritualistic Tailgating Behaviors

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	p-value
Setting up own tailgating spot	3.87[3] (2.04)	4.45[2] (2.02)	5.34[1] (1.83)	5.51[1] (1.57)	0.000*
Decorating spot with home team colors	4.04[3] (1.98)	4.58[2] (1.89)	5.08[1] (1.86)	5.33[1] (1.55)	0.000*
Visiting other people's spots	5.90[2] (1.22)	5.68[2] (1.33)	5.18[1] (1.63)	5.01[1] (1.60)	0.000*
Playing corn hole	5.83[2] (1.42)	5.85[2] (1.43)	5.49[2] (1.67)	5.02[1] (1.75)	0.000*
Playing drinking games	5.85[2] (1.59)	5.53[2] 1.72)	3.82[1] (1.84)	3.71[1] (1.89)	0.000*
Dancing	5.04[3] (1.78)	4.48[2] (1.90)	4.05[1] (1.71)	3.99[1] (1.86)	0.000*
Creating own rituals	4.40[2] (1.77)	4.32[2] (1.88)	4.82[1] (1.62)	4.74[1,2] (1.64)	0.027*
Playing throw/catch football	4.93 (187)	5.30 (1.64)	5.05 (1.85)	4.73 (1.78)	0.096
Watching pregame TV	4.08 (2.03)	4.27 (1.94)	4.18 (1.87)	4.46 (1.79)	0.347

Group means with standard deviations in parenthesis, Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons (Duncan): Means not sharing the same superscript are significantly different at 0.05.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study on tailgating motivations and rituals make both theoretical and practical contributions to the literature on tailgating and spectators in the college football context. Interestingly, while previous research has reported feelings of escape, community and togetherness, and spending time with friends and family as the most important tailgating motivations (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; Gibson *et al.*, 2002; James *et al.*, 2001; Kerstetter *et al.*, 2010), the highest motivating factor in this study is identifying with the home team for all cohorts. Identifying with a team can provide fans with a "we feeling" and possibly tie in to a sense of belonging, which was captured with the author-

developed community affiliation measure (Gibson *et al.*, 2002). As the community measure is a new multi-item construct, this construct needs further validation in tailgating and other contexts. Closely related to togetherness and community is who you choose to tailgate with, such as family and friends (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; Gibson *et al.*, 2002; James *et al.*, 2001; Kerstetter *et al.*, 2010). For perhaps obvious reasons, younger groups prefer to tailgate with friends while older groups prefer family (or a mix thereof). The younger groups may attend a college far away from family and therefore not have the option of tailgating with family; in addition, their chosen behavior (e.g., excessive drinking) at tailgating may not be conducive to combine with family members (e.g., parents or younger siblings). In addition to belonging, team identification can provide a sense of pride in the team and university. Kerstetter *et al.* (2010: 41) listed pride as meaning or purpose to tailgate right after a sense of "being together with family and friends, and socializing."

The results regarding community and escape mirror previous research findings as all cohorts find this important. In terms of escape, there was no difference between the four cohorts. As the results show, escaping everyday life was rated as an important motivating factor to tailgate more so than attending the game itself, confirming James *et al.*'s (2001) findings from a larger northern university. A possible assumption of the clustering of the observed behavioral similarities is that Boomers and Gen X tend to be more pragmatic than Gen Z and Millennials. They could be more into the traditions of their alma maters, more reluctant to engage in the consumption of alcohol beyond their personal limits, and more loyal to their teams, including staying for games regardless of the weather conditions (Wann and Branscombe, 1990). They also are more likely to tailgate with fewer people and not engage in visiting with other tailgaters. Gen Z and Millennials are driven by a different perspective. With less individualism and greater enjoyment of social interaction, Gen Z and Millennials may have greater satisfaction by simply enjoying the situation. These cohorts are more likely to engage in drinking games, which encourage greater consumption (Glassman *et al.,* 2010). In addition, they are more likely to enjoy visiting other tailgating groups and are usually in the company of larger gatherings of friends. Study results show that they are less likely to stay for the whole game if there is inclement weather and avoid tailgating entirely if they cannot consume alcohol.

While there may be generational differences creating these similar groupings, it may also be a function of age. Boomers and Gen X are older than Millennials and Gen Z. They are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking games, and perhaps are less physically active, making them less likely to visit other tailgaters. They also have greater life experience than Millennials and Gen Z, which makes them more likely to have lived through the fan experience's peaks and valleys, and therefore, more likely to maintain loyalty in difficult circumstances. Follow-up research could pursue attempting to answer whether the observed differences are a function of different generations or a function of different age groups. Such research should be conducted longitudinally in intervals corresponding to generational changes. Instability in scores in corresponding age groupings in longitudinal studies would indicate generational variations.

The current study results are consistent with Drenten *et al.* (2009) and the link with Apter's (1982) reversal theory and expand current academic understanding of tailgating behavior by linking consumer behavior (rituals) during the events with possible motivations of four generational cohorts. Consumers can have telic motivations (where

the primary mover is the pursuit of a goal), which are found in the behaviors of Boomers and Gen Xers. This group is more likely to pursue setting up a tailgating spot and to decorate it in the totems of the university, including the colors and flags. They are more likely than Gen Z and Millennials to attend and stay at the games regardless of inclement weather. Despite the devotion to their tailgating rituals, they get more enjoyment out of actually attending the game versus the tailgating experience, which can be implied that tailgating is not an end in itself.

The Millennials and Gen Z group, however, fit the definition of consumers with paratelic motivations where experience in the pursuit of the goals is an end in itself. They enjoy visiting other tailgating spots and sampling other tailgating experiences. They participate in drinking games and consider drinking important enough to not tailgate if the university has a campus-wide ban on alcohol consumption, and they prefer to pursue their own tailgating rituals. If the experience turns unpleasant, such as inclement weather, they are less likely to attend or stay at the game (Wann and Branscombe, 1990). Perhaps most telling is they profess to enjoy tailgating more than watching the actual game. It should be noted, however, that while this research aims to understand generational differences in tailgating rituals, it does not purport to make any generalizations about brand loyalty. There is not an implied greater loyalty to the university or the team by those with telic motivations versus paratelic motivations.

For practitioners, this research helps in crafting a greater focus for marketing communications towards these cohort groups. For university students who have just graduated and those fans that fit the Millennials and Gen Z cohort, the university should consider messages that embrace the experience of attending a game. These include the experiences of meeting other cohort members on campus, frequenting tailgating experiences, and include in the messages that, while alcohol consumption should not be encouraged, communicate that it is allowed and accepted. The university should also consider in their budgets creating their own tailgating experiences, such as setting up spots for playing corn hole and other activities. Universities should also consider setting up spots on campus where the game could be experienced even during inclement weather. For Boomers and Gen X, there should be an emphasis on the appreciation of their loyalty and some way of rewarding their tailgating behavior, such as contests and awards for their tailgating efforts. Marketing communications towards Boomers, Gen X alumni, and others should promote the pursuit of sharing of comradery before the game experience. It should also attempt some sales promotion to encourage new Boomer season ticket holders to come and pursue tailgating before the game.

For commercial vendors in the university area, this research also helps to focus their efforts on pursuing those cohort groups that would enjoy their atmospherics. Retail establishments that wish to appeal to the younger cohorts should craft their messaging around the paratelic motivations of the experience, including expressing ways tailgaters can continue the same experiences after the game. Those wishing to appeal to the older cohorts could consider messaging that mentions immersion in post-game discussion, such as game replays and sports-talk. Specific breakfast, lunch, brunch, and/or dinner combination promotions by local bars, restaurants, and hotels could be targeted towards different cohorts, as they may want to experience the game-day in various ways. Alcoholic beverage brands can team up with local businesses to sponsor game-day related events. Therefore, knowing the beverage and music preferences of tailgaters can be utilized by sponsors and local businesses to host competitions and give-aways of

tailgating equipment, such as branded cornhole, footballs for tossing, etc. Finally, it should be mentioned that recent marketing research has reported that about 30 percent of general tailgaters don't attend the game and engage in "homegating," i.e., engaging in tailgating behaviors within the comforts of home or an establishment unaffiliated with the stadium area (Delicato Family Winery, 2018). Interestingly, this is consistent with the percentage in the current study, in which 72 percent of the sample attended the game after they tailgated while 28 percent did not attend. This constitutes a significant market segment with potential for brands to engage in these fans (Delicato Family Winery, 2018). Recently, various branded events, such as "Sailgating" sponsored by Wendy's for University of Washington tailgaters in the Seattle's Husky Harbor and "Brunchgating" sponsored by Bota Box in New York City have aimed to tap into those tailgaters who may not continue on to the game. Sponsored activities such as these can tie brands closer to their segments. Future research by broadening the scope of tailgaters, homegaters, and overall fan experiences can help marketers provide greater value to their experience to the betterment of both the university and the communities in which they operate.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations need to be mentioned. First, this research is a cross-sectional descriptive study of tailgating rituals confined to a mid-sized university in the southeastern part of the U.S., where football traditions are strong and span generations. However, there are much larger universities and much smaller ones as well. Furthermore, this research confides to the gameday experience. It should be noted that there are more examples of tailgating experiences that include consumers arriving during the week of the game, enjoying the gameday experience, and not leaving until sometime after the game is over (Rode and Hardin, 2017). These fans should be considered when researching the fan experience of tailgaters. Second, this study did not investigate tailgaters' social media usage or behavior. Therefore, social media usage during tailgating, game, and post-game should be examined, as this is likely to be prevalent for today's tailgaters. Third, recently after data collection ended, it was announced that the university stadium would offer alcohol sales during the next season. Alcohol sales would begin two hours prior to kick-off and end at the end of the third quarter. This follows a general trend of a gradual relaxation of rules prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol on U.S. college campuses over the last ten years. Currently each conference and each campus have their own rules (Clouse, 2019). The sales of alcohol in stadiums could change the behavior of Millennials and Gen Z tailgating activities by giving them an additional incentive to attend the game and further change post-game rituals as well. Future research needs to compare tailgater behavior, including drinking behavior, at universities with and without alcohol sales at the stadiums. Fourth, the measurements used for items measuring attending home games and team motivations had not previously been used in a US football tailgating context, which further contributes to the understanding of tailgating rituals by different cohorts. In addition, future studies should validate the community measure developed by the authors to see if similar results are found in tailgaters at colleges of various size. Finally, with the advent of Covid-19 changing the focus on experiences, a continued study of generational cohorts and their tailgating activities should yield beneficial knowledge on how to meet the needs and desires of these consumer groups. Related to rituals affected

by Covid-19, future research could investigate what effect age has on tailgating activities. With current recommendations to avoid crowds, in particular for some age groups, how will this affect consumption of future sporting events? Life experiences happen on both a social and personal level. This research finds a significant clustering of cohort differences between those groups that are younger and those that are older. Future research should attempt to include this in their surveys.

Appendix A

Scale items

Escape *(James et al., 2001),* α=0.847
 Tailgating provides me with an escape from my day-to-day activities.
 Tailgating provides a change of pace from what I regularly do.
 Getting to tailgate at football games gives me a break from my regular routine.

Family *(James et al., 2001)* α=0.957
 Spending time with family is why I tailgate.
 I tailgate because it is an important activity for my family.
 The main reason I tailgate is to enjoy time with my family.

Friends *(James et al., 2001)* α=0.747
 I tailgate because it gives me an opportunity to spend time with my friends.
 Tailgating is a way to be with friends I don't see very often.
 Tailgating allows me to be around friends I don't otherwise spend time with.

Team Identification *(Wann and Branscombe, 1993)* α=0.766
 How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of App State football? (Not at all a fan –
  Very much a fan)
 How important is it that App State wins? (Not important – very important)
 I wear _____(University team colors) to support the
  _____(University)team. (Never –Always)

Desire to Attend Home Games *(Funk and Brunn, 2007)* α=0.869
 I regret when I am unable to attend _____(University team name) home
  games.
 I feel that attending _____(University team name) home games is vitally
  important to me.
 I am really interested in attending _____(University team name) home games.

Community Affiliation *(developed by the authors of the current study)* α=0.836
 I tailgate to feel part of something bigger than myself.
 I tailgate because it gives me a sense of belonging.
 I tailgate because it makes me feel part of the _____(name of
  university) community.

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Promoting Intercollegiate Beach Volleyball: The Rise of the NCAA's Fasting Growing Sport

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Abstract: Intercollegiate beach volleyball has emerged as the fastest growing sport in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) because of the popularity and marketability of the sport. Beach volleyball's rich history along with its continued popularity has caused college athletic departments to see the benefits of adding beach volleyball to their department. The attention garnered by beach volleyball at the Olympics has helped in making intercollegiate volleyball a very marketable new sport for women.
Keywords: Sport Marketing, Intercollegiate Beach Volleyball, Tourism, NCAA

Beach volleyball for females has grown exponentially in recent years. Increased attention at the Olympics and expanded global media coverage have fueled the sport's rise in popularity (Avison, 2018). Beach volleyball on the women's side transitioned from an "emerging sport" to a full NCAA championship sport at record levels (Johnson, 2015). The NCAA, as the preeminent figure in intercollegiate athletics, provided immediate credence of the sport. The increased attention of the sport led to the NCAA's

adoption of beach volleyball as a championship sport in 2016. With championship level attainment, there has been an influx of new intercollegiate female volleyball programs nationally. This has further been enhanced by the annual beach volleyball championship tournament now receiving extensive national television coverage (NCAA, 2017). Viewers now have an opportunity to be exposed to beach volleyball outside of the Olympics, and as a result, television ratings have steadily increased for the championship tournament. With the Olympics' television ratings, NCAA championship level as a sport and accompanying television coverage, and female student-athlete scholarship opportunities on the intercollegiate level, this has resulted in the continued growth of beach volleyball.

The Early Years
     The origins of beach volleyball can be traced back to the 1920s in Santa Monica, California (Olympic.org, 2020). The year 1920 is considered the official birthday record for beach volleyball (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). The most crucial event in the history of beach volleyball had almost nothing to do with the sport alone; instead, it started with a simple construction project along the California coast as the city of Santa Monica built new jetties that were able to transform the rugged shore into a smooth, flat surface and create an ideal space for beach volleyball courts (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). The first public court appeared in 1922 and started the trend of becoming a favorite gathering place for families and college students (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). Beginning as a family fun event, the sport began spreading globally. Initially a recreational pursuit, it developed rapidly into a popular and thriving sport (Tokyo2020.org, 2020). By the 1930s, the game had reached countries like Czechoslovakia, Latvia, and Bulgaria (Olympic.org, 2020).
     Interestingly, beach volleyball's popularity accelerated in the United States during the 1930s, perhaps as a slight relief from the Great Depression (Olympic.org, 2020). Cash-strapped Americans in the hundreds flocked to the beaches to play a virtually no-cost pastime and free entertainment (Athletic Scholarships.net, 2020). Beach volleyball became very popular in Europe during World War II when soldiers used the sport to relax and keep fit (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). This created further growth of the game across European beaches. The first official two-person tournament took place in 1947, and the first beach volleyball circuit, involving hundreds of players and five California beaches, began in the 1950s (Olympic.org, 2020).
     The 1950s and 1960s are known as "the golden age of beach volleyball" as the sport gained popularity in Northern California, Florida, and internationally in Brazil (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). Women also became huge fans of this sport, and even though their participation was limited to co-ed teams in the beginning, by the end of the 1950s, they were able to compete in tournaments with their two-woman teams (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). However, it was the crossover with popular culture that ignited the sport's popularity. "In the 1960s, The Beatles appeared at the legendary Sorrento Beach in Los Angeles to play beach volleyball with US President John F. Kennedy. The image appealed to companies as a marketing opportunity and prize money for tournaments poured into the sport after that," (Olympic.org, 2020). In 1965, beach volleyball became a legitimate sport with a set of standardized rules and official tournaments (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). The California Beach Volleyball Association (CBVA) was the sport's official governing body created for

establishing and enforcing the new rules, which evolved into the game played today (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015).

As beach tournaments became sanctioned, it was essential to develop beach volleyball on a professional level, and the best solution was prize money (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). In 1975, a cigarette company agreed to sponsor a tournament in Long Beach, California, with $1,500 in prize money (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). This led to a growing trend in increased sponsorship opportunities. In 1976, a local Santa Monica beer company signed a sponsorship for the Professional Championship of Beach Volleyball, which offered a $5,000 prize for the winners (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). The championship was viewed as a success because over 30,000 spectators attended the event, and beach volleyball's popularity continued to rise (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015).

As the game of beach volleyball continued to grow in popularity and marketability, companies and organizations began to associate with the sport through sponsorships. In 1980, the first corporate-sponsored tour was organized and divided into seven tournaments with $52,000 in prize money (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). In 1983, the tour expanded to twelve tournaments with stops in Chicago, Florida, and New York with the prize tour financials amounting to $137,000 (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). The first international tournament sanctioned by the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) was held in 1987, and an international circuit was launched in 1990 (Tokyo2020.org, 2020).

The popularity of beach volleyball continued to grow throughout the years due to increased participation and prize money. By the 1990s, beach volleyball had significant international recognition with federations worldwide (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). FIVB, the international governing body for indoor volleyball, became involved in the beach game (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). The inclusion of FIVB was a monumental step for beach volleyball. FIVB, the global governing body for indoor and beach volleyball, works closely with national federations and private enterprises. FIVB's goal is to develop volleyball as a major world media and entertainment sport through world-class planning, competitions, marketing, and development activities (Federation Internationale de Volleyball, 2020). Additionally, FIVB is a component of the Olympic Movement and greatly contributes to the success of the Olympic Games.

The Olympics

The sport of beach volleyball has gained widespread popularity in the last thirty years. Beach volleyball managed to be included as a demonstration sport at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). Demonstration sports are used at the Olympics to display a sport unique to the country hosting the Games. Most recently, they serve as a stepping-stone for consideration as a future Olympic medal sport (Topend Sports, 2020)**.** The first step in the process of becoming an Olympic sport is being recognized as a sport from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Britannica, 2020). After being recognized, the new sport is classified with the International Sports Federation (IF) status. To become a sport of the upcoming Olympic Games, the sports' IF must apply for admission by registering a petition establishing its eligibility criteria to the IOC. The IOC may then admit an activity into the Olympic program in one of three different ways: as a sport; as a discipline, which is a branch of a sport; or as an event, which is a competition within a discipline (Britannica, 2020). The

recognition was given to beach volleyball as an Olympic discipline at an International Olympic Committee meeting in Monaco, opening the sports' door to participate in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Beach volleyball took a massive step forward in 1996 when the sport became an Olympic sport in the Atlanta Olympic Games (Beach Volleyball Major Series, 2015). Beach volleyball has been an Olympic sport for both men's and women's teams since 1996. Beach volleyball at the Olympics features two 24-team tournaments, one for men and one for women (NBC Olympics.com, 2020). The teams are divided into groups for a preliminary round-robin phase. A round-robin tournament consists of all individuals or teams playing each entry an equal number of times (Byle, 2014). After the round-robin tournament, a bracket-style elimination round determines the medalists (NBC Olympics.com, 2020).

With the introduction of beach volleyball in the Olympics in 1996, the sport gained significant media and fan exposure. Since the introduction of beach volleyball into the Olympics, it has become one of the most popular Olympic sports (FIVB, n.d.). Beach volleyball's popularity spikes every four years when people watch the sport during the Olympics (Tracy, 2016). Beach volleyball was part of NBC prime-time coverage during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and received more airtime hours than any other sport (Smith and Bissell, 2014). Mario Medeiros, Commercial Director at FIVB, stated "that volleyball (indoor and beach combined) was the most popular sport at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games in terms of the accumulated number of viewer hours, reaching more than 2.6 billion hours. This figure is equivalent to every single person in the world (approximately 7.5 billion people) watching 20 minutes of volleyball" (Avison, 2018).

Rise of Intercollegiate Beach Volleyball

Intercollegiate beach volleyball has seen increased exposure due to the popularity and increased attention given to beach volleyball. The expanded television time devoted to beach volleyball at the Olympics has played a part in adding to the popularity of the beach volleyball at the collegiate level. The sport of volleyball ranks second only to soccer globally among participation sports (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2018). This increased popularity in participation has helped the sport of volleyball grow both domestically and internationally.

The popularity of beach volleyball has exploded over the last few years (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2020). The growth of intercollegiate beach volleyball can be attributed to US beach volleyball team's success at the Olympics (Hopkinson *et al.*, 2016). AVP First and AVP America contributed to the growth to play in college and beyond with their 170 affiliated clubs nationwide (Smith, 2020). With the opportunity to compete on a beach volleyball team in college, more 12 to 18-year-olds play than ever before (Smith, 2020). Over two years starting in 2007, the number of girls participating in sand volleyball in the US Beach Junior Tour grew from 534 to 1,757 in 2009 (NCAA College Beach Volleyball, 2011). According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association, beach volleyball backers note that the number of beach volleyball players nationwide grew 7.5 percent in 2008, to 4.2 million players (Belson and Thomas, 2010). From 2007 to 2014, young women's beach volleyball participation jumped nearly 50 percent (Tracy, 2016). Likewise, the American Volleyball Coaches Association and the U.S. Olympic Committee found that "more than 200,000 females ages 6-17 play beach volleyball, and more than 60 percent compete exclusively in the sport rather than indoor

volleyball" (Johnson, n.d.). With this increased popularity of beach volleyball and institution's willingness to add the sport to their athletic departments, the sport of intercollegiate beach volleyball continues to grow.

Colleges and universities have been able to use the exposure generated from the popularity of Olympic beach volleyball to market the sport on their campuses within their athletic departments. While the sport of beach volleyball had success with television viewers at the Olympics, fans of the sport are watching domestically the airing of the intercollegiate beach volleyball championships. ESPN did well in its three-day beach national championship coverage with the championship match of UCLA beating Florida State in 2018 drawing 298,000 viewers, up 14% from the previous year (Feinswog, 2018).

Sand volleyball (as it was referred to initially) was added to the list of emerging sports in 2009; a designation intended to encourage women' development by awarding NCAA subsidies to colleges that initiate programs (Belson and Thomas, 2010). There was strong support initially from the Gulf Coast and West Coast teams due to their geographic location and ideal climate. Sports on the list as emerging sports are given full championship status if 40 colleges begin programs within ten years (Belson and Thomas, 2010). Beach volleyball was expected to be played in the spring semester with indoor volleyball continuing in the fall semester, which would allow student-athletes to play for both teams.

As the sport has grown in popularity, institutions began to petition the NCAA to offer beach volleyball as an official championship sport. Institutions quickly realized beach volleyball could be an intercollegiate sport that would be readily marketable and worked to get NCAA approval to offer the sport. Due to the Olympics and increased television exposure, beach volleyball has become an outlet for female athletes to compete in college and on a professional level as well.

According to Johnson (2015), the transition of intercollegiate beach volleyball from "emerging sport" status to "championship sport" in just five years was the fastest in NCAA history. With the launching of beach volleyball as an NCAA sport, opportunities for female athletes has increased. NCAA existence for beach volleyball offers more scholarship opportunities (185.5 total for female college players), but it also exposes kids to the game at a younger age (Smith, 2020). Initially, sixteen institutions offered a varsity beach volleyball program starting in the 2011-12 academic year: the University of Southern California, University of California, Santa Barbara, California State University, Long Beach, the University of Hawaii, Florida State University, College of Charleston, Jacksonville University, Florida Atlantic University, Mercer University, University of North Florida, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Saint Leo University, Stetson University, Warner University, Webber International, and Tulane University (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2011). Thirteen of these schools competed at the Division I level.

The Gulf Coast and West Coast universities, notably the PAC 12 Conference teams, were primary factors in beach volleyball. The Atlantic Sun Conference was instrumental also in the push to make beach volleyball a championship sport (Johnson, n.d.). After it became an NCAA-sanctioned sport in 2016, the growth of intercollegiate teams has been exponential. As of September 2020, there were 90 intercollegiate programs across the nation, and a 500% increase since 2011 (Next College Student-Athlete, 2020).

This growth in popularity, in particular women's beach volleyball, has led many intercollegiate athletic departments to add beach volleyball as a sport to market their

athletic programs. In 2011 when beach volleyball was a club sport, there were 15 NCAA-affiliated teams but this number increased to 56 beach volleyball teams once it became an NCAA-sanctioned sport in 2016 (Smith, 2020). With the popularity and success of beach volleyball, NCAA beach volleyball programs have continued to emerge. The marketability and exposure of beach volleyball has led the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to add it as the 90th Championship sport and ESPN to sign a deal to showcase the championships live from Gulf Shores, Alabama.

Perception Issues

Since the emergence of beach volleyball globally at the Olympics, female attire perception issues have been front and center. The beach volleyball dress code that existed since 1996, when beach volleyball first became an Olympic-medal event, gave players two options: bikini or bodysuit (Hayes, 2016). Being a summer sport with these only options, the bikini became the "official" outfit. The bikini for which the Federation Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) allows "a maximum side width of seven centimeters (2.76 inches)" (Hayes, 2016). However, there has been opposition since the bikini is not the most religiously or culturally sensitive uniform. Additionally, there has been speculation around whether female players are being exploited for their bodies. Bissell and Duke's (2008) research of 2004 Summer Olympic Games revealed beach volleyball television angles included that more than 20% of the camera shots were found to be tight shots of the player's chests, and just over 17% of the shots were coded as buttock shots, which left viewers with lasting memories of player's bodies rather than memories of athleticism. Research conclusions of the analysis of the game's visual coverage confirm that sex and sexuality were used to promote the athletes and sell the sport to viewers around the world (Bissell and Duke, 2008).

As a result, with the 2012 Olympics, the rules regarding the beach volleyball dress code for women changed to now also allow wearing shorts and a top (Hayes, 2016). While the top can be sleeved or sleeveless, the shorts are limited to a maximum length of three centimeters (1.18 inches) above the knee (Hayes, 2016). The new rules allow multiple attire opportunities for participants and allow players to select leeway for religious and cultural requirements.

Due to the original beach volleyball uniform, beach volleyball marketing on campuses was debated heavily, with perception issues coming to the forefront. The idea of female intercollegiate student-athletes participating in skimpy bikinis was a significant concern for the NCAA. Despite the popularity of Olympic beach volleyball, the idea of college athletes wearing provocative apparel was an issue that had to be considered. Gurung and Chrouser (2007) noted that clothing influences perception, and perceptions of female athletes found that provocative clothing leads to the athletes' objectification. For that reason, the NCAA was determined to deal with the issue of the beach volleyball uniform before marketing this new sport.

Similar to previous Olympic attire limits, the NCAA mandated minimum standards. In order to deal with the perception issues that could affect the marketability of the sport, the NCAA required that female student-athletes must cover their midriffs while standing still and shorts or briefs must have a one-inch seam (Tracy, 2016). The standard uniform looks very similar to track and field uniforms: a set of shorts/briefs and a singlet or tights and long sleeves for cooler weather competition (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2016). Current NCAA rules for track and field uniforms include (NCAA

Cross Country and Track and Field. 2019: 62).

> "A uniform consists of two school-issued components – shorts or briefs, and a top. A one-piece bodysuit is acceptable as a combination of the two components. Any outer garment (that is, sweatpants, tights) that is school-issued becomes the official uniform when worn. 1) The uniform must be of a material and design deemed to not be objectionable or offensive by the athletics department of the issuing institution. 2) The uniform top must, by design and size, cover the full length of the torso, meeting or hanging below the waistband of the bottoms, while the competitor is standing, and allow competitors' numbers to be placed above the waist, front and back."

These requirements have appeased any perception issues that might be a concern for the sport of beach volleyball.

Emerging Athletic Opportunities for Female Student-Athletes

To assist in continued compliance with Title IX regulations, NCAA members often add emerging sports to their athletic programs. In 1994 when the NCAA Gender-Equity Task Force was commissioned, one recommendation was to compile a list of emerging sports for women to help offer more participation opportunities to females in intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2020a). The NCAA defines an emerging sport as "a sport recognized by the NCAA to provide additional athletics opportunities to female student-athletes." Institutions are allowed to use emerging sports to meet the NCAA minimum sports-sponsorship requirements and the NCAA minimum financial awards (NCAA, 2020b).

With the inclusion of beach volleyball at the Olympics, overall interest continued to grow. With beach volleyball, two of the most substantial areas of support came from the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA), who submitted a legislative recommendation to the NCAA, and the substantial success that men's and women's beach volleyball has experienced as an Olympic sport since its adoption in 1996 (Johnson, 2015).

Additionally, beach volleyball offers university athletic departments a feasible financial opportunity with an estimated starting cost of $100,000-$150,000 and annual operating costs of $35,000-$50,000 (DeBoer, 2017). This figure includes coaching salaries, scholarships (up to three), travel, per diem, and lodging for ten student-athletes and a coach for three to five road trips, one official per each championship match of tournament play, and recruiting. As for the competition structure and rules of the game, it has been decided that there is a minimum of eight contests (three have to be duals) with a maximum of sixteen dates of competition (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2015).

While the institutions wanted to embrace beach volleyball popularity to market new women's sport, the NCAA still had reservations. According to Johnson (n.d.), one marketing concern arose whether beach volleyball would provide new opportunities for women to compete in a sport or if the same players playing indoor volleyball would play beach volleyball. If this were the case, athletic programs and the NCAA could not market beach volleyball as a sport offering new female student-athlete opportunities. This concern was alleviated during the first year of beach volleyball as a championship sport, as 44% of the beach volleyball players played beach volleyball exclusively and has continued to rise (Johnson, n.d.). Furthermore, institutions sponsoring beach volleyball

for at least five years found that "77% of volleyball-playing student-athletes compete in only one of the two sports, and among those players competing for the 2016 beach championship, 90% played only beach volleyball" (American Volleyball Coaches Association. 2016).

Another marketing issue surrounding the emergence of beach volleyball as a championship sport dealt with whether or not institutions near an actual beach or in warm weather environments would have an unfair marketing advantage over those institutions that were landlocked or in colder climates. This brought some major opposition from many northern or cold-weather teams. Colleges with established indoor programs feared that those that added sand volleyball would have an advantage in recruiting over schools that have only the more traditional version of the sport (Belson and Thomas, 2010). Many northern colleges opposed beach volleyball because of their location and lack of adequate beach volleyball facilities due to the weather. The argument was that volleyball teams able to field indoor and beach teams would have an advantage over institutions that could not; therefore, it would hurt their indoor volleyball program since student-athletes could compete for both teams at other institutions. Mark Rosen, the volleyball coach at the University of Michigan, opposed sand volleyball because "it puts schools in cold-weather states at a disadvantage. If a school in the south has both programs and one in the north does not, it forces me to lose a recruit or ask my athletic director to spend money where he cannot spend it elsewhere. Many northern schools will end up playing a majority of their games on the road because it will be too cold at home to play outdoors in March or April," (Belson and Thomas, 2010). While this issue was a concern at first, beach volleyball marketability has not been affected adversely by access to a beach or warm weather environments.

Despite the initial reservations about warm weather locations and proximity to beaches, universities not geographically located near a beach have implemented beach volleyball at their universities. According to the American Volleyball Coaches Association, states such as Nebraska, Colorado, Maryland, Washington, Idaho, and Oregon have beach volleyball teams, and the growth of the sport in these states continues to rise (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2016).

While it is undoubtedly easier to schedule outdoor activities in more temperate parts of the country, beach volleyball is only reliant on sand, so hopefully like some other geographical sports, it will spread around the country in a similar fashion (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2016). According to a 2017 survey by the National Federation of State High School Association, volleyball is the second-highest sport for female participation at the high school level behind outdoor track and field (Friedman, 2017). Beach volleyball popularity continues to trickle down from the Olympics to intercollegiate athletics to interscholastic levels. Arizona (AIA) added Sand VB as a sanctioned sport in 2012 while California and Florida both have numerous high school leagues and sanctioning issues are under discussion in their High School Associations (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2016).

Since beach volleyball was recently recognized as an NCAA championship sport, it serves as a viable option for university intercollegiate athletic departments to comply with Title IX requirements. Under Title IX, the 1972 law prohibiting gender discrimination at schools that receive federal funds, the Department of Education mandates that the total amount of scholarship aid made available to men and women must be substantially proportionate to their participation rate (Trahan, 2016).

According to the NCAA (2020b), there are three essential parts of Title IX as it applies to athletics: participation, scholarships, and other benefits. Schools are allowed to use emerging sports to help meet minimum sports-sponsorship requirements. Institutions must have participation opportunities proportionate to their respective rates of full-time undergraduate students or show a history and continued practice of program expansion for the underrepresented sex (Mercer and Connolly, 2016).

Division I and II schools can use emerging sports to meet minimum financial-aid requirements (Johnson, 2015). Women's ice hockey, women's bowling, women's water polo, and women's rowing are examples of sports that successfully achieved championship status after starting as emerging sports (Johnson, 2015).

Marketing

With the NCAA adding beach volleyball as its 10th sports championship, it also included a name change from sand to beach volleyball. When the sport was placed on the list of emerging sports for women in 2009, it was called sand volleyball (Johnson, 2015). Since the sport is known as beach volleyball at all other levels of play throughout the world, the committee made its decision on the name based on membership support from all three divisions' championship committees, the American Volleyball Coaches Association, and USA Volleyball (Johnson, 2015).

The ability to market beach volleyball as a women's NCAA intercollegiate sport has been evident by the number of participating teams that have started and the popularity that the NCAA Beach Volleyball Championship has garnered. In 2018, the AVCA reported that in the eight years since beach volleyball began as an emerging sport, there were now 75 institutions that sponsor varsity programs as well as 40 institutions in various other intercollegiate athletic associations that offer the sport (American Volleyball Coaches Association, 2018). Similarly, the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) has followed the NCAA's lead and added beach volleyball as its 48th championship event beginning in 2021 (Sprecher, 2018). The NJCAA has witnessed the successful marketing of beach volleyball at the NCAA level and hopes to bring that to the junior college level. For the 2019-20 season, 148 schools sponsored varsity beach volleyball programs, including a high of 62 on the NCAA Division I level (ScholarshipStats.com, 2020).

NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics is a significant business in today's world, and adding another sport can undoubtedly increase its reach to fans. With the increased popularity of intercollegiate athletics through television contracts and social media platforms, it is imperative that intercollegiate athletics programs expand their options in attracting fans to athletic events. These revenue-generating activities may include broadcasting rights, multimedia rights, stadium concessions, corporate sponsorships, individual donations, merchandise sales, and ticket sales (Bouchet *et al.*, 2011). Intercollegiate athletic institutions desire a consistent stream of sports' fans at their home venues.

Fans and spectators of sports and athletics are perennially motivated to visit arenas, stadiums, fields, and rinks to cheer on their favorite teams (Spiller *et al.*, 2017). Having packed crowds reinforces the university's brand and promotes the "front porch of the university." Additionally, these filled environments offer a home advantage to the designated sports. However, recent years have posed several challenges for sports organizations, including a more significant number of entertainment options and

higher ticket prices (Spiller *et al.,* 2017). At the collegiate level, a primary goal of athletic departments is to develop and support marketing initiatives conducive to the generation of revenue (Koesters *et al.,* 2015). As sports marketers compete for spectators' share of interest and share of wallet, they quickly realize that they must adopt a more segmented marketing approach since not all spectators and fans are alike (Spiller *et al.,* 2017).

Much of college athletics success is based upon tradition (Wells *et al.*, 2000). While beach volleyball is a new sport and is being added to athletic departments, universities can use their tradition in other sports to garner attention from their fans to the new sport on campus. All intercollegiate athletics programs are searching for new fans and adding a new sport and venue on campus can draw instant attention from the fan base. Athletics target sports fans to get on board the marketing escalator and ascend them to increasing user levels. The bottom line is that attracting attendees to events regularly is vital to sports organizations (Spiller *et al.*, 2017).

Highly successful seasons and winning ultimately greatly assist attracting fans in current sports. New sports like beach volleyball will have to focus on the newness to attract initial fans. Martinson *et al.* (2015) stated that one method that does seem to be a way to renew interest in an unsuccessful program is to bring in a new coaching staff. With it being a new sport, beach volleyball will have to hire first-time coaches**.** With the presence of a new coach and team culture, there is a renewed sense of hope for increased winning on the horizon. Martinson *et al.* (2015) noted that a new coaching staff brings an instant buzz, and an optimistic, enthusiastic new coach can breathe life into a program and energize the fan base. This is an excellent opportunity for new beach volleyball coaches to garner interest in the community and campus. Recent research explored new team rivalries to generate competitive enthusiasm and promote sporting event attendance (Hutchinson *et al.,* 2016).

Shackelford and Greenwell (2005), when examining intercollegiate sports, noted the importance that intercollegiate sports teams draw spectators from the student community and the local community. Students are a valuable aspect of home-court advantages for football and men's basketball venues and can be in other sports. Capacity and loud student sections can motivate the home team performance and energize the general season ticket holders. These young fans are more connected to the student-athletes on the playing field due to current class and possible other associations. It is vital for intercollegiate athletic departments to gain consistent student fan attendance. Peetz (2011) reported on the successful outcome of a student rewards program in marketing college sports. Furthermore, this is a vital time for the intercollegiate athletics program to connect to this future fan base. These past sports connections will prove invaluable in possible future attendance as alumni.

With today's current trends and access to technology, it is vital for intercollegiate athletics departments to communicate through various social media platforms to connect to fans. Dixon *et al.* (2015) examined social media as a marketing strategy in college sports. These platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms. Martinson *et al.* (2015) stated that Facebook and Twitter are the most well-known social media networks and are thus the best ways to connect with fans. Other emerging platforms that can be very beneficial to fans are Pinterest, YouTube, and Periscope. One of the most significant reasons to use these resources is that they are free of charge.

Sports marketers are now employing promotional strategies to maximize sport event attendance, build relationships with spectators, and convert spectators into fans to secure their future support (Spiller *et al.,* 2017). The importance of building relationships between sport consumers and marketing college sports using a segmented game plan is much emphasized in both academia and practice (Gray and Wert-Gray, 2012). Many researchers believe a paradigm shift has occurred in sports marketing, from a traditional exchange model to a relationship-marketing model (Kim and Trail, 2011; Harris and Ogbonna, 2008). Recent college sports marketing studies have concentrated on promotional activities to generate game attendance and cultivate relationships with sports fans, among other related topics (Spiller *et al.*, 2017). In conclusion, building, enhancing, and maintaining good relationships with fans on a segmented basis is critical to successful sports marketing activities (Spiller *et al.*, 2017).

NCAA Championship in Gulf Shores

The inaugural championship for the National Collegiate sport took place in spring 2016 (Johnson, 2015). The NCAA National Championship is held at Gulf Shores Public Beach in Gulf Shores, Alabama, annually in May. The championship rounds have been held there since its inception in 2016. The format includes the invitation to the top eight remaining teams and includes a double-elimination tournament.

The popularity and marketability of intercollegiate beach volleyball have enabled the city of Gulf Shores, Alabama, to create a very successful event in the NCAA Beach Volleyball Championship. Originally, Turner Sports had a television deal with the NCAA and displayed the beach volleyball tournament via truTV, TBA, and their streaming platforms (NCAA.com. 2016). ESPN came on board the following season, which increased television coverage and viewership jumped from approximately 256,000 viewers with Turner Sports to just under 300,000 viewers in their first telecasts (Feinswog, 2018). This was a unique event for ESPN to cover for the first time, and they utilized 30 cameras to cover the various courts and angles. ESPN's extensive coverage included streaming on each court individually on ESPN3 or the app and whip-around coverage on the linear networks. ESPN coverage continued with eight hours live on ESPNU on Friday, four hours live on ESPN2 on Saturday, and then the championship on Sunday on ESPN (Feinswog, 2018). ESPN's additional resources to enhance their coverage included feature materials, storytelling, and the actual coverage with two jibs and drone coverage.

The city of Gulf Shores uses the popularity of beach volleyball to generate tourism dollars, which in return helps market their city and beaches. The city hosts the NCAA Beach Volleyball Championship alongside a junior tournament that hosts more than 400 teams competing (Scheurich, 2019). It costs $390,000 to host the tournament each year, with the costs split between the city of Gulf Shores and Gulf Shores-Orange Beach Tourism (Scheurich, 2019). "To have our beaches exposed on national television for a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday all day long, is invaluable for people to see. They are saying, where are those beaches, and we want to go there on a family vacation," stated Beth Gendler of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach Tourism (Scheurich, 2019).

NCAA committee decided to name Gulf Shores as the first site for the championship due to their past championships of junior tournaments (Johnson, n.d.). Per championship format, a member school has been host, and local University of Alabama at Birmingham was brought aboard. Gulf Shores' decision to host the NCAA Beach

Volleyball Championship assists in their marketing efforts for the junior tournament. The NCAA Beach Volleyball Championship serves as an exposure event for the city, as they promote their beaches with the sport's popularity. The championship brings in 3,000 people per day, but since the event is broadcast live on ESPN for three days, the exposure the city gets is worth the price of hosting the event (Estes, 2018). ESPN and the NCAA reached a multiyear agreement to televise the event for the next five years, and coverage allows excellent exposure for the sport (NCAA, 2017). The exposure from the ESPN coverage and the tourism dollars that come to Gulf Shores because of the NCAA Beach Volleyball Championships significantly boosts the local economy.

The event hosts are Gulf Shores, Orange Beach Sports, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (NCAA, 2017). This included the award to ESPN for national television coverage. ESPN will televise the event for the next five years, spanning 2018 through 2022 (NCAA, 2017). The ESPN television coverage will bring great attention to the sport of beach volleyball and Gulf Shores. ESPN, as the premier national sports station, and its' network of channels (ESPN2, ESPNU, etc.) brings extensive coverage of the beach volleyball tournament into homes across the nation. "The coverage ESPN will provide for the championship allows great exposure for the sport, the hard-working student-athletes and the growth and excitement surrounding the NCAA Women's Beach Volleyball Championship," stated Kelcey Roegiers, chair of the NCAA Women's Beach Volleyball Committee (NCAA, 2017). With increased college sports programs and television exposure, this will only accelerate the interest in young female participants and increased television ratings. "Beach volleyball is an emerging sport with untapped potential, and ESPN looks forward to helping increase its national profile," said Dan Margulis, ESPN senior director, college and high school sports programming (NCAA, 2017).

The annual championship format has been conducted over three playing days with an open practice free to the public before the first day of competition (Gulf Shores.com, 2020). Spectator seating options are set up to include general admission, courtside seating, and NCAA Experience options (Gulf Shores.com, 2020). With an eight-team bracket, the championship has included a double-elimination format with teams consisting of five pairs of female student-athletes (NCAA, 2017). Beach setup has included five collegiate courts and five practice courts, and bleachers and courtside seating for the volleyball enthusiasts in attendance (Gulf Shores.com, 2020).

Conclusion

Beach volleyball is currently the fastest-growing NCAA sport. Additionally, the overall interest is considered to continue to grow due to Olympics television coverage, NCAA championship level with national television, and increased scholarship opportunities for female student-athletes. The popularity of beach volleyball allows athletic departments to add women's beach volleyball as an additional sport, and in doing so, not only helps with more opportunities for women to participate in sports but also helps draw attention to the athletic department. Beach volleyball has also assisted university athletic departments in meeting Title IX regulations. With the quick and sudden rise as an emerging sport, beach volleyball has also opened the door for additional championship sports for female student-athletes. Current NCAA emerging sports for female student-athletes include acrobatics and tumbling, equestrian, rugby, triathlon, and women's wrestling (NCAA, 2021). Acrobatics and tumbling and women's

wrestling were the latest approved for the emerging sports program in Division I (Dent, 2020).

With the initial push from Olympics television coverage, beach volleyball continues to accelerate, so sports marketers need to be aware of how to maintain the sports' popularity with the participants and the fans. Successful marketing of beach volleyball will be evident in the exposure the sport receives in the coming years. This opens increased opportunities for sponsorships and ticket sales to elevate beach volleyball into a more financially lucrative sport for university athletic departments and programs.

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The Effect of eWOM from Identity and Non-Identity Social Media on Movie Sales

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Abstract: Social media platforms differ in the extent to which users reveal their identities, as well as users' ability to detect others' identities, both of which could lead to differential effects of social media generated word-of-mouth (eWOM) on actual consumer behavioral responses. Based on prior research on social identification, and relationship orientation of social networks in marketing, the authors examine whether eWOM on identity-focused (e.g., Facebook) and non-identity-focused (e.g., Youtube) platforms impact an objective consumer response variable: motion pictures box office sales. Using social media posts data for 58 randomly selected movie releases across all platforms during the period November 2014 – February 2017, the authors demonstrate that the overall volume of eWOM across all social media is positively associated with movie box office sales. The authors further find that eWOM on identity and non-identity-focused platforms each have a positive effect on sales, and the magnitude of their effect is not significantly different, suggesting that both types of platforms merit attention from marketing managers.
Keywords: electronic word-of-mouth, identity-focused social media, non-identity-focused social media, movie box office sales

Social media generated word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been a topic of increasing interest for both academics and marketing managers since the dawn of social media. Over the course of the past two decades, social media has become a major part of human communication. The types of social media platforms have also proliferated: social networking platforms, blogs, and forums attract considerable attention and following as they allow people to communicate more frequently and on a larger scale than ever before. According to Hootsuite, there are approximately 3.8 billion active social media users worldwide (Clement, 2020) and the sheer volume of digital communications has exploded to unprecedented levels.

One of the main implications of these developments is the elevation of word-of-mouth (WOM) communications from the offline world to the digital domain. As WOM has transitioned to the digital domain concurrent with the rise of social media, it has become the dominant form of person-to-person communication in cyberspace. Commonly known as eWOM, it refers to "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company that can be accessed by a multitude of people and institutions via the internet" (Hennig-Thurau *et al.,* 2004). Despite the increasing importance of social media-enabled digital communications in the form of eWOM, research in marketing has been relatively slow to empirically study its impact on objective consumer response variables. For example, there is somewhat limited research on the ability of eWOM to generate sales (e.g., Baek *et al.,* 2017; Yang *et al.,* 2020) with a few exceptions (e.g., Berger *et al.,* 2010; Duan *et al.,* 2008; Liu, 2006). In addition, as also mentioned by Pelletier *et al.* (2020), marketing studies in this context often use a single source of social media data (i.e., a single social media platform; Dessart, 2017; Hennig-Thurau *et al.,* 2015; Wise *et al.,* 2010; Yang *et al.,* 2016).

Given the importance of eWOM for both marketing academics and practitioners, as well as the limited understanding of its effects in the literature, more research is needed to have a better understanding of the factors that promote its transformation into objective and measurable consumer responses (e.g., Berger, 2014; Berger and Iyengar, 2013; Dellarocas, 2003; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Marchand *et al.,* 2017; Meuter *et al.,* 2013). In this research, the authors suggest that it is not simply the volume or valence of social media generated eWOM that may lead to consumer actions, but also the type of social media platform that it originates on. As the proliferation of different social media platforms increased the overall volume of eWOM (Goodrich and Mooij, 2014; Smith *et al.,* 2012), it has also contextualized it in the digital domain. Differences in the type and structure of eWOM arise across platforms (e.g., Marchand *et al.,* 2017; Smith *et al.,* 2012), partially due to the degree of identity authentication required. Research has identified two major groups of social media, depending on the degree of relationship orientation among users: identity-focused and non-identity-focused. Identity-focused platforms include Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, MySpace, and blogs (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The users of these social media platforms interact based on the identity they present, and the identity of others as they attempt to gain trust (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) also argue that such relationship centered social media platforms need to validate the authenticity of the users, which requires a disclosure of personal information. Digital platforms that do not feature a self-disclosure aspect, deemphasize the process of relationship building (e.g., forums, YouTube, review sites such as Reddit) and are therefore classified as non-identity-focused. For example, YouTube or Reddit users are likely to voice minority opinions

without bearing the cost of social isolation as they have limited identity disclosure, while users on a platform such as Facebook may remain silent if their opinions are not socially desirable in their network. In summary, an empirical study of the unique impact of each type of platform based on relationship orientation (i.e., identity and non-identity-focused) on customer responses as well as the differences between the magnitude of their effect has been absent from the literature and practitioner press.

This study examines how different social media platforms can drive or inhibit offline consumer behavior through the eWOM contextualizing effect, in the domain of the motion picture industry. In addition, this study investigates whether all social media platforms are equal in the transmission of eWOM to actual customer purchase behavior. Prior research in this context, using single social media platforms as a data source (e.g., primarily Yahoo! Movies), has uncovered that the volume of pre-release and opening weekend eWOM (Duan *et al.,* 2008; Liu, 2006), rather than the valence, matter more in terms of increasing movie revenues. In the current work, the authors make an initial attempt to empirically contextualize eWOM based on systematic differences between the identity orientations across platforms and to empirically evaluate the impact of those differences on an objective variable of interest to academics and practitioners: movie theater box office sales. In particular, the authors attempt to answer the following research question*: Is there a difference in the relative magnitude of the effect of social media posts generated on identity- and non-identity-focused platforms on movie box office revenues?*

To do this, the authors compile an exclusive dataset of all eWOM generated around the time of 58 randomly selected movie releases in a two-year period (November 2014 - February 2017) across all social media platforms available in the U.S. The dataset captures the entire volume of eWOM across both identity-focused and non-identity-focused platforms which mention any of the movie titles. Thus, this approach allows for the empirical investigation of the relationship between eWOM volume and box office movie sales, while avoiding potential sources of selection and omitted variable bias, as all social media eWOM sources are included.

As such, this study makes the following contributions to the literature and practice; first, it provides the first empirical insights into the unique and differential effects of eWOM generated on identity-focused and non-identity-focused social media platforms on an objective customer response measure. Second, it presents the first evidence of cross-platform eWOM effects on box office movie sales, using data from all available social media platforms. Finally, for practice, the results of this study call for caution as the nature of social-media relationship orientation within platform matters: managers should be cognizant that the volume of eWOM on non-identity-focused social media platforms increases box office revenues similar to eWOM generated on identity-focused ones. Thus, it may be wise to allocate digital advertising and promotions spending across all platforms. See Figure I for the conceptual model of current research.

Figure I
Conceptual Model
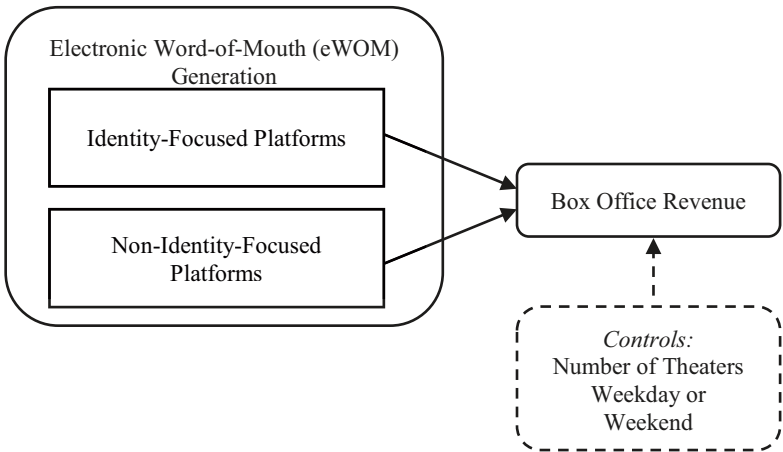
WOM and eWOM

Conventional WOM is a powerful form of interpersonal communication which serves an important role in influencing consumers' adoption and use of products (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). eWOM exceeds the limits of traditional WOM because of the variety of media by which consumers share product information (Gelb and Sundaram, 2002). Furthermore, eWOM differs from conventional WOM in terms of the degree of anonymity and discretion allowed, as consumers do not have to disclose their real identities (on some social media), the lack of time and geographic restrictions, the unprecedented speed of information exchange, as well as the permanence of online conversations (Gelb and Sundaram, 2002). All these developments have resulted in an exponential growth of consumer sharing or posting across social media platforms. In general, online posts are interactive venues for sharing information and personal opinions, recommendations, complaints and feedback about experiences with a variety of goods, services, and companies (Chatterjee, 2001). Such reviews are disseminated through various blogs, review sites, social networking sites, and instant messaging, and have become a major information source for consumers as an aid in their consumption decisions (Lee *et al.,* 2011).

Before the rise of social media, WOM research on purchase intentions had focused exclusively on interpersonal communications (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1995). Specifically, due to the intangible nature of services, WOM is important in predicting purchases (Murray, 1991; Zeithaml *et al.,* 1993). Some early research on social media's impact on sales found that the dispersion of eWOM across many different newsgroups generates more sales (as opposed to looking at overall eWOM volume; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) further note that consumer posts on review sites can promote sales: intuitively, positive reviews on these sites strengthen sales, whereas negative reviews diminish sales. Using Yahoo! Movies (a movie review site) web data, Liu

(2006) demonstrates that pre-release movie eWOM and opening weekend eWOM have the most explanatory power for movie box office sales. Furthermore, counter to previous research, toward explaining movie box office revenue, the volume of eWOM appears to have more explanatory power than its valence (i.e., the sheer number of reviews is more important than whether consumers were primarily negative or positive in their evaluations; Kim *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, Duan *et al.* (2008) find that increased volume of eWOM on Yahoo! Movies leads to higher movie box office performance.

Overall, research on social media-generated WOM's ability to generate sales suggests a positive effect. Yet, very few of the previous studies (e.g., Baek *et al.*, 2017; Yang *et al.*, 2020) use more than one social (or other) media in their conceptual or empirical models. At the same time, when assessing the causality claims of prior research, there is the potential for severe omitted variable(s) bias when word of mouth stemming from other social media is not included in the model. It is very likely that Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, review sites, forums, and blogs are all highly correlated with each other, and with the dependent variable (i.e., sales). Yet, it is invalid to assume that one platform can proxy for the entire realm of social media because each social media platform can be categorized into a broader theoretical context, as argued by Kietzmann *et al.* (2011).

Hypothesis Development

In general, eWOM in marketing serves three main purposes from the users' perspective: functional, social, and emotional (Lovett *et al.*, 2013). First, functional needs include information seeking behavior. Second, social needs satiate self-enhancing behavior, and third, emotional needs include sharing excitement and satisfaction (Lovett *et al.*, 2013). Similar to how offline and online communication mediums affect the three said eWOM purposes, the authors suggest that the different social media platforms serve different functional, social, and emotional purposes for the user. One of the ways to examine social media platforms is by the degree of closeness (e.g., relationship intensity) among users (Dubois *et al.*, 2016). Previous research suggested Facebook as a platform in which users share content with others that are closer, while on LinkedIn users share with others that are more distant (see experiment 3 in Dubois *et al.*, 2016). Thus, social media relationships with others can range from being completely immaterial, to being the sole reason people participate in the given social media. Platforms that are non-relationship focused may be primarily used for information seeking (i.e., functional) behavior, such as acquiring information, whereas relationship-focused platforms are used primarily for social and emotional purposes. The lack of authenticated identity in non-relationship platforms can inhibit relationship/social building processes. For example, the branding of Facebook and Twitter as social networking sites (focused on connections, e.g., social and emotional need satisfaction) is different from forums like Reddit that are focused on information gathering and dissemination (e.g., Record *et al.*, 2018) (e.g., functional need satisfaction) in a relatively anonymous setting.

Although social media platforms have been categorized in multiple ways including social networking, content sharing, and microblogging (e.g., Smith *et al.*, 2012), this study seeks to examine social media along theoretically derived differences, rather than as individual artificial categorizations. Consistent with Kietzmann *et al.* (2011), each social media platform can be categorized into certain key constructs (e.g., identity-

focused, conversation-focused). Each digital platform has its own social structure that primes users to give and receive information differently (Brown *et al.,* 2007). Similarly, contingent on the different purposes fulfilled by social media platforms, some may motivate more negative eWOM whereas others may motivate more positive eWOM.

The current work focuses on the theoretical construct of identity and examine the effect of social media platforms' degree of relationship orientation on movie sales. Closely related to the construct of identity, the value of trust is instrumental for relationships to form in social media platforms. Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that trust exists when "one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity." Previous work has further shown that trust can lead to greater customer satisfaction (Kau and Loh, 2006). The salience of trust in a person's eWOM can be shaped by the reputation and relationship between the users inhabiting the given social network. Given that Twitter and Facebook have a salient information disclosure aspect, one would expect there to be a difference in how information is processed compared to forums or blogs featuring users with largely anonymous identities.

Digital social media platforms can be divided into two major groups depending on the degree of inherent relationship orientation among users: identity-focused and non-identity-focused. Identity-focused platforms include Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, MySpace, and blogs (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The users of these social media platforms interact based on the identity they present, and the identity of others. Because of this self-disclosure aspect, social identity theory suggests that people (i.e., social media users in this case) are motivated to engage in impression management with others (Goffman, 1959). The process of self-disclosure is an important aspect of relationship building and gaining trust (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) also argues that social media that are relationship focused need to validate the authenticity of the users, which requires a disclosure of personal information. Digital platforms that do not have this self-disclosure aspect impede the process of relationship building (forums, YouTube, and review sites such as Reddit) and are therefore classified as non-identity-focused.

Dubois *et al.* (2016) argue that WOM is driven by interpersonal closeness. On the one hand, those who are close to each other tend to share negative word of mouth in order to protect themselves as well as their friends from negative events. Furthermore, consistent with prospect theory (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981), negative perceptions of performance have a greater effect on satisfaction and purchase intentions than do positive perceptions of performance (Lee *et al.*, 2008). On the other hand, users who are distant from each other (i.e., part of non-identity-focused platforms) tend to share positive WOM in order to associate their own self-image with positive attributes (Chen, 2017). Because tie strength is stronger on identity-focused platforms, and users trust close others more than distant others (Grimes, 2012), the information will have more credibility and weight to the receiving user, and the users with strong ties also interact more frequently and deeply (Brown and Reingen, 1987; Leonard-Barton, 1985). Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

> **H1:** eWOM on identity-focused platforms will have a stronger effect on
> movie box office revenues than eWOM on non-identity-focused
> platforms.

METHODS

Data

Movie reviews eWOM data was collected and provided by Crimson Hexagon, a proprietary service which collects all mentions of a movie title across all social media platforms. Fifty-eight movies were selected at random over a two-year time period, from November 2014 to February 2017. Data was collected based on mentions of the movie title in posts across all social media platforms (see Table 1 for total mentions of all movies by platform). For example, the data for Rogue One was collected by searches for "Rogue One" and "@Rogueone," and "#RogueOne." Movie box office revenue data was collected from BoxOfficeMojo.com. Furthermore, the authors did not collect this data, ensuring that classifications were not biased by research objectives. The dependent variable of interest is movie theatre box office revenues. The main independent variables include the number of eWOM posts in identity-focused platforms (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Google Plus, blogs) and the number of eWOM in non-identity-focused platforms (i.e., forums, review sites, news, YouTube, comments). Moreover, control variables are the number of movie theaters each movie was projected in, a dummy variable indicating if the projection date fell on a weekend (Friday to Sunday), and a variable indicating the number of days from launch to time of data collection.

Model

In line with previous research (e.g., Asur and Huberman, 2010), a multiple OLS regression was used to test the hypothesis. The sample includes over 280 million eWOM social media mentions across the time period, which is significantly more than prior studies (Duan *et al.,* 2008; Liu, 2006) and significantly reduces sample bias. Accordingly, due to the nature of the sample (multiple time points for each movie for an extended period of time), following Godes and Mayzlin (2004), a panel data linear regression model with fixed effects was used for estimation. In addition to the general fixed effects, movie-specific effects within the sample were controlled for to account for idiosyncratic biases. For example, the fixed effects for each movie potentially capture a combination of effects, such as scheduling influences, production company and director reputation, actor selection, and each movies' intrinsic quality (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004).

Empirical Results

Table 2 lists all results from the estimation models. Consistent with previous literature that all social media seems to drive box office receipts, the results reveal that overall social media eWOM is positively associated with sales ($\beta = 0.1809$, $p < 0.001$; see model 1 on Table 2). More specifically, eWOM on identity-focused social networks increases movie box office revenues ($\beta = 0.1291$, $p < 0.001$; see model 4 on Table 2). At the same time, eWOM generated on non-identity-focused social media also seems to increase box office revenues ($\beta = 0.1862$, $p < 0.001$; see model 4 on Table 2). Based on the magnitude of these effects ($\beta_{non-identity} > \beta_{identity}$), H1 (i.e., the extent to which the effect of eWOM on identity-focused social networks on box office sales is stronger than eWOM on non-identity-focused social networks) is not supported.

Table 1
Number of eWOM by each Movie on Different Platforms

Movie	Identity-Focused Platforms					Non-Identity-Focused Platforms				
	Blogs	Facebook	Google+	Tumblr	Twitter	Comments	Forums	News	Reviews	YouTube
Age of Adaline	2,930	210	1	1,361,093	127,070	141	5,595	8,187	110	294
American Sniper	82,496	35,629	28	2,880,833	3,695,728	3,039	67,690	173,114	6,170	22,401
Angry Birds	7,262	152,207	3	2,470,272	300,247	452	35,806	21,852	462	25,358
Anomalisa	6,235	730	0	737,979	96,461	510	8,985	16,263	92	1,562
Ant-Man	16,623	13,366	22	2,550,325	1,013,803	2,442	50,710	24,515	1,985	22,963
Avengers	56,362	27,954	89	10,266,538	3,690,056	9,944	172,047	65,931	8,503	23,884
Batman v Superman	22,032	441,860	13	4,950,150	1,416,775	3,973	121,549	63,663	4,477	65,734
Bridge of Spies	5,121	760	0	290,092	90,728	543	9,953	20,149	262	2,368
Captain America: Civil War	9,579	169,503	5	3,031,641	411,401	554	46,659	25,420	542	31,322
Central Intelligence	2,180	45,582	1	830,795	151,227	180	10,114	13,602	90	12,980
Cinderella	35,090	17,294	39	2,338,149	2,294,189	3,105	40,165	44,320	7,532	28,049
Conjuring 2	3,012	98,597	0	1,825,260	1,606,971	383	26,201	12,769	443	21,943
Deadpool	11,043	453,804	7	7,318,666	388,286	3,345	100,062	34,951	5,604	30,825
Ex Machina	3,878	341	4	130,757	98,366	410	8,660	5,259	892	349
Fantastic Beasts	12,248	9,844	4	2,729,642	1,069,306	1,433	55,420	33,432	468	42,474
Fantastic Four	9,239	5,349	9	963,724	426,698	1,141	25,607	13,875	1,285	10,070
Fifty Shades of Grey	63,207	30,843	9	2,048,104	2,064,355	1,301	20,098	96,357	4,293	38,973
Finding Dory	14,240	113,940	14	3,682,617	2,637,896	1,810	73,047	39,117	1,244	94,445

Table 1 (continued)
Number of eWOM by each Movie on Different Platforms

Movie	Identity-Focused Platforms					Non-Identity-Focused Platforms				
	Blogs	Facebook	Google+	Tumblr	Twitter	Comments	Forums	News	Reviews	YouTube
Girl on the Train	3,968	28,206	2	722,934	151,693	525	10,415	15,146	525	5,585
Good Dinosaur	6,188	3,456	9	1,679,890	221,747	340	13,555	16,659	783	5,859
Hidden Figures	10,929	8,708	4	661,728	622,598	2,156	27,485	45,054	132	10,827
Hotel Transylvania 2	5,050	3,463	3	1,298,386	266,189	253	9,101	14,618	264	7,669
Imitation Game	46,241	4,886	25	580,964	725,482	1,121	37,437	51,726	1,608	20,816
Independence Day: Resurgence	4,303	40,188	2	426,760	120,433	274	16,528	12,737	270	9,399
Jason Bourne	5,779	74,949	6	4,434,522	261,642	700	34,226	21,137	774	27,021
Jurassic World	45,229	33,275	66	8,013,141	4,236,593	6,429	118,952	78,509	15,798	62,390
Kung Fu Panda 2	9,509	172,324	10	5,904,693	591,356	1,325	36,120	39,616	2,489	29,939
La La Land	28,226	23,572	10	829,320	2,438,981	6,546	114,897	125,254	591	47,976
Listen to Me Marlon	177	12	0	746	3,627	2	37	291	0	173
Mad Max: Fury Road	28,243	5,335	16	4,755,355	889,909	3,230	76,966	40,046	5,270	9,490
Magnificent Seven	4,525	33,427	3	712,246	158,391	632	19,804	16,787	328	8,989
Manchester by the Sea	11,307	1,340	4	209,479	171,747	1,555	29,419	69,359	93	8,523
Maze Runner	6,333	3,944	1	1,796,313	938,051	789	18,475	13,420	2,181	16,891
Minions	44,135	106,457	104	4,262,942	5,091,373	12,274	260,080	56,514	20,456	96,770
Mission Impossible	15,501	8,133	16	1,152,875	574,585	1,190	32,600	35,659	3,011	10,486
Moana	16,513	32,052	2	3,145,051	2,219,989	2,150	76,849	40,892	1,096	136,152
Mockingjay	21,129	47,048	4	6,799,567	2,044,702	2,735	89,625	63,716	8,466	103,428

Table 1 (continued)
Number of eWOM by each Movie on Different Platforms

Movie	Identity-Focused Platforms					Non-Identity-Focused Platforms				
	Blogs	Facebook	Google+	Tumblr	Twitter	Comments	Forums	News	Reviews	YouTube
Peanuts Movie	7,886	1,857	5	1,737,055	155,156	323	12,958	19,110	388	9,913
Pete's Dragon	1,409	44,650	2	41,424	104,933	269	10,187	8,520	121	8,739
Pitch Perfect 2	12,368	3,314	5	2,159,418	1,283,030	987	24,378	24,553	1,651	3,758
Ride Along 2	2,282	251,713	1	3,552,276	192,996	217	4,487	9,816	229	2,421
Rogue One	83,462	119,106	64	8,355,465	6,921,424	17,604	813,745	211,673	12,206	602,390
Sing Street	1,092	34,075	0	63,796	66,566	141	3,737	5,176	15	1,218
Spectre	32,109	18,229	47	3,832,557	1,308,461	3,513	167,055	107,113	9,445	54,949
Star Trek Beyond	7,214	45,864	2	4,842,287	261,084	1,169	46,927	20,951	630	17,397
Star Wars: The Force Awakens	221,852	599,086	365	44,491,283	17,937,238	49,410	1,721,865	464,133	101,445	761,681
Straight Outta Compton	13,873	30,887	7	1,082,931	2,280,689	498	13,520	30,527	632	6,598
Suicide Squad	21,561	207,935	12	9,688,838	4,127,877	6,039	228,719	53,888	3,049	233,583
Taken 3	8,147	1,616	5	58,687	676,104	259	13,687	10,453	1,036	12,467
Terminator	19,829	17,624	42	593,798	930,970	3,507	81,118	33,477	5,303	24,768
The Legend of Tarzan	3,193	53,686	0	1,368,764	131,111	305	12,044	17,241	547	11,885
The Martian	37,976	19,179	37	4,775,433	1,131,161	7,531	137,903	114,798	4,238	18,637
The Purge: Election Year	979	47,025	0	145,254	97,462	81	4,517	5,814	95	5,310
The Revenant	39,074	177,667	26	7,292,768	2,317,271	9,782	181,229	209,270	5,982	34,301
The Secret Life of Pets	7,018	74,146	1	3,003,200	367,746	937	27,223	21,589	377	43,594
Tomrrowland	9,990	2,818	6	1,071,772	934,935	1,392	20,829	15,068	993	1,521
Xmen	5,628	151,853	5	1,691,820	356,124	826	43,816	17,940	1,440	32,847
Zootopia	18,112	392,288	9	18,298,191	2,790,418	3,088	248,152	42,327	2,906	98,289

Next, the opposite of H1 was tested following the procedure suggested by Cumming (2009). The corresponding 95% confidence intervals were estimated via bias corrected bootstrapping (1,000 re-samples). If the confidence intervals overlapped by less than 50%, the beta weights would be considered statistically significantly different from each other (identity-focused: β = 0.1291, *SE:* 0.038, *95% CI:* 0.055 to 0.203*;* non-identity-focused: β = 0.1862, *SE*: 0.043, *95% CI:* 0.101 to 0.271). Results showed that the confidence intervals overlapped by more than 50% and therefore are not significantly different (p > 0.05). This suggests that the effect of eWOM on non-identity-focused platforms on box office revenues is not significantly stronger than eWOM on identity-focused platforms.

Table 2
Effect of Identity and Non-Identity Social Media WOM on Movie Sales,
Fixed Effects OLS Regression

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
All Social Media eWOM	0.1809			
Identity eWOM		0.1679		0.1291
Non-Identity eWOM			0.2236	0.1862
Controls				
Number of Theaters	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0007
First week of Opening	-0.0244	-0.0245	-0.0248	-0.0241
Weekend	1.052	1.0518	1.1066	1.082
Observations	5,400	5,400	5,400	5,400
R-squared (within)	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.92

Notes: All coefficients are significant at p < 0.001. Each model includes movie-fixed effects. Movie sales, all social media eWOM, and identity- and non-identity eWOM are log transformed to reduce skewness.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The effect of publicity and eWOM on sales is well established in the literature. Supporting existing research, the results provide evidence that the overall eWOM has a positive effect on box office revenue. In addition, the volume of eWOM generated in non-identity-focused social media sites (e.g., review sites such as Reddit, Youtube) as well as identity-focused social media sites (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) seem to both increase sales. Moreover, the effect of eWOM on identity-focused platforms and non-identity-focused platforms is not significantly different.

This work makes several contributions to literature and marketing practice. First, it highlights the importance of the volume of eWOM by offering the first empirical insights in the differential effects of eWOM generated on identity-focused vs. non-identity-focused social media platforms. Although the top three social media platforms that are used by marketers are all identity-focused (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; Stelzner, 2019: 11), this work underlines the importance of also marketing through non-identity-focused platforms. Indeed, after Facebook with 2.5 billion, YouTube, a non-identity-focused platform, is the second most popular with 2 billion users (Oberlo, 2020), and Reddit is the third most visited social media website in the United States with 1.15 billion visits (following YouTube and Facebook; Semrush 2020). Yet, top two platforms with most digital advertising revenue are Facebook ($70.7 billion) and Instagram ($20 billion), followed by Youtube ($15.1 billion; Business Today, 2020). It seems that while eWOM volume on identity-focused and non-identity-focused platforms both positively affect consumer response, marketers and social media managers should not lose sight of eWOM generated on non-identity-focused platforms as they offer comparable return on investment. The expectation was that the customers would be more reluctant to act on the positive or negative feedback of others on non-identity-focused platforms, leading to a weaker effect of eWOM in non-identity-focused platforms on sales. However, it seems that the effect of eWOM from non-identity-focused platforms is the same as eWOM from identity-focused platforms.

Although not in line with the authors' expectations, this finding is not entirely surprising. Readers' perceptions over the information provided may vary based on the extent to which they are close with the sender of the information and the sender's identity is available. Indeed, people find anonymous messages as more honest (Kang *et al.*, 2016) and believe that others with no tie to themselves provide more novel information (i.e., including positive and negative feedback about a product) than those that they have weak or close personal ties (Morris *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, impression management literature also supports this contention that individuals are motivated to conform to societal norms if they feel visible to others over self-image concerns (Lapinski and Rimal, 2005). Thus, eWOM from non-identity-focused platforms may have unique characteristics to readers such as reflecting writers' authentic thoughts, which is potentially why its effect on box office revenues is positive and not weaker than eWOM from identity-focused platforms.

Second, this research sheds light on the need to minimize the effects of omitted variable bias in empirical research in the eWOM context by including as much information about the heterogeneity of eWOM across social media platforms. Although results of current research revealed no difference between eWOM from identity-focused and non-identity-focused platforms, previous research shows that not all social media eWOM is created equal (e.g., Cyca, 2018; Roma and Aloini, 2019). For example, Marchand *et al.* (2017) note that eWOM varies across consumer review sites and blogs, and consumers tend to cross reference their information search across different social media platforms. At the same time, social media platforms do not completely overlap, particularly in the degree of relationship orientation of users. These results are in line with Marchand *et al.* (2017)'s findings: each platform is likely to serve a different purpose in the information search process. Given this finding, as a best practice, researchers and practitioners must include as many sources of eWOM as possible to avoid such biases.

Third, although researchers could use a single social media platform for predictive modeling, it is important to recognize that such models are underspecified. Even though their effect on box office revenues is equally positive in the current work, the aforementioned characteristics of different social media platforms grant the need to generate inclusive research models with both identity and non-identity-focused platforms. These findings caution marketing practitioners to be aware of the relationship orientation of social media platforms when generating publicity: they should be cognizant that the volume of eWOM on both identity and non-identity-focused social media platforms equally increases sales. Reports suggest that most of marketers' attention is on identity-based platforms (e.g., Business Today, 2020; Stelzner, 2019). Reallocating marketing budgets across identity and non-identity social media platforms may be a wise policy without heavy devotion on either.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations and opportunities for future research. Scholars can investigate moderators that could weaken or strengthen the effect of eWOM in social media from identity-focused and non-identity-focused platforms on sales. For example, movie genre, budget, star-power, or director-power can all be considerations to explore. Next, the current work did not focus on valence of eWOM, which is a critical component of eWOM. Research suggests that more positive valence leads to more favorable consumer response (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006), unless consumers are warned with potential manipulations over the reviews by retailers (Karabas *et al.,* 2020). Thus, it is possible that positive eWOM and negative eWOM lead to different effects on sales depending on the type of platform and the extent to which consumers perceive eWOM on these platforms as credible. Relatedly, research can examine the type of platform consumers may select as a function of their opinion of the product. As a form of selection bias, it would be interesting to both academics and practitioners to know whether platforms attract a certain type of eWOM (e.g., negative vs. positive, long vs. short). Another limitation is the lack of marketing mix variables at the movie title level. However, this is not a major limitation, as the nature of the product category studied is associated with uniformly heavy advertising and pricing which is likely to lead to non-significant findings (You *et al.,* 2015). In addition, conducting behavioral studies could help strengthen the findings and identify potential mediators to the effect of eWOM from different platforms on sales. Future research is granted to delve deeper into the ways consumers process information on identity and non-identity platforms.

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