

SPORT BRAND COMMUNITIES: A SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS
PERSPECTIVE

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family present and departed who supported me throughout this journey. This would not have been possible without you.

Abstract

This dissertation was created and bound by an “alternative format” where three separate journal articles were created in a sequence that ties brand community literature, social network analysis (SNA) literature, and an empirical case study together. Paper #1 (Chapter 2) serves as conceptual literature review paper which traces the evolution of brand community research from its beginnings in the general business literature to the current brand community research in sport marketing today. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) define brand communities as a specialized and non-geographically bound community based around a set of structured social relationships amongst admirers of a brand, and are often recognized as the most integral relationship component of consumers to brands (Muge & Ozge, 2013). An attachment to brand community (ABC) framework is proposed through variables gathered in a review of brand community literature.

Paper #2 (Chapter 3) is a conceptual paper that proposes several brand community sport marketing applications for the emergent SNA methodology from a foundation of relevant literature. The conceptual direction and methodological techniques of SNA in areas such as fan identification, team success, player movement, internal marketing, marketing to the lifetime fan, and small fan groups as well as subcultural analyses were explicitly utilized. Paper #4 (Chapter 4) is an exploratory analysis of a single off-site fan group, which produced an applicable fit to the Attachment to Brand Community (ABC) framework revealing consumer brand loyalty group structure towards practical marketing implications.

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Chapter One:
Introduction

Sport marketing is ever evolving just as the industry it promotes, from sport marketers nurturing customer relationships through social marketing (Williams, Chinn, & Clavio, 2010) to creating a hybrid element of the promotional mix by allowing the client to create consumer-to-consumer interaction (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Through this evolution, there have been several key sport marketing principles that have remained consistent, such as understanding the importance of the consumer experience and satisfaction (Greenwell, Fink, & Pastore, 2002), using these experiences to increase consumer satisfaction (Clemes, Brush, & Collins, 2011), and the importance of developing and maintaining strong fan attitudes to ensure long-term success (Tosi & Pilati, 2011). Now it is time to keep up with this evolution of the projected 2017 \$67.7 billion sport industry (Van Riper, 2013) in the expansion of innovative ideas for sport marketing research.

The concept of brand community is one evolving area of sport marketing research. “Brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Brand community research has focused on a range of consumer goods and services elements within the sport industry from the creation of new teams, external influences on team identity, and relationship-building community events (Grant, Heere, & Dickson, 2011; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, & James, 2011; Woolf, Heere, & Walker, 2013). Hassay and Pelozo (2009) suggested that through a series of satisfying behavioral experiences, consumers might develop a sense of community. Despite this observation, research on brand communities and consumers experiencing

behavior experiences in non-traditional ways is limited. With such a large focus on the front line sales of sport organizations, consumers who experience sport in non-traditional ways and at off-site locations are often overlooked during the development of marketing campaigns.

“In order to become effective decision-makers, sport managers must avail themselves on the best and most recent knowledge available; that is they must become consumers of research” (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011, p. 4). Social Network Analysis (SNA) is one emergent method for sport marketers to examine their consumers. SNA provides a contrasting method to other areas of social sciences that often focus on the attributes of the consumer rather than on the relationships between them (Serrat, 2009). With research often being defined as a systematic process of discovery and knowledge, carrying the SNA methodology to the front lines of sport marketing is an appropriate and innovative step for the unique creation of knowledge. While there are various ways of measuring and analyzing SNA data, the importance of understanding the “structural equivalence” or “sustainability” of individuals (i.e. sport consumers), within social positions is paramount for a better understanding of sport consumers as a whole (Scott & Carrington, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

This dissertation aims to connect established sport marketing principles, as well as emerging brand community theory, to possible SNA implications. This research addresses a gap within sport marketing literature that to date, only contains a select few SNA applications. None of which accounts for the brand communities and their non-

traditional fan group relationships. Future SNA research is suggested through industry leading exploration (Katz & Heere, 2013; Quatman & Chelladuri, 2008b; Warner, Bowers, and Dixon, 2012) and this dissertation is a unique attempt to contribute to the knowledge gap of SNA as it is applied to sport marketing and brand communities.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop an attachment to brand community (ABC) framework, lay a foundation for SNA application to brand community research (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muge & Ozge, 2010), and empirically test the proposed ABC framework using SNA. While a myriad of literature exists pertaining to brand community and the SNA methodology, research on brand community utilizing SNA is almost non-existent. It is evident that the use of SNA provides all disciplines with an opportunity to create a deeper understanding of their consumers within a group context (Nixon, 1993). However, the effectiveness of the SNA methodology has yet to be properly examined and empirically tested amongst irrational sport consumers (Rowe, 2003) that generate a brand community (Ross, 2007). For these reasons, the purpose of this dissertation is to develop an ABC framework and utilize SNA statistical components to empirically test the framework.

This purpose is fulfilled through the use of quantitative measures to obtain SNA data from sport consumers. Fan consumers of professional ice hockey are chosen for the analyses context of this project to ensure a necessary scope for in-depth investigation. Given the growing competition for consumer attention, due to increasing entertainment

options (Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003), professional ice hockey consumers provide an ideal focus for which SNA can provide analysis.

Project Significance

With the stated increased competition for entertainment dollars in an industry experiencing rapid growth (Van Riper, 2013), the significance of this project lies within the ABC framework development and utilization of SNA as an innovative methodological tool to enhance marketing methods for generating revenue. The results of this dissertation are hypothesized to illustrate the practical effectiveness of SNA inquiry in the development of marketing campaigns to enhance brand community attachment. Theoretically, a deeper understanding of brand community attachment can additionally yield evidence related to increasing brand community and consumer behaviors such as purchase intentions. The potential of a deeper understanding of brand community is directly tied to the unexplored potential of SNA applications. This dissertation in its entirety proposes an attachment to brand community (ABC) framework, provides an overview of SNA related to sport marketing implications, and empirically tests the ABC framework through a case study investigation of a “off-site” ice hockey fan group from the myriad of unexplored possibilities.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this dissertation project, a variety of unique terms will be used. The following definitions are provided to ensure the understanding of these terms with uniformity throughout the study. All definitions without citation are researcher developed:

- Attitude:* A psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).
- Bi-modal:* Two different types of SNA data that reflects the fact that there are two distinct and different entities (or set of actors). “A [bi-modal] data set contains measurements on which actors from one of the [data] sets have ties to actors in the other [data] set” (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 29).
- Brand Community:* “A specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412).
- Entity:* An entity is a group, person, or organization, etc. relative to another group, person, or organization (i.e. a set of actors).
- Fan Culture:* Fan culture is a form of popular culture that echoes

many institutions of legitimate culture will fill cultural gaps by offering social prestige and self-esteem (Fiske, 1992). Fan culture also contains grouped stereotypes of behavioral norms, which are normally displayed publically and/or privately for that respective team.

Fan Group:

A set of 3 or more individuals who communicate and/or meet with some sort of regularity for the purpose of consuming or discussing the product of a specific team.

Fan Identification:

A spectators perceived connectedness to a team and the experience of the team's failings and achievements as one's own (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Fandom

“The social structures and cultural practices created by the most passionately engaged consumers of mass media properties” (Jenkins, 2010, p. 1).

Hub Marketing:

Marketing to consumers who are centered and/or

connected to a centered resource or outlet for consumption.

Loyalty:

A commitment to a specific team that is persistent, resistant to change, and influences cognitive thoughts and behavior (Funk & James, 2006).

New Media:

“The emergence of digital, computerized, or networked information and communication technologies in the later part of the twentieth century” (Filo, 2012, p. 442).

Offsite Fan Group:

A set of 3 or more individuals who communicate and/or meet with some sort of regularity for the purpose of consuming or discussing the product of a specific team at a location that is not the venue where the respective game is being played.

Points of Attachment:

Variables that explain, “motives for attendance and [/or] attachment to various aspects associated with the team” (Robinson & Trail, 2005).

- Relationship Marketing:* Marketing efforts focused on enhancing relationships between an organization and its consumers that results in increased organizational outcomes through avenues such as tickets sales, sport media consumption, and licensed merchandise sales (Kim, Trail, & Ko, 2011).
- Social Media:* “The tools, platforms, and applications that enable consumers to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others” (Williams, Chinn, & Clavio, 2010, p. 422).
- Style of play:* The type of game strategy/system that a respective team normally produced in effort to win a game (i.e. Defensive, Neutral Zone Trap, West Coast, Smash Mouth, etc.) (Bernstein, 2006).
- Unwritten Rules (UWRs):* The societal norms that govern sportsmanship during game play beyond the written rule book (i.e. when to fight in hockey, crowding the plate in baseball, hard fouls in basketball, etc.) (Bernstein, 2006).

Limitations

The limitations of this study include potential weaknesses that are out of control of the researcher (Simon, 2011). The limitations of this research project are acknowledged as follows in conjunction with best practices of the academy.

1. The use of self-reported data is a study limitation as the data cannot be independently verified. Correspondingly, Andrew, Pedersenm, and McEvoy (2011) report that the gravitation toward being socially desirable or the tendency of participants answering questions to portray themselves in a socially favorable manner will likely increase. For example, a new member of a fan group might exaggerate his or her self-reported fan identification level in order to be in alignment with group norms.
2. The lack of project results being generalizable beyond the specific population is a limitation due to the convenience nature of the sample. Additionally, each fan group had a non-generalizable group profile.
3. The cross sectional nature of the data is a limitation as participant responses may vary based on team success and the season completion mark of data collection. The point of the season at which the respective “favorite team” is during data collection can vary fan identification levels due to the anticipated probability of playoff qualification. This holds true for data collection with “favorite teams” that are out-of-season.
4. The limitations associated with SNA methodology must also be recognized. For the purposes of this project, complete fan group participation is required to obtain

the necessary SNA data for structural analysis of fan groups. As such, this project is limited to the observation of fan groups with manageable participation size of 3 – 12 members. Fan groups of this size do not want to incur the social costs of non-participation amongst other fan group members (i.e. not being eligible for the food and beverages incentives due to non-participation).

Delimitations

Delimitations are defined as limitations that are in control of the researcher. These delimitations include those characteristics that define the boundaries and limit the scope of a study (Simon, 2011). The delimitations that must be recognized for the purpose of the research project are acknowledged as follows in conjunction with best practices of the academy.

1. As there is a lack of sport related research utilizing the SNA methodology, much of what is presented within this dissertation is new to the field of sport marketing. For this reason, implementing the ABC framework that had not been empirically tested prior to Chapter 4 lead to some uncontrollable issues during the data analysis process such as new participant reported attachment variables.
2. The survey items of multiple choice, likert-scale items, and open-ended response items is also a delimitation. The use of open-ended items were implemented to ensure that all points of attachment for fan group members were accounted for. This left the door open for multiple interpretation issues and manageability concerns of the collected data.

3. In addition to the aforementioned convenience sample limitation, the respective “favorite team” of the participants does not represent a majority of NHL fans, as there are the thirty ice hockey clubs, limiting the generalizability of the findings within this project. In addition to fan groups of other NHL teams not being included within the Chapter 4 study, fan groups of international professional ice hockey clubs were not included. In this regard, it may be that the brand community findings within this project will differ in an international context.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1 presents the research project overview, purpose of the project, project significance, definition of terms, and project limitations along with delimitations.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review paper focusing on the evolution of brand communities within the literature and developing the ABC framework. Chapter 3 houses the methodological paper. This SNA methods paper contains a historical overview on the evolution of SNA as a methodology. A transition is then made into a review of SNA applications that have been applied to sport the sport industry. Further, the paucity of SNA use within the sport marketing field is discussed. Chapter 4 is then comprised of the empirical examination paper. This empirical examination contains a discussion of why the ice hockey context was chosen for SNA Investigation and the current relevance of this first ever SNA examination within an ice hockey context. Chapter 5 comprises a discussion of the synthesis of the dissertation’s papers, their practical and theoretical implications and suggestions for future research.

As this dissertation is a unique and original research endeavor, a literature review paper exploring brand community and purposing the ABC framework from the literature was completed. Chapter #2 provides an overview of brand community literature as it relates to the construction of an ABC framework. The foundation of this ABC framework was developed through the literature in attempt to account for the brand community attachment variables of family influence, geographic location, media coverage, team success, star player(s), coach(es), style of play, fan culture, team colors, social media, and word of mouth that play a role in the loyalty and behavior of brand communities. In addition, a sub-theme of unwritten rule agreement or disagreement was hypothesized for framework inclusion via the literature. Social networks are a major driver of brand communities and combined with organizational assets, such as brand attachment variables, have been cited to influence consumer intentions and behaviors (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). The proposed ABC framework was proposed as a visual conceptual figure in Chapter #2 that served as the foundation for empirical examination in Chapter #4.

SNA was then utilized in Chapter #3 to pose a SNA related paper as a precursor to chapter #4 with a conceptual methodological framework. The methodological application of this paper contains pertinent sections such as a SNA historical overview, an overview of SNA applied to a sport context, and the brief examination of the very limited SNA research conducted with a sport marketing lens. With this broad SNA historical context and understanding in-place, an in-depth exploration of SNA was then

built one study at a time to lay the foundation for future SNA research application opportunities within the field of sport marketing.

Chapter #3 provided a conceptual context of SNA as it related to an overview of sport marketing. A broad range of sport marketing implications were discussed to examine the large impact that SNA may have on the field. This paper builds from the historical context of SNA and the previous applications to sport management in general. Chapter #3 was the first step toward taking a more in-depth look at the social structure variables of sport brand communities to come in Chapter #4.

Chapter #4 serves as an exploratory SNA sport marketing case study while determining the applicability of the ABC framework developed in chapter #2. This case study yielded SNA data on how fan group structure and leadership related to the brand attachment variables from Chapter #2's proposed ABC framework. The relations of these fan group attachment variables were examined to establish an applicable fit and confirmation of framework variables. Additionally, the literature review within Chapter #4 contains a discussion on why the ice hockey context was chosen for SNA investigation, the marketing relevance of ice hockey, and a proclamation of the first ever empirical examination of ice hockey utilizing a SNA methodology.

The case study nature of Chapter #4 adds depth, detail, and nuance to this dissertation's exploration of SNA within sport marketing applications. This chapter is by definition a case study, as the data collected from the offsite fan group is non-generalizable to other group profiles. Chapter #4 was the first step in assisting sport marketers with a more in-depth understanding of brand community development and to

“better understand the shared group experiences of consumers” (Katz & Heere, 2013, p. 283). This practical SNA exploration examined the brand community attachment structure of the fan group and investigated the structural variables with respect to decision-making, leadership, and brand loyalty levels.

Chapter Two:
Literature Review Paper

Tracing the ABC's of Brand Community

Chapter Summary

This article traces the evolution of brand community research from its beginnings in the general business literature to the current brand community research in sport marketing today. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) define brand communities as a specialized and non-geographically bound community based around a set of structured social relationships amongst admirers of a brand, and are often recognized as the most integral relationship component of consumers to brands (Muge & Ozge, 2013). Media transcends geography and brand communities will continue to transcend geography to the boundaries of mass media. With this growing importance on attachment to brand community through mass media, or attachment team in the sport context, further exploration on attachment variables is critical for the success of the next evolutionary stage of brand communities. As such, an attachment to brand community (ABC) framework is proposed through variables gathered in a review of brand community literature.

Introduction

Brand community is now a fundamental core of business in the mid twenty-tens. The analysis of customer re-purchase (Cross & Smith, 1995) is behind us and we now have widened our scope to organizational relationships with consumers instead of just customers and their purchase behaviors (Kumar, Ghosh, & Tellis, 1992). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) asserted that developing a strong brand community is a critical step in actualizing the concept of relationship marketing. At this moment, still early in the twenty-first century, "the notion of [brand] community occupies a particularly important space" and is worth revisiting from a sport perspective (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 428).

The purpose of this article is to trace the evolution of brand community research from its beginnings in the general business literature to the current brand community research in sport marketing today so that a much needed sport applicable brand community framework can be proposed. A brand community is a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Today brand communities are referred to with the inclusion of traditional markers of community that include shared consciousness (Gusfeld, 1978), rituals and traditions (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Marshall, 1994), and a sense of moral responsibility (Frankfurt, 1969). These brand community markers are seen respectfully in sport with out-of-state supporter groups and pubs, Les Habitants fans booing the United States national anthem, to Chicago Cubs' fans continuing to support their longstanding unsuccessful team. As such, an attachment

to brand community (ABC) framework is proposed through variables gathered in a review of brand community literature to address a literature gap of sport attachment.

The term brand community has gained significant traction within the literature since the Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) article formally introduced and defined the term within the industry. Muniz and O'Guinn first presented the term brand community in 1995 to the Association of Consumer Research (ACR) at the 25th annual ACR conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and 12 years later were recognized with the 2007 Thompson Scientific Impact Award for "Brand Community" being one of the twenty most cited articles in economics and business. Not just a general business term anymore, brand community research is now appearing in numerous other industries such as, health care, tourism, and music.

Brand Community Overview

Prior to the third millennium, there were elements of brand community appearing within other scholarly research such as brand loyalty (Tucker, 1964), brand commitment (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973), brand equity (Aaker, 1991), and consumer behavior (Link, 1932). This discourse is primarily about the evolution of brand community, but this discussion would not be complete without acknowledgment of the contemporary social theorists who have contributed to the evolution of our acquaintance with community (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Etzioni, 1993; Fischer, 1975; Maffesoli, 1996; Putnam, 1995; Wellman, 1979). Yet despite the wide acceptance and potential research significance of brand community, the construct is just now gaining

traction within sport consumer behavior. This article aims to reconnoiter the trail on brand community into the sport industry.

Today, brand communities are released from Wellman's (1979) geographic boundaries and well-versed by McLuhan (1966) and Ong's (1982) mass mediated sensibilities to form a bond that converges O'Guinn and Shrum's (1997) individuals from all socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds. Additionally, most brand communities contain some form of tradition or ritual as "brand community rituals and traditions function to maintain the culture of community" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 421). This is significant as these non-geographically bound brand communities are self-maintaining cultures through direct interaction and mass media. Having identified that strong brand communities self-sustain their culture, it is imperative to further understand the origin variables that draw initial attachment to the brand.

These brand community variables that draw initial attachment to team are also present in the fan identification to a sport (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Jordan, Brandon-Lai, Sato, Kent, & Funk, 2014; Stevens & Rosenberger III, 2012) and team identification literature (Funk & James, 2006; Lock, Funk, Doyle, & McDonald, 2014; Wann, Waddill, Polk, & Weaver, 2011). With regard to fan identification, research has shown that the more identified a fan is, the more likely that fan will exhibit desired consumer outcomes that align with brand community variables (Gladden & Funk, 2004). In addition, team identification research has shown a direct link between the relationship of brand loyalty and the motives for supporting a certain team (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Funk & James, 2006; Kaynak, Salman, & Tatoglu, 2008). Whether it is attachment to a sport or

sport organization, these brand community attachment variables are in need of further refinement. The brand community attachment variables are not just unique to sport however, and their evolution is present within other industries.

General business

The general business industry is a logical home for brand communities due to its core community commonalities. The first core community element is consciousness of kind (Gusfield, 1978). Consciousness of kind refers to the intrinsic connections that brand members have with one another such as Mac computer users and their sense of difference from PC users. Secondly is a communal sense of shared rituals and traditions (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Marshall, 1994), where shoppers' swarm to the local stores early Black Friday morning to find the best retail prices of the year. Third and lastly, is the sense of moral responsibility element (Frankfurt, 1969), where collective action is sometimes taken in the presence of a threat such as a small town resisting the addition of a Wal-Mart that will hurt local businesses.

“The shared consciousness of brand communities is also informed by an explicitly commercial and competitive marketplace ethos (e.g. Coke vs. Pepsi)” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 419). Looking past the physical nature of the product or service, brands are socially constructed objects. Hoeffler and Keller (2002) showed that consumers are actively involved in brand creation and that brand community clearly affects brand equity. One example is that of the Apple brand community. This community has a strong sense of relationship marketing (Berry, 1995) as the Apple brand community carries out important functions on behalf of the brand, such as sharing

product release and update information, perpetuating the history and culture of the Apple brand, and providing technical assistance through numerous troubleshooting blogs for brand community members.

On-line brand communities also align with most general business models as most organizations continue to try to build their communities in a digital age. With the aforementioned moderating effect of communities, an increase in the commitment to ones on-line community also increases their brand loyalty to that respective brand (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008). With the increasing ease of self-expression and information sharing, research has revealed the multidimensional and dynamic nature of online consumer engagement (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Digital business research is evolving to further understand Brodie et al.'s (2013) discovery that on-line brand community variables emerge at different levels over time. These distinct consumer engagement states have not been proven generalizable to the masses in a brand community context, as we know each to be unique in composition, loyalty, satisfaction, empowerment, emotional bonding, trust and commitment (Brodie et al., 2013). Further research will be critical in uncovering the consequences of consumers engaging in digital brand communities and especially, the consequences to the digital brand community when an organization attempts to re-create brand meanings within these non-traditional digital communities.

Healthcare

Brand community research has spread into the medical field as the healthcare industry attempts to uncover ways to build consumer-brand relationships and expose

genuine stakeholder perceptions. Brand community research began to take hold in earnest starting at the turn of the century with studies such as Lofgren, Rhodes, Miller, and Solomon (2007) that examined how to differentiate a medical organization in the community with “brand-essence.” The literature continued with the Awaisu (2008) study of the brand community of Malaysian pharmacists who believe in and prescribe generic substitution prescription drugs. Additionally, one case study shows the efforts of the Good Samaritan Hospital trying to increase their brand community in Dayton, OH (Michael & Janis, 2010). The Good Samaritan Hospital offered to provide ten local schools with certified athletic trainers for their athletic events in exchange for the naming rights of various sport complexes and school buildings. This brand community sponsorship initiative aligns with Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) as they stated “brand communities are participants in the brand’s larger social construction and play a vital role in the brand’s ultimate legacy” (p. 412).

Sharing brand stories has also appeared frequently throughout the health care industry literature (Lofgren et al., 2007; Rodrigues, 2010; Saunders & Rod, 2012) as proponents of certain drugs, procedures, and hospitals reinforce their commitment to brand through the knowledge that others feel the same. “By sharing the comments of other community members, any one member feels more secure in his or her understanding that there are many like minded others ‘out there,’ a prime benefit of community” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 423). The sharing and recycling of information amongst a brand community also perpetuates the survival of the brand and helps ensure the legacy of brand cultures and their communities. Muniz and O’Guinn

(2001) identified that brand communities differ from other communities as these rituals and traditions exist in a hypertextual media environment where the commercialism of the brand serves a primary role in group membership and satisfaction.

Understanding these cause and effect relationships of consumer brand associations is important for both academics and practitioners in the medical industry (Foo, Douglas, & Jack, 2008). From Aaker (1991) we know that the perceptions, references, and choices in memory that are linked to a brand, are critical to relationship marketing and the formation of brand community. Through brand community research, the healthcare industry is now able to identify these consumer perceptions and attempt to manipulate them in hopes of influencing non-members with a subsequent choice of one brand over another via community influence.

Tourism

Brand community research has also reached the tourism industry. Prior to the twenty-first century, the hospitality industry had put forth a concerted effort to focus on brand loyalty (Tepeci, 1999), and alignment with the introduction of the brand community was the logical next step. Brand community literature has assisted in creating further understanding of Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, and Gnoth's (2014) "sense of place" by providing support with scholarship in destination branding, and a sense of place model. Destination branding activity is addressed in the literature as an appreciation of a sense of place from perspective residents (i.e. the local brand community). Brand communities are also seen as "having an active interpretive function, with brand meaning being socially negotiated, rather than delivered unaltered and in toto from context to

context, consumer to consumer” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 414). These destination-branding strategies seek to identify that brand communities are socially constructed and culturally dependent.

It has been demonstrated that marketers can strengthen brand communities through the facilitation of shared consumer experiences (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002), and has been implemented as a driver for the tourism industry. Lasch (1991) acknowledged that commerce is the great engine of modernity and is responsible for the advancement of consumer culture. “Brand communities do not typically reject aspects of the surrounding culture’s ideology. They embrace them” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 414). Such is the key to the tourism industry as each unique destination embraces its unique culture and provides a rich conceptualization of these brand communities to the world.

Brand community campaigning is more than just conceptualization however, as promoting export tourism markets gains leverage for the respective products and services (Gnoth, 2002). There are many brand community blogs dedicated to a sole location for the social promotion of a specific location. For example there is a unique brand community related to the Hawaiian island of Kauai where members post reviews of their top beach locations to visit void of general tourist (Kauai Beach Scoop, 2014). This Kauai brand community is quite ironic as it is actually promoting Kauai tourism to these “hidden” locations through the sharing of insider information with Kurtzman and Zauhar’s (2005) pseudo choice. While it is possible to be a brand community member without having visited the island of Kauai, ones membership status is not truly complete

until personal inside information is gained and shared on the review blog. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) reinforce this sharing brand stories principle as "the status members obtain from migration from marginal to insider community adds value to the consumption experience, and is an incentive for becoming a stronger and more informed brand advocate" (p. 422). The sharing of brand stories and insider information within this Kauai brand community provide an excellent example of leverage for products and services attached to these specific "hidden" Kauai locations.

Music

"A community is made up of its member entities and the relationships among them" and brand communities tied to the music industry are no different (McAlexander et al., 2002, p. 38). Cova (1997) laid claim to the fact that one of the many things that holds brand communities together is a consumption practice. This "we-ness," as described by Bender (1978), is the link that many followers of a certain band feel toward each other from a shared consumption. In fact, these followers of a music brand feel that they "sort of know each other" through their connection to the brand even if they have never met before (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 418). This sense of community within the music industry started to really take hold for supporters of Elvis, the Beatles, and continues today with the Justin Bieber culture.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, brand community research was taking hold of the music industry as one form of prevention efforts to slow the culture of free music downloading and sharing. Research focused on adding social benefits to fans by building brand communities online (Fox & Wrenn, 2001) as a means for consumers to

establish bonds with like-minded people via websites. Fox and Wrenn (2001) showed how artists and music labels attempted to increase the “possibility of cross-selling goods and services and integrating consumption of specific goods or services as an integral part of the social network” (p. 116). This was just the beginning however, as the music industry remained focused on their brand communities and attempted to align their respective vision and image utilizing the growth of the Internet.

In music culture, fans have had a significant and increasing influence in shaping the phenomena around which they establish community (Baym, 2007). Music fans continue to push the boundaries of the Internet to form community, from the MySpace boom, to the current peak of Facebook and other ancillary social media outlets. As a result, music brand communities can be more selective around what technology best houses their expressions of fandom. Hur, Ahn, and Kim (2011) quantified that brand community commitment does in fact play a mediating role between the brand community trust / affect and the brand loyalty of the community. Artists have taken note and now make concerted efforts to control their brand community’s image via online platforms specialized for their fans.

Peer reviewed brand communities

Today, brand communities represent a form of consumer agency in scholarly journals. This consumer agency is primarily available with the marketing literature in places such as the Journal of Marketing, Journal of Brand Management, Journal of Interactive Marketing, and Sport Marketing Quarterly. This peer-reviewed knowledgebase is an important resource to consumers and marketers alike as any

individual can locate one brand community or another and find an established collective for information on a brand phenomenon. Schau, Muniz, and Arnould (2009) have shown how marketing research demonstrates that consumers will construct brand communities if given the freedom to modify their products. Continuing, the research argues that companies should provide consumers with the any possible opportunities with which to welcome, badge, document, milestone, evangelize, and so forth a brand community.

The philosophy of enabling consumers has become common with marketers who create and work on traditional and digital social media campaigns that promote an ease of interaction. Interactional ease is sought to create more opportunities to leverage a brand by tapping into the power of brand communities. Roberts (2014) claims “the people out in the marketplace who embrace the values of the brand, as customers and/or purchase influencers, are the brand's true ‘owners’” (p. 1). This viewpoint is commonplace throughout the literature and researchers continue to work on how best to market to these “true owners” of the brand community. One thing that is for certain is that the marketing field will continue to house this important research for the foreseeable future.

A basic Big Ten university library search revealed that there are at least 418 peer-reviewed journal articles that contain “brand community” or “brand communities” in the title. While all but two of these articles were housed within business journals, 55 found their home in marketing specific journals. It should be noted that 1505 peer-reviewed journal articles contained the exact phrase “brand community” or brand communities.” While the purpose of this article is not to uncover every brand community article, a preliminary understanding that brand communities find their place in scholarly marketing

journals is essential for understanding the evolution from general business literature to the current brand community research in sport marketing today.

Sport Brand Communities

As is the purpose of this article to trace brand communities to their current form in the sport industry, sport brand communities have grown exponentially in research popularity during the twenty-tens. In general, sport fans are often viewed from a brand community perspective. The previously mentioned Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) definition that a brand communities is a specialized and non-geographically bound community based around a set of structured social relationships amongst admirers of a brand, and who are often recognized as the most integral relationship component of consumers to brands (Muge & Ozge, 2013). Given Van Riper's (2013) analysis of the sport industry's current and future growth to \$67.7 billion by 2017, sport marketers will continue to focus on the long-term importance of investing resources to spur favorable brand associations in regard to attracting consumers (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006).

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) identified that brand communities can form around any brand, but are more likely to do so around a brand with a strong image, prestigious history, and robust competition. Sport brand communities often contain all these creational variables, generating a public consumption and image that organizations exploit. Sport organizations do not want these relationships hidden, as there is a higher probability of increasing the size of a brand community in public than in private. As such, there is a fine line between the public promotion of a team's brand community and Schau et al.'s (2009) resistance to members who join the community for the "wrong"

reasons. Understanding these brand community linkages will continue to be a focus of future research.

Robust competition and oppositional tendencies explain some of the strength of these brand communities, large or small, as many communities pull together and form the tightest bonds during distressful periods or when faced with increased competition (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This is often realized in the sport industry during the playoffs for the respective brand communities/teams or when facing ones rival opponent. It is not hard to image the strengthening of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs brand community when facing the leagues dynasty team in the Miami Heat during the finals. Similarly, brand community members united against a common opponent when the MLB's New York Yankees face the New York Mets during interleague play.

Inline with a discussion on opposition, a brand community may form simply in opposition to another strong brand community even if they do not actually pose a threat or competition. Take fans of the NFL's Green Bay Packers ,for example, and the fact that there are dedicated "Packer" bars major in American cities such as Dallas, Texas. The Dallas Cowboys are not in the same division as the Green Bay Packers and are therefore not a direct oppositional threat. However, Green Bay Packer fans living in Dallas form a strong community regardless of their psychological commitment level (Funk & James, 2001) because it adds legitimacy for not cheering for the local Dallas Cowboys football team. Research has also been conducted on brand community in the context of newly established teams. Grant, Heere, and Dickson (2011) found that failing

expansion franchises have also failed in implementing the markers of brand community into their overall marketing strategy.

Sport organizations can build and manipulate brand communities around their respective team if done properly. Underwood, Bond, and Baer (2001) proposed that social identity can be built among fans by focusing on group experiences, the history or lack thereof for the organizations, rituals and traditions, and the physical facility. With respect to expansion franchises, there is a unique opportunity for fans to build social identity with the organization support promoting that they are actively creating organizational history. With fans being billed as Roberts' (2014) "true owners" of the expansion tradition, they hold critical managerial implications. If expansion organizations puts these fans central to their marketing strategy, Grant et al. (2011) claims that marketers will be able to circumvent a poor marketing mix and create a community strong enough to which the success of the team is secondary to the overall sense of community that fans perceive as the "true owners" of the brand community. This focus holds significant implications for expansion teams as their first-year performance is often not up to par with the rest of the league.

Conclusion

It has been argued that if more organizational-consumer interactions lead to a stronger brand community, then marketers should strive to encourage greater diversity in interactions given these multiple interactive opportunities serve to cultivate these brand community markets (Schau et al., 2009). "Sports are often used to bridge and bond individuals together" (Hedlund, 2011, p. 205), and as such, today's marketing landscape

within the sport industry will continue to place an increased focus on these fan brand communities as the keepers of the culture. The purpose in tracing the brand community evolution to this point is so that a discussion of what is missing from the literature can be had for the advancement of this important line of research.

The hidden variables

With all the brand community research amongst the sport industry, a knowledge gap still exists for certain variables. One missing variable or idea is that of assisting in the use of the brand. In other words, how brand community members assist others in brand use and knowledge acquisition must be explored. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) identified that brand community members have a "moral responsibility [that] also includes looking out for and helping other members in their consumption of the brand" (p. 425). Verizon Wireless currently provides an excellent example of this with their current NHL XLTE commercial. This commercial depicts a group of brand community members watching their favorite team's game at a pub when the television feed cuts out. One community member pulls up the NHL Game Center application on his tablet and starts streaming the game live over Verizon cellular service. Instead of privately viewing the game, he publically rejoices that he's "got the game over here."

This is a prime example of a group member displaying a sense of moral responsibility to help other members with their brand consumption. Similarly, this moral responsibility is often exhibited in the world of paid subscription based recruiting sites for college athletics. Mudrick and Lupinek (2015) identified that blogging insider info on recruiting sites was in effort to help others within the community consume the

brand/team in the most knowledgeable way possible. This review of brand community literature associates that a community member's desire to share insider information with other group members is in effort to increase their legitimacy within the group.

Fournier and Lee (2009) have identified that many companies who try to turn their customers into a cohesive "brand community" falter because of serious misconceptions. For example, many sport organizations relegate community building to the foundation or marketing department instead of treating it as a high-level organizational strategy. Interactive blogs hosted on team websites will not do the trick, as a vertical commitment to brand community needs to start at the top. "To build and maintain strong brand communities, companies must understand the individual and social needs of members and do everything possible to support and engage them on their own terms" (Fournier & Lee, 2009, p. 106). Many sport organizations are missing this message, as rather than attempting to control a sport community, the brand community should be guiding the organization. In other words, the brand community experience should be central to all sport organizations' business model.

If we are to take Fournier and Lee's (2009) advice to let the brand community guide the sport industry, then the management of said sport organizations must be open and provide a corporate-level commitment. Providing this level of commitment to the brand community can assist sport organizations in building deep consumer loyalty, increasing marketing mix efficiency, and enhancing brand image (Fournier & Lee, 2009). This is easier said than done, and for progress to be realized on a macro management

level, the consumers that comprise these brand communities must be further analyzed on a micro level.

Next-level brand community variables

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) noted that communities are no longer restricted by geography, as is true with sport brand communities as the industry shifts to a model of global sport. While we might not see brand extensions built void of direct interaction such as NASCAR in Africa and the NHL in the Middle East according to the 2030 prognostications of Lupinek, Ross, and Walsh (2013), building fan relationships through brand community will continue to grow in importance. Media transcends geography and brand communities will continue to transcend geography to the boundaries of mass media. With this growing importance on attachment to brand community through mass media, or attachment to team in the sport context, further exploration on these attachment variables is critical for the success of the next evolutionary stage of brand communities.

First team symbols must be explored, as this is the key piece of imagery that holds a brand community together internationally. From global impulse consumption that comes from organizational success (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002), enhanced self-esteem through the attainment of social prestige (Mitrano, 1992), and the symbols of national identity that team symbols can provide through sport (Holmes, 1994). These team symbol brand community attachment variables provide insight into how not only the individual consumer can be socialized into sport brand community attachment, but also the community or nation in which the sport team is located. Cultural identity through purchase consumption or display, whether locally, nationally, or internationally is often

present within sport team symbols and thus must be accounted for as a brand community attachment variable.

Next, additional consideration is also needed for face-to-face interaction of brand community members and their attachment variables. This is in opposition to Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) claim that "brand communities are largely imagined communities" (p. 426). While this might be true in a general retail and business sense, the sport industry is generally the opposite. Even if a brand community member is void of face-to-face interaction, they can see other non-imagined brand community members on television, the Internet, or via text sources reporting on the live sporting event. Brand communities are largely void of these direct contact game day communities (Anderson, 1983), as most members have never met or directly interacted, yet are easily related to (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). With the proliferation of mass media in modern times, the media "allows community members to possess a well-developed sense of vast unmet fellow community members" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 413).

In order to understand these non-direct interaction brand community members, we must first further investigate face-to-face brand community members to develop an attachment base of the irrational sport consumer context (Rowe, 2003) that has the power generate a brand community (Ross, 2007). It is known that greater social benefit can be seen through community interaction, which brand communities likewise provide. Research should be extended to non-traditional fan groups who support their brand communities from afar and off-site locations as these fans align with Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001), not from an "imagination" of place, but from the mass media

proliferation of place with stadium atmospheres on game day. While it is the position of this article, traced through the research, that brand communities are often formed around one good or service, attachment to the brand/team in the sport context must be investigated further as attachment variables related to a specific team are often intangible.

Limitations

One limitation of testing brand community attachment variables is legitimacy (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) of members as bandwagon fans in the sport context. In the context of a sport brand community, legitimacy is demonstrated by really knowing the team/brand as opposed to self-aligning with the team/brand during times of popularity. These illegitimate reasons are typically revealed by failing to know, understand, or follow the aforementioned brand community culture, traditions, and rituals that signify legitimate brand community membership. As such, this limitation should be quarantined during initial investigation by piloting research with brand community members that have face-to-face interaction and accountability. One suggestion for quarantined legitimacy is for future research on non-traditional fan groups who meet at an off-site location (non-playing venue) to view their favorite team/brand's games.

Proposing an ABC framework

“Brand communities reveal the socially situated nature of brands as something more than a summation of attitudes or impoverished critical stereo types” (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 428). When discussing attachment to brand/team variables in the sport context, investigation must go below the surface level points of attachment such as geography and family influence (Robinson & Trail, 2005). Research must be conducted

to get below these surface level attitudes and identify what other variables play a significant role in brand/team attachment. If we are to hold to Firat and Venkatesh's (1995) claim that brands are fundamentally social entities and created as much by consumers as by marketers, then marketers must desire to empirically test and identify all attachment variables.

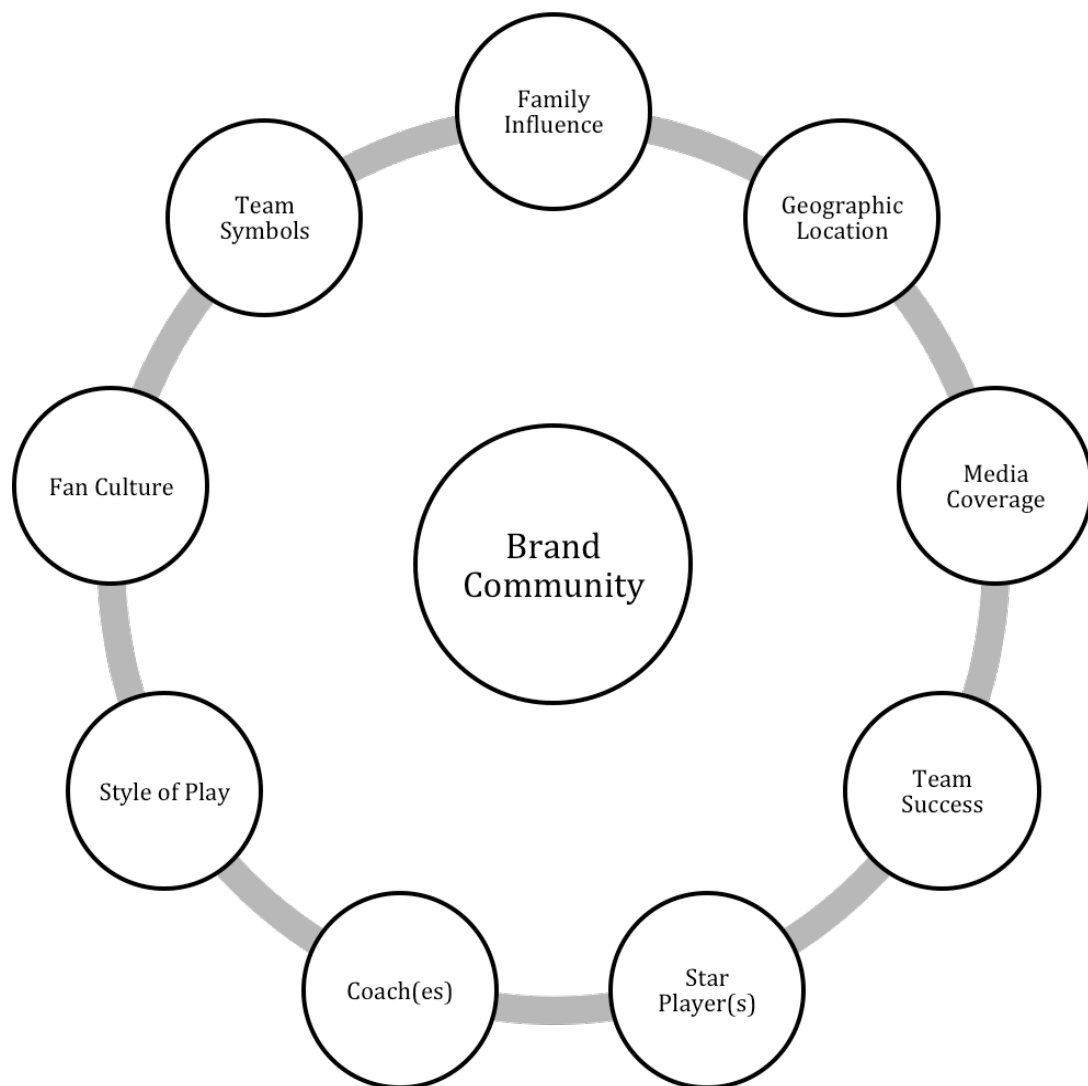


Figure 2.1. Attachment to Brand Community (ABC) Framework

The attachment to brand community (ABC) framework (see Figure 2.1) is unique from existing work on points of attachment and identification research as it is a first of its kind to specifically examine the sport fandom of brand communities.

Rank the relevance level of how you became a fan of the MN Wild:

	Not Relevant	Little Relevance	Relevant	Very Relevant	Extremely Relevant
Family Influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geographic Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Coverage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Star Player(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coach(es)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Style of Play	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fan Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Symbols	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Rank the relevance level of why you are a fan of the MN Wild today:

	Not Relevant	Little Relevance	Relevant	Very Relevant	Extremely Relevant
Family Influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geographic Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Coverage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Star Player(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coach(es)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Style of Play	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fan Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Symbols	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 2.2. ABC framework scale items to be tested for inclusion

These attachment variables (see Figure 2.2) that are proposed in the ABC framework also have strong ties to the aforementioned team identification literature. Additionally, some of these team identification variables are referred to as points of attachment (Robinson & Trail, 2005) where it was found that attachment to team is only one of several possible points that comprise team identification variables. Robinson and Trail (2005) also note that future research regarding points of attachment should use age as an independent variable along with the use of other “demographic variables (e.g., employment status, race, income, etc.) and behavior (e.g., number of games attended, years as a fan) as a dependent variable” while continuing to look at these attachment variables cross-comparatively within the other major professional sports.

Future research

Future research in all the aforementioned areas provides useful opportunities and insight in examining leading theories and creating interdisciplinary research opportunities. Research in these areas will assist sport marketers in a more in-depth understanding of brand community and to “better understand the shared group experiences of consumers” (Katz & Heere, 2013, p. 283). This future research will ultimately assist sport marketing professionals with the challenge of accounting for uneven relationships within fan bases and between consumers by exploring their respective attachment to the brand.

Social network analysis (SNA) as a budding methodology is also called upon for this context as it aligns with Bender’s (1978) definition of community that is “a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds” (p. 145). A social analytic

perspective aligns well with sport consumers due to the focus on primary ties instead of concentrating on perceptions of local solidarity (Zaglia, 2011). SNA is a perfect methodological fit to gain a micro view of these brand community attachment variables for team supporters, season ticket holders, social networks, and other vested stakeholders. Recognizing the leaders and followers of any fan group type is important, and season ticket holders are no exception. Katz and Heere (2013) place a heightened focus on key individuals, as a passionate and satisfied network hub is the easiest way to promote a strong brand community of highly identified fans. For example, there are SNA implications with season ticket holder hubs and their brand community attachment relationships. A “hub” is defined as a centered resource or outlet for consumption of the sport product or event. Katz and Heere (2013) suggest that there are season ticket holders who purchase groups of season tickets, tailgating permits, and parking passes with the intention of re-selling them and/or distributing them amongst fan group members. This example shows the importance of SNA’s ability to identify micro group structures and classify these group “conduits” for targeted attachment marketing campaigns. Currently, sport marketers often rely on word of mouth communication to observe organizational change (Shreffler & Ross, 2013), whereas SNA has the ability to recognize structural attachment shifts of these season ticket fan groups over time. The SNA method has the ability to add to the understanding of large and small brand communities and the social structure of the fans that comprise them, whether it is cross-culturally or within the same media market. A greater understanding of these social structures is key to the

development of strong brand community attachment as the organization of society often revolves around concepts of social change (Servaes & Lie, 2013).

Chapter Three:
Methodological Paper

A Social Network Analysis Perspective on Brand Community

Chapter Summary

Sport marketing is ever evolving just as the industry it promotes, from sport marketers nurturing customer relationships through social marketing (Williams, Chinn, & Clavio, 2010) to creating a hybrid element of the promotional mix by allowing the client to create consumer-to-consumer interaction (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Now it is time to keep up with this evolution of the projected 2017 \$67.7 billion sport industry (Van Riper, 2013) in the expansion of innovative ideas for sport marketing research. One such research method often used outside of sport marketing is social network analysis (SNA), which provides an opportunity to examine the aforementioned evolving sport consumer with a different lens focusing on the structure of consumer relationships, ranging from casual acquaintance to close bonds. This conceptual paper proposes several brand community sport marketing applications for the emergent SNA methodology from a foundation of relevant literature explicitly utilizing the conceptual direction and methodological techniques of SNA in areas such as fan identification (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003), team success (Robinson & Trail, 2005), player movement (McManus, 2014), internal marketing (Katz & Heere, 2013), marketing to the lifetime fan (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998), and small fan groups as well as subcultural analyses (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002).

Introduction

Sport marketing is ever-evolving just as the industry it promotes, from sport marketers nurturing customer relationships through social marketing (Williams, Chinn, & Clavio, 2010) to creating a hybrid element of the promotional mix by allowing the client to create consumer-to-consumer interaction (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Through this evolution, there have been several key sport marketing principles that have remained consistent, such as understanding the importance of the consumer experience and satisfaction (Greenwell, Fink, & Pastore, 2002), using these experiences to increase consumer satisfaction (Clemes, Brush, & Collins, 2011), and the importance of developing and maintaining strong fan attitudes to ensure long-term success (Tosi & Pilati, 2011). Now it is time to keep up with this growth of the projected \$67.7 billion sport industry by 2017 (Van Riper, 2013) by the expansion of innovative ideas for sport marketing research.

Given the current industry growth and emerging trends such as social media, iFans, and the resurgent idea of “smellovision” (i.e. digital scent technology), the last 10 - 15 years have changed the business of sport dramatically (Lupinek, Walsh, & Ross, 2013; Shreffler & Ross, 2013). While proven business models such as merchandise sales have remained consistent, teams’ are constantly integrating new strategies such as alternative uniforms, or third jerseys, to maintain sales (Van Riper, 2013). Sport marketing research is also following suit with proven data collection methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, projective techniques, surveys, experiments, and test marketing being proved as successful (Shank, 2009). However, less examined research methods outside

of sport management and innovative types of data collection provide an opportunity to further our understanding of sport consumers.

One such research method often used outside of sport is social network analysis (SNA), which provides an opportunity to examine the aforementioned evolving sport consumer with a different lens focusing on the structure of consumer relationships, ranging from casual acquaintance to close bonds. SNA provides a complimentary method to other areas of social sciences that often focus on the attributes of the consumer rather than on the relationships among them (Serrat, 2009). SNA provides a unique opportunity to view, in an interpretive manner, how the sport industry is changing by focusing on consumer relationships, how growth is impacting consumer brand loyalty and purchase intentions, and to reaffirm in a group-setting previously suggested frameworks and models created quantitatively via methods such as structural equation modeling (SEM). Figure 3.1 Provides an example of how SNA can be used to study a small fan group that chooses to consume their favorite ice hockey team, the Minnesota Wild, at various local pub establishments. This MN Wild Fan group was examined based on each group members' attachment to brand community (ABC) framework (Lupinek, 2015) elements in conjunction with a brand loyalty (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006) scale and self-reported group leadership/decision-making levels.

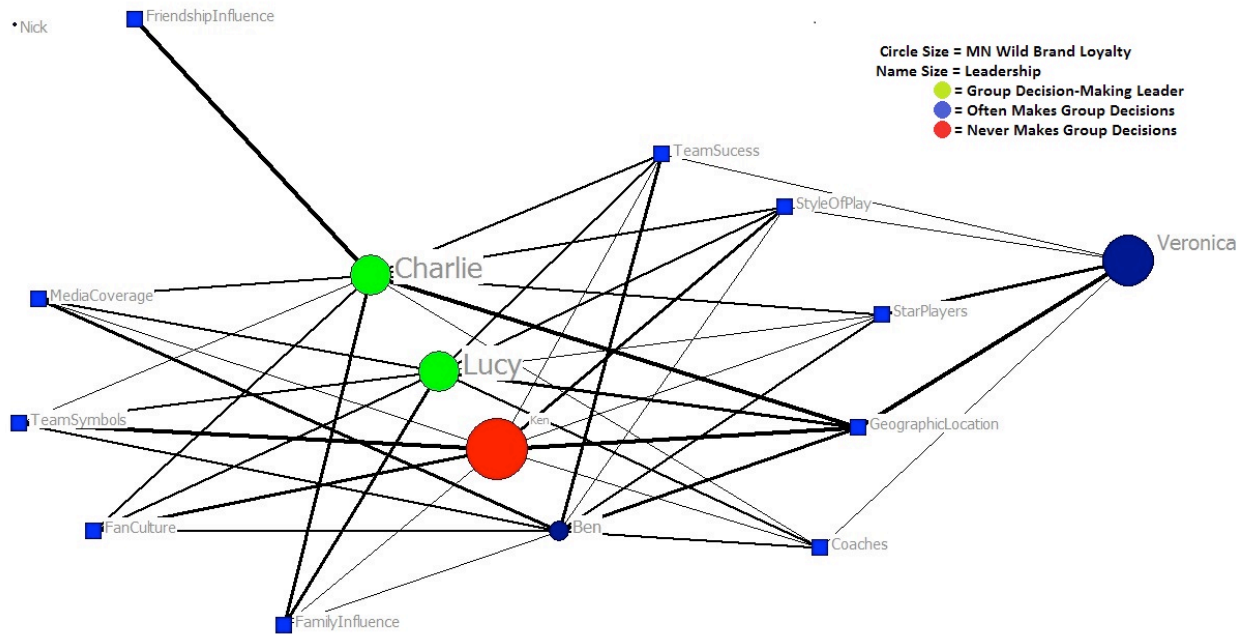


Figure 3.1. ABC Framework with MN Wild Brand Loyalty, Fan Group Leadership, and Decision-Making

Note. Line thickness represents the attachment level of each group member to each ABC Framework variable. Name size represents the group reported Leadership level of each participant. Circle color represents the group reported Decision-Making level of each participant. Circle size represents the self-reported Brand Loyalty level of each participant to the Minnesota Wild Ice Hockey Club.

I don't intend to challenge the value of traditional marketing research or the effectiveness of the existing techniques within sport. Instead, my objective is to suggest that sport marketing can greatly benefit from more attention being paid relative to a "stripped-down level of social interaction and underlying structures" (Nixon, 1993, p. 315). Such as the SNA example in Figure 3.1, SNA is a great methodological tool to

reveal Nixon's (1993) underlying structures of the key players within sport social circles so that marketers can better understand large and small fan group dynamics when developing marketing campaigns.

Globalization

Lupinek et al. (2013) suggest that an increasingly interconnected society is spurring globalization of sport through the broadening of technologies. As a result of increased globalization, organization (team) brand exposure will dictate a shift to global brand management in professional and intercollegiate sport. This shift will likely occur with teams that are limited to North American markets, yet have the desire and ability to expand their brand globally. There will be targeted efforts for signing international players from specific developing markets and global sponsors with explicit ties to both respective markets (Lupinek et al., 2013). With this global communication in place via emergent digital technologies, leagues and teams will be able to insert programming, camps, and overseas events similar to current examples such as the NBA's Basketball Without Borders, MLB's World Baseball Classic, and the global NFL Play60 brand. Amongst various forms of measurement, utilizing SNA on large consumer populations yields numerous opportunities for sport organizations to evolve their global marketing strategies and campaigns. This larger organizational SNA scale allows for a broad overview perspective for investigation of sport consumers.

Large networks such as national youth sport organizations can be surveyed to measure the effectiveness of a North American global marketing campaign. In a related fashion, one of SNA's primary strengths as a methodology is the ability to longitudinally

measure network change over time. Maguire (2011) suggests further investigation into the make-up of the global sport power elite and SNA is an excellent tool to measure this cultural change over time. SNA can also be utilized with a mixed-methods approach for understanding globalization issues, such as, resistance to western culture, the national culture of sport, and political variables that impact consumer decision-making. With the social benefits no longer drastically outweighing the financial costs of hosting mega sporting events such as the Olympics and World Cup, SNA can be used to explore the social impact with pre and post analysis of local consumer networks as suggested by Costa (2013). For example, a quantitative survey can be implemented to examine the perceived pre-social impact of a Olympic host community and followed up with qualitative interviews and analyzed with a grounded theory (Corbin, & Strauss, 2014) framework to understand the societal impact post-perception of the local community members. These are just a couple examples of the significance of sport globalization research and with supporters and anti-globalization activists, there is no paucity of research opportunities that may benefit from SNA.

iFan culture

Today's sport marketplace is no longer geographically restricted based on fan group proximity. Team supporters, such as interactive fans (iFans), are now able to follow their favorite team anywhere in the world with Internet or cell phone service. Regardless of geographic barriers, iFans are able to consume the products of the team on-demand through new media outlets (Shreffler, 2013). As a result of increased globalization, team brand exposure will dictate a shift to global brand marketing deals

shifting organizational focus to new fan cultures (Lupinek et al., 2013). Certain fan identification principles, such as Ross, Walsh, and Maxwell's (2009) feeling of team ownership, loyal perceptions, personal importance, and expression to others, are expected to remain consistent across cultures, but other constructs such as consumer purchase intentions might vacillate. SNA provides an opportunity to better quantitatively understand geographically unrestricted fandom via relatively small sample sizes. This methodological advantage will enable sport marketers to better understand the dynamics of group formation and development.

Social networks are an area where SNA methodology can be integrated within virtual on-demand fan groups that exist for many professional and collegiate teams. "Fan bases are more accurately described as a collection of a few thousand [or a just a few] highly invested consumers who bring their own personal network to consume the team's product" (Katz & Heere, 2013, p. 283). These highly invested consumers connect the SNA methodology as egocentric networks where emphasis can be placed on the patterns of social relations amongst sport fans and the personal nature of modern-day fan brand communities (Chua & Wellman, 2011). Another example lies within the free and paid subscription-based sites, such as NHL.com and the Rivals.com networks, which offer fans the opportunity to build non-geographically based digital fan group relationships. SNA methodology has the capacity, via statistical software such as UCINET (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002), to extract compiled data sets for examination of these online fan groups visually and with network measures such as density and cohesion. The increasing sophistication of this software has allowed for the advancement of SNA as

scientific methodology with numerous empirical examination capabilities stemming from small groups, all the way to large populations samples from which social network information can be mined from the data. Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, and Kim (2008) have found that within online social networks, community member interaction strongly influences members' community commitment. This effect is practically relevant to many sport marketers as a valuable option to target those fans whose opinions are most highly regarded amongst their respective online social network. Additionally, SNA allows the aforementioned strength of longitudinal study capabilities, via SIENA software (Ripley, Snijders, Boda, Vörös, & Preciado, 2014), where practitioners can yield beneficial knowledge of long-term structural change within social networks. On-line setting examples, such as Rivals.com, are a reaffirmation of McWilliam's (2000) finding that increased interaction amongst community members will lead to increased fan communication with respect to commitment toward the brand and other community members.

Brand communities

In general, fans are often viewed from a brand community perspective. Brand community is a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412), and is often recognized as the most integral relationship component of consumers to brands (Muge & Ozge, 2010). Given Van Riper's (2013) analysis of the sport industry's current and future growth, sport marketers will continue to focus on the long-term importance of teams investing resources to spur favorable brand associations that attract

consumers (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). SNA is a useful methodology to gain a large-scale view of these team supporters, season ticket holders, social networks, and other vested stakeholders.

Recognizing the leaders and followers of any fan group type is important, and season ticket holders are no exception. Katz and Heere (2013) emphasize a specific focus on the key group individuals, as a passionate and satisfied network hub is the easiest way to promote a strong community of highly identified fans. These network “hubs” are often the most active within their networks or have the most direct lines of communication for informational flow. For example, there are SNA implications with season ticket holders and their brand community relationships. Katz and Heere (2013) suggest that some season ticket holders purchase groups of season tickets, tailgating permits, and parking passes with the intention of re-selling them and/or distributing them amongst fan group members. This example shows the importance of SNA’s ability to identify group structures and classify these group hubs as “conduits” of network connections within and between groups for individualized marketing campaigns. Currently, sport marketers often rely on word-of-mouth communication to observe change (Shreffler & Ross, 2013), whereas SNA has the ability to recognize structural shifts of these season ticket fan groups over time. SNA methods have the ability to add to the understanding of large brand communities and the social structure of the fans that comprise them, whether cross-culturally or within the same media market. A greater understanding of these social structures is key to the development of strong brand

communities as the organization of society evolves around complex social change (Servaes & Lie, 2013).

Social Structure

Underwood, Bond, and Baer (2001) state that to understand the relationship between consumers, the discussion of group experiences is developmentally crucial for fans when creating a sense of identity within their fan brand community. Each team in each respective sport has a unique network of consumers. However, we do not know whether or what commonalities link the social structures of these unique fan bases. Social structure can be seen as a consumer network or as units of social cohesion such as family, friends, schools, and community, which create social cohesion (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). A social structure within the sport consumer context is a network of fans and how the sport consumption is organized as it relates to the distribution of power and resources within the respective consumer network.

Complex sport consumer social structures can be examined quantitatively via SNA survey instruments. Social network data differ from standard behavioral and social science data in a number of important ways (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). As previously mentioned, SNA data can be studied on several levels. From a large-scale approach, survey measurement is the most practical for collecting data on sizeable social networks. These large population based SNA data can then be input into the analysis software for visual and empirical analysis.

Alternatively on a small scale, a qualitative approach is sometimes best. While it is easy to measure surface relationships with a quantitative survey, it can be impossible to

gather in-depth network relationship elements without a mixed-methods or qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods such as field interviews and observations are often used by researchers utilizing SNA (Wasserman & Faust, 1994) in effort to give the member a “voice” through the data (Grenier, 2011). Qualitative interviews are sometimes the only means of attaining SNA data in closed or restricted environments. In a consumer group setting, individuals might be hesitant to fill out survey questionnaires that might speak negatively about other members. In these situations, a face-to-face interviews can relieve some member anxiety about the reporting of contextual data and increase participation.

Specifically, I aim to discuss SNA and its methodological implications and connections to sport marketing research. A sport marketing structural and consumer relationship focus of analysis can utilize contemporary social network perspectives, concepts, and methods to converge on the “underlying social structures in sport” along with the nature and influence of social interaction (Nixon, 1993, p. 316). This paper is not suggesting an exclusive reliance on quantitative or qualitative research, but conversely, this paper provides a proposition on behalf of the use of SNA in sport marketing for unique mathematical modeling via both quantitative and qualitative methodology.

Existing SNA research on consumer group structure (Berkowitz, 1982; Freeman, White, & Romney, 1992; Wasserman & Faust, 1994) provides useful methodological tools for “identifying and understanding social interaction, structures, and change” (Nixon, 1993, p. 316). Some SNA researchers study the complex network structure

within large-scale complete networks, while others examine smaller-scale egocentric social networks where members are often more interconnected and defined with a focal individual standpoint (Nixon, 1993). In both contexts the focus is on the structure of “social relationships that directly or indirectly link people to each other” and to their respective groups, subgroups, organizations, communities, and assorted other collectivities that are part of their social environment (Nixon, 1993, p. 316). Unlike the literature in the parent discipline of marketing, an extremely limited amount of sport marketing research has explicitly utilized the conceptual direction or methodological techniques of SNA. While SNA has an extremely broad range for potential sport and industry applications, to develop a true SNA understanding within a sport marketing specific lens (with brand community implications), this paper calls for an ongoing discussion to be continued through future research. Again, the purpose of this discourse is to highlight and draw attention to possible implications of employing structural SNA as a guide for future research within a sport marketing context.

Social Network Analysis

The SNA methodology is one area of research that has yet to be fully investigated in sport marketing. As such, many terms must be defined for the purposes of this discussion. A social network can be defined as “a finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them” (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 20), where each individual can be treated as a “node” and his or her relations as “links” (or lines) to other “nodes” (Koschade, 2006). SNA yields an opportunity to “uncover patterns of interaction between and among actors or entities in a system, determine the conditions

under which those patterns arose, or attempt to identify the consequences of the structural patterns” (Quatman & Chelladuri, 2008, p. 343). Therefore, SNA can be viewed as a innovative method for “connecting the dots,” which allows researchers to measure and map human groups and organizations ranging from simple to complex, and sometimes even covert (Krebs, 2002). From any practical perspective, SNA methodology focuses on “predicting behavior and decision-making within the network” (Renfro & Deckro, 2001, p. 4) by uncovering the patterns of human interaction and correctly interpreting these social networks (Koschade, 2006). Further narrowed within a sport marketing lens, SNA provides an opportunity to understand and possibly to predict the behavior of individual consumers within a social fan network (Renfro & Deckro, 2001), allowing researchers to evaluate specific marketing actions that may influence the members of a social fandom network in a desirable manner.

SNA and social structure

Emirbayer (1997) reports that the foundation of SNA stems from the view that the world’s relationships are comprised of structural webs with embedded actors. These structural relationship webs are well defined within the sport context as fan bases. Fan bases can be viewed from a large-scale fan population down to a small-scale fan group that gathers to view a specific sporting event. SNA can view relationships for either of these large complete networks or small egocentric consumer networks depending on the nature of the problem being investigated.

For example using a large-scale approach, a “hub” is defined as a very highly connected node within the network who can be a central resource or outlet for

consumption of the sport product or event. Not all, but some social networks are “scale-free” networks (Barabási, 2003), meaning that each fan has links to very few sport hubs, but together as a fan community, a small number of connected sport hubs are linked together via a large social network following proper degree distribution law (Clauset, Shalizi, & Newman, 2009). As an organization, understanding your consumers’ social network provides an opportunity to build stronger bonds with individual consumers. Sport marketers now have the opportunity to identify these consumer hubs visually, via SNA research outputs, in hopes of maintaining a closer connection to their consumers via marketing that specifically targets network hubs as they are likely to have the most impact when passing on information and recommendations to their numerous contacts. Maintaining fan to team connections is a primary concern for sport marketers in a growing industry within the virtual experience revolution.

Utilizing SNA, sport marketers should primarily be concerned with maintaining and strengthening hub-to-team relationships, as communication with the select number of network hubs is more cost effective than communication with entire fan group populations. Social network hubs connect large quantities of nodes (fans), and the destruction or disappearance of a single hub can have devastating consequences for even the largest social networks (fan bases) (Katz & Heere, 2013). For example the loss of a single hub, such as a local sports bar, can disrupt or even completely disconnect an individual fan from the fan base. Therefore, utilizing SNA to identify and make hub connections within scale-free networks (i.e. a fan base), is a unique and novel opportunity for sport marketers to sustain and build brand community. More specifically, SNA offers

a lens of inquiry for the perceived fit of sport organizations and their consumers by examining the underlying processes of brand community development.

A hub marketing focus is important because previous research suggests that intergroup trash talking by leaders can lead to negative brand community outcomes (Hickman & Ward, 2007). Sport marketers can also benefit from SNA hub research via a subcultural examination of fan group leadership traits. Katz and Heere (2013) suggest an investigation into the personality characteristics of fan group leaders in order to examine characteristics that differentiate successful from unsuccessful group leaders. These fan group leaders are often identifiable as hubs through peer response when asked to self-report leadership levels of fan group members (Lupinek, 2015). More specifically, investigation into what types of fan group leaders sport marketers should explicitly target is needed as there are many different definitions of qualities that comprise leadership.

Implicitly, different cultures will yield different levels of power and personality characteristics among fan group leaders. As such, the globalization of sport continues to play a large role in my call for research that can compare and contrast fan group leadership structures, characteristics, and motivations. For example, the creation of a New York Rangers ice hockey fan club in Abu Dhabi potentially has vast differences in hub leadership, group motivation, and purchase intentions than a Canadian based Ranger fan clubs.

Statistical mechanics of SNA

SNA has a significant advantage as a methodology, given that it can be employed either quantitatively within a survey or qualitatively via in-person interviews to gain data

on a respective network. While there are various ways of data collection, there are also numerous requirements for measuring and analyzing SNA data. For example, the importance of understanding the “structural equivalence” or “sustainability” of individuals (i.e. dynamic and longevity of fan group members) within social positions is paramount for a better understanding of sport consumers as a whole (Scott & Carrington, 2011).

Traditional SNA statistical elements of density and centralization are calculated for each individual within the network in addition to the option of two-mode network visualization outputs. A two-mode network consists of two types of entities, such as fans and teams or consumers of a brand and the brand, and the connections between them are investigated with two-mode data. Further more, two-modal consumer data can be collected for the purpose of discovering ways each fan group member, as a consumer, is attached to the sport or team. Two-modal data are appropriate for this example as member-to-organization relationship analysis usually contains one set of actors (Mode 1: fan group members) as the “senders” and one set of actors (Mode 2: the organization) as the “receivers” (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). More specifically, consumer affiliations with the organization and overlapping affiliation subgroups (Wasserman & Faust, 1994) can be examined based on each consumer’s self-reported points of attachment (Robinson & Trail, 2005) to the organization (i.e. family influence, peer influence, geographical location, star players/coaches, trades/signings, playing style, etc.).

SNA also utilizes terminology and concepts of graph theory (Harary, 1969) at its foundation, as SNA data uses basic matrix algebra operations. The terminology of graph

theory provides a vocabulary that is used to label and denote many social structural properties. Elements of “prominence” (i.e., control of network communication flow) can be measured with an individual’s centrality (i.e., centered position within the network) and prestige (i.e. importance) within the network as a whole. Additionally, relationship closeness can be measured in relation to the entire large-scale network and directional relations between individuals with measures such as “betweenness” scores that identify who has the most control of network informational flow. Depending on the particular research question, relational algebra and other SNA concepts are utilized by the software to determine the network positions and roles of each individual member of the network.

Sport marketing and SNA integration

There are specific examples of sport marketing research that utilize explicitly or implicitly network-related illustrations (Bunting, 2012; Katz & Heere, 2013; Warner, Bowers, & Dixon, 2012), highlighting the different ways that sport marketers can benefit from a more cognizant use of SNA methods. While not an exhaustive list, the subsequent examples provide a basis for discussion of SNA implications within a sport marketing context. These SNA areas are discussed along with suggestions for future brand community research highlighting influential hub marketing actors (organizations, management, fans, etc.) in sport who have the opportunity to connect sport marketing research with standard industry practice. In addition, some SNA examples are explored from other research contexts that yield potential additional paths for the SNA of sport marketing.

Fan identification

In defining fan identification, “the more contact a person has with an organization, the more likely that person is to define himself or herself as a member” fan of that respective team (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003, p. 278). Thus, it is hypothesized that the more contact a sport consumer has with his or her fan network, the more likely the individual will be more highly identified with that brand community and will be more centralized within the network. “A key aspect of identification is that individuals are motivated to establish and maintain their ties to the group through their behaviors” (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998, p. 29). In other words, those consumers who have high fan identification are more likely to maintain brand community loyalty via social network connections. The methodological approaches of SNA provide a “formalized means to conceptualize, measure, and analyze the characteristics of the social relationships within which people are embedded” (Quatman & Chelladuri, 2008b, p. 655). As such, SNA can be utilized to examine if similarities exist between those who hold positions of prominence and centrality with consumer fan group networks and their respective levels of fan identification.

Fan identification is not just important for the sport organization; significant results have been found tying fan identification levels to brand loyalty of the organization’s respective sponsors (Levin, Beasley, & Gamble, 2004). Not all sports are created equal with affinity to brand community sponsorship. Sports such as NASCAR and premier European football, or soccer, are shown to correlate fan identification with sponsor brand loyalty (Bauer, Sauer, & Exler, 2005; Levin et al., 2004). SNA can be

utilized to track fan identification levels over time with comparison to consumer network structural shifts. If the results are found fruitful, significant knowledge can be gained through a deeper understanding on the impact of sponsor brand loyalty and fan identification.

Team success

In professional sport, the key to financial success is often cited as winning, as winning sells tickets (Murphy, 2014). However, Forbes named the Chicago Cubs the fourth most valuable Major League Baseball franchise, worth \$1 billion dollars (Ozanian, 2013), even though they have not won a championship since 1908. It is highly likely in this instance that a strong brand community plays a role in the fiscal success of the Cubs organization. Certainly team success can be longitudinally examined with brand community measures, however, via SNA methodology, sport marketers have the opportunity to examine individual consumer points of brand attachment that succeed while the team is producing a failing product. Organizational elements, or points of attachment (Robinson & Trail, 2005), other than on field success such as player signing, player trades, facility features, and tailgating experiences can now uniquely be observed via SNA methods. In other words, success as it relates to the brand community is no longer purely tied to a “winning” product.

Professional teams typically make organizational decisions in hopes of producing the most revenue possible and perhaps also yielding the best product on the playing surface. Now with current industry growth via the globalization of sport, brand community must be considered to remain relevant. With franchise success being a

loosely defined term, organizational decisions have large brand community impacts. For example, the newly rebranded Miami Marlins' of the MLB decided in 2012, to dismantle their roster after previously announcing they would invest more funds into the team for a new stadium. Instead of examining the Miami fan base reactions through local media, internally, sport marketers could have utilized the opportunity to measure fan identification impacts through SNA. Sport organizations now have the opportunity, if warranted through brand community data, to gain additional evidence on how certain player movement impacts the organization's bottom line in effort to not let history repeat itself.

Internationally, team success is still defined in many markets as the visibility of winning (i.e. winning percentage, championship trophies, etc.). Through strategic alliances, winning sport organizations such as the New York Yankees have strategically aligned with other successful global brands like the Manchester City Football Club. A further example is how the National Football League (NFL) has created a strategic alliance with the global provider of risk management Aon. International social networks are cited for sport entertainment and commercial success, and often seen as two sides of the same coin (PWC, 2011). Now is the time to utilize SNA longitudinally with pre-examination of these alliances and re-evaluation post upon conclusion of the alliance. As such, sport and commercial consumers ought to be examined under the light of these strategic alliances for their feelings and connections to the brand community before and after major sponsorship changes. Only then can changes in social network structures be quantifiable to the long-term success or failure of these sponsorship ventures. Warner et

al., (2012) identify that team cohesion is positively related to team performance within sport. However, what is not known is how team performance impacts international brand communities with respect to both sport and commercial ties.

Player movement

Player movement related to brand community loyalty is also an area for which emergent SNA methodologies can be utilized. Player movement, as a point of attachment, can be examined to determine the effects of management decisions on brand community and consumer network structure. While many player movement decisions (i.e. trades, signing, re-signing, releasing, etc.) are made for decisions other than fan popularity, it is still important to keep a finger on the pulse of a consumer base. One prominent example is the NFL's New York Jets signing of quarterback Michael Vick after he paid his debt to society in federal prison for animal abuse charges. While many fans with high fan identification within the NY Jet's brand community network were speculated to value team success over player movement, there are cited examples of the Jet's consumers considering and/or cutting ties with their brand community because of Vick's past actions (McManus, 2014). A contrasting example is the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers inability to re-sign LeBron James in 2010. While many speculated on the true cause of this player movement situation, it is still important to consider the state of the Cavaliers' brand community in order to fully understand the outcome. In this instance, a qualitative approach could be used by employing SNA via in-person consumer interviews designed to gauge the social structure and network effects of losing a franchise player. If substantial structural gaps emerged through the research process between consumer

desires and organizational roster movements, internal marketing teams would have the opportunity to identify and begin to target these areas for improvement. One such example is the Cleveland Cavaliers' recognition of their fan base disconnect and displeasure of losing LeBron James as a star player and their internal organizational roster steps to make sure they were in a position to resign him in 2014.

Internal marketing

Internal marketing is a philosophy for the organizational management of resources based on a marketing perspective (George & Gronroos, 1989). Internal marketing focuses on “achieving effective internal exchanges between the organization and its employee groups as a prerequisite for successful exchanges with external markets” (George, 1990, p. 63). From an internal marketing perspective, social structures within the organization may allow for a better understanding of the flow of available resources and power. Organizational differences from a myriad of sources such as geographical location, in-league/conference media coverage, intercollegiate athletic departments, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as a governing body must be understood with relationships at an inter-organizational level in sport. Internal marketing also plays an important global level role for organizations. Organizational alignment and sponsorship with international corporations is important for employee buy-in and cultural sensitivity. In order to evolve with increased globalization, organizations must effectively internally market their staff in preparation for successful exchanges with global marketplaces.

Internal review of policies, procedures, and relationships with other sport organizations can be explored using a social network lens. Just as social structures need to focus on their constituents, sport organizations can benefit from internal SNA review. Organizations can benefit from “dedicating more attention and time to identifying [internal] network leaders and ensuring their [support level]” (Katz & Heere, 2013, p. 285). Future internal marketing SNA research within leading sport organizations will assist in measuring the internal “buy-in” factor that can yield significant results as globalization continues to expand the sport industry.

Identifying key brand community consumers, such as the NY Jets unofficial mascot “Fireman Ed” Anzalone, and targeting those central figures presents the opportunity for a more efficient flow of organization information and decisions amongst the brand community. It would seem reasonable that since Fireman Ed is on TV cheering at every home game, that the team could build or propose sponsorship for Ed’s season tickets via fire hat sponsorship. With the correct sponsorship selection, the NY Jets have the opportunity to internally hub market Fireman Ed and increase brand community through the organizations support for their loyal fans. Additionally, the popular press suggests that sponsorship can function as a primary instrument for internal marketing (Hickman, Lawrence, & Ward, 2005). Another example is that of the MLB’s Minnesota Twins’ 2014 announcement of an exclusive title sponsor for umpire video reviews. This sponsorship by the MN Twins is an example of internal marketing to motivate organizational members with a sense of civic engagement, as the brand of Renter’s Warehouse is well known for their community support. SNA is a methodology novel to

sport that has the ability to identify these prominent brand community members, hubs, and leaders in order to effectively internally target market to them.

Additionally, SNA provides an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of internal communication by examining the culture and any potential change at different levels of the organization. For example, SNA principles can be used to gather data for visual examination of inter-organizational structure, change, and connectedness as opposed to standard employee satisfaction surveys. Organizational review is a common business practice when a new organizational direction is decided upon (Ott, KZatz, & Thomas, 2014). Internal marketing programs alone are not sufficient to create or change organizational culture (George, 1990) as they are often called upon to do. Qualitative in-person interviews can provide rich two-mode data for visual transformation of internal marketing program effectiveness. As a result, SNA can be utilized internally by sport organizations, in either a quantitative or qualitative fashion, to longitudinally measure internal culture as it relates to internal marketing campaign development.

Marketing to the lifetime fan

Lifetime fans, or “superfans” as they are sometimes called, are an excellent niche market to be targeted for exploratory SNA research. There are several SNA implications for investigation of longstanding fan group consumers, with further analysis of these superfans having the ability to uncover differences and similarities from more casual fans. Exploring these differences and similarities, provides an opportunity to identify key brand community elements that can be directed to those persons climbing the fan identification ladder.

Often times, the most significant relationship of lifetime fans is not between the consumer and the team, but rather between consumers. Since fan communities often lack a direct connection to the team, highly identified fans “rely instead on in social interaction between group members to create brand identification” (Katz & Heere, 2013, p. 272). These social interactions that create brand identification are referred to as “brandfests” (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998). A brand centered event such as college football pep rally is one example of a brandfest that is centered around cultivating customer loyalty. SNA can provide a unique investigation into these brandfests by examining how these brandfest leaders and potential leaders engage in high interaction consumption and brand celebrations (Katz & Heere, 2013). Even in large settings such as brandfests, SNA data sets can be created to reveal the key players within these social networks.

Smaller fan groups and subcultural analyses

To date, no research studies in sport marketing have taken advantage of SNA methodology to explore if a deeper understanding of fan identification culture within groups and subcultures can be constructed. If found useful, this understanding of fan identification will be practically relevant for sport organizations in regards to such marketing objectives as ticket sale promotions and in-game target marketing. For example, salient influencers of team selection and game playing style preference have been identified from industry research (Heere & James, 2007; Lavoie, 2003; Robinson & Trail, 2005). These influencers should be reexamined using the principles of the SNA methodology for application to both in-stadium and off-site fan group game viewing

settings. Ultimately sport promotion will continue to be based on sales, but researchers now have the opportunity to graphically analyze their fan groups for marketing campaign effectiveness.

One situation for gaining a greater understanding of consumer fan base relationships lies with those fan groups who meet off-site to view their favorite team's games. SNA methods can be implemented to gather data from these non-traditional, non-direct consumer fan groups in attempt to discover how each member is connected to the other members within that social network. Measurement of structural one-mode fan group variables can determine how the fan group population is connected to each other on a member-to-member basis. Additional focus can also be placed on these social group structural variables and density measurements of group members along with the formation of any applicable subgroups or "cliques." These fan subgroups will fit the clique definition of three or more members that each choose each other (Wasserman & Faust, 1994) and are important for their communicational flow, and lack thereof, with the rest of the group members. Thirdly, SNA focus can be placed on brand loyalty and how internal/external forces affect group membership and/or level of group involvement. Data can be collected in attempt to discover the ways each fan group member is attached to their respective sport and/or team. Once attachment is established, follow-up research can investigate major organizational changes as they relate to longitudinal group involvement and membership. Brand loyalty may also play a role with this two-mode SNA data analysis as comparison between involvement changes and brand loyalty scores

may yield a contribution to the literature by understanding how group hubs withstand major organizational change.

Fan group and subculture research via SNA allows sport marketers to measure the importance of “off-site” fan groups and their impact to the brand community, contributions to fan culture, and relevance to purchase intentions. SNA has the ability to examine the likelihood of future attendance “on-site” if certain network leaders are influenced and if group leaders hold the key to group or individual purchase intentions. Potential research on these topics may shed light on the significance of non-traditional fan bases and their relevant contribution to brand community.

Conclusion

While this is not an exhaustive list of potential SNA lines for sport marketing research, a sample of recent non-sports marketing related SNA studies indicates a range of possible applications within sport marketing (Katz & Heere, 2013; Quatman & Chelladuri, 2008a; Warner et al., 2012). SNA has the opportunity to revolutionize how certain sport marketing strategies are viewed with respect to brand community. Previous brand community models suggest a horizontal line between consumers (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), while Katz and Heere (2013) have found that fan base subgroups follow the principles of scale-free networks aligning with Closet et al.’s (2009) power law distribution with individuals serving as both leaders and followers. The notion that not all fans are created equal is paramount for the evaluation of major front-line marketing strategies that aim to reach the greatest amount of people. The existence of these scale-free social networks “implies that the greatest

number strategy may not be the most efficient method for marketing to fan bases” (Katz & Heere, 2013, p. 283) as depending on the network size, identifying key leaders is a more effective step for marketers to grow the brand community.

SNA can be used to understand these social marketing relationships at both the most straightforward and complex levels of societal webs and global networks.

Sociological principles are at the core of SNA, and as a result, can be used for content interpretation of social structure, social interaction, and social change (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). While these understandings are often practical in nature, the detailed mathematical design of SNA can lead to precise explanations of sport marketing theory. With more frequent use of SNA among sport marketing research, advancement of the literature and practical understanding can yield a “stripped-down” view of the social variables that are often hidden to sport marketers (Nixon, 1993).

Future research

Future research in all the aforementioned areas provides opportunities of insight useful in examining leading theories and creating interdisciplinary research opportunities. Research in these areas will assist sport marketers in a more in-depth understanding of brand community and to “better understand the shared group experiences of consumers” (Katz & Heere, 2013, p. 283). This future research will ultimately assist sport marketing professionals with the challenge of accounting for uneven relationships within fan bases and between consumers.

In order to develop a better understanding of these shared group consumer experiences, SNA must be innovatively integrated into pressing research questions one study at a time

to develop a dialogue within the literature. Exploratory case studies of non-traditional fan groups are one suggested place to begin this line of inquiry. For example, a potential first SNA research project could aim to address the lack of recognition from non-traditional or indirect consumers with relation to their brand community attachment. Organizations can potentially integrate those findings into future development of marketing campaigns geared toward non-season ticket holders and out of market fans that consume offsite away from the arena. The potential impact to the brand community literature and the respective sport industry justifies a case study investigation on both traditional and non-traditional fan groups for the critical associations of brand community attachment and prospective consumer purchase behaviors.

Chapter Four:
SNA Empirical Case Study

A Social Network Analysis of an Off-Site Ice Hockey Fan Group's Brand Community Attachment

Chapter Summary

Marketing with respect to “off-site” ice hockey fan groups is the research area targeted with this study. These fans bases are often considered “brand communities” within the literature (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Ice hockey brand communities are being investigated due to their underrepresentation within the business and sport management literature. Ice hockey brand community members who consume their community’s product away from the arena were studied to analyze the impact of fan group structure and “off-site” group variables via social network analysis (SNA) methodology. This pilot analysis of a single off-site fan group produced an applicable fit to the Attachment to Brand Community (ABC) framework revealing consumer brand loyalty group structure towards practical marketing implications. A group leader was identified for influence relating to group purchase intentions and a “non-fan” group member that is often overlooked with fan identification scales (Funk & James, 2006) was also recognized as being a key cog to group decisions. These results produce a call to find “Charlies” and remember that “Nicks” matters.

Introduction

With the cost of attending live sporting events on the rise, from the annual increase of college football season tickets for Big Ten Conference schools over the next three years (Christensen & Brackin, 2014) to the cheapest tickets of the most recent Super Bowl XLIX costing above nine thousand dollars (Rovell, 2015), fans are increasingly choosing to consume their favorite team's product away from the stadium or "off-site." Off-site consumption also has a societal impact as the literature has suggested that sport spectatorship represents a non-exercise form of leisure (Mannell, 2007) that has been found to be as beneficial as fitness activities for lowering the risk of mortality (Bygren, Johansson, Konlaan, Grjibovski, Wilkinson, & Sjöström, 2009). This study aims to provide high-quality evidence regarding the practical efficacy of using specialized marketing campaigns to brand community subgroups away from the arena. Ultimately, research from institutions of higher education should benefit the public, and it is unfortunate that private sponsor-driven laboratory studies have been so overwhelmingly favored in this area. As a consequence, ambiguity exists regarding the optimal marketing strategies for sport organizations and this study will act as a catalyst for further translatable research.

The North American sport industry is predicted to reach \$67.7 billion in revenue by 2017 (Eichelberger, 2013), making it all the more disconcerting that the evidence underpinning marketing campaigns is based on research with questionable applicability (Singhapakdi, Vitell, Lee, Nisius, & Grace, 2013). While there are many different metrics to measure the net worth of the sport industry, it is generally understood that the

industry is continuing to experience significant growth. This growth provides justification to further understand this segment of the global economy. This work aims to bridge the gap between laboratory research and the actual field strategies used by sport organizations for their off-site marketing efforts.

“Brand communities reveal the socially situated nature of brands as something more than a summation of attitudes or impoverished critical stereo types” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 428). Attachment to brand/team variables in the sport context is necessary for investigation to enhance specialized marketing campaigns as research must go beyond the surface level points of attachment such as geography and family influence (Robinson & Trail, 2005). Research in this study aims to get below these surface level attitudes and identify what other variables play a significant role in brand/team attachment. If we are to hold to Firat and Venkatesh’s (1995) claim that brands are fundamentally social entities and created as much by consumers as by marketers, then marketers must desire to empirically test and identify all attachment variables such as the Attachment to Brand Community (ABC) framework (Lupinek, 2014).

Utilizing this ABC framework for this study is unique from existing work on points of attachment and identification research as it is a first of its kind to specifically test the sport fandom of small fan group brand communities. The ABC framework attachment variables also have strong ties to the aforementioned team identification literature. Additionally, some of these team identification variables are referred to as points of attachment (Robinson & Trail, 2005) where it was found that attachment to team is only one of several possible points that comprise team identification variables.

This study aims to examine the fit of the ABC framework within an ice hockey brand community context to reveal any consumer brand loyalty connections to fan group structure that produce practical marketing implications.

Significance of Research

The role of brand community investigation within the sport industry context has been studied for the last several decades. Brand communities are a specialized and non-geographically bound community based around a set of structured social relationships amongst admirers of a brand, and are often recognized as the most integral relationship component of consumers to brands (Muge & Ozge, 2013). Media transcends geography and brand communities will continue to transcend geography to the boundaries of mass media. With this growing importance on attachment to brand community through mass media, further exploration on attachment variables is critical for the success of the next evolutionary stage of brand communities. Unfortunately, calls for further investigation on brand community development are based mostly on conceptual research. While many fan group samples are needed to re-develop foundational theory, exploratory research is needed to determine if, and to what extent, brand communities are efficacious for applied marketing campaigns. Indeed, commentary within the well-regarded *Informational Systems Research* journal called for applied brand community research (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013).

For this study, a sample of fans from a professional men's ice hockey brand community is examined. The sub-topic of ice hockey involves research related to the effects of repeat consumption at an "off-site" location that fans gather to consume their

brand community product at a minimum frequency of once monthly. There are many variables that are defined with respect to a brand community member's decision to attend live sporting events (Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2009; Chien & Ross, 2013). However, no research to date has investigated the brand community attachment variables of fans that choose to consume their brand away from the arena. Conducting field investigation on these consumers has the potential to unlock unique variables with respect to consumption decisions and marketing toward brand communities through the evolving mass media boundary. Current brand community research has found that providing defined fandom roles within these communities increases on-site/in-stadium consumption (Katz & Heere, 2013), yet no research has investigated the group variables that effect off-site behavior with respect to mass media consumption within brand community surroundings such as a local restaurant, bar, or fan group home. Since the off-site fan group is also it's own brand community, as defined by Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001), with the larger Minnesota Wild brand community, this study will refer to the fan group level of brand community as a bimodal brand community. The impact of ice hockey off-site fan groups' bimodal identification, within the brand community, justifies further analysis for practical marketing implications leading to the following research questions:

- RQ1* What is the social structure among members of an "off-site" ice hockey fan group?
- RQ2* How does "off-site" ice hockey fan group leadership and decision-making variables impact the attachment to brand community?
- RQ3* How do the brand loyalty levels of the fan group relate to the salient

influencers of the ABC framework?

RQ4 Is the Attachment to Brand Community Framework an applicable fit for this “Off-Site” Ice Hockey Fan Group data?

Methodology

To determine the applicability of the ABC framework variables with respect to this off-site fan group, social network analysis (SNA) will be used to quantify collected survey data. SNA is a research method often used outside of sport marketing that provides an opportunity to examine the evolving sport consumer with a different lens focusing on the structure of consumer relationships, ranging from casual acquaintance to close bonds. SNA provides a complimentary method to other areas of social sciences that often focus on the attributes of the consumer rather than on the relationships among them (Serrat, 2009). SNA provides a unique opportunity to view how the sport industry is changing by focusing on consumer relationships, how growth is impacting consumer brand loyalty and purchase intentions, and to interpretively reaffirm in a bimodal brand community group-setting previously suggested frameworks such as the ABC framework.

Data analysis

For this study, ice hockey brand community data was collected from a bimodal brand community off-site fan group of the Minnesota Wild. This fan group was identified through communication with local sport bars to identify groups of people that gathered there with a frequency of at least once per month to watch their favorite ice hockey team’s games, and to obtain establishment consent. The participant audience of this study was identified and selected as a MN Wild bimodal brand community fan group

who chooses to gather at non-arena sites (such as restaurant, pub, or member's house, etc.) to view their favorite ice hockey team's games with some frequency. The participants of this study met as a group at various locations to consume televised live MN Wild games, but was identified for this participation by meeting mostly at a specific bar within the Minneapolis, Minnesota metropolitan area.

A SNA base survey (see Appendix A for more information on the survey instrument) was administered to the participants electronically via a survey link on the Qualtrics software platform. The survey was piloted prior to administration on a different off-site fan group to account for validity concerns with the small sample size of off-site fan groups. Face validity of the survey was accounted for by utilizing in-person think-aloud procedures (Willis, 2004) and the review of an expert panel consisting of three Doctors of Philosophy with expertise in the content area. Content validity concerns were also addressed via Willis' (2004) think-aloud procedures during the pilot as in-person understanding of each survey item was measured. By utilizing SNA principles, the fan group sampled for this study, was surveyed with a 100% response for the group. Specifically, this fan group of 6 individuals ($N = 6$) met the previously mentioned selection criteria as they gathered as a group twice a month during the regular season to watch live televised MN Wild games together.

The administered survey contained 33 questions with 28 questions measured on Likert style scales with five optional open-ended free response questions. The total response times averaged 9 minutes and 33 seconds (6:28 – 13:37). There are two survey sections, fan group structure and fan group points of brand community attachment,

designed with SNA principles to map and understand the social marketing relationships within a fan group and brand community context. Each participant saw 24-33 survey questions depending on their responses for questions related to the other fan group member's (i.e. friendship level, decision-making, etc.) whose first names were pre-loaded into the survey. Each participant self-selected their friendship connection level with each group member (acquaintance, friend, best friend) for which each group member auto populated into additional questions based on their respective selection. The total number of survey questions seen by each participant also varied based on their responses to questions regarding the effect of internal and external influences on fan group participation and involvement. Additionally, the survey contained primarily closed questions related to each fan group member, with one open-ended question at the end of each section to gather any additional participant comments/suggestions.

Fan group structure

The administered survey was organized around gathering brand community group data in an attempt to discover how each member of the fan group is connected to the other members of the social fan network. The questions derive structural SNA variables to determine how the fan group population is connected to each other on a member-to-member basis. This survey also focused on social group structural variables and measured the connectedness of group members along with any applicable subgroups/cliques. Regarding fan group information and social structure, data was gathered on the frequency of fan group gatherings; the frequency of each participant's attendance at gatherings; fan group communication outside of gatherings and the

frequency of the outside communication; the level of friendship or acquaintance strength between each group member; the levels of on-site interaction between each group member; the identification of fan group leaders; as well as the fan group leadership and decision-making dynamics.

Fan group points of brand community attachment

The second survey section focused on attachment to brand community and how internal and external forces have created group membership and/or level of group involvement. Data was collected to measure the applicability of the Attachment to Brand Community (ABC) framework (Lupinek, 2014).

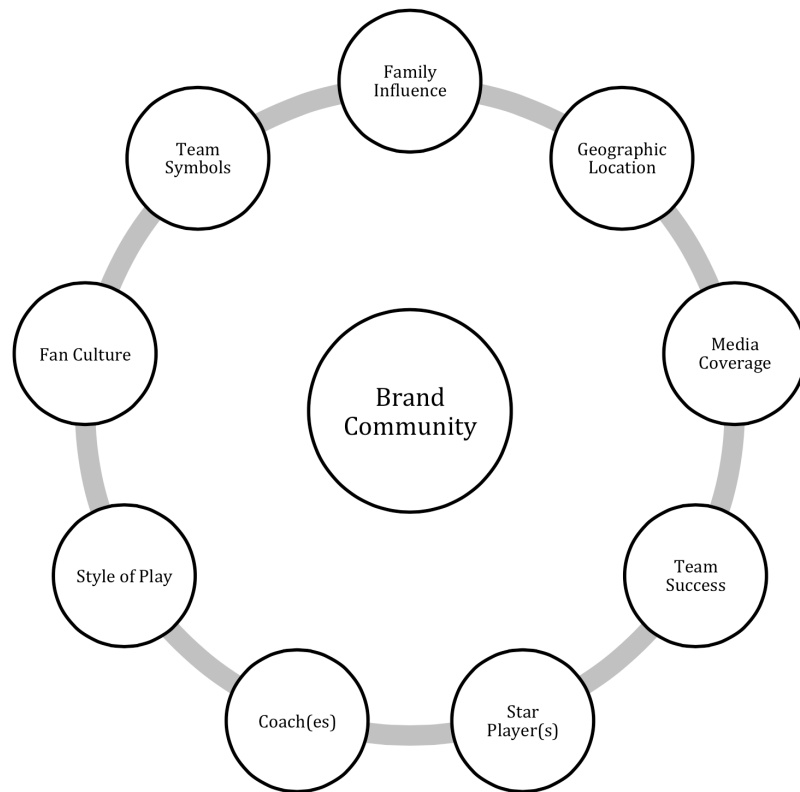


Figure 2.1. Attachment to Brand Community (ABC) Framework

These structural attachment variables were measured on two or more sets of entities (Wasserman, & Faust, 1994). For example, fan group friendship affiliation subgroups and leadership level within the fan group was examined based on the member's self-reported points of attachment (see Figure 2.1). These levels of group affiliation within the bimodal brand community can then be examined with respect to the larger MN Wild brand community attachment. Regarding fan group brand community attachment, data was gathered on the variables that lead, as proposed through the brand community literature (Baym, 2007; Gnoth, 2002; Saunders & Rod, 2012), to connection with the ABC framework; the internal fan group decision-making process and level of leadership; the fit of this pilot off-site Minnesota Wild fan group to the ABC framework.

Results

“Off-site” ice hockey fan group structure

The first research question investigated the social structure of relations among members of this “off-site” ice hockey fan group. The analysis of the SNA data for this fan group portrays a tightly connected fan group that is uniquely composed. Figure 4.1 depicts the UCINET software rendering of this off-site fan group to scale with respect to closeness of relationship as self reported via communication outside fan group meetings. Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 are further developed and contain manipulated fan group network “closeness” positions to enhance the visual clarity of the results with respect to the research questions. While this exploratory look at the brand community attachment of an off-site fan group does not produce generalizable results, it does produce highly descriptive results with the primarily means of developing analytical tools towards

further investigation.

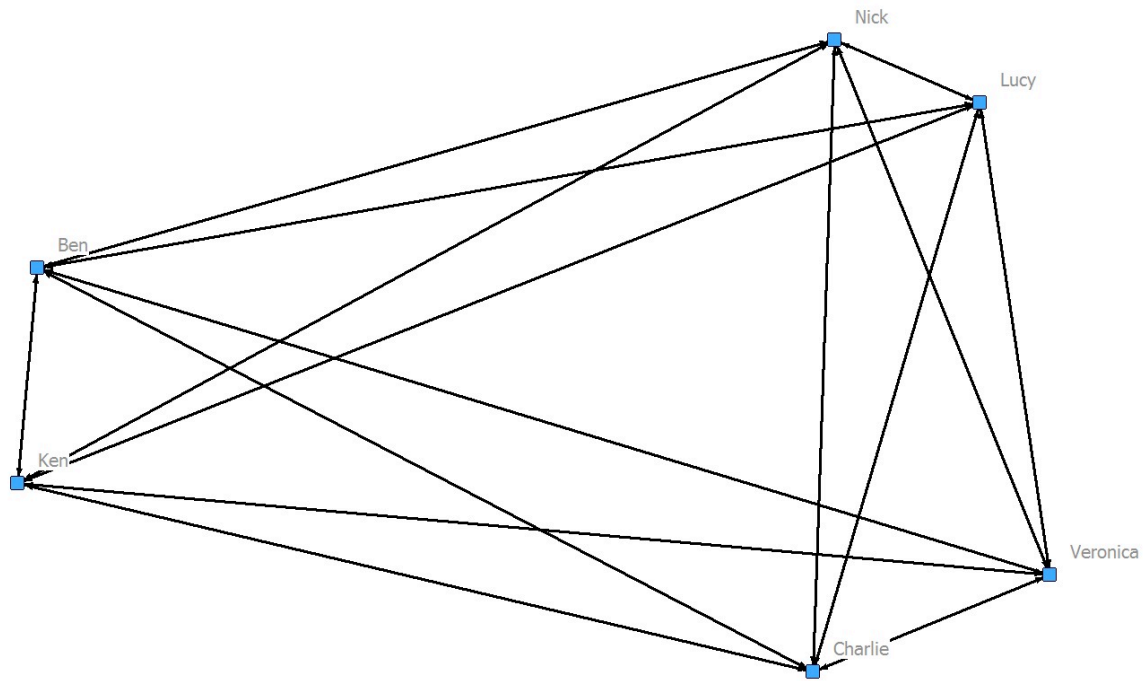


Figure 4.1. MN Wild Fan Group Communication

Note. Closeness of group members as produced by UCINET and Netdraw software (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002) via communication data.

This National Hockey League (NHL) fan group of the Minnesota Wild (see Figure 4.2) has a unique structural composition of three sets of “best friends,” nine fan group connections of “friendship,” and four fan group connections at the “acquaintance” level. These fan group relationships are also measured with respect to member-to-member communication outside of MN Wild fan group meetings.

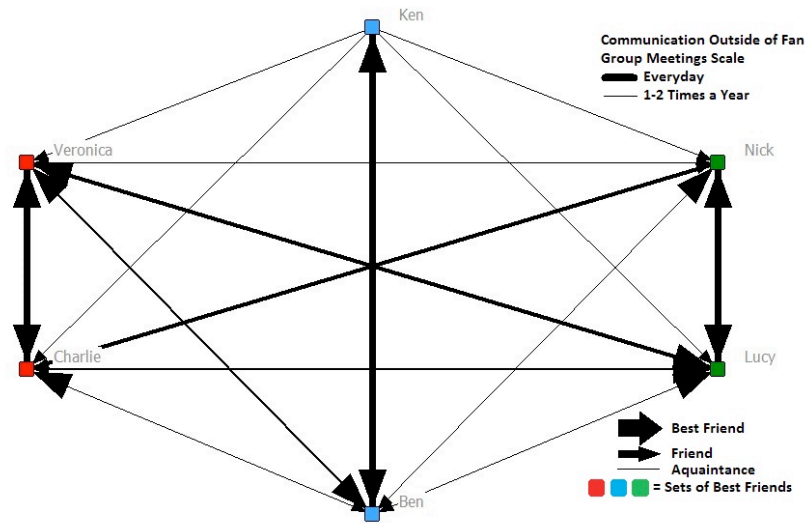


Figure 4.2. MN Wild Fan Group Communication and Friendship

Note. Line thickness represents the Communication level of each group member outside of fan group meetings. Arrowhead size represents the self-selected Friendship level from the sender of each group member. Square color represents unique sets of “Best Friends” where this Friendship level was reciprocated from both participants.

This Minnesota Wild Fan Group is comprised of three sets of people who both self-report each other as “best friends” in Veronica and Charlie, Ken and Ben, as well as Nick and Lucy. These three sets of best friends also both self-reported communication everyday outside of fan group meetings. Lucy is found to be the most connected fan group member at this level of analysis with four group members identifying her as a “best friend” as opposed to Veronica with three best friend designators and just two for Charlie, Nick, and Ben. Connections at the best friend level will be further referenced in the results and discussion section for their potential relationship impact on other fan

group variables with respect to peer influence and communicational flow.

Fan group relationships at the “friend” level are visually represented in Figure 4.2 with nine connections reported. These friendship relationships are important results as they represent the majority of fan group relationships. Important one-way friendship relationships are seen in Figure 4.2 that may lead to communicational breakdown and influence group decision-making. For example, Ben claims that Charlie is a “best friend” while Charlie only reports Ben as a friend. This is also true for the relationship between Ben and Lucy along with Ben and Nick. Ben being the central figure of these non-reciprocal relationships may be important as Ben may value other group members’ opinions more so than the others of Ben’s opinion. Additionally Ken sees Veronica, Charlie, Nick, and Lucy as friends, but that view is not reciprocated as Veronica, Charlie, Nick, and Lucy only report Ken as an acquaintance. While a case could be made that Ken’s definition of friendship is flawed, the acquaintance label is supported by the reciprocal report of communication outside of fan group meets of just 1-2 times a year.

There are four relationships at the acquaintance level for this MN Wild fan group and they are all directed at Ken. While Ken does not reciprocate this relationship label as reported above, it is a central element of group structure nonetheless as these four acquaintance labels designate Ken as the least connected fan group member with respect to friendship and communication outside of fan group meetings. The opposite positions of Lucy and Ken within this fan group are significant when considering friendship formation and the possibility of selection bias (Hsieh, & Lee, 2014) with the future evolution of group membership as Lucy was the only member who indicated that she is

“extremely likely to invite a new member into the fan group.” If the social structure of this fan group shifts with new members that are initially attached to Lucy, Lucy will gain additional group power and increase her status as the most connected member with respect to social status.

Group leadership and decision-making

The second research question looked at “off-site” ice hockey fan group leadership, and decision-making variables impacting the attachment to brand community. The analysis of the SNA data for these fan group variables portrays a clear group hierarchy structure (see Figure 4.3) with Charlie being identified as the group leader along with Charlie and Lucy having the most decision-making power. Leadership effectiveness has strong ties to Hoyt, Murphy, Halverson, and Watson’s (2003) group performance and collective efficacy which makes group decision-making critical with respect to the cognitive centrality of group members and group decision-making procedures (Kerr, & Tindale, 2004). These variables of leadership and decision-making are represented within the literature for their significance towards group behavior. With Ken having the smallest level of leadership and being the least significant group decision-maker, his role is to be noted moving forward as the inverse of Charlie and Lucy with the addition of the ABC framework.

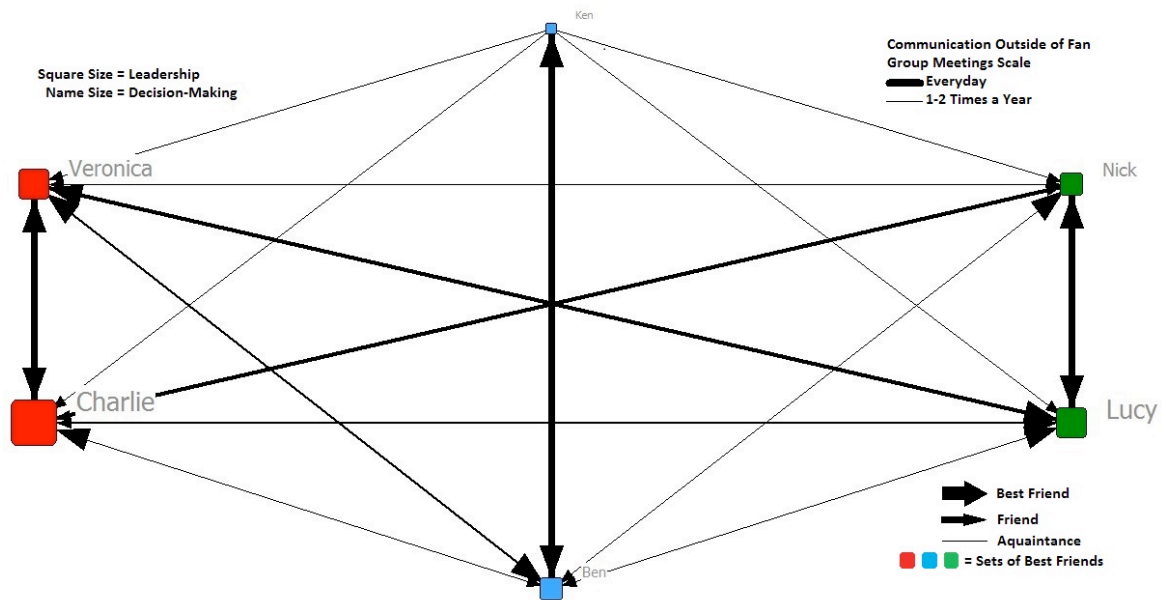


Figure 4.3. MN Wild Fan Group Leadership, Decision-Making, Communication, and Friendship

Note. Square size represents the group reported Leadership level of each participant. Name size represents the group reported Decision-Making level of each participant.

After the basic group structure was explored with respect to the leadership and decision-making variables, the ABC framework was then examined within this MN Wild ice hockey fan group. Figure 4.4 illustrates the level of attachment to each ABC framework variable via weighted lines. The leadership and group decision-making frequency variables are also present in Figure 4.4 via the names size of the group members and the color code of their node (circle) respectively on the SNA graph.

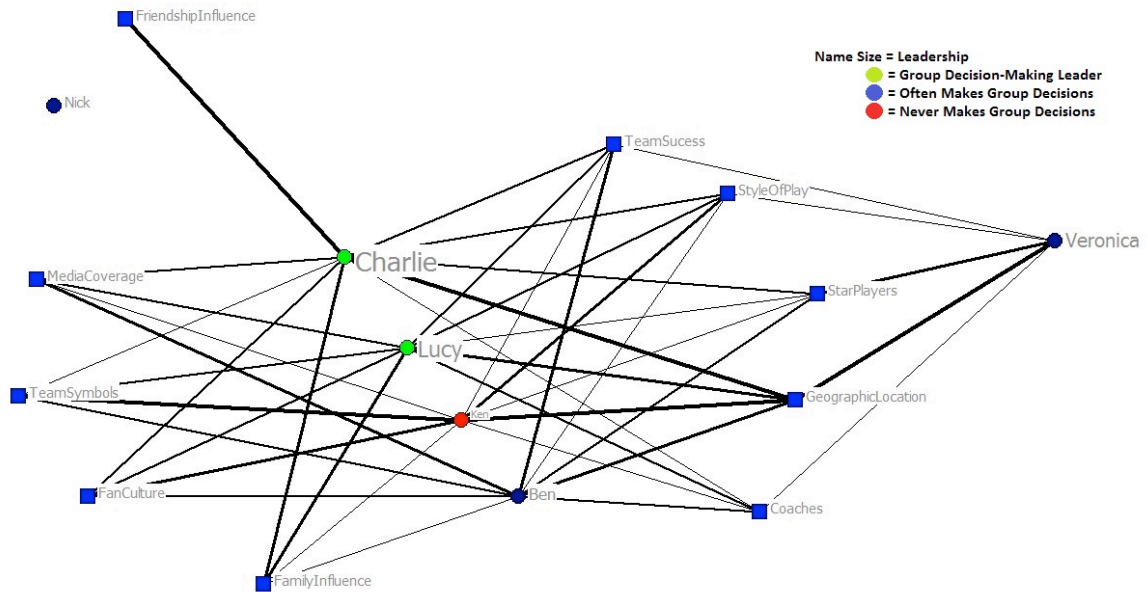


Figure 4.4. ABC Framework with MN Wild Fan Group Leadership and Decision-Making

Note. Line thickness represents the attachment level of each group member to each ABC Framework variable. Name size represents the group reported Leadership level of each participant. Circle color represents the group reported Decision-Making level of each participant.

Each group member was asked to self-report on his or her perceived level of leadership and decision-making of each group member, including him or herself. Two group decision-making leaders emerged from the data as Charlie and Lucy. This coincides with the visual representation of Charlie and Lucy as decision-making leaders from Figure 4.3. While Ken was reported as the only group member to not make any group decisions, he still was one of the four group members who attached to all of the nine original ABC framework variables from Figure 2.1. From further data analysis, Nick's non-connection to the ABC framework results from Nick not being a Minnesota

Wild fan. While Nick regularly attends fan group meetings and often makes fan group decisions, Nick does not show any attachment to the brand community of the Minnesota Wild. It is interpreted from the data that Nick is socialized into the group via the friendship variable as being paired prior as a “best friend” of Lucy.

With respect to the research question, Charlie and Lucy are the group decision-making leads with Charlie being reported as the group leader. With respect the ABC framework, both Charlie and Lucy’s strongest point of attachment combined is “family influence.” This matches the findings of James (1997) as the potential progression in the development of fan loyalty emerges from the socializing agents thought to best provide the initial influence on the development of fan loyalty. It is also important to note that Charlie utilized an opened ended question response to yield a new ABC framework variable of “friendship influence” as an equal socialization agent. Friendship influence is represented in Figure 4.4, however future consideration of this point of attachment might merge this new variable with the peer socialization contained with the fan culture literature (Crawford, 2004). With the overall group leadership of this Minnesota Wild fan group containing strong ties to the family influence, family literature (Greendorfer & Lewko, 1978, McPherson, 1976; Melnick & Wann, 2011) supports the significance of this ABC element and its importance to the framework.

Ken is also of significant consideration for this exploratory research question as his levels of attachment are unique amongst the group and he is the only MN Wild fan group member that “never makes group decisions.” This coincides with the results from Figure 4.3, which designates Ken as the least connected fan group member with respect

to friendship and communication outside of fan group meetings. Ken's connection the ABC framework is unique as his strongest points of attachment are "team symbols" and "geographic location." Team symbols are a key piece of imagery that holds a brand community together from global impulse consumption that comes from organizational success (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002), enhanced self-esteem through the attainment of social prestige (Mitrano, 1992), and the symbols of national identity that team symbols can provide through sport (Holmes, 1994). Ken's position with the ABC framework can be portrayed that team symbols are more important for those less invested within the socialized fan group.

Brand loyalty and brand community

The third research question was aimed towards exploring how brand loyalty levels of the fan group relate to the salient influencers of the ABC framework. Figure 4.5 illustrates the graphical representation of this Minnesota Wild fan group via SNA analysis with the addition of group member brand loyalty levels. A brand loyalty scale was adopted from Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) and was used with all fan group members. Except for Ben and Nick, scoring means greater than or equal to 6.0 on the 7-point Likert scale. Ken scored the highest loyalty to the Minnesota Wild brand at 7.0 and conversely there was a brand loyalty relationship of 0.0 between Nick and the MN Wild. Re-analyzed from Figure 4.4, Nick was found to not be a fan of the MN Wild ice hockey club resulting in his disconnectedness from the ABC framework even though he often makes fan group decisions as a socialized core group member.

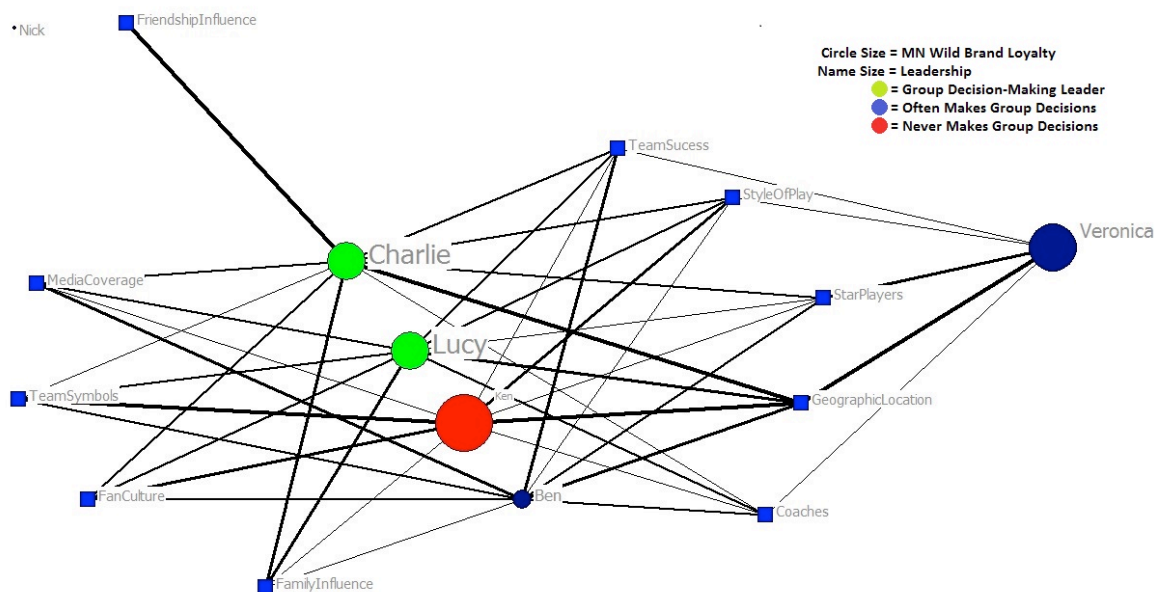


Figure 4.5. ABC Framework with MN Wild Brand Loyalty, Fan Group Leadership, and Decision-Making

Note. Circle size represents the self-reported Brand Loyalty level of each participant to the Minnesota Wild Ice Hockey Club.

Ken's scored the highest level of Minnesota Wild brand loyalty, which sheds light on the salient attachment influencer of team success. Ken reported a very limited relationship with the team success element of the ABC framework, which combined with his high brand loyalty score, supports the popular literature on basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) and cutting off from reflected failure (CORFing) (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). BIRGing occurs when after an individual's favorite team wins and that person presents public displays of fandom. Conversely, CORFing occurs when an individual's favorite team loses and they action to hide their fandom publically or do not publically display their fandom at a "normal" level. In Figure 4.5, Ken is seen as highly brand loyal

without much regard for the on-ice success of the Minnesota Wild in conjunction with his reported seven years of fandom. This aligns with the BIRGing and CORFing ideals that those with very high fan identification levels (Funk, & James, 2001; 2006) are often resistant to the ups and downs of team success.

Overall, the level of brand loyalty of this Minnesota Wild fan group highlights the “geographic” location of the ABC framework as the most central element. The most brand loyal group members as identified via scale mean scores and visually from Figure 4.5 all contain their strongest attachment to the ABC framework through geographic location. This finding matches that the evolution of brand communities within the literature as brand communities are released from Wellman’s (1979) geographic boundaries and well-versed by McLuhan (1966) and Ong’s (1982) mass mediated sensibilities to form a bond that converges O’Guinn and Shrum’s (1997) individuals from all socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds. Additionally, most brand communities contain some form of tradition or rituals as “brand community rituals and traditions function to maintain the culture of community” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 421). Culture and community is a common component of ice hockey fandom and it is not surprising that geographic location is the primary element of attachment for this ice hockey fan group to the MN Wild brand community.

Attachment to brand community (ABC) framework

The forth and final research question was aimed towards exploring the applicability of the Attachment to Brand Community (ABC) framework for this “off-site” ice hockey fan group data. Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5 show the connection that each

group member has to the ABC framework. While all the framework variables have importance, the SNA tools show that some attachment elements are more important than others. Overall, the ABC framework is well connected throughout this Minnesota Wild fan group and each attachment variable is well represented with respect to fit. Table 4.1 shows the “importance” of these connections with respect to the strongest and weakest ABC framework variables.

Table 4.1		
<i>ABC Framework Connections</i>		
<u>Strongest Connections to the ABC Framework</u>	<u>MN Wild Fan Group Mean Score (1-7)</u>	<u>Group Member’s Strongest ABC Connection</u>
1) Geographic Location	5.75	Ben, Charlie, Ken, & Veronica
T-2) Fan Culture	2.625	N/A
T-2) Star Player(s)	2.625	N/A
T-2) Style of Play	2.625	N/A
T-2) Team Symbols	2.625	Ken
T-2) Team Success	2.625	Ben
T-7) Family Influence	2.333	Ken, Veronica
T-7) Media Coverage	2.333	Veronica
9) Coach(es)	2.042	Ben, Charlie
<i>Note.</i> Each participant self-reported their ABC Framework connection level on each variable		

As discussed prior, with respect to brand loyalty, geographic location was also the overall strongest connection variable to the ABC framework. Each of the nine original variables were analyzed categorically based on the selection weight of each group member and then converted to a 7-point scale for evaluation ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.11$). It is important to note that Nick did not have any connection to the ABC framework, which lowered the overall mean scores. The top rated geographic location variable is strong outlier element as most fan group members ranked this element as “extremely relevant”

to how they became a fan of the MN Wild. This is significant for future study as if geographic location continually is an outlier of connection strength, than it should be weighted as such within ABC framework visual representation. Five of the attachment variables accounted for the second strongest connection to the ABC framework with equal mean scores of 2.625 mostly accounting for “relevant” and “very relevant” responses when asked to rank the relevancy level of how they became a fan of the MN Wild.

The Minnesota Wild “coach(es)” variable was represented as the weakest connection to the ABC framework for this fan group. With a mean score of 2.042, “coach(es)” is still represented within this group as a overall “relevant” response to how they became a fan of the MN Wild. For the purposes of framework “fit,” any variable mean scores less than 2.0 may be considered for framework elimination in future study renditions. It is postulated that the “family influence” variable was one of the weakest points of connection as the MN Wild ice hockey club is an expansion franchise beginning play during the 2000/01 season. With the entire fan group being greater than twenty-one years of age, it is possible that no one was subject to being socialized into the brand community through Robinson and Trail’s (2005) family influence point of attachment.

While Nick is not accounted for in this research question as he is not a Minnesota Wild fan, Veronica has a unique contribution as she is the only group member that is a fan and doesn't attach to all nine original variables. Figure 4.5 and Table 4.1 show that Veronica only reports ABC framework attachment to the geographic location, star player(s), coach(es), style of play, and team success variables respectively. It is

important to note that four out of the five variables connecting variables for Veronica are performance related. Veronica's connection to the ABC framework is less tangential in nature, which is posited to be a secondary level of attachment. This attachment could be secondary in nature to that of the sport of ice hockey as opposed to a professional team's brand community. One possible explanation, based on complete conjecture, is that Veronica is a former hockey player and connects to the values that she perceives as important within the MN Wild brand community to those as a current or former ice hockey player.

Overall, the findings of this study support the applicability of fit for this ABC framework with this particular Minnesota Wild fan group as there is a strong visual representation of connection and none of the variables have a group mean score that is below 2.0 on a 7-point scale. There are different weights (levels of attachment) for each of the original nine variables of attachment for this specific group with respect to each ABC framework, as originally proposed through the literature, but they all appear to have an appropriate fit for future study. These results show significant potential for future development and study. However until this framework is measured repeatedly, more data is needed prior to any re-structure of the ABC framework.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal the feasibility of moving forward with this line of research, as this study lends insight into one ice hockey fan group, exploratory visual structural analysis, methodological SNA exploration, and the adaptability of SNA methodological tools to Eichelberger's (2013) growing sport marketing industry.

Additionally, the ABC framework was not disproven by this exploratory data as all the purposed attachment variables were accounted for within the fan group. The ABC framework also was found to fit within the BIRGing and CORFing literature (Campbell, Aiken, & Kent, 2004; Trail, Kim, Kwon, Harrolle, Braunstein-Minkove, & Dick, 2012; Wann & Branscombe, 1990) based on the participant data. The participants of this study displayed a strong overall connection to the team success variable of the ABC framework aligning with Heider's (1958) theory of cognitive balance of which BIRGing and CORFing are conceptually rooted and Spinda's (2011) impression management process of sport fans where "fans of winning entities tend to internalize success while fans of losing entities tend to externalize failure" (p.393). Confirming the ABC framework within additional sport management literature is a significant step toward further investigation, as there might be other hidden variables of brand community attachment outside of the main stream of brand community literature.

This study aimed to synthesize brand community literature in conjunction with the ABC framework for a unique contribution of knowledge. As an exploratory study, now a baseline example has been set for the structural composition of an off-site ice hockey fan group and the socialized peer interactions of brand community members representing all loyalty levels. Sport organizations, such as the Minnesota Wild, have the opportunity to use this fan group information to increase their relationship marketing strategies (Buhler, & Nufer, 2012). According to Zaglia (2013) "applying successful marketing strategies today, and in the future, also means exploring and seizing the unprecedented opportunities of social network environments. (p.216). The participants of

this study are an excellent example of a brand community cluster embedded within a social network that is untapped by Buhler and Nufer's (2012) relationship marketing standards. With the knowledge that strong sets of friendship ties does not necessarily equal the strongest impact on leadership or group decision-making, sport organizations have the opportunity to find out if those who have strong loyalty, but not the highest level as was the case with Ken, in fact have the most group decision-making power.

By investigating a proper off-site sample within a specific brand community, the sport organization has the opportunity to better segment their sales and marketing effort within local and remote "fan establishments" or sports bars. With respect to the 80-20 Rule where 80 percent of an organization's revenue comes from the top 20 percent of that organization's respective consumers (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014), organizations may want to commit more relationship marketing resources to these "off-site" consumers, as they often times can lie within that top 20 percent due to their commitment to consume the product socially at least once a month. With Moores (1993) showing that the context of viewing consumption affects the meaning of experience, off-site fan groups should be targeted by marketing managers during actual times of consumption. Many more off-site fan groups should be identified and studied within all professional sports to find the "Charlies," group decision-making leaders who show high levels of brand loyalty, and develop relationship marketing lines as first points of contact to these fan groups. Finding these "Charlies" have many potential managerial marketing implications, as specialized incentives targeted toward "Charlies" should be analyzed for increased

effectiveness of fan group peer purchase intentions stemming from the recommendations of “Charlies.”

While this study does not fit all the tenants of grounded theory (Corbin, & Strauss, 2014) with survey questions being guided by the ABC framework, there still is some spark of theory that has emerged from the data. Further research is needed to create a sound theoretical conversation, as portions of data interpretation are pure speculation. Finding “Charlies” with future research may lead to further grounded theory connectedness if more data collection identifies “Charlies” and “Nicks” that can be grouped into categories which may become the basis for grounded theory confirmation or for new theory. For example, Charlie’s identification of “friendship influence” attachment variable is a needed addition to the ABC framework. Additionally, Nick might matter as much as Charlie for relationship marketing (Buhler & Nufer, 2012) even though we often ignore Nick based on his fan identification and loyalty scores (Funk & James, 2006). Just these examples alone, provide reason that this exploratory analysis is a unique contribution of knowledge, justifying a further line of research for theoretical implications.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the identification and recruitment of off-site fan groups to participate in this exploratory analysis. Off-site fan groups of size 2-4 were relatively easy to find. However, finding an off-site fan group of size 6 that meets at least once a month was a significant challenge. It is difficult in today’s society to gather socially with the same core members at a frequency of once a month and the coordination

of group members was seen to exponentially increase with difficulty relative to each additional group member. While it is speculation that this social difficulty may be from a lack of group leadership, this only strengthens the marketing implications and capabilities of finding these “Charlies” who possess the leadership skills necessary to influence group peers.

The emergence of Nick as a core participating member with respect to this MN Wild fan group’s consumption, while not attaching to the MN Wild brand community, exposed a limitation in the survey item wording. Survey questions #6-9 contained the fan loyalty scale to the MN Wild as adopted from Ross, James, and Vargas (2006), but did not provide the option for participants to select loyalty measures to teams other than the MN Wild. Future research ought to not assume that each fan group member is attached to that group’s core brand community and integrate a brand community self-selection option at the beginning of the survey so that the ABC framework can be analyzed with respect to group structure for any brand community within that respective sport.

Additionally, this study should have been more cognizant of the gender makeup within these fan groups as there is an opportunity to further add to research on women in sport to the literature with this topic. With respect to gender roles, Meyers, Berdahl, Brashers, Considine, Kelly, Moore, Peterson, & Spoor (2005) found that females in small mixed gender groups were less influential when they were cognitively central, as opposed to when they were more peripheral. Therefore, more research on this topic is needed before a clear understanding on the role of leadership centrality in group decision-making can be achieved with respect to the gender roles.

With respect to validity in the context of brand community attachment utilizing SNA methodology, a face-to-face data collection method was used to improve network connection validity. The SNA method is not immune to validity concerns, as the issue of informant bias must be accounted for. While this is a more significant challenge with the analysis of larger networks, informant biases can occur with social networks of any size when units, also referred to as “egos,” inadvertently overlook certain network members or chose not to reveal all of their relationships with other network units. Knoke and Yang (2008) conclude that these missing relationship links, or “ties,” are often those with weak ties to the units. Informant bias did not effect the face validity of the study data as all group members were identified prior to incorporate their names into the survey instrument. Furthermore, all group members were surveyed for this case study, alleviating the validation limitation of “missing data” for the SNA method.

The purpose of this dissertation is not to make blanket statements, but to know quite a lot more about these members of the larger sport brand community network. Correspondingly, determining network boundaries is a key challenge in all forms of SNA (Heath, Fuller, & Johnston 2009) and limiting this initial research to a smaller network size of an off-site fan group accounts for this boundary concern. As such, future research in this area can refine the ABC framework to include knowledge gained and hopefully address the literature gap between the knowledge and understanding of attachment to the broader sport brand community network.

Suggestion for future research

This study yields a promising new direction for future brand community applications within the sport industry. This study should be replicated for other NHL brand communities within and outside of their respective NHL media markets. Ideally, an off-site fan group of size 10 or more should be studied to further understand the fit of the ABC framework to the SNA processes of fan group structure. Additionally, a follow-up study with this specific fan group should be completed if the ABC framework undergoes any re-structure through the identification of new elements or additional studies confirm weighted attachment variables.

The ABC framework, once validated through additional NHL research, should also be studied with respect to football and the National Football League (NFL) as “off-site” fan groups are more commonplace with the repetitive weekly game schedule. These NFL fan groups already have a place in the literature as Katz and Heere (2013) provided data that shows the importance of group leaders, “Charlies,” in task delegation. These “Charlies” have provided each group member with a role to increase group connectedness and ownership. In a league where the 32 teams make up an overall NFL value of \$46 billion annually (Chemi, 2014), it might be easy to find “Charlies” but “Nicks” may matter even more as a potential consumer of two brands while only self-identifying with one brand community.

Chapter Five:
Discussion and Implications

Synthesis of Dissertation Papers

For a dissertation of this format it was a challenge to determine which methods and literature would produce the most salient and relevant data. As a committee, we determined that the methods described in the above papers were the most effective means to review brand community literature, present a solid foundation of SNA, and conduct an empirical examination via a case study. Of course there is additional literature that can be reviewed and other methods to conduct an empirical investigation. However, this dissertation makes a unique contribution by synthesizing together three distinct papers while maintaining a connection to brand community and SNA literature.

Additionally, the ABC framework, which was created in Chapter #2 (Figure 2.1), is an inventive first conceptualization of how fans attach to their respective brand communities. This framework was then integrated and carried through each paper as a connecting theme for future research ultimately resulting in a first applicability test within Chapter #4. This ABC framework contribution is the main synthesizing element that lays the foundation for a future research agenda. The call for this line of research is not only exploratory in nature, but it also has the opportunity for practical industry connections while maintaining theoretical implications.

Practical Implications

The research presented within this dissertation stimulates the conversation for the practical integration of brand community literature and SNA within marketing campaign research and development (R&D). As presented in Chapter #3, there are many possible practical implications warranting further development of the ABC framework and

utilization of the SNA methodology. One possible practical implication is the further development of fan identification via the ABC framework. According to Funk & James (2006), fans can be grouped into different categories based on their level of identification as a fan of their respective favorite team. Essentially the higher the level of fan identification, the more important you are as a consumer of that respective sport brand. The ABC framework has the opportunity to develop and refine how we think of the relationship between high fan identification and high consumption levels. Chapter #4 identified that Nick matters as a consumer of a sport brand even if he does not show any level of fan identification. From a practical standpoint, there are many sport consumers, who for various reasons do not identify as a fan but consumer that respective sport brand at a high level.

Player movement is another practical implication example with possible ties to further ABC framework development. Zirin (2010) implies that owners use trades to remind professional athletes who really is in control. However many player trades are often “due to salary disputes or personal grievances with owners” (Grey, 2012, p. 531). Grey (2012) continued that the disposability of players and the casual disregard owners’ often show for their teams and their players’ talent can lead to a disconnect with fans when their respective favorite players move to a different team. The ABC framework can be further developed for longitudinal utilization as a way to measure pre and post player movement attachment to brand community levels. If the findings proved significant, the practical implications of fans declining in brand attachment may provide

sport organization management with pause to further consider the possible fan reaction before trading or failing to resign star players.

Perhaps the most prominent practical implication of this dissertation is the validity of the ABC framework for the future globalization of sport markets. Pending future research utilizing the ABC framework for model development and validity testing, this framework has the opportunity to measure the connection variables that matter most to fans in non-traditional markets. For example, with iFans being able to consume the products of their favorite team on-demand through new media outlets anywhere in the world via the Internet (Shreffler, 2013), the further development of the ABC framework provides an opportunity to measure the attachment variables that matter most in various global markets.

The SNA methodology also has the opportunity to be utilized by sport marketers to visually map fan group ABC framework differences in these global sport marketplaces. For example, an attached brand community cluster, as created in Chapter #4, can be found in each major brand community media market. While surveying all of these brand community clusters is a significant challenge, there are practical implications to be found from the visual network mapping differences of each fan group cluster. For example, we do not yet know the structural composition of brand community clusters for each professional sport in North American, never mind the many global sport marketplaces. Creating SNA datasets and analyzing brand community clusters under the ABC framework has the potential to visually explore if any structure differences exist within North America and global markets. More specifically, perhaps ice hockey brand

community cluster fan groups in North America have mainly one or two group leaders that make group decisions, whereas ice hockey brand community clusters in Russia show equal decision-making and leadership roles. This hypothetical example would carry practical implications in the way these consumers are marketed to during consumption gatherings.

As previously discussed, each fan group comprises a unique and non-generalizable structural composition. What we don't know is if these brand community clusters each carry the same connection variables of the ABC framework. Either confirmation or disconfirmation of the ABC framework presents a unique opportunity for sport marketers to better understand the consumers that comprise their brand communities. If confirmed, sport organizations can utilize the ABC framework to create SNA datasets for visual confirmation of how their respective brand community clusters are attaching. This visual confirmation is one advantage of using SNA methods with the ABC framework as two-mode data converted into a graphical form can often be easier for management who might be unfamiliar with statistics to interpret.

If future research disconfirms the ABC framework, there are also practical implications. While the ABC framework shows that Nick matters from Chapter #4, "Nicks" may still stand out within brand community clusters via other measures such as brand loyalty (Ross, et al., 2006) and BIRGing and CORFing (Campbell, et al., 2004) scales. Further development of the ABC framework may have to be specifically tailored toward each respective sport of analysis. Additionally, sport organizations still can utilize the SNA fan group brand community cluster information even if the ABC

framework is disconfirmed. For example, if an ice hockey brand community cluster is found to not have an applicable fit to the ABC framework, the group leadership and decision-making structure may produce unique information as to how fans are consuming the brand off-site. In this hypothetical example, perhaps a majority of the cluster attaches to the brand via sponsor relationships. While an example such as this has not appeared within the ice hockey literature, organizations could still benefit from this practical knowledge when making sponsor alignment decisions.

Regardless of the ABC framework's future fate, there are advantages and disadvantages of utilizing the SNA methodology for this research. The numerous advantages of both group structure and visual analysis have been previously presented in Chapter #1 through Chapter #5. However it is important to discuss the disadvantages of utilizing the SNA methodology in this line of research. One of the largest disadvantages of the SNA method in this context is data collection and brand community cluster participant recruitment. From a practical perspective, sport organizations often do not have the time and resources to identify these small fan group clusters. Additionally, the unique survey distribution, with preloaded fan group member names, requires a significant software license and sizeable research team. Whereas a generalizable ABC framework survey could be mass distributed for development of attachment knowledge, however without the creation of SNA datasets, the rich and thick interpretive data would be lost (Grenier, 2011). Without such interpretive data, brand community attachment information cannot be matched to any specific fan group roles or brand community cluster leadership levels.

Theoretical Implications

The three papers contained within this dissertation make a compelling argument for both the theoretical value (Quatman & Chelladuri, 2008a) and the insight provided by the network theories of SNA (Emirbayer, 1997; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). This dissertation contains practical implications resulting in a call for future research. If this call evolves into a future line of research, there may also be emergent theoretical implications. While this research should be driven by the industry demand to better understand how consumers attach to respective brand communities, a theoretical impact to the literature may also emerge.

If undertaken, this line of research might be expanded to include Quatman and Chelladuri's (2008a) "more extensive, intuitive, and direct means of analyzing, interpreting, and reporting the network-related concepts" instead of just measuring fan identification (Wann, 1995) and brand loyalty (Funk & James, 2006) scales (p. 345). By utilizing the SNA methodology, this line of research may either further confirm grounded theory literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) or provide the foundation for new brand community and group theory to emerge from the data. Creating SNA datasets from brand community consumer groups, such as the fan group cluster of Chapter #4, for visual mapping has the opportunity to provide Grenier's (2011) rich and thick data from which theory can be built.

Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) arose for discussion within Chapter #4 as the results were derived from a collection of data and a transformation into an SNA dataset. While the collected data did not become a basis for new theory, the data analysis

framework does match the tenants of grounded theory and it is possible that new theory composition may emerge through future research. The results of this dissertation do not create any new theory or provide suggestions for the improvement of established theory and research frameworks. However, this dissertation does make a theoretical contribution to the literature by viewing brand communities through the unique SNA lens and examining the unknown attachment variables of ice hockey fan group brand community clusters, along with presenting a call for future research. The theoretical implications of this future research agenda align with the foundational tenants of “letting the data speak for itself” widely regarded within the literature for such theoretical frameworks as grounded theory (R. Grenier, personal communication, February 3, 2011). With the exploratory nature of Chapter #4, further research is needed to begin a sound theoretical conversation connecting the ABC framework and SNA methodology.

Chapter #4 suggested that finding others such as “Charlies” with future research may lead to further grounded theory connectedness. If data collection of more brand community clusters identifies the “Charlies” and “Nicks” to be grouped into categories as key network players, there may become the basis for grounded theory confirmation or for new theory to arise. For example, Charlie’s identification of the “friendship influence” attachment variable is a needed addition to the ABC framework. Additionally, Nick might matter as much as Charlie for relationship marketing (Buhler & Nufer, 2012) even though we often ignore “Nicks” based on his fan identification and loyalty scores (Funk & James, 2006). Just these examples alone, provide reason that this dissertation is a

unique contribution of knowledge, justifying a future research line while paying attention to the theoretical implications.

Future Research

The research contained within this dissertation is just a starting point for a SNA sport marketing conversation to begin within the literature. Further narrowed, the ABC framework ought to be examined for applicability within all professional sports. Many more off-site fan groups should be identified and studied to find the generalizable attachment variables that create fan group brand community clusters. While each sport will undoubtedly have a few unique attachment variables, further research may produce the data necessary to create overarching variable categories for a valid ABC framework of sport. Upon validation of the ABC framework from future research, a typology should be developed to further measure the ABC framework via exploratory factor analysis or confirmatory factor analysis to better understand the attachment of all types brand community members. Ultimately, the ABC framework should be a unique line of research for sport marketers to better understand why “Nick matters” and the importance of “finding Charlie.”

This dissertation is first step towards establishing a line of research that is sustainable within the academy and has the practical implications necessary to secure industry funding. For example, Anheuser-Busch was awarded Street & Smith’s “Sports Sponsor of the Year” award in 2013 (Sports Business Daily, 2013). Divisions of Anheuser-Busch often sponsor media market specific sport advertising campaigns that are housed with pubs and restaurants. As mentioned in Chapter #4, organizations such as

Anheuser-Busch generally market at locations away from the arena in the same manner that is proven to work within the arena. This line of research presents a unique opportunity to examine what drives off-site consumption of brand community members, as many sport organizations do not have the time or staff resources to effectively understand off-site fan groups that are brand community clusters.

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Appendix A

Chapter #4 Social Network Analysis Fan Group Survey



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
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Consent Form

Welcome to the survey on "Off-Site" Ice Fan Group Networks.
Thank you for your time!

CONSENT STATEMENT

Administration of "A Social Network Analysis Perspective on an Off-Site Ice Hockey Fan Group" Survey

You are invited to complete a survey on Off-Site Ice Hockey Fan Group Networks. You were selected as a possible participant by other members of your fan group. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to complete the survey.

This study is being conducted by Joshua Lupinek as part of the requirements for dissertation research at the University of Minnesota.

Background Information:

The purpose of this survey is: to explore if a deeper understanding of off-site fan identification culture can be constructed by examining Fan Group structure and behavior. If successful, this understanding will be practically relevant for sport organizations in regards to ticket sale promotions and off-site establishment target marketing.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a short survey. The survey should take about 10-20 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no immediate or expected risks for participating in the survey. The survey administered and the data collected are in conjunction with the University of Minnesota confidentiality research standards. Once your responses are entered into an electronic file, the original survey form will be destroyed.

There are also no immediate or expected benefits for you for participating in the survey. Your participation will allow the survey researcher to learn about the conduct of survey research and the use of pilot data for the improvement of survey instruments.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. No reports containing identifiable information will be published or publicly available.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Joshua Lupinek. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Josh at lupi0017@umn.edu. You may also contact the project advisor Dr. Stephen Ross, at sdross@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, contact Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

You may have a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Optional: Enter your email address below to receive a copy of the Consent Statement (email addresses will not be saved)

Do you consent to participate in this study?

Yes

No

Fan Group Information

Instructions:

You have been identified as a member of this MN Wild Fan Group that meets with some frequency for the purpose of viewing a live game broadcast.

How often does this Fan Group meet to watch MN Wild games?

Less than
Once a Month

Once a Month

2-3 Times a
Month

Once a Week

2-3 Times a
Week

Every Game

How often do you attend these Fan Group meetings to watch MN Wild games?

I attend less than half of the meetings I attend half of the meetings I attend most meetings I attend all Meetings

How many years have you attended these Fan Group meetings to watch MN Wild games?

How would you rate your overall loyalty to this MN Wild Fan Group?

Not At All Loyal Slightly Loyal Somewhat Loyal Moderately Loyal Extremely Loyal

Instructions

Please select how likely you are to do the following:

	Not At All Likely	Unlikely	Neither Likely or Unlikely	Likely	Extremely Likely
Invite a new member into the Fan Group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attend one MN Wild game this season with Fan Group members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Purchase MN Wild merchandise this season	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Instructions

Please select your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The MN Wild are my Team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider myself a loyal fan of the MN Wild	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supporting the MN Wild is very important to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want others to know I am a fan of the MN Wild	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Instructions:

- The next 2 questions must be answered for all MN Wild Fan Group members listed

For each person listed below, indicate how often you communicate outside of these

MN Wild Fan Group meetings (*in-person, phone, text, social media, etc.*):

(Note: select "Never" for yourself)

	Never	1 - 2 times a year	3 - 4 times a year	Once a month	2 - 3 times a month	Once a week	2 - 3 times a week	4 - 6 times a week	Every day
Ben	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charlie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lucy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veronica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each MN Wild Fan Group member listed below, indicate if you consider them an acquaintance, friend, or a best friend:

(Note: select "Self" for yourself)

	an Acquaintance	a Friend	a Best Friend	Self
Ben	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charlie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lucy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veronica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each MN Wild Fan Group member that you listed as an acquaintance, indicate your connection with each:

	"Fan Group" only	1st met in "Fan Group" and now also outside acquaintance	Outside acquaintance before "Fan Group"
» Ben	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Charlie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Ken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Lucy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Nick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Veronica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each MN Wild Fan Group member that you listed as a friend, indicate your level of friendship with each:

	"Fan Group" only	1st met in "Fan Group" and now also outside friend	Outside friend before "Fan Group"
» Ben	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Charlie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Ken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Lucy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Nick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Veronica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each MN Wild Fan Group" member that you listed as a best friend, indicate your level of friendship with each:

	"Fan Group" only	1st met in "Fan Group" and now also an outside best friend	Outside best friend before "Fan Group"
» Ben	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Charlie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Ken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Lucy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Nick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Veronica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Indicate your level of communication with each member of the Fan Group members while watching MN Wild Games:

(Note: select "None" for yourself)

	None	Occasional Communication	Average Communication	Above Average Communication	Heavy Communication
Ben	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charlie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lucy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veronica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each person listed below, indicate the MN Wild Fan Group leadership level of each member:

(Note: for yourself, self select your leadership level)

	No Leadership	Some Leadership	Group Leader
Ben	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charlie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lucy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veronica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How are group decisions made within this MN Wild Fan Group?

- Collective Decision-Making (everybody makes every decision together equally)
- Individual Decision-Making (one or multiple people make decisions for the group)

For each person listed below, indicate the MN Wild Fan Group decision-making level of each member:

(Note: for yourself, self select your decision-making level)

	Never Makes a "Fan Group" Decision	Ocasionally Makes a "Fan Group" Decision	Often Makes a "Fan Group" Decision	Always Makes a "Fan Group" Decision
Ben	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charlie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lucy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veronica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain below, anything additional that you would like to mention in regards to fan group structure, communication, friendship, leadership, and/or decision-making within this MN Wild Fan Group:

Points of Attachment

Instructions:

- The next 3 questions are related to how and why you are a fan of the MN Wild
- (optional) If there is an "other" reason, please type it in the text box and rank it's relevance

How many years have you been a fan of the MN Wild?



How many MN Wild Games (home or away) will you have attended in-person at the end of the 2015/16 regular season?



Rank the relevance level of how you became a fan of the MN Wild:

	Not Relevant	Little Relevance	Relevant	Very Relevant	Extremely Relevant
Family Influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geographic Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Coverage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Star Player(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coach(es)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Style of Play	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fan Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Symbols	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Rank the relevance level of why you are a fan of the MN Wild today:

	Not Relevant	Little Relevance	Relevant	Very Relevant	Extremely Relevant
Family Influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geographic Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Coverage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Star Player(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coach(es)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Style of Play	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fan Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team Symbols	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Fan Group Brand Community Loyalty

Instructions:

- This is the last survey section!

Have there ever been any decisions made within this MN Wild Fan Group by group members that have effected overall fan group membership?

Yes

No

Please explain the decision(s) by group members that have effected overall "Fan Group" membership:

Have there ever been any decisions made within this MN Wild Fan Group by group members that have effected your level of fan group participation?

Yes

No

Please explain the Fan Group decision(s) that effected your level of fan group participation:

Have there ever been any reasons or forces outside the group that have effected

overall MN Wild Fan Group membership?

Yes

No

Please explain the reasons or forces outside the group that have effected overall MN Wild Fan Group membership:

Have there ever been any reasons or forces outside of this group that have effected your level of MN Wild Fan Group participation?

Yes

No

Please explain the reasons or forces outside the group that have effected your level of MN Wild an Group participation:

Have the MN Wild organization made any decisions effected overall Fan Group membership?

Yes

No



Please explain the organizational decision(s) made by the MN Wild that effected overall Fan Group *membership*:

Have any organizational decisions made by the MN wild effected your level of Fan Group participation?

Yes

No

Please explain the MN Wild organizational decisions made by the MN Wild that effected your level of Fan Group participation:

In closing, please state anything additional below that you would like to mention in regards to this MN Wild Fan Group involvement and membership:



Vita

Joshua M. Lupinek, from East Haddam, Connecticut, graduated from Franklin Pierce University in 2009 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Management and Mathematics. Before relocating to Minnetonka, Minnesota to pursue a doctoral degree in Kinesiology with an emphasis in Sport Management, he graduated from the University of Connecticut in 2011 with a Master of Arts in Sport Management and Sociology. Following the completion of his Ph.D., Josh will begin his faculty career at the University of Alaska Fairbanks as an Assistant Professor of Business Administration within the School of Management.