

Building Relationships between Fans and Teams in the National Basketball Association through

Facebook: The Influence of Engagement on Relationship Quality and Consumer Behavior

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between National Basketball Association fans' engagement with their favorite teams' Facebook pages, fans' relationship quality with their favorite team, and their purchase and referral intentions using relationship marketing as a framework. Additionally, the types of content fans preferred teams post on Facebook were examined. Two convenience samples, one collected by posting a link to Facebook and the other by purchasing a Qualtrics panel, were collected. Data were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and frequency tables. Results indicated in both samples that individuals who engaged more on Facebook also had greater relationship quality. Additionally, in the Qualtrics panel, a higher level of engagement with teams' Facebook page had a statistically significant, positive impact on purchase intentions. In both samples, the indirect effects of Facebook engagement on purchase and referral intentions as mediated by relationship quality were statistically significant and positive, suggesting more engaged individuals on Facebook had higher relationship quality and were more likely to intend to purchase tickets and merchandise in the future and refer others to do the same. Overall, respondents indicated they preferred content related to players, including injury and movement, as well as score-related posts, suggesting they might prefer using Facebook as another way to receive information instead of choosing to actively engage with their favorite team. However, because results from modeling suggest engaging individuals on Facebook has positive impacts on future behavioral intentions, sport marketers should consider engaging individuals on Facebook while still fulfilling their need for information about players and game results.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Spectator sport in the United States is big business. The major professional sport leagues bring in \$23.5 billion in revenue and are growing; in 2012 the growth rate was 3% (Danova & Jose, 2013). Analysts at Pricewaterhouse Coopers suggest the entire sport industry will grow from \$53.6 billion in 2012 to \$67.7 billion in 2017 (Van Riper, 2013). According to these analysts, gate revenues currently account for \$19.1 billion, making fans essential to the survival and success of professional sport teams. In fact, a secure fan base, one that is loyal despite team success or failure, is vital to the continuing growth of professional sport team revenues (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008).

Traditional professional sport leagues, such as the National Basketball Association (NBA), and their teams face increasing competition from other sport and non-sport entertainment options for consumers' discretionary income (Kim & Trail, 2011; Rein, Kotler, & Shields, 2006). For example, lacrosse has experienced a significant increase in attendance in recent years, illustrating the increasing popularity of niche sports (Greenhalgh, Simmons, Hambrick, & Greenwell, 2011). To remain competitive, traditional professional sport teams must avoid complacency by finding new ways to market to potential customers and retain current customers. New media and technological advancements provide innovative marketing channels for team marketers, if marketers choose to capitalize on them to communicate with and create added value for customers (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). Additionally, adopting innovative business philosophies, such as shifting marketing strategy from traditional methods meant to drive transactions to methods aimed at building customer relationships, will allow professional sport teams to prosper in this competitive environment (Ferrand & McCarthy, 2009; Lachowetz, McDonald, Sutton, &

Clark, 2001; Shani, 1997). Moreover, teams that can learn to successfully develop lasting relationships with customers, sponsors, suppliers, and employees will have competitive advantages (Buhler & Nufer, 2010).

For sport organizations wishing to focus their marketing strategy on building and maintaining customer relationships, relationship marketing is a viable strategy. Relationship marketing, a term referring to marketing strategy concentrated on customer relationships, gained attention and popularity from researchers and practitioners starting in the last decade of the 20th century (Egan, 2004). In the past, traditional marketing focused on increasing transactions and exchanging goods and services for money (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). Shifts in consumer profiles and business goals, however, uncovered a lack in traditional marketing models for businesses in the service industry (Egan, 2004). For example, as consumers adjusted to an environment tailored to meet their individual needs and businesses recognized the benefits of customer retention, companies realized strategy aimed at simply driving more customer transactions was no longer sufficient. To fill this void, relationship marketing offers strategies and tactics more congruent with the needs of the service environment characterized by intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability (Egan, 2004).

Relationship marketing also works best in competitive markets where consumers continually desire and demand the product or service (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). Sport is an ideal industry for implementing relationship marketing strategy as it shares many characteristics with the service industry and is distinguished by intense competition. While sport marketing originally adopted a transactional focus, Ferrand and McCarthy (2009) recommend sport organizations shift to relationship marketing strategy, especially because sport is an exemplary setting for relationship marketing (Egan, 2004; Kim, Trail, Woo, & Zhang, 2011b; Shani, 1997).

Moreover, Bee and Kahle (2006) suggest all sport marketing transactions involve relationship marketing at some level. Building and sustaining relationships with customers is essential for success in today's multi-billion dollar sport industry.

There are multiple reasons a relational approach is superior to a transactional approach in sport (Ferrand & McCarthy, 2009). First, competition for consumers' discretionary dollars makes relationship building necessary to encourage repeat attendance and purchases (Neale, Georgiu, & Purchase, 2004). Second, many sport fans differ from average consumers because they are already more devoted to a team, which facilitates attempts by the team to establish relationships with them (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Egan, 2004; Waters, Burke, Jackson, & Buning, 2011). For example, fans often are already passionate about sport, have family connections to a team, or identify socially with a team, and will choose to attend games or purchase merchandise without much marketing effort from the team. Once these fans are in the arena, initial contacts at games and events can be cultivated into long-term relationships. These long-term relationships increase profitability and purchases while also reducing costs (Kim et al., 2011b). In addition, successful relationship marketing serves as a bridge to bind customers to a team and builds brand loyalty (Shani, 1997). As fans become attached to teams, they continue purchasing merchandise and attending games regardless of team performances (Gladden & Funk, 2001). Clearly, relationship marketing can be a beneficial strategy for professional sport teams.

Relationship marketing facilitates customer relationship building because it is a two-way process. However, this process requires more than simply delivering a message to customers; it also is necessary to engage with your audience to build connections to your brand (Drury, 2008). The online environment has changed marketing communications by connecting the audience to the organization and each other, allowing greater access to information, and enabling customers

to find information from multiple sources (Gurau, 2008). The consumer is no longer a passive participant in the relationship (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013) but an active partner with the opportunity to find information, vet this information, and make purchase decisions based on information from multiple sources.

Marketing communications are specifically influenced by the introduction of social media, which are changing the way consumers communicate and impacting consumer purchase behavior (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Füller, 2013). Research from marketing firms suggests users are spending anywhere from 42 minutes a day to over 3 hours a day communicating and interacting on multiple social media channels, such as social networking sites (Facebook) or micro blogging sites (Twitter) (Adler, 2014; Bennett, 2014; Brustein, 2014; MarketingCharts, 2013). Social media can be used for a variety of marketing functions including advertising, disseminating content, building a brand, communicating one-on-one with customers, generating leads, monitoring reputation, encouraging loyalty, and cultivating engagement (Dzamic, 2012). Meeting and interacting with consumers on social media channels allows companies to engage in more effective, timely, and direct contact with them (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media meet relationship marketing goals when organizations use them to understand customer needs, increase their satisfaction, and enhance relationship value for customers (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013; Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Not only can organizations share information through social media, they also can engage customers through these channels (Rishika, Kumar, Janakiraman, & Bezawada, 2013).

Companies can create contests, start discussions, or engage consumers in product development.

A prominent presence on social networks is important for building strong brand relationships because companies can participate in dialogue via customers' preferred channels (Shen &

Bissell, 2013). However, to realize the benefits of social media, sport teams should commit human, financial, and time resources to building their social media presence, interacting online, and evaluating the pulse of fans (Abeza et al., 2013). Simply hosting social media accounts does not guarantee consumers will engage with the company or content it posts (Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010), and organizations must actively cultivate participation and activity with consumers on social media. For example, teams could encourage dialogue by asking consumers questions or hosting contests on social media sites. Additionally, organizations need to determine the level of interaction consumers' desire on social media platforms and then meet their needs, which will lead to deeper connections with consumers (Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

One social media platform, Facebook, encourages connections with customers through communication and interaction. Facebook is an online social networking site that allows organizations to interact with individuals “through messages, videos, competitions, games, and other content” (Smith, 2013, p. 357) and build relational bonds (Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker, 2012). As the dominant social networking site, Facebook captures 71% of online American adults, with 63% using the platform at least once a day and 40% visiting Facebook more than once a day (Duggan & Smith, 2014). The high percentage of adults using Facebook and frequency of their visits makes it a useful tool for relationship marketing. Williams and Chinn (2010) assert social networks aid relationship marketing by allowing consumers to communicate with organizations and contribute content. Businesses can create a fan page on Facebook allowing their Facebook followers to receive organizational updates and actively participate and interact with the company. Compared with Twitter, Facebook is more personal and visual and encourages more interactive experiences (Clavio & Walsh, 2013), which enhances its effectiveness as a relationship marketing tool.

Sport also seems an ideal setting for using social media to build relationships with customers. A team's existing fan base renders social media ideal channels to encourage interaction with players, coaches, and the organization (Wallace, Wilson, & Miloch, 2011). Since many sport fans already have an affinity for a specific team, teams have a group of avid customers to interact with online in an attempt to build stronger relationships. Also, because sport fans often adopt new media and technology quickly, they will be likely to use social media because they have a desire to connect with sport fans inside and outside of their current area (Phua, 2012). Finally, the instant interaction on Facebook gives sport organizations another chance to engage with customers outside of games or special events (Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, & Blaszk, 2013). If used properly, teams foster fans' attachment to the team through consistent communication and shared participation on social media. However, while it is important for sport teams to understand how to utilize social networks like Facebook to increase customer interest, improve customer relationships, and increase profitability, little research exists in this area (Pronschinske et al., 2012; Rishika et al., 2013). It is not well understood what practices encourage engagement and how sport fans use social media to interact with their favorite teams.

In the current business environment, marketing managers are required to prove the return on investment of marketing expenditures (Rishika et al., 2013). However, the evolving and constantly changing environment of social media presents a challenge for marketers who must measure the value of investments in these channels (Drury, 2008; Lipsman, Mud, Rich, & Bruich, 2012). Little is understood about how online engagement and types of posted content impact business outcomes such as revenues, brand equity, and relationship quality.

Studying relationship marketing and the use of social media is complicated by the differences across organizations, and in sport, across leagues. In general, Egan (2004) does not

recommend using a one-size-fits-all relationship marketing strategy because of differences across organizations and industries. While all major sport leagues merit study, the NBA may be an ideal setting for studying marketing from a relationship marketing framework. Cousens, Babiak, and Slack (2001) and Mawson and Coan (1994) suggest the NBA must be vigilant in building fan relationships and generating revenues to survive in the highly competitive sport industry. In the late 1990s, the NBA was in the midst of work stoppages, off-court issues with players, and general fan apathy and needed to re-evaluate its business strategy (Lachowetz et al., 2001). At the time, the NBA adopted relationship marketing at the league level to try to repair its image, connect with fans, and recover from a lack of fan interest (Cousens et al., 2001; Lachowetz et al., 2001). However, the most recent research by Dick and Sack (2003) and Dick and Turner (2007) into marketing tactics used in the NBA does not indicate relationship marketing has been implemented by individual teams.

Furthermore, the NBA also is an ideal league to study the use of social media as marketing tools to build relationships. As a league, the NBA uses social media extensively and has built a large following on multiple networks with 17 million Facebook fans on the league page and over 7.3 million followers on Twitter (Jessop, 2013). Successful use of social media at the league level should encourage individual franchises to follow suit, especially since the demographics of NBA fans also support using social media as marketing tools. Scarborough Sports Marketing suggests 26% of avid fans are 18-34 year old men with 22% having a household income over \$100,000 (Scarborough, 2012). Avid fans are likely to use social networks with 49% on Facebook and 66% on Twitter. According to an infographic published by opendorse, a marketing firm that works specifically with athletes, agents, and sport brands, 64% of NBA fans are male, 34% are over 50 years old, 32% are 35-49, and 33% are 18-34

(opendorse, 2013). Also, in comparison with other United States professional sport leagues, the NBA has the most Twitter and Facebook followers. The demographics of Facebook users indicate numerous individuals in each NBA fan age group also use the social networking site, which supports its use as a marketing tool for NBA teams. Research on social media indicates that among online adults in the United States 84% of 18-29 year olds, 79% of 30-49 year olds, and 60% of 50-64 year olds use Facebook (Duggan & Smith, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

League and team marketers in the NBA must continually adapt to the changing sport marketing landscape by adopting new marketing techniques focused on building fan relationships. During the 2011-2012 lockout, team marketers underscored the importance of fostering fan relationships and keeping fans engaged during the work stoppage, citing long-term relationships as an important goal (Ianello & Cloud, 2012). While previous research into marketing tactics in the NBA has been conducted (Dick & Sack, 2003; Dick & Turner, 2007; Mawson & Coan, 1994), there is a dearth of research published examining marketing tactics, and specifically social media marketing, used by NBA teams within a relationship marketing framework.

Additionally, little research exist into how social media are utilized by professional sport teams (Hopkins, 2013; Mahan, 2011; Pronschinske et al., 2012). Most research on social media in sport examines Twitter using communication theories (Blaszka, Burch, Frederick, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Clavio, Burch, & Frederick, 2012; Clavio & Kian, 2010; Clavio & Walsh, 2013; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Ozsoy, 2011; Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson, 2010) or Facebook in intercollegiate sport (Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2012; Walsh et al., 2013). Outside of a

conceptual article by Williams and Chinn (2010), only a few other studies use relationship marketing theory to examine the use of social media in sport. These studies focus on user constraints and motivations for using social media (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012), build a scale for relationship quality (Kim et al., 2011b), discuss opportunities and challenges of using social media (Abeza et al., 2013), examine how national governing bodies and national sporting organizations use social media (Eagleman, 2013; Thompson, Martin, Gee, & Eagleman, 2014), and detail the ways professional sport teams use Facebook to reach fans (Pronschinske et al., 2012). Finally, very little is known about how to encourage customers to engage on social media, the ways in which customers engage online, and how customer engagement impacts business outcomes (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlstrom, 2012; Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Constantinides and Fountain (2008) and Pentina, Gammoh, Zhang, and Mallin (2013) implore researchers to examine how social media impact customer behavior and how to maximize the marketing effectiveness of these tools.

It is clear social media should be examined in the sport industry as more organizations are using social media to build and maintain relationships with fans (Kim et al., 2011b). Relationship marketing provides a framework for examining how social media are used to build relationships. Also, because little research exists on evaluating relationship marketing tactics or how these tactics impact sport consumers' behavior, research should address this lack (Kim, Trail, & Ko, 2011a).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of NBA fans' engagement with their favorite teams' Facebook pages on their consumer behavioral intentions and quality of their relationships with their favorite teams. This study aims to investigate the relationship between

specific social media behaviors and the strength of fans' Facebook relationships with their favorite teams and how these relationships effect relationship quality and fans' consumption behaviors. Additionally, the type of Facebook content consumers prefer teams post is explored.

The following research questions will be examined:

Research Question 1: Which Facebook user behaviors increase the overall level of engagement of Facebook followers?

Research Question 2: Does the level of engagement of Facebook followers improve the quality of their relationship with the team?

Research Question 3: Does the level of engagement of Facebook followers influence their purchase and referral intentions?

Research Question 4: Does relationship quality mediate the relationship between Facebook engagement and purchase and referral intentions?

Research Question 5: What types of information do Facebook followers prefer to receive from teams on Facebook?

Definition of Terms

- *Comment*: An engagement behavior on Facebook that involves users writing their thoughts or opinions underneath a Facebook post. In this study, comment is an indicator of Facebook relationship strength.
- *Confirmatory factor analysis*: A statistical technique that allows the researcher to test relationships between observed variables and their underlying latent constructs.
- *Consumer/customer*: Any individual who currently or potentially purchases and/or consumes an organization's products or services. These terms are used interchangeably in this study.

- *Facebook*: A social networking site where users can connect with other individuals and post and share information with their network.
- *Facebook follower or Facebook fan*: A Facebook user who has liked and followed the content posted by his or her favorite NBA team on Facebook.
- *Fan*: A sport consumer or customer who has an attachment to a specific team and identifies with that specific team.
- *Like*: An engagement behavior on Facebook where a user clicks a thumbs-up button underneath a Facebook post. It is used as an indicator of Facebook relationship strength in this study.
- *Message*: An engagement behavior on Facebook where a user sends a private, direct message to another user or organization. It is used as a potential indicator of Facebook relationship strength in this study.
- *Purchase intentions*: A measure of consumer behavior that quantifies an individual's plan to purchase a product or service in the near future.
- *Read*: The action of reading content posted on Facebook. In this study, read is used as an indicator of Facebook relationship strength.
- *Referral intentions*: A measure of consumer behavior that quantifies an individual's plan to suggest a product or service to others in the near future.
- *Relationship marketing*: A marketing strategy focusing on establishing, building, enhancing, and maintaining relationships with customers aimed at retaining customers and strengthening customer loyalty.
- *Share*: When a Facebook user chooses to send a post, posted by another Facebook user, to his or her own network of Facebook friends by clicking on an arrow and adding their

own optional description of the post. It is used as an indicator of Facebook relationship strength in this study.

- *Structural equation modeling*: A statistical method for modeling hypothesized relationships between latent constructs combining confirmatory factor analysis, path analysis, and regression.
- *Transaction-based marketing*: A marketing strategy focused on driving more transactions (i.e., more customer purchases).
- *Twitter*: A micro-blogging site where users have 140 characters to share thoughts, opinions, and activities with their followers.
- *Visit*: The action of a Facebook user purposely viewing another Facebook user or organization's Facebook page to view posted information. In this study, it is used as an indicator of Facebook relationship strength.

Limitations

This study focused on one professional sport league in the United States, the NBA, which potentially limits the generalizability of the findings. While findings may not be directly applicable to all professional sport leagues in the United States, similarities in how teams in other professional leagues use Facebook and consumers' profiles between leagues suggest these findings will have value for marketers of other professional sport teams. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants by posting a link to Facebook as a means of survey dissemination and purchasing a respondent panel from Qualtrics. The higher likelihood of females to respond to survey research (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2000; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003) means the demographics of these samples likely differ from the entire population of NBA fans. However, male respondents represented nearly half of all respondents, so while the demographic

percentages may not be representative of the actual population of NBA fans, both sexes were represented adequately.

The data in this study are self-report. While this is common in marketing research, it does rely on individuals correctly recalling and reporting their behaviors, thus there is potential for human error. Additionally, data are measured on Likert-type scales, which are ordinal in nature, but are treated as continuous during data analysis, which is common in social sciences research (Flora & Curran, 2004; Rhemtulla, Brosseau-Liard, & Savalei, 2012). When sample size is large and the scale has five or more points, using estimators that assume data are continuous perform as well as categorical estimators (Beauducel, & Herzberg, 2006; Rhemtulla et al., 2012). Additionally, Little (2013) termed ordinal data *metrical* as it represents an underlying continuum and suggested it performed well in robust estimation procedures. However, this does limit the interpretation of results as it is difficult to distinguish the difference between scale points on a strongly disagree to strongly agree scale (i.e., how much more of a trait needs to exist to move an individual from agree to strongly agree).

The model, created using an extensive literature review, has not previously been tested. Therefore, results cannot be considered conclusive and additional models may fit the data just as well. This means that more testing using this model will be required, regardless of the results of this study. Finally, because this study does not use an experimental design, interpretations of data cannot confirm causation. Discussions of the results will focus on the connections and potential meanings between constructs based on what the data show.

Significance of this Study

Understanding the relationship between social media marketing and customer relationships is complicated, especially as not all customers use social media (Abeza et al., 2013;

Ang, 2011), and it is difficult to know if social media engagement increases purchase intentions and behavior or if loyal fans are the ones who engage on Facebook (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Dzamic, 2012; LaPointe, 2012). However, the use of social media is continually growing, precipitating a need for inquiry into its use as a marketing channel regardless of these complications.

In professional sport, little research has yet to examine the relationship between social media marketing and behavioral outcomes. The lack of knowledge about how to market on social media channels, such as Facebook, potentially constrains its functionality as a marketing channel. While research has found that all professional sport teams have Facebook pages (Kim et al., 2011b), the effectiveness of Facebook as a marketing tool has received little attention. If teams are going to put resources into using Facebook for marketing, which Abeza et al. (2013) advocate, then its use must be critically examined and best practices should be elucidated.

According to Williams and Chinn (2010), relationship marketing is an ideal framework for driving use of and examining social media marketing in sport. This study is important because it is the first attempt to apply relationship marketing theory to marketing via Facebook in the NBA. The critical examination of relationship marketing as a marketing framework in sport is limited, even though several researchers (Egan, 2004; Ferrand & McCarthy, 2009; Kim et al., 2011b; Shani, 1997) suggest sport is an ideal industry for employing relationship marketing strategy. For researchers, this study will provide insight into ways to examine Facebook and its impact as a marketing tool in sport by establishing a connection between relationship marketing and social media marketing. Testing relationships between Facebook engagement, customer relationships, and behavioral intentions will add to the literature on social media marketing and relationship marketing in sport, and will provide a framework for

examining these relationships in other sport leagues and on other social media channels. For sport marketers, this study will help them better understand the content their customers desire on Facebook, driving their social media strategy. Additionally, it will allow sport marketers to consider their measures of marketing success on Facebook and provide an alternate method for quantifying impacts. Finally, this study will encourage researchers and sport marketers to reconsider marketing strategy and its measurement in sport, specifically as it relates to social media. For NBA teams, this study is particularly significant as Ianello and Cloud (2012) point out that fostering customer relationships is an important long-term goal for team marketers.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This study's purpose is to investigate the impact of engagement of NBA teams' fans on Facebook on the quality of their relationship with their favorite team and consumer behavioral intentions. Relationship marketing was chosen as a theoretical framework to examine customers' engagement with the content NBA teams post on Facebook because relationship marketing encourages building relationships with consumers through interaction and communication. The review of literature begins by examining relationship marketing in more detail to explicate why it provides an ideal conceptual framework for exploring marketing using social media. A description of how social media correspond with relationship marketing, previous research on social media as marketing tools in sport and other industries, and a description of one social networking platform, Facebook, follow. The review ends with an examination of consumer behaviors and business outcomes linked to the use of social media and previous research on how best to measure the impact of social media.

Relationship Marketing

The utility of relationship marketing has become a global concept examined by researchers in many industries around the world (Egan, 2004). Relationship marketing, a customer-focused strategy, includes any marketing activity used to establish, develop, enhance, and maintain customer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). For organizations dedicated to changing their marketing strategy, Berry (1995) suggested all marketing should be directed at solidifying customer relationships, cultivating loyal customers, and serving customers. Grönroos (1996) reiterated that companies should emphasize serving customer needs.

The focus of relationship marketing is not on monetary transactions but on building long-term relationships with customers. Egan (2004) highlighted that relationship marketing, “...focuses not on what you can do *to* your customer but on what you can do *for* your customer and what you can do *with* your customer, to ensure customer satisfaction” (p. 130). The emphasis is not on extracting value from customers but on serving customer needs and centering strategy around meeting these needs (Ferrand & McCarthy, 2009). Treating customers less as a means to a monetary end and more as a partner in the creation of value for the customer and organization is critically important.

The core ideal of relationship marketing has been identified as long-term collaboration, where both sides actively participate and benefit (Gummesson, 1999). These relationships evolve through interactions between parties and involve mutual exchanges serving the goals of all involved (Ferrand & McCarthy, 2009). As such, every interaction between each customer and the organization serves to build relationships. Interactions can be in person, on the phone, through electronic mail, or via other online channels. Also, interactions with any individual working for or perceived as a part of the organization are included. When relationship marketing is fully implemented, the customer and organization work collaboratively to meet shared goals through communication, feedback, and engagement. For example, team marketers and customers would both benefit from a seamless season ticket referral and renewal system. To implement a system that works for both parties, team marketers would actively ask season ticket holders which ways they prefer to renew tickets and what benefits they would like to see from a referral program. Implementing a system that works for both parties can increase the number of renewals and referrals, making the process easy for customers and increasing sales for the team.

The value of relationship marketing lies in the belief that long-term customer relationships are desirable because retaining existing customers, which reduces costs and saves time, is less expensive and more important than acquiring new ones (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Egan, 2004). Lachowetz et al. (2001) suggested it could cost five times more to acquire a new customer than it does to retain a current one. Buhler and Nufer (2010) and Payne and Frow (2000) stated a 5% increase in retention increases profitability by 20-85% for businesses in the service industry. As such, companies are choosing to focus on and shift more resources to customer retention than customer acquisition (Egan, 2004).

In spectator sport, the core product (i.e., the game) cannot be controlled by the marketer and its outcome is unpredictable, the experience is intangible, and the product is perishable as it is produced and consumed simultaneously (Buhler & Nufer, 2010), making sport an ideal setting for relationship marketing (Berry, 1995). Moreover, teams have opportunities to capitalize on relationship-building strategy because sport fans' connection to the team is more passionate and loyal than to products and services in other industries (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). By consciously attempting to foster fan relationships, teams influence merchandise purchases and encourage continuing and consistent attendance. According to Barnes (2000), relationships were more likely to be established when the customer came into face-to-face contact with the company, where the service was personal or characterized by high-involvement, and where goals and interests of the parties were symmetric. In spectator sport, customers are in contact with team staff at each game attended, feel connected with the team on a personal level, and are already attached to the team's success. Because team performance is out of the control of the sport marketer, strong customer relationships are essential in case of poor on-court performance

because devoted fans will continue to attend games and purchase merchandise (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Kim et al., 2011b; Neale et al., 2004).

Shani (1997) presented a framework for relationship marketing in sport to help marketers advance from the transactional end of the spectrum to the relational end. In his framework, sport marketers begin by segmenting their markets and breaking those segments into smaller niches. Next, he suggests teams build customer databases, which are essential to successful segmentation, to facilitate the move to the next step, which is database marketing. Teams could then use their databases to identify core customers and tailor personalized communications to each customer, moving toward relationship marketing. Finally, once relationship marketing is adopted, teams should focus on building financial, social, and structural bonds with fans.

Bonding has been applied as a framework for relationship marketing in many industries. Berry (1995) suggested all customers advanced through financial, social, and structural bonds with an organization. In fact, all partners in a marketing relationship participate in and encounter economic, resource, and social exchanges (Morgan, Crutchfield, & Lacey, 2000). Gummesson (1999) further described three levels of customer dependency and commitment based on these exchanges. In level one, customers are attracted mostly by price. Customers in level two have a deeper relationship based on social, interpersonal contact. When customers reach level three, they are committed to the relationship and share resources with the organization. Gummesson (1999), Liang and Wang (2007), and Peng and Wang (2006) used the structure of financial, social, and structural bonding to examine relationship marketing techniques.

Customer bonding begins at the financial level, is cultivated through social contact, and then is solidified when customers are attached by participating in reaching mutual goals, such as improving the game experience. Financial bonds alone are not enough to build solid, long-term

relationships and do little to increase loyalty or satisfaction (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Gummesson, 1999; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2000). In sport, these bonds afford the team little protection against negative publicity or poor performance (Shani, 1997). Buhler and Nufer (2010) suggested relying solely on discounts and other pricing strategies resulted in “cold loyalty,” which did little to bring customers back in the absence of price discounts. While giving discounted tickets will bring fans to the game, it may not be sufficient to get them to return in the future. However, using pricing strategies to get customers in the door initially gives the organization an opportunity to use social bonding strategies to build long-term relationships (Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000). Through social bonding, organizations connect on a personal level with customers, creating for them positive associations with the organization (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). Social bonds can be created at games or events as fans interact with employees, staff, or the team.

To move customers to the final level of bonding, they must perceive they are a part of the organization. Integrating the customer with the organization’s goals by including them in the value creation process builds structural bonds (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Egan, 2004; Gummesson, 1999). For example, inviting fans to provide input into product design or logo redesign can build structural bonds because fans are included in value creation. Grönroos (2004) proposed relationship marketing included interactions, communications, and value processes. His theory suggested organizations can build relationships with customers by managing interactions, engaging in two-way communications, and creating added value the customer perceived as beneficial to them. All interactions and communications with customers are essential in creating and nurturing long-term relational bonds.

As a caveat, not all customers desire long-term relationships with an organization (Egan, 2004). Some prefer independence, freedom of choice, variety, or privacy causing them to be disinterested in relationship-building initiatives (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2000). From the perspective of the business, these customers can be given different types of attention, as they are unlikely to be receptive to relationship-building attempts, to avoid wasting company resources.

Recognized Benefits of Relationship Marketing

Research across many disciplines has identified measureable benefits of relationship marketing. Relationship marketing improves financial performance, increases revenue, and reduces costs (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Gummesson, 1999). In addition, relationship marketing can improve customer retention rates (Berry, 1995; Bush, Underwood III, & Sherrell, 2007; Kim & Trail, 2011), which increases profitability (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Payne & Frow, 2000). Additionally, Egan (2004) explained customers were less price sensitive when relationships between the organization and customers were strong. This is important because sport teams will periodically increase ticket prices and strong relationships with fans increase the likelihood that they will continue to purchase tickets regardless.

Williams and Chinn (2010) suggested relationship marketing also could increase brand loyalty. Loyal customers are desirable because they demonstrate a high tolerance for an organization's mistakes and are less likely to switch to competitors, which increases stability for the organization (Diller, 2000; Gummesson, 1999). Additionally, loyal customers are more likely to continually purchase merchandise and attend games. For the sport marketer, customer retention and loyalty are essential for the long-term financial success of the team (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). With multiple entertainment options in the marketplace, professional sport teams

need loyal fans who will continue to buy tickets during losing seasons and renew season tickets even after these seasons.

To build loyalty, organizations first must understand what impacts brand loyalty. Bauer et al. (2008), in their study of German soccer fans, found non-product-related attributes had a greater effect on brand loyalty than product-related attributes (i.e., team performance, coaches, and players). These researchers suggested sport marketers foster fan loyalty through interactions with the organization and other fans. Gladden and Funk (2001), who also examined predictors of brand and team loyalty in sport, indicated sport marketers consider the importance of identification with the team in fans' lives, which was positively related to team loyalty. They suggested that providing access to players, coaches, and team personnel would help fans feel like part of the team. Additionally, they determined communication strategies designed to heighten the connection between the fan and team might be useful in building brand loyalty. Strategies could include sending weekly electronic messages to customers, posting daily on social media accounts, or using the telephone to speak with customers periodically. They also found the benefit of escape, or using the team as a distraction from daily life, was positively related to team loyalty. Giving fans more outlets, such as social networking sites, for escape from daily life could increase team loyalty.

Strong relationships also increase and improve customer recommendations and positive word-of-mouth comments, which are inexpensive and effective ways to market (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Diller, 2000). Specifically, evidence shows referrals are an effective way to sell season tickets in the NBA. An internal study of NBA teams found 25-40% of new season ticket holders resulted from referrals (Lachowetz et al., 2001). In fact, customer recommendations may be the most important way to increase the dependability of organizations in the eyes' of consumers.

According to Brill (2000), “There is no better way of achieving credibility than through the statements of customers themselves” (p 336). When customers provide positive feedback on companies, they become partners in customer acquisition and organizational success. Because relationship marketing is mutually beneficial, customers also stand to benefit from long-term relationships through increased confidence in the service provider and other social, economic, and special treatment benefits (Buhler & Nufer, 2010).

Specifically, different types of bonding have been linked to business outcomes in multiple industries. In the service industry, strong social bonds positively affect business outcomes, including sales growth, customer retention, return on investment, and overall performance (Sin, Tse, Yau, Lee, & Chow, 2002). In the retail bank industry, Liang and Wang (2007) reported financial, social, and structural bonding improved relationships and led to changes in behavioral intentions. Social bonds also may insulate the organization against service failures (Berry, 1995) or less successful seasons. Fans may continue to attend games and support their team if they are socially connected through relationships with players, coaches, staff, or other fans, regardless of the team’s record.

In sport, a sizeable fan base is necessary for financial success, because it results in repeat attendance, encourages merchandise purchases, and makes the team an attractive investment opportunity for sponsors (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Funk & Pastore, 2000; Kim et al., 2011b; Lachowetz et al., 2001). Finally, long-term customers, such as season ticket holders, also spend money on concessions, parking, and merchandise (Lachowetz et al., 2001). Therefore, long-term customers have a higher potential for creating continuing value for teams. Often, getting fans to the game, regardless of ticket cost, is important because of all the ancillary purchases these individuals may make. Because the effects of a large, devoted fan base are well documented, it is

important to determine the impacts of marketing strategy to determine the best ways to reach customers and encourage purchases.

Measurement of Relationship Marketing

Increasingly, the success of marketing techniques must be measured by their impacts on business outcomes (Rishika et al., 2013). Specifically, Sheth and Parvatiyar (2002) stressed relationship marketing strategy must be measured to encourage its acceptance as a beneficial strategy. While measuring the impacts of relationship marketing is difficult, levels of customer loyalty and relationship quality may be useful measures of relationship marketing success (Bush et al., 2007; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002; Sherrell & Bejou, 2007; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Particularly in sport, Kim and Trail (2011) suggested relationship quality could be used to assess the effectiveness of relationship marketing strategy. Because the main goal of relationship marketing is customer retention, it is necessary to understand the relationship between customer retention, loyalty, and relationship quality (Hennig-Thurau, 2000). However, both loyalty and relationship quality can be difficult to quantify, although suggested measures exist for both.

To measure sport fan loyalty, both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty must be considered (Bauer et al., 2008). Behavioral loyalty is measured by the number and frequency of purchases (Egan, 2004). In sport, this includes attending games, purchasing merchandise, consuming game-related media, talking about the team, and wearing team colors (Bauer et al., 2008; Funk & Pastore, 2000). Attitudinal loyalty is more abstract. Consumer preferences, disposition, and attachment to the team are used to measure attitudinal loyalty (Bauer et al., 2008; Egan, 2004). However, attitudinal loyalty may be more important because fans with a high level of attitudinal loyalty feel a deep, enduring, inner commitment to their team that is impervious to criticisms

from others (Bauer et al., 2008). Gummesson (1999) suggested loyalty also could be measured by relationship length and retention rate. High retention rates and long tenures for season ticket holders could indicate a high level of fan loyalty to the team, whereas constant turnover of season ticket holders signifies low loyalty. Retention and tenure rates do not require customer feedback to be measured and thus may be convenient measures of loyalty, which can be used to assess relationship marketing strategy, for sport teams.

Relationship quality can be measured by customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Hennig-Thurau, 2000). First, meeting and exceeding customer expectations increases customer satisfaction (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Westerbeek & Shilbury, 2003) and can be measured using short surveys or post-experience polls. Second, a customer's past positive experiences with an organization build trust in the relationship. Trust increases along with satisfaction; as expectations are met, trust increases. Finally, commitment, defined as intention to continue purchasing and not switch to another company, indicates a customer is attached to the organization based on his or her perceived value of the relationship (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). These authors suggested strong commitment could be signified by a low sensitivity to price increases, a high tolerance for poor performance, and low likelihood of switching to a different entertainment option. Egan (2004) connected customer satisfaction and loyalty by suggesting satisfaction sustained loyalty and was driven by the quality and performance of the core product or service, support services or systems, and customer interactions with the organization and its employees. Casalo, Flavián, and Guinalú (2010) agreed, stating greater satisfaction increased trust and motivated long-term commitment to the relationship. Ultimately, buying behavior is impacted when commitment is increased through customer satisfaction and high levels of trust (Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf, & Schumacher, 2003).

In the sport industry, relationship quality has received attention as a measure of relationship marketing. Kim et al. (2011a) evaluated relationship quality and sport consumption behaviors using a conceptual model that included trust, commitment, intimacy, identification, and reciprocity constructs developed by Kim and Trail (2011). Kim et al. (2011a) reported general relationship quality increased intentions to attend, consume media related to the team, and buy team-licensed merchandise. They also suggested some constructs might have a greater impact on consumer behavior intentions than others.

Few measurement tools for assessing relationship marketing tactics exist, especially specific to sport. There is a need for metrics to evaluate relationship marketing strategy (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2002). Building on the work of Kim and Trail (2011) and Kim et al. (2011a), Kim et al. (2011b) developed the Sports Consumer-Team Relationship Quality Scale (SCTRQS) to measure relationship quality and consumption behaviors in sport, as well as the effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies. The scale measured five constructs including trust, commitment, intimacy, self-connection, and reciprocity. It was tested for reliability and validity and demonstrated internal consistency, construct reliability, discriminant validity, criterion validity, and robustness. The SCTRQS could be used to explore the impacts of relationship quality on consumer behaviors. In addition, this scale helps sport marketers measure relationship quality to inform relationship marketing strategy, measure relationship marketing efforts across time, segment consumers, and assess problematic areas of relationships. Magnusen, Kim, and Kim (2012) suggested the reciprocity construct might be even more important because a team could establish an initial relationship with customers in hopes of motivating them to reciprocate by purchasing tickets to games.

When using customer satisfaction to measure relationship marketing efforts, Egan (2004) and Gummesson (1999) warned that satisfied customers are not enough because satisfaction does not always lead to repeat purchases, and dissatisfaction does not always lead to defection. Additionally, satisfaction alone may not lead to retention (Egan, 2004). Measuring customer satisfaction only may not be indicative of relationship marketing efforts, so organizations should consider multiple assessments. The previous measures of relationship quality, loyalty, satisfaction, trust, and commitment have yet to be associated with specific relationship marketing tactics.

Social Media Marketing

Relationship marketing also should guide the use of social media as marketing tools because of their ability to build social bonds through interaction and communication. Grönroos (2004) placed the management of interactions at the core of relationship marketing. Additionally, two-way communications are integral parts of relationship marketing strategy (Berry, 1995; Grönroos, 2004; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006), and online communication mediums provide channels for two-way communications and interactions where companies can build social relationships with customers (Abeza et al., 2013; Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000). Also, Internet technologies enable companies to consistently communicate with customers without geographical boundaries or time limits (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Pöyry, Parvinen, & Malmivaara, 2013). Egan (2004) posited, "...technology can help a company learn from every customer interaction and deepen a relationship" (p. 214). For example, online communities give customers platforms for discussing products and companies. If sentiment online is monitored, companies can immediately reach out to customers who have complaints in an effort to repair

relationships. Also, companies can encourage individuals to share positive experiences by thanking them for their thoughts or providing additional services within the online communities.

Social bonds, a tenet of relationship marketing, can be built through two-way interactions and communications with customers (Berry, 1995; Grönroos, 2004). Social media create additional avenues for building social bonds through management-to-consumer communications (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). One type of social media, online communities, offers a channel for communication with customers. Marketers, stated Egan (2004), should support these communities to capitalize on relationship-building opportunities and target customers. Also, these communities create opportunities for organizations to monitor praise and customer feedback and determine customers' perceived strengths of products and services (Stauss, 2000).

Social media play an important role in offering information and interacting with customers, which builds trust and improves relationships (Askool & Nakata, 2011). Sashi (2012) and Drury (2008) identified social media as tools for enhancing relationships and engaging in conversations with consumers, suggesting they should be used to connect with customers. Researchers in sport have specifically identified social media as relationship marketing tactics that build dialogue and enhance relationships (Abeza et al., 2013; Grönroos, 2004; Kim et al., 2011b; Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as platforms where users participate in creating content and applications. As an extension of Web 2.0, Nair (2011) further described social media as, "online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights, and media can be shared....At its core, social media is about relationships and connections between people and organizations" (p. 45). More specifically, social media include weblogs (blogs), widgets, discussion boards, wikis, video blogs (vlogs), consumer product rating sites, chat rooms,

podcasts, RSS feeds, content aggregators, and social networking sites (Askool & Nakata, 2011; Parsons, 2013; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified social media into six categories including blogs, social networking sites, virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, content communities, and virtual game worlds. Each category of social media serves different purposes or functions for users.

Social networking sites are among the most popular forms of social media. Tsai and Men (2013) described social networking sites as, “relationship centric and inherently participatory” (p. 77) and suggested engagement with brand pages aids in forming relationships. These sites allow users to connect and share photos, videos, audio files, opinions, ideas, news, and blogs (Drury, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While these sites originally functioned solely as interpersonal channels, now businesses, non-profit organizations, and segments of popular culture use them as well. As new communication channels, customers connect with an organization and other customers, positively impacting relationships with an organization (Rishika et al., 2013). In fact, consumers presume organizations have a presence on multiple forms of social media, including social networks (Nair, 2011). As such, Hutter et al. (2013) supported social media as important and worthwhile marketing tools for companies who must communicate with customers on customers’ preferred channel. Additionally, using relationship-building practices via social media can enhance engagement and strengthen the consumer-organization connection (Pentina et al., 2013). For example, asking fans to vote on product attributes, choose the style of the upcoming season’s jersey, or participate in a discussion about a game can intensify the relationship between the fan and team.

Antecedents to Online Participation

Reaching consumers via social media, however, is complicated by a lack of understanding how individuals use social media (Miller & Lammas, 2010). Understanding potential antecedents to participating in social media should drive social media marketing strategy (Tsai & Men, 2013). Identifying the reasons consumers engage online aids the organization in creating and delivering content consumers find useful and interesting. Heinonen (2011) reported consumers participated in social media for entertainment, information, surveillance, opinions, and inspiration. In addition, individuals participated to create social connections. Most often, individuals have more than one motivation for using social media. Casalo et al. (2010) used a variation of the expectation-disconfirmation theory to examine antecedents to online community participation. Using relationship marketing theory to add a relational aspect, the researchers suggested satisfied users were motivated to continue using social media because perceived benefits were met and exceeded and thus perceived usefulness increased. Satisfaction, affective commitment, and perceived usefulness positively impacted participation in online communities. When users found social media met their needs, they also believed social media were more useful.

The utilization of social media also has been examined using uses and gratifications theory, which postulates that individuals use media channels for specific reasons with the expectation of achieving some gratification (Clavio & Kian, 2010). Tsai and Men (2013) surveyed users who followed at least three companies' Facebook pages. The most common reasons these individuals followed the brands' Facebook pages were to get information on discounts or coupons, exchange information with other consumers, or for fun. These researchers also found people who were more dependent on social media in general or felt a sense of

belonging to the community of the brand's Facebook users were more likely to engage on Facebook. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found individuals used Facebook and Twitter as sources of information or for social reasons (to connect with or make friends). Similarly, Jahn and Kunz (2012) determined gratifications for interacting with a brand's Facebook page were content-oriented, relationship-oriented, or self-oriented. Individuals use Facebook to read specific content, interact with others, or fulfill self-representation needs. For example, sport fans publicize their connection to sport teams by following them on social media, thus acknowledging the team's role in their self-identity (Phua, 2012).

After conducting a survey of an athlete's Twitter fans, Clavio and Kian (2010) identified the most common reasons for following an athlete on Twitter were affinity for the athlete and content related to the athlete. The needs of Twitter feed followers related to their desire to follow the feed were associated with being an intellectual or emotional fan of the athlete. Also, uses and gratifications theory was used by Clavio and Walsh (2013) to examine college sport fans' interaction with their university teams' social media accounts. They found student college sport fans used social media to watch videos while still using traditional media sources or Web 1.0 applications (university athletic websites) for information. Student fans in the sample were willing to post comments on existing content or upload pictures but were unwilling to engage in creating more substantial content. Finally, they found that college student sport fans' uses of Facebook could be categorized as either information or interactivity.

Mahan (2011) used the technology acceptance model (TAM) to examine motivations for using social media to connect with sport organizations. The TAM examines usefulness and perceived ease of use as predictors for attitudinal and behavioral intentions toward using technology. Mahan (2011) postulated involvement in social media and its convenience positively

impacted usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment of social media leading to a more positive attitude. He reported the more an individual enjoyed social media, the greater the influence on attitudinal and behavioral intentions to use social media. In addition, convenience of using social media was an antecedent to motivations for using social media in sport. He also posited the immersive nature of social media was likely more enjoyable than visiting a team website and greatly increased attitudinal and behavioral intentions to use social media. Smith (2013) also examined reasons for participating on social media and determined individuals experiencing strong positive emotions related to posted content were more likely to engage in social media actions, such as sharing, commenting on, or liking content.

Regardless of the reasons individuals use social media channels, relationship marketing requires businesses to design strategy to meet customer needs online. Examining how individuals interact and engage with an organization can provide clues into motivations for use and benefits desired by customers. While social media have the potential to develop customer relationships, companies must make active efforts to learn and address users' needs to most effectively manage social media for relationship building (Schultz & Peltier, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013). This information should then inform social media approaches.

Facebook as a Marketing Tool

Facebook is a social networking site companies can use to market to customers. According to market research by the PEW Research Center, Facebook is the most commonly used site by adults in the United States (Duggan & Smith, 2014). Of the individuals surveyed, 66% of men and 76% of women used Facebook, as did 71% of Whites, 76% of Blacks, and 73% of Hispanics. By age group, 84% of 18-29 year olds, 79% of 30-49 year olds, 60% of 50-64 year olds, and 45% of those 65 and over used Facebook. Often, Facebook is thought to be a network

for young, college-aged adults, but trends show Facebook use is becoming more and more prominent across all age groups.

Founded in 2004, Facebook opened up as a social networking site for anyone in 2006 and by 2012 boasted over one billion users (Facebook, 2014). Social networking sites are defined by three characteristics including a public or semi-public profile within a restricted system, connection to a list of other users, and perusal of profiles of connections and others on the network (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Any individual can create a Facebook account, post his or her personal information, and connect with friends. Content, such as pictures, statuses, stories, and videos, can be liked, shared, or commented on by anyone in a person's network. Facebook also allows any organization or individual to create a page that can be liked by friends or consumers and used to disseminate information. Facebook pages are examples of one online social network where businesses can communicate with consumers, and consumers can interact with brands (Pöyry et al., 2013). For organizations and individuals, Facebook has become a very popular means of communication (Ross et al., 2009). Facebook enables consumers to identify with brands and share branded content with friends (Lipsman et al., 2012).

Many fans already desire consistent communication with their favorite sport team. Personnel working for sport teams are recognizing fans want to communicate with the team directly through Facebook and teams' active participation on this platform improves fan-team relationships (Mahan, 2011; Pronschinske et al., 2012). Pronschinske et al. (2012) added teams seemingly were aware of how representation on social media sites could attract fans, increase awareness, and drive purchases. As Facebook has grown in popularity, sport marketers are increasingly using the site to connect with fans and build relationships with them (Ozsoy, 2011; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Williams & Chinn, 2010). In fact, teams believe having a Facebook

page can strengthen relationships with fans (Williams & Chinn, 2010). In an analysis of professional sport teams using social media, Kim et al. (2011b) found all professional teams in Major League Baseball (MLB), the NBA, the National Football League (NFL), and the National Hockey League (NHL) communicated with fans using Facebook or Twitter. Additionally, in a study by Eagleman (2013), all survey respondents indicated the United States national governing body they worked for utilized Facebook. Responses also indicated that social media were used to improve relationships with fans and promote their sport.

However, there are some drawbacks to using social media as marketing tools. The lack of marketer control can adversely impact the organization when comments in the community are unfavorable, such as service or product complaints (Abeza et al., 2013; Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). This lack of control extends to the impact of the content, because while the marketer creates the content, the consumer controls its impact. If the content is not viewed as interesting, it will not be shared and its reach will be limited (Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni, & Pauwels, 2013). Also, because customers can publish their criticisms online, word-of-mouth becomes global, easily accessible, and viral. This threatens customer relationships and requires managers to monitor and react to these types of communications (Stauss, 2000). Finally, Abeza et al. (2013) and Ang (2011) stated not knowing whether individuals participating on social media are customers, while also knowing that not all customers are online, makes using social media to build relationships challenging. Organizations may be investing time and money into social media strategy and only reaching a small segment of their markets. In fact, Baird and Parasnis (2011) suggested companies assumed customers wanted to engage on social media, when in fact, consumers only wanted to receive tangible value by following company social media accounts. As is the case with relationship marketing where not all consumers desire long-

term relationships with companies, it is likely not all consumers will want to engage on social media. However, Schultz and Peltier (2013) suggested the lack was not in consumer desire for engagement but in the strategy marketers employed on social media. They implored marketers to find better ways to engage customers on these channels.

Information, Engagement, and Participation: Tools for Social Media Marketing

Schultz and Peltier (2013) and Tsai and Men (2013) concluded marketers were ineffective at using social media channels to build connections with customers. In fact, many companies are simply using social media as another one-way communication channel for sales promotions (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). For social media marketing to be most effective, it should embrace relationship marketing concepts, building an online environment allowing consumers to connect with one another, share information, and express opinions (Miller & Lammas, 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010). While sharing information can build relationships, it is because social media encourage engagement that they are capable of cultivating strong relationships (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Pronschinske et al., 2012). Although there is a lack of agreement on what engagement with social media means for consumers, Schultz and Peltier (2013) argued it should involve some type of reciprocal relationship where both parties allocate time and effort as opposed to a sales promotion designed to elicit a short-term response. Push marketing does not make social media effective marketing tools, but two-way exchanges can deepen connections with consumers if social media are used to encourage engagement.

Organizations use social media to learn about their customers, share information with them, and foster customer engagement. For example, social media are used to communicate public relations messages, listen to customers' wants and needs, and engage in personalized, one-to-one marketing (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). In sport, social media use builds

relationships and allows organizations to easily disseminate information (Pronschinske et al., 2012). Teams may ask sport fans to comment on the game, participate in a poll about the team, or share a status designed to drive traffic to purchase team-licensed merchandise. Organizations should spend time and resources reviewing social media channels to learn about and meet customers' needs and preferences (Askool & Nakata, 2011). Ang (2011) suggested organizations keep tabs on consumer conversations, encourage customers to engage in product development, and attempt to learn about consumer preferences through social media.

Culnan et al. (2010) examined the adoption and frequency of social media platforms of all Fortune 500 businesses. They examined three differing Fortune 100 firms using a framework for implementing social media including mindful adoption, community building, and absorptive capacity. They determined these three elements were important for successful use of social media. Mindful adoption suggests organizations consider their markets and local contexts, responsibilities for managing social media accounts, and measurements of use of social media. Community building involves increasing the involvement of individual consumers with the overall community on social media. Finally, absorptive capacity is the ability of the organization to learn from and use knowledge provided by customers. Organizations implementing social media using these three elements were more successful at reaching consumers and interacting with them.

While having a Facebook page is a necessity for businesses, the specific content posted is of greater importance for building relationships (Nair, 2011; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Rishika et al., 2013). Organizations should post content that elicits the intended response whether it is to encourage purchases or increase curiosity (Smith, 2013). For example, a team may post an advertisement about the next home game with a link to purchase tickets, or it may post a few

lines of an interview with a coach along with a link to a video. In the first case, the desired response is for fans to purchase tickets; in the second, the desired response is for fans to click the link and watch the video to view the entire interview.

It is becoming widely accepted that social media tools should be used to encourage participation (Williams & Chinn, 2010). In fact, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated, “Social media are all about sharing and interaction, so ensure that your content is always fresh and that you engage in discussions with your customers” (p. 66). Failing to consistently update your page or reposting prior videos and articles does not capitalize on the full capabilities of social media tools.

According to Woodcock, Broomfield, Downer, and Starkey (2011), the main purpose of social media should be to post content that connects with consumers and sparks conversations eventually leading to sales. Organizations should not just use competitions and contests to draw people to a Facebook page but should instead design content to entertain and increase socialization (Gummerus et al., 2012). Publishing engaging content is important because it often increases the likelihood of reaching fans (Lipsman et al., 2012). If a page is entertaining and engaging, it will be liked and interacted with more often, causing it to show up in the news feeds of friends of those who have liked the Facebook page.

Ideally, content on social media elicits engagement, encourages discussion, and builds conversation instead of merely disseminating information (Heinonen, 2011; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray, Neiger, & Keller, 2012; Walsh et al., 2013). This may include using a Facebook status to pose a question fans can answer in the comments or explicitly asking fans to share or comment on an article when it is posted. Malhotra, Malhotra, and See (2013) suggested organizations should become cognizant of what encourages engagement to help convert

consumers to advocates for the brand. They detailed multiple ways a brand could increase customer likes on Facebook posts. First, well-thought-out photos produced a higher response. Second, posting about current topics, new products, or brand successes increased likes. These authors explained that often simply including a call to action and asking for a post to be liked was effective. Third, posing questions encouraged individuals to interact with posts. Finally, contests, deals, and event-related messages were less likely to be liked, suggesting Facebook fans recognized this content as a means of product promotion and were less connected to it.

In an examination of 100 brand pages on Facebook, Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) found the type of content, type of media connected to the post, and time of the post all significantly influenced the number of likes, comments, and shares a post received. Content coded as entertainment, which included content that posed questions to Facebook fans or asked for their participation, was found to have the greatest effect on the three levels of engagement. Brand-related information also had a significant effect on the number of likes and comments. Finally, remuneration, which included content promoting sweepstakes, had the lowest level of impact on comments, no effect on shares, and a negative effect on likes. To increase engagement, brands should post content designed to entertain Facebook fans. Also, photographs elicited a higher level of engagement than videos or links, suggesting photographs might be the most effective multimedia. The authors suggested Facebook page moderators post during low activity hours (4:00am to 4:00pm) on weekdays to provoke the highest level of engagement with their content so their content avoids being lost in the clutter of other posts during the high activity periods.

Engaging content also has the potential to increase the Facebook fan base of an organization. Based on a content analysis of professional sport teams' Facebook pages,

Pronschinske et al. (2012) suggested teams could increase the number of Facebook fans and retain them by fostering fan engagement. These authors specifically proposed that professional sport teams should post information encouraging fans to engage on Facebook, such as uploading pictures to the site, to increase their number of fans. Malthouse et al. (2013) suggested engagement exists on two levels. The first was lower engagement where consumers passively consume content or interact on a very simple level, such as liking a post on Facebook. The second was higher engagement where consumers participate in various forms of content creation and actively weave the brand into their lives. Highly engaged customers may post comments, submit content by tagging the team in their own posts, or share content their friends see in the news feed.

Higher levels of engagement are hypothesized to lead to stronger relationships. Rishika et al. (2013) determined the higher the level of activity on a company's social media page, the greater the positive influence on customer relationships. Also, engaged fans are more important in building and sustaining reach online (Peters et al., 2013) because activity on social media is broadcasted throughout an individual's social network. In fact, positive attitudes about a company can be created by consistent and active social media pages where the company and other customers are posting messages (Rishika et al., 2013). Through actively engaging fans, marketers also capitalize on the economic value of social media including increased visibility and improved brand image (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013).

Taking an active role in cultivating customer engagement on social media may be essential for companies. Baird and Parasnis (2011) found the majority of social media users did not interact online even though users had aggressively adopted social media. After they surveyed consumers about their social media behavior, 75% of users were categorized as casual

participants who only occasionally responded to content or posted their own. The rest of the respondents were either engaged authors (5%) who often commented on content and posted their own, or silent observers (20%) who read content but did not engage with it or post their own. Even though many users were not actively engaged, these authors still indicated social media provided organizations opportunities to get closer to customers but may require organizations to take an active role in encouraging interaction. Because they found consumers followed companies online for tangible benefits, Baird and Parasnis (2011) suggested organizations use incentives to encourage those in the casual and silent category to interact.

Understanding how organizations use Facebook is an important step in examining what practices work best and what theory can be used to investigate its use. Content analyses have shown companies use Facebook to interact and engage with consumers. After completing a content analysis of beauty brands' Facebook pages, Shen and Bissell (2013) determined these brands were using Facebook to interact with customers as opposed to promote products. In her study of 70 brands' Facebook pages, Parsons (2013) found organizations were using Facebook to build relationships and not just disseminate information. These studies indicated businesses understood using Facebook as another one-way communication channel was ineffective.

Researchers also have considered the ways sport organizations use Facebook. Using relationship marketing as a framework, Abeza and O'Reilly (2014) examined the use of Facebook and Twitter by Canadian national sport organizations. They found pages were used more for communication dissemination than for interaction. These organizations were not using either social media platform to build two-way relationship dialogues with customers. Furthermore, they found users were not engaging in relationship dialogue with the organizations, choosing instead to simply like content. Similar to these findings, Eagleman (2013) determined

that United States national governing bodies also used social media more for information sharing than as a marketing tool. However, these organizations were successfully engaging customers in interactions and two-way dialogue. Thompson et al. (2014) also studied national sport organizations, this time in New Zealand, and Facebook strategy using relationship marketing framework. They found individuals interacted most with content that posed questions. Additionally, contests requiring individuals to like (i.e., click a thumbs-up button allowing the content posted by the organization on Facebook to appear in individuals' news feeds) the Facebook page to participate were effective for increasing number of fans, thus improving awareness of the organization. Behind-the-scenes content also received a favorable response from Facebook fans.

Wallace et al. (2011) examined the types of communication used on Facebook, how Facebook was used, and the level of interaction of Facebook fans on National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) organizational Facebook pages and pages of athletic departments in the Big XII conference. They discovered communication tools available on Facebook were underutilized and content was focused mostly on status updates and links. Also, the pages of the NCAA and Big XII athletic departments covered product-related attributes more often than non-product related attributes. This meant details about the events were promoted more, while stories or information that would connect Facebook fans to the organization or event were promoted less often.

Waters et al. (2011) used the framework of stewardship to conduct a content analysis of relationship-building activity on Facebook pages of NFL teams. They coded content into four categories: reciprocity (references to stakeholders, promotions for specific groups, and fan appreciation days); responsibility (information on community relations, fan courtesy, team's

vision or goals, and special needs services); reporting (news releases, players' behaviors, financial documentation, environment efforts, team roster and recruiting); and relationship-nurturing (interactivity designed to keep fans involved). These researchers concluded NFL teams most commonly used reciprocity and relationship nurturing to build relationships.

Using the Facebook Assessment Index (FAI), Miranda, Chamorro, Rubio, and Rodriguez (2014) examined Facebook pages of teams in North American and European professional sport leagues. They found that 61.8% of teams had descriptive information about the team on their Facebook pages. Additionally, 19.2% posted marketing messages, 41.4% included product information, 66.7% posted information about events, 38.2% used opinion polls or surveys, 35.3% used contests to attract new followers, and 19.6% presented exclusive product offers for their followers. Teams were using Facebook to improve the game-day experience and entertain fans. They concluded that while all teams had profiles on Facebook, most were ineffectively operated and could be improved greatly by adopting focused strategy. Additionally, they determined teams should post quality content and encourage two-way interaction with customers.

While research touts engagement and two-way communication as the most effective use of social media, little is understood about how engagement can be nurtured. Schultz and Peltier (2013) stated researchers and practitioners needed to know more about how social media nurture customer engagement to determine how engagement could be encouraged. Initial examination of how companies are using Facebook and the interaction with content can provide insight into strategies that will encourage customer interaction on social media.

Impacts of Social Media Marketing

If social media are used as parts of a marketing strategy, their impacts on business outcomes must be assessed. Askool and Nakata (2011) concluded social media had the ability to make an organization more successful, especially if the company engages in meaningful conversations with customers. Additionally, social media use has been connected to specific business outcomes. For example, Jahn and Kunz (2012) indicated an organization should have a Facebook fan page because it had measurable effects on brand relationships with customers. In fact, Smith (2013) stated engaging consumers on Facebook likely increased brand equity. Walsh et al. (2013) reported liking the Facebook pages of NCAA events influenced customer ratings of the event's brand attributes. A strong brand image, stated Bauer et al. (2008), could influence fans' preferences and differentiate a team from its competition, creating brand loyalty. These researchers revealed a positive brand image was important in promoting loyal fan behavior. Jahn and Kunz (2012) and Gummerus et al. (2012) suggested Facebook page usage and engagement led to increased customer loyalty, even if a baseline level of loyalty existed.

Using social media to promote a positive image leads to intentions to repurchase by increasing customer satisfaction (Ferrand, Robinson, & Valette-Florence, 2010). Ramsaran-Fowdar and Fowdar (2013) suggested benefits of using Facebook for marketing included lower communication costs, personalized advertising, immediate customer feedback, word-of-mouth referrals, and positive impacts on purchase behavior. Because setting up a Facebook page is free, organizations can focus resources on hiring individuals to curate content and dedicate time to development and maintenance of social media strategy. In addition, the share and like features of Facebook allow an organization to determine what its customers enjoy and receive instant referrals from Facebook fans through the sharing of content with the customer's social network.

Social media directly impact purchase behaviors (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Dholakia and Durham (2010) examined one café chain's Facebook use and found Facebook fans spent more money per visit, visited more often, and generated more positive word-of-mouth comments. They also were more likely to choose the café over other establishments and refer friends to the café. Using the case study approach, Hopkins (2013) examined the impact of an Australian rules football franchise's social media use. He suggested that after making improvements to the club's Facebook and Twitter accounts, membership sales, attendance, merchandise sales, television audiences, and ticket sales increased. Online travel community participation also had a significant effect on consumer intentions to purchase a company's products and services (Casalo et al., 2010).

Researchers also have examined the impact of specific content and engagement strategies on Facebook. The emotional impact of Facebook content influences the likelihood to participate on social media, leading to intentions to purchase, and increases the likelihood customers will refer a company's products (Smith, 2013). Customers who have positive experiences with a brand's content on Facebook are more likely to share content or comment on Facebook, make a future purchase, and recommend the brand to others (Smith, 2013). Because of this, marketers need to consider what emotions they are trying to stimulate prior to posting content. Engaging customers on a Facebook page also has been shown to lead to more frequent shopping visits (Rishika et al., 2013) and increased purchases (Goh et al., 2013). Goh et al. (2013) determined marketer-generated and user-generated (posts and comments) content positively impacted consumer-buying behavior. Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, and Kim (2008) found interaction and reward for activities positively influenced commitment to the community, which then positively impacted brand loyalty.

Gummerus et al. (2012) examined the effect of behavioral engagement on relationship benefits including practical benefits, social benefits, social enhancement, entertainment, and economic benefits in an online gaming Facebook brand community. They reported customer behavioral engagement, measured by likes, comments, and reading content, positively impacted relationship benefits. They also suggested using Facebook as an online brand community connected customers to the brand but not to each other. Hutter et al. (2013) specifically proposed customers' interaction with a company's Facebook page had a positive impact on brand awareness, word-of-mouth activities, and purchase intentions. These findings supported more engaged individuals had a greater impact on business outcomes as they had a greater brand awareness, more positive word-of-mouth comments, and increased intentions to purchase. In college sport, Phua (2012) found more intense Facebook users also were more engaged in the fan community and more interested in being involved in fan-related activities.

Additionally, engaging content can result in an increased number of Facebook fans (Pronschinske et al., 2012), which is valuable to sport organizations because Facebook use impacts business outcomes and increases brand awareness, word-of-mouth comments, and purchase intentions. The more Facebook fans teams have, the more individuals reached through those fans' social networks. Pronschinske et al. (2012) examined the impacts of authenticity (an official page), disclosure (sharing detailed information), engagement (posting content that encouraged engagement), and dissemination (sharing information) on the number of Facebook fans teams in the four major professional sports leagues in the United States using content analysis. Controlling for market size, success, and year of establishment of each team's Facebook page, they reported an official fan page and use of engagement strategies that created a dialogue with fans resulted in an increased number of fans. Therefore, a team would be best

served by having and managing its own Facebook page and studying strategy to engage fans online. Additionally, in the sport news realm, Boehmer and Lacy (2014) found encouraging interaction on Facebook drove traffic to an organization's website, which might increase advertising revenue by increasing the number of visits to the website and increasing value for advertisers.

While the literature supports that more engaged and active Facebook fans result in greater impacts on business outcomes, Pöyry et al. (2013) suggested Facebook might be better used as a way to distribute information to consumers. They examined utilitarian versus hedonic motivations for using Facebook looking specifically at the differences between browsing and participation behaviors on purchase and referral intentions. The study conceptualized utilitarian motivations as those related to finding useful information to help make consumption-related decisions and hedonic motivations as entertainment, spending time, and having fun while visiting the page. Motivations impacted how the consumer used the Facebook site, and certain usage behaviors influenced future consumer behaviors, such as purchases and referrals. Individuals who used Facebook to find useful information were merely browsing on Facebook, whereas individuals using the page as entertainment were participating on Facebook with the organization. Interestingly, while many researchers suggest engagement and participation have a greater impact on consumer behaviors, Pöyry et al. (2013) did not find participation behavior influenced future purchase intentions or referral intentions but did report it impacted intentions to continue being a member of the Facebook page. Additionally, Phua (2012) found a higher intensity of Facebook usage was more useful for college sport fans to forge many weak ties with a larger group of fans of the same team as opposed to strong ties. Instead of building a deep

connection, Facebook may allow sport fans to connect loosely with a community of people who also have an affinity for the team.

Measuring Social Media Behavior

Social media are different than traditional media and require new metrics for measurement (Peters et al., 2013), although there is little agreement on exactly how businesses and researchers should measure the impacts of social media. Additionally, little is understood about how social media help organizations meet relationship marketing goals (Askool & Nakata, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to investigate the best measurements of social media as marketing tools. Hoffman and Fodor (2010) suggested organizations focus on measuring the long-term payoff of using social media to build relationships with customers. This is done by measuring the investments customers make in the social media relationship through their interactions and reasons for engaging online. This view of social media measurement reflects the goals of relationship marketing.

In attempt to gauge the impact of Facebook page exposure on consumers, Smith (2013) measured the emotional impacts of content on the individual consumer's purchasing, social media, and advocacy intentions. From this study, he suggested measuring the value of Facebook using two metrics. The "value of experience metric" measures the likelihood those having positive experiences on Facebook pages say they are likely to interact on social media, purchase products, or advocate for a brand. This metric evaluates the overall experience a customer has with the page and does not specifically examine the content or measure actual social media behaviors. The "value of a fan metric" measures the likelihood that people who are likely to participate in social media actions also purchase a product or advocate for the product. These metrics have not been tested beyond this initial research and solely measure intentions instead of

actual behaviors. While potentially valuable, these measures do not ask about specific behaviors individuals engaged in on Facebook but instead focus on their overall experience on the Facebook page.

Cheung, Lee, and Jin (2011) conceptualized that engagement on social media platforms included three constructs labeled vigor (level of energy and willingness to invest time and energy), absorption (fully concentrated and engrossed), and dedication (sense of significance, pride, enthusiasm, inspiration, and challenge toward the platform). They suggested researchers consider using this scale in their surveys to explore customer engagement. However, this scale does not attempt to measure engagement behaviors in a concrete way and is likely not a useful tool for practitioners.

Traditionally, customer lifetime value (CLV) has been the measure businesses use to calculate the value of a relationship with a customer. However, Malthouse et al. (2013) proposed this measure was no longer adequate, especially because it focused only on the value the company derives from the client and ignored other values, such as referrals and customer influence. While likes and number of fans are popular measures of the reach of an organization, alone they are not adequate measures of consumer engagement or relationship strength (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Research suggests page traffic, frequency of visits, reach, number of followers, messages, time spent on page, likes, posts, reads, page visits, comments, and sharing content as potential metrics of the impact of social media (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Lipsman et al., 2012; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray et al., 2012). Shares may be of additional importance as they indicate a Facebook fan is willing to align with the brand (Malhotra et al., 2013). When something is shared on Facebook, it shows up in the news feed of the individuals' friends. A share indicates the consumer is willing to publicly show his or her allegiance to or affinity for the brand. Abeza

et al. (2013) posited the level of fan involvement in a dialogue with a team on social media as well as a specific message's flow, traffic, and frequency indicated the strength of the fan's relationship. Additionally, they suggested sport teams could use participation frequency and comment content to gauge fan relationships. Monitoring the rate of growth in followers and traffic is yet another potential performance metric (Peters et al., 2013).

Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) encouraged corporations to use likes, comments, and shares as indicators of popularity, commitment, and virality respectively to measure the level of reactivity, dialogues, and engagement on Facebook. They suggested, because these measures are easily accessible on the social networking site, corporations use them to evaluate the influence of their own content and content of their competitors. In their research, they determined these metrics could be gathered simply and easily transferred to the measurement of other networks with slight variations.

In assessing professional sport teams' use of Facebook, Miranda et al. (2014) used an objective measure called the Facebook Assessment Index (FAI). The FAI measures Facebook use on three levels including popularity (the number of Facebook fans), interactivity (average number of posts made by the company, likes, comments, shares, and consumer posts answered by the company), and content. A benefit of the FAI is the ability to compare the use of Facebook across teams, leagues, and countries. However, the index does not assess the impact of Facebook marketing and communication on consumer behaviors.

Sentiment analysis also is a suggested measure of social media relationships (Malthouse et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2013; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray et al., 2012). Sentiment analysis examines the negative or positive feeling of user-generated content. In advocating for this deeper analysis, Peters et al. (2013) suggested organizations go beyond the metrics of likes, shares, and

comments and delve into what fans were saying and how they were saying it. Goh et al. (2013) also encouraged marketers to turn to more qualitative tools when examining social media to get a better understanding of consumers' thoughts, opinions, wants, and needs.

Millward Brown, a company specializing in helping organizations grow their brands, suggested Facebook fan use can be measured by community loyalty and engagement and content response and resonance (Millward Brown, 2013). Community loyalty determines how many active fans exist and how often they interact. Loyalty within the Facebook community may translate to loyalty outside of the social media world. Community engagement is measured by the interaction and conversation the page generates. Measuring the level of engagement helps an organization determine how involved or connected its Facebook fans are. Content response examines what makes fans respond quickly and strongly. Finally, content resonance examines how the different messages and content compare in response. Different types of content may provoke different responses in consumers. Examining what types of content encourage the desired response is an important piece of measuring social media strategy.

In an attempt to apply measurement of social media to sport, Thompson et al. (2014) used return on objective (ROO) to measure the impact of marketing on Facebook. Instead of focusing on monetary value, ROO examines whether strategy met organizational objectives. To measure this, these authors used audience demographics, number of followers, number of new followers, impression count, page likes, new page likes, likes on posts, comments, shares, and sentiment of content.

Unfortunately, social media metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and followers are not without their downside. According to Baym (2013), the use of these metrics to evaluate, assess, and value the use of social media is complicated by the fact that engagement can be

purchased. She also illuminates the problematic impacts of algorithms that determine who sees posts, demographics of social media users, and the ambiguity in the meaning of terms such as like on the usefulness of these measures. These issues increase the importance of a deep understanding of what these metrics represent and careful scrutiny by those who are collecting and interpreting them (Baym, 2013).

Furthermore, measuring the impact of social media is controversial because it is difficult to distinguish if engagement increases purchase intentions and behavior or if already loyal fans engage on Facebook as another outlet (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Dzamic, 2012; LaPointe, 2012). Walsh et al. (2013) posited the positive impacts on brand personality might be due, in part, to user interactions with the brand outside of social media in conjunction with his or her use of social media. In examining whether Facebook fans were more likely to be heavy buyers or light buyers, Nelson-Field, Riebe, and Sharp (2012) found Facebook fans of chocolate milk and soft drinks were mostly already heavy buyers. Pöyry et al. (2013) and Rishika et al. (2013) suggested measuring social media investments could be challenging, but a measure of return on investment was needed to compare the amount of money invested in social media to the amount of profit or brand equity it created (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). The creation of a measure of return on investment is complicated by the lack of understanding of who is connecting on social media and what interaction on social media means for the organization.

For the NBA team marketer, measuring marketing tactics is essential (Dick & Turner, 2007). Because marketing techniques can impact ticket sales, leading to larger crowds who purchase concessions and merchandise, NBA team marketers must try new techniques and assess all marketing techniques (Dick & Turner, 2007). These authors examined NBA team marketers and fans' perceptions of marketing techniques and reported a disconnect between what each

group thought of specific marketing tactics. As a result, they called for more research into marketing strategies used by NBA teams. While Lachowetz et al. (2001) stated NBA franchises were using relationship marketing in their organizations, no research examining marketing through a relationship marketing framework in the NBA exists.

Pöyry et al. (2013) suggested, “Facebook will undoubtedly be one of the most prominent tools to conduct social commerce activities” (p. 224). Studying consumer behavior on Facebook reveals what behaviors connect to business outcomes and which types of behavior an organization should encourage to positively impact sales (Pöyry et al., 2013). However, there has not been considerable research conducted into how companies are using social media (Parsons, 2013), especially as marketing tools in sport.

There is a lack of information about and understanding of social media in sport (Thompson et al., 2014). Hambrick et al. (2010) advocated social networks should be examined to understand their impacts on sport communication and fan relationships. Sport organizations need to understand how to use online social networks and what potential outcomes exist. To best inform the use of social networks, practitioners and researchers first must understand how social networks like Facebook are being used and then assess the impacts of use. They suggested it was important to know what information was being disseminated and how social networks were being used prior to connecting social media to outcomes or sport fan behavior. Pronschinske et al. (2012) added researchers should continue to study a broad range of variables related to social media and their impact on organizational outcomes.

Conceptual Model

Drawing from the literature on relationship marketing, measurement of relationship marketing, relationship quality and loyalty, marketing on social media, and measurement of

social media, a proposed conceptual model will examine the impact of social media engagement on relationship quality and fan consumer behavior in sport. The proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

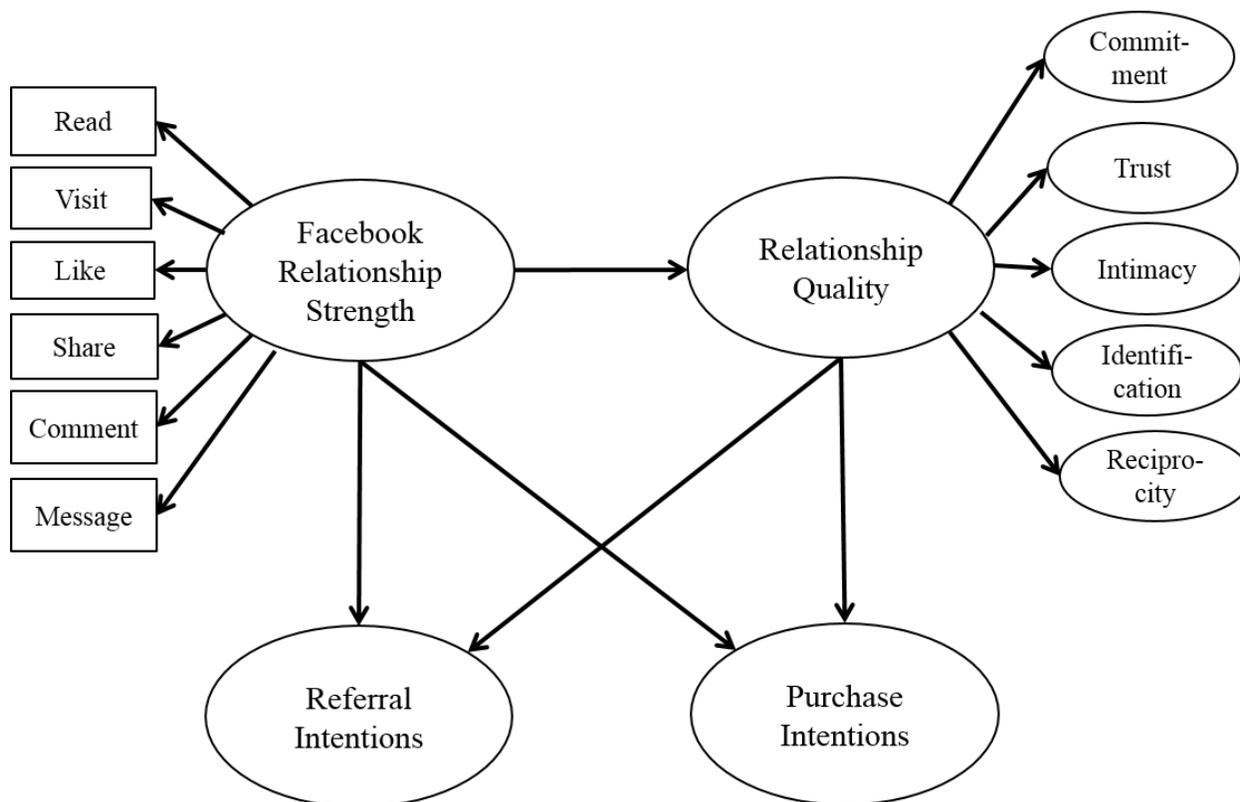


Figure 1. Proposed model for measuring Facebook relationship strength, relationship quality, and consumer behaviors in sport.

Since engaging consumers on Facebook instead of merely disseminating information is important for influencing consumer behavior (Gummerus et al., 2012; Lipsman et al., 2012; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Woodcock et al., 2011), the level of engagement with a team's Facebook page is included in the model as the construct Facebook relationship strength. The higher the level of engagement, the stronger the relationship between the consumer and organization on Facebook will be. Gummerus et al. (2012) used surveys, including 5-point ordinal scales, to examine engagement on Facebook by measuring frequency of page visits,

content liking, news reading, commenting, game playing, and money spent playing games. This study will employ a similar design using suggested Facebook behavior measures from the literature including frequency of page visits, messages, likes, shares, reads, and comments (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Lipsman et al., 2012; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray et al., 2012) to measure Facebook relationship strength. Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) recommended research examine the differences between number of likes, comments, and shares on posted content to reveal the potential meaning of differences. For this reason, each behavior is measured separately in the model to allow for comparisons of impact and importance of each behavior to determine if more engaging behaviors have a greater impact on behavioral intentions or relationship quality. For example, Hopkins (2013) suggested the value of shared content is greater because it comes from a source other than an organization, which other Facebook users trust.

A higher level of engagement and activity with an organization's Facebook page leads to a greater influence on relationships with consumers and greater economic returns (Goh et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2013; Rishika et al., 2013). As such, the conceptual model suggests the strength of the Facebook relationship, measured by level of engagement, directly effects relationship quality and behavioral outcomes. In the model, relationship quality is assessed using the SCTRQS developed by Kim et al. (2011b). They implored researchers to use the SCTRQS to examine the relationship between relationship quality and consumer behaviors, such as attendance, merchandise purchases, and word-of-mouth behaviors in sport. The scale measures relationship quality with five constructs; trust, commitment, intimacy, self-connection, and reciprocity. A 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strong disagreement to 7 = strong agreement) is used to assess three items loading on each construct.

Based on prior research, two consumer behavior outcomes were identified for use in this study. First, because relationship marketing, and the loyalty it creates, has been shown to influence actual purchase behavior (Goh et al., 2013; Hutter et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2011b; Smith, 2013), purchase intentions are included as an outcome in the model. In sport, tickets and merchandise are commonly purchased by customers and, as such, the three-item scale used to measure purchase intentions by Pöyry et al. (2013) was modified to assess purchase intentions. Second, because referrals or word-of-mouth activities are discussed as important outcomes in literature on relationship marketing and marketing on social media (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Dholakia & Durham, 2010; Lachowetz et al., 2001; Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013), a construct of referral intentions is included and measured with three items, as used by Pöyry et al. (2013).

This study endeavors to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Which Facebook user behaviors increase the overall level of engagement of Facebook followers?

Research Question 2: Does the level of engagement of Facebook followers improve the quality of their relationship with the team?

Research Question 3: Does the level of engagement of Facebook followers influence their purchase and referral intentions?

Research Question 4: Does relationship quality mediate the relationship between Facebook engagement and purchase and referral intentions?

Research Question 5: What types of information do Facebook followers prefer to receive from teams on Facebook?

Chapter 3

Method

Using relationship marketing, defined as marketing focused on building, enhancing, and maintaining customer relationships, this study built a theoretical model through an extensive literature review to investigate how the interaction and engagement of NBA teams' fans on Facebook impacted their relationship quality with their favorite team. Additionally, the impact of engagement and relationship quality on purchase and referral intentions was examined, along with the types of content NBA teams' fans preferred to see on teams' Facebook pages.

Study Design

A post-positivist approach, where the researcher starts with a theoretical basis and then collects data to assess what factors influence outcomes, was taken in this cross-sectional study. Data were collected at one point in time, using surveys, to examine self-reported consumer behaviors and attitudes related to customers' use of social media and connection to their favorite team in the NBA. The focus was specifically on examining the behavior of individuals who are fans of teams in the NBA. Past studies also have chosen to focus specifically on the NBA as a population, sending surveys to all teams operating in the NBA (Dick & Sack, 2003; Dick & Turner, 2007; Mawson & Coan, 1994). For this study, participants must be fans of a specific NBA team or follow a specific NBA team on Facebook to be included. Survey research, which allows the researcher to gather data about individual behaviors, attitudes, and opinions (Rea & Parker, 2012), was chosen to better understand fans' behavioral engagement on Facebook, relationship quality, and purchase and referral intentions. When conducted using the scientific process, surveys are effective ways to collect quantitative data about a sample that can be used to make statistical inferences (Rea & Parker, 2012). For this study, an Internet-based survey was

used. Internet surveys are advantageous because they can be visually appealing, interactive, personal, flexible, and allow for real-time data capture (Zikmund & Babin, 2010). Sax et al. (2003) suggested benefits for respondents included convenience and interactivity.

Participants

The samples for this study were gathered using two sampling techniques. The first group of respondents was gathered using convenience and snowball sampling. The link to the online survey was posted on the researcher's Facebook page and the pages of 10 professional contacts working in sport. This technique capitalized on the social aspect of Facebook by allowing anyone to share the survey. Additionally, this method ensured that individuals who use Facebook were included in the sample. A second convenience sample was collected by sending email messages to a research panel, purchased from Qualtrics, including individuals who were fans of the NBA and used social media. The Qualtrics panel increased the likelihood of reaching individuals across the nation who were season ticket holders. Additionally, this group ensured a sample size large enough for the proposed data analysis techniques. To combat issues with missing data, the survey was forced response, meaning individuals must respond to each question to continue through and complete the survey. However, in the Facebook sample, missing data existed when individuals who started the survey dropped out. Because the Qualtrics panel was provided by the company as a purchased service, the sample was monitored for completed surveys only.

In total, 354 responses were gathered using the Facebook. In this group, only 146 were fans of the NBA and eligible to be included in the analysis, 100 of whom completed the entire survey. The Qualtrics panel resulted in 427 completed surveys, all of whom were fans of the NBA. Demographic and consumer purchase characteristics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Demographic Characteristics for the Facebook Sample and Qualtrics Panel

| Characteristic | <i>n</i> | Facebook sample (<i>N</i> = 146) | <i>n</i> | Qualtrics panel (<i>N</i> = 427) |
|-------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Sex | 102 | | 427 | |
| Male | | 54% | | 39% |
| Female | | 44% | | 61% |
| Age | 102 | | 427 | |
| Mean (<i>SD</i>) | | 31 (8.53) | | 44 (13.63) |
| Range | | 18-67 | | 18-79 |
| Ethnicity | 102 | | 427 | |
| White | | 90% | | 75% |
| Black/African American | | 5% | | 12% |
| Hispanic/Latino | | 3% | | 7% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | | 0% | | 4% |
| Native American/American Indian | | 0% | | 1% |
| Marital Status | 102 | | 427 | |
| Single/Never married | | 48% | | 30% |
| Married/Domestic partnership | | 45% | | 57% |
| Separated | | 0% | | 1% |
| Divorced | | 4% | | 9% |
| Widowed | | 1% | | 3% |
| Children under 18 living with them | 102 | | 427 | |
| No | | 71% | | 57% |
| Education level completed | 101 | | 427 | |
| Some high school, no diploma | | 1% | | 2% |
| High school graduate or equivalent | | 2% | | 23% |
| Some college credit, no degree | | 9% | | 21% |
| Trade/technical/vocational training | | 1% | | 6% |
| Associate degree | | 4% | | 13% |
| Bachelor's degree | | 24% | | 24% |
| Master's degree | | 27% | | 9% |
| Professional degree | | 4% | | 1% |
| Doctoral degree | | 9% | | 1% |
| 2013 household income before taxes | 100 | | 427 | |
| Less than \$24,999 | | 12% | | 17% |
| \$25,000 to \$49,999 | | 17% | | 28% |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999 | | 18% | | 26% |
| \$75,000 to \$99,999 | | 15% | | 15% |
| \$100,000 to \$124,999 | | 16% | | 3% |
| \$125,000 to \$149,999 | | 6% | | 4% |
| \$150,000 or more | | 7% | | 4% |

(table continues)

| Characteristic | <i>n</i> | Facebook sample | <i>n</i> | Qualtrics panel |
|---|----------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
| Consumer characteristics during 2013-2014 season | | | 426 | |
| Season ticket holders | 144 | 1% | | 13% |
| Average games attended | 143 | 0.46 | | 3 |
| Attended no games | 143 | 83% | | 49% |
| Average pieces of team-licensed merchandise purchased | 140 | 0.83 | | 2.75 |
| Purchased no team-licensed merchandise | 140 | 61% | | 28% |

Survey Instrument

A survey instrument was created based on previous interviews with industry professionals, previous research on social media and relationship quality, and consultation with marketing professionals. First, the survey was drafted based on current literature in sport and recent research on Facebook behaviors. Next, the survey was sent to five contacts who work in marketing research and sport marketing. Piloting the survey with experts is an important part of survey construction to check the question language, formatting, and structure of the survey (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003). Contacts were asked to review the survey for content and design. Feedback from their reviews of the question content, order, and design was used to improve the survey and its readability, clarity, and flow.

Measures. Previous research has used Likert-type scales to measure Facebook behaviors (Gummerus et al., 2012; Pöyry et al., 2013). Gummerus et al. (2012) used likes, comments, and reads to measure Facebook community engagement, after dropping visits from their model as it loaded on the transactional factor that included time and money spent playing games. This measure was expanded in this study and Facebook relationship strength was measured by asking respondents about the frequency of their Facebook behaviors including likes, comments, messages, page visits, reads, and shares measured on an 8-point scale (never, a few times a year, once a month, a few times a month, once a week, a few times a week, once a day, and a few times a day). These six behaviors were chosen as indicators of Facebook engagement based on

the literature review, including both academic and practitioner literature, which suggested all were measures of individual Facebook follower's engagement on the network. Face validity was supported by the adaptation of a previously used measure and the extensive literature review. The 8-point scale was used as opposed to a common 7-point Likert-type scale (never to frequently) to set specific numbers on self-reported behaviors to decrease the variability in what one individual considers frequently compared to another. The Facebook scale was evaluated for reliability using a pilot sample.

An existing scale for measuring relationship quality in sport, the SCTRQS, was used to measure relationship quality. The SCTRQS has five constructs including trust, commitment, intimacy, self-connection, and reciprocity with three items measuring each construct. These five constructs then measure overall relationship quality. The scale previously has been tested for reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficients from .82 to .95 and average variance extracted (AVE) values of .61 to .86), discriminant validity (correlations between all factors were significantly different from 1.0), and concurrent validity (the model had good fit) (Kim et al., 2011b). The scale also was cross-validated and robustness was supported by the stability of factors across populations (males and females).

In marketing research, Likert-type scales have been commonly used to measure behavioral outcomes. For example, Smith (2013) used 5-point Likert scales to determine the likelihood of individuals' future behaviors after visiting an organization's Facebook page. Pöyry et al. (2013) used a 7-point Likert scale to measure purchase, referral, and membership continuance intentions. In this study, purchase and referral intentions were measured by three items each, used by Pöyry et al. (2013), on a 7-point Likert-type scale. These authors evaluated both of these measures for validity and reliability. The purchase and referral constructs showed

good convergent validity as all factor loadings were greater than the .60 standard used by Fornell and Larcker (1981). In addition, the AVE for referral and purchase intentions were greater than .50 (.72 and .59 respectively) and composite validity (CR) were greater than .70 (.88 and .78 respectively), providing support for internal consistency.

Procedure

Prior to data collection for both the pilot study and main study, Human Subjects Committee approval was obtained. The approved information statement given to participants served as informed consent and can be found in Appendix A.

Pilot study. Pilot study data collection began in the summer of 2014. A convenience sample of previous and current students was collected by sending an electronic message requesting their participation through the university's learning management system. Initial qualifying statements screened survey respondents by asking which college sports they followed. A reminder email was sent to all students one week after the initial message. Additional students were recruited by cooperating instructors in the author's department. Pilot data collection continued for one month, with reminders sent each week, with a goal of 100 completed surveys. Only students who were fans of the university's men's basketball team were included in the data analysis. Results from the pilot study were downloaded and analyzed using the robust-maximum likelihood estimator in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in MPlus Version 7 to evaluate the reliability of items designed to measure Facebook relationship strength.

The pilot sample size was 78. Of this pilot sample, 55% were male. The age range of participants was 18-37 with an average age of 21.7 years and a standard deviation of 3.41 years. The sample was predominantly White (61%), but also included students identifying their

ethnicity as Asian or Pacific Islander (8%), Other (5%), Black or African American (4%), Hispanic or Latino (3%), and Native American or American Indian (3%).

The pilot study was conducted to evaluate the construct validity and reliability of the Facebook relationship strength scale. Based on the pilot data, the measurement model for Facebook relationship strength was estimated using CFA and factor loadings and correlations were examined. Factor loadings, standard errors, and *p*-values are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Factor Loadings for the Facebook Relationship Strength Construct in the Pilot Sample

| | Std. Estimate | SE | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------|---------------|-----|----------|
| Hypothesized model | | | |
| Visit | .83 | .12 | < .001 |
| Read | .84 | .12 | < .001 |
| Share | .81 | .13 | < .001 |
| Like | .89 | .09 | < .001 |
| Comment | .72 | .18 | < .001 |
| Message | .39 | .15 | .01 |
| Revised model | | | |
| Visit | .81 | .13 | < .001 |
| Read | .86 | .08 | < .001 |
| Share | .78 | .12 | < .001 |
| Like | .92 | .07 | < .001 |
| Comment | .68 | .16 | < .001 |

Note. Std. Estimate = Standardized Estimate; *SE* = Standard Error.

After this analysis, one of the six indicators of Facebook relationship strength, message (i.e., How often do you send the team a message through Facebook?), was dropped from the Facebook relationship strength scale as a review of NBA teams' Facebook pages revealed that not all teams' allowed consumers the option to send them a message. This means that some teams removed the "send a message" option from their Facebook pages, which makes this engagement behavior not applicable to all respondents in the full study and makes its use as an indicator dependent upon whether customers had the option in the first place. Also, pilot data revealed the message indicator had a small loading (.39), indicating a weak relationship with the

construct. While this loading was only slightly below the cutoff (.40) for retaining indicators in a factor analysis suggested by Matsunaga (2010), this weak relationship coupled with the inconsistency in NBA teams' Facebook page settings necessitated its removal from the scale.

Using the revised model without message as an indicator, reliability was re-examined. Factor loadings, standard errors, and *p*-values for the revised model are reported in Table 2. Brown (2006) suggested reliability coefficient values of 0.8 or above show good internal consistency. In the pilot sample, McDonald's (1999) omega coefficient (ω) was .91. The omega coefficient is a measure of internal consistency commonly used in CFA and SEM because it allows for a variable relationship with the construct (i.e., factor loading) and variable error variances. Omega coefficient measures whether a test measures the attribute its items are supposed to measure (McDonald, 1999). Support for construct validity was examined by reviewing convergent validity, which Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested was evident if average variance extracted (AVE) was greater than .50. The AVE for the five-item Facebook relationship construct was .66, providing support for convergent validity. Convergent validity was further supported because all factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$) (Hair, Tatham, Anderson, & Black, 2005). Based on these results, reliability of the Facebook relationship strength scale was deemed satisfactory. The revised model is depicted in Figure 2.

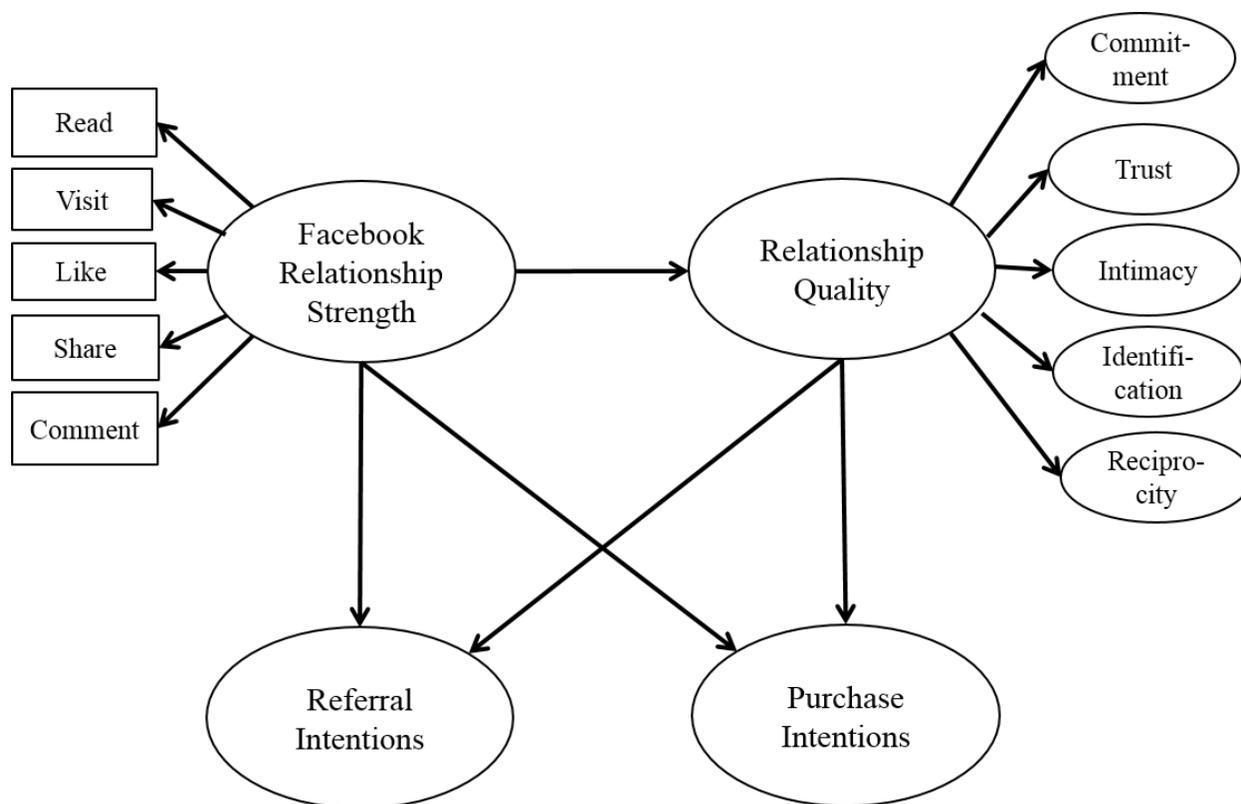


Figure 2. Revised structural model for measuring the impact of engagement on Facebook with relationship quality, referral intentions, and purchase intentions.

Additionally, patterns causing a lack of survey completion were examined to determine if rewording questions would result in higher completion rates. There were no consistent drop-out rates at specific questions or at certain points in the survey, suggesting no individual question was causing a lack of response nor was length of the survey a reason for drop-out.

Main study. After the survey instrument, found in Appendix B, was finalized, it was coded into Qualtrics and a duplicate copy was created to keep results from each sample separate. A recruitment message to be sent to potential panel respondents and a Facebook message post were created. The electronic message for panel respondents was sent to Qualtrics staff and the Facebook message was sent to the researcher's professional contacts. Survey distribution was

coordinated with Qualtrics staff and professional contacts and data collection began on the same day, one month before the 2014-2015 NBA season began.

All professional contacts were instructed to post the Facebook message to their Facebook profiles on the same day between 9:00 and 11:00 am. They were then asked to re-post the message two days later between 2:00 and 4:00 pm. Finally, they were instructed to re-post the message a week later between 6:00 and 9:00 pm. Qualtrics staff sent an electronic message to potential panel respondents requesting their participation. Once the requested number of responses was reached (400), the Qualtrics survey was closed. The Facebook sample survey was closed two weeks from the date data collection began.

After both surveys were closed, data were downloaded onto a secure server and opened in SPSS Version 22. Data were inspected to verify all variables were coded correctly. Then, a group identification variable was created and the two samples were merged into one file so invariance testing could be performed. Finally, data were saved into a file format to be analyzed in MPlus Version 7. Separate data files also were maintained for use if the entire sample failed measurement invariance and samples needed to be analyzed separately.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the demographics in each sample were calculated using Qualtrics survey software. Then, means, standard deviations, kurtosis, and skewness statistics were calculated for each variable in the model in MPlus Version 7. Finally, a series of models were tested using CFA and structural equation modeling (SEM) using MPlus. CFA and SEM were used because they allow for the estimation of relationships among variables while adjusting for measurement error, instead of assuming that the variables are measured without error (Brown, 2006; Kline, 2011; Little, 2013). Additionally, using SEM results in better estimates of

effect sizes (Kline, 2011). SEM was also used because it allows for estimation of latent variables (variables that are not directly observable or quantifiable) where measurable indicators are used to estimate the underlying construct (Little, 2013). In this study, relationship quality, Facebook relationship strength, and purchase and referral intentions are all latent variables with reflective indicators (the indicators reflect the underlying trait of the construct). For example, individuals with a good quality relationship with their favorite sport team would score higher on a 1 to 7 Likert-type question about how much they trust the team than individuals with a poor quality relationship with the team. The first set of models tested measurement invariance to determine if the two samples could be combined into one and analyzed together. Next, a CFA was run to check the constructs for reliability and validity in each sample.

Kline (2011) suggested two-step modeling, where the measurement model is run first and fit is examined prior to the structural model, was appropriate for structural regression models. In the two-step modeling process, the structural model is first specified as a CFA measurement model. Model fit is then examined to determine if the measurement model is adequate. If the measurement model is acceptable, then a series of structural models are run and then compared using chi-square difference tests or likelihood ratio tests. Following this procedure, the model fit of the measurement model was examined first for each sample, prior to fitting the structural models. Then, multiple structural models were fit to inspect relationships between purchase intentions, referral intentions, relationship quality, and Facebook relationship strength. In each sample, a partial mediation model was run, which models all direct effects in the model along with the indirect effects from Facebook relationship strength to purchase and referral intentions as mediated by relationship quality. Then, direct paths from Facebook relationship strength to purchase and referral intentions were removed one at a time and likelihood ratio tests with the

scaling correction factor were conducted to compare models after each path was removed. Model comparisons were used to determine whether relationship quality mediated the relationship between Facebook engagement and consumer behaviors and to uncover the best fitting, most parsimonious model in each sample.

Data on the importance of different types of content were examined using SPSS Version 22. First, means and standard deviations were calculated and reported. Then, to show the variation in importance ratings, frequency tables were created based on respondents' answers to the Likert-type scale questions.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore how interaction and engagement with their favorite NBA team's Facebook page impacted consumer relationship quality and intentions to purchase tickets to games and team merchandise and refer others to do the same. Relationship marketing was used as a theoretical framework to guide the formation of a model including four latent constructs, Facebook relationship strength, relationship quality, purchase intentions, and referral intentions. This model was used to explore the relationships between constructs. While the latter three scales have been used in previous research and have shown good reliability, a pilot study was conducted to check the validity and reliability of the Facebook relationship strength scale. Then, data from two convenience samples, a Facebook sample and Qualtrics panel, were collected for the full study. CFA and SEM were used to test the measurement and structural models to explicate relationships between the latent constructs.

Measurement Invariance

Measurement invariance was tested to determine whether the two separate samples, the sample collected on Facebook and the Qualtrics panel, could be combined. To do this, each construct in the model was examined independently by running a separate measurement model with only one construct and its respective indicators. The first step was to test model fit in each sample separately. In this study, multiple model fit indices are examined as suggested by Brown (2006). The first way to assess model fit is using the χ^2 test statistic. In the case of CFA and SEM, a non-significant χ^2 is desired because this indicates the sample covariance matrix is not different than the model-implied covariance matrix. However, χ^2 is sensitive to sample size. Since it is suggested that studies using CFA and SEM have large sample sizes, other fit statistics

need to be considered. Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) is a parsimony-corrected index of model fit. Little (2013) suggested that values from .02 to .05 indicate good fit, .06 to .08 indicate acceptable fit, and .09 to .10 indicate mediocre fit. Two measures of comparative fit include the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). For both of these indices, values from .95 to .99 indicate very good fit, .90 to .94 indicate acceptable fit, and .85 to .89 indicate mediocre fit (Little, 2013). Finally, a commonly reported fit index, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is an absolute fit index. Values of SRMR that indicate good, acceptable, and poor fit are similar to those of RMSEA (Little, 2013). Fit indices are examined as a group to assess whether model fit is adequate for interpretation of parameters.

The Facebook relationship strength scale was tested first for measurement invariance. The measurement model, using the robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator in Mplus, was run in each sample. In the Qualtrics panel, model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2_{(5, n = 416)} = 38.21, p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.09, .17)} = .13$; CFI = .97; TLI = .94; SRMR = .02. Model fit also was acceptable in the Facebook sample, $\chi^2_{(5, n = 110)} = 11.27, p = .05$; $RMSEA_{(.01, .19)} = .11$; CFI = .94; TLI = .88; SRMR = .05. This led to testing of the configural invariance model by analyzing the structure and pattern of factor loadings of the samples simultaneously. The overall model fit, reported in Table 3, was acceptable. Next, metric, or weak, invariance was tested by equating the factor loadings in the samples and running the model again. The model fit statistics are reported in Table 3. Cheung and Rensvold (2002) suggested the chi-square difference test was too strict in large sample sizes for establishing invariance, so their less stringent test of the change in CFI and TLI of $< .01$ was used. Based on this test, measurement invariance does not hold in these two samples.

Table 3

Model Fit Statistics for Tests of Measurement Invariance

| Model tested | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | ρ | RMSEA | RMSEA 90% CI | CFI | Δ CFI | TLI | Δ TLI | Pass? |
|--------------|----------|-----------|--------|-------|-----------------|-----|--------------|-----|--------------|-------|
| Configural | 45.09 | 10 | <.001 | .12 | .08, .15 | .97 | -- | .94 | -- | Yes |
| Weak | 95.34 | 14 | <.001 | .14 | .01, .17 | .92 | .05 | .90 | .04 | No |

Note. CI = Confidence Interval.

Once one construct failed the test, further testing was discontinued as even one construct that was not invariant precluded the integration of the samples. Because invariance does not hold, each sample was analyzed separately. The results are reported in separate sections for each sample.

Facebook Sample Results

Descriptive statistics for the Facebook sample ($n = 114$) are reported in Table 4. With the exception of the 5 indicators measuring Facebook relationship strength, all indicators were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert-type scale. The indicators visit, read, share, like, and comment were measured on a 1 (never) to 8 (a few times a day) scale.

Table 4

Facebook Sample Means, Standard Deviations, Skew Values, and Kurtosis Values

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Skew | Kurtosis |
|---|----------|-----------|-------|----------|
| I intend to attend the team's games during the 2014-2015 season (Purchase 1) | 3.09 | 2.07 | 0.55 | -1.03 |
| It is likely that I purchase tickets to the team's games during the 2014-2015 season (Purchase 2) | 2.91 | 2.03 | 0.62 | -1.04 |
| I intend to purchase the team's team-licensed merchandise in the next year (Purchase 3) | 3.43 | 1.90 | 0.32 | -1.00 |
| I intend to say positive things about the team to other people (Referral 1) | 4.41 | 1.66 | -0.36 | -0.26 |
| I plan to recommend the team to other people (Referral 2) | 3.76 | 1.94 | 0.10 | -1.06 |
| I will encourage my friends to purchase tickets or attend games (Referral 3) | 3.18 | 1.86 | 0.25 | -1.19 |
| I trust this team (Trust 1) | 3.32 | 1.67 | 0.25 | -0.48 |
| This team is reliable (Trust 2) | 3.27 | 1.69 | 0.17 | -0.91 |
| I can count on this team (Trust 3) | 3.04 | 1.63 | 0.37 | -0.61 |
| I am committed to this team (Commit 1) | 3.82 | 1.81 | 0.12 | -0.76 |
| I am devoted to this team (Commit 2) | 3.46 | 1.94 | 0.36 | -0.95 |
| I am dedicated to this team (Commit 3) | 3.63 | 1.80 | 0.23 | -0.78 |
| I am very familiar with this team (Intimacy 1) | 4.29 | 1.86 | -0.25 | -0.93 |
| I know a lot about this team (Intimacy 2) | 4.15 | 1.84 | -0.15 | -1.05 |
| I feel as though I really understand this team (Intimacy 3) | 3.27 | 1.61 | 0.30 | -0.43 |
| This team reminds me of who I am (Identify 1) | 2.48 | 1.73 | 1.05 | 0.13 |
| This team's image and my self-image are similar in a lot of ways (Identify 2) | 2.54 | 1.57 | 0.81 | 0.22 |
| This team and I have a lot in common (Identify 3) | 2.70 | 1.63 | 0.78 | -0.23 |
| This team unfailingly pays me back when I do something extra for it (Reciprocity 1) | 2.26 | 1.43 | 0.87 | -0.04 |
| This team gives me back equivalently what I have given them (Reciprocity 2) | 3.22 | 1.83 | 0.30 | -0.78 |
| This team constantly returns the favor when I do something good for it (Reciprocity 3) | 2.34 | 1.46 | 0.76 | -0.60 |
| How often do you visit your favorite team's Facebook page (Visit) | 1.81 | 1.35 | 2.20 | 5.47 |
| How often do you read content posted by the team on Facebook (Read) | 2.39 | 1.88 | 1.27 | 0.62 |
| How often do you share content posted by the team on Facebook (Share) | 1.45 | 0.98 | 2.94 | 10.54 |
| How often do you like content posted by the team on Facebook (Like) | 1.91 | 1.46 | 1.67 | 2.51 |
| How often do you comment on content posted by the team on Facebook (Comment) | 1.25 | 0.59 | 3.09 | 10.91 |

Evaluation of assumptions. Prior to data analysis, Q-Q plots for each indicator were examined along with kurtosis and skew statistics. As shown in Table 4, skew ranged from -0.36 to 3.09. Kurtosis statistics ranged from -1.19 to 10.54. Skew and kurtosis were divided by their standard error (0.23 for skew for all variables and 0.45 for kurtosis for all variables except like, comment, share, read, and visit, which was 0.46) to determine z-scores. Of the 26 variables, 12 had z-scores greater than + or – 1.96 for skew and 13 for kurtosis, indicating they deviated from normality significantly. Based on these tests, it was determined that the data were not univariate normal and therefore not multivariate normal. This prompted the use of the robust-maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator option in MPlus, which uses a scaling correction factor to adjust for non-normality in the data. To deal with missing data, full information MLR was used. The correlation matrix for all variables in the analysis is included in Table 5.

Table 5

Facebook Sample Correlation Matrix

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|--|
| 1. Purchase 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Purchase 2 | .88 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Purchase 3 | .60 | .64 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Referral 1 | .34 | .36 | .48 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Referral 2 | .41 | .46 | .57 | .54 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Referral 3 | .60 | .63 | .59 | .42 | .69 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Trust 1 | .30 | .34 | .46 | .56 | .58 | .45 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Trust 2 | .30 | .34 | .51 | .53 | .50 | .38 | .74 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Trust 3 | .33 | .37 | .57 | .48 | .67 | .49 | .71 | .72 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. Commit1 | .47 | .52 | .54 | .54 | .58 | .50 | .59 | .55 | .63 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11. Commit 2 | .44 | .51 | .59 | .51 | .64 | .54 | .57 | .60 | .71 | .82 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12. Commit 3 | .37 | .43 | .59 | .47 | .63 | .53 | .55 | .55 | .67 | .80 | .84 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13. Intimacy 1 | .32 | .43 | .45 | .37 | .43 | .43 | .43 | .45 | .49 | .65 | .67 | .59 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14. Intimacy 2 | .43 | .46 | .49 | .46 | .39 | .40 | .37 | .41 | .45 | .64 | .63 | .53 | .80 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15. Intimacy 3 | .36 | .44 | .58 | .44 | .56 | .52 | .54 | .51 | .60 | .64 | .64 | .61 | .59 | .56 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16. Identify 1 | .31 | .41 | .43 | .39 | .52 | .50 | .45 | .52 | .61 | .56 | .61 | .58 | .45 | .47 | .62 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17. Identify 2 | .43 | .50 | .56 | .47 | .57 | .61 | .50 | .52 | .60 | .49 | .58 | .55 | .46 | .44 | .58 | .72 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18. Identify 3 | .47 | .53 | .52 | .45 | .60 | .66 | .56 | .54 | .63 | .61 | .60 | .52 | .48 | .49 | .64 | .65 | .71 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 19. Reciprocity 1 | .26 | .31 | .39 | .26 | .33 | .34 | .35 | .44 | .45 | .41 | .45 | .36 | .29 | .21 | .38 | .45 | .46 | .43 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 20. Reciprocity 2 | .25 | .31 | .30 | .36 | .42 | .38 | .40 | .49 | .50 | .43 | .45 | .46 | .30 | .26 | .33 | .35 | .43 | .41 | .43 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 21. Reciprocity 3 | .31 | .37 | .41 | .28 | .43 | .42 | .45 | .55 | .47 | .40 | .41 | .39 | .31 | .23 | .46 | .52 | .57 | .49 | .69 | .49 | 1 | | | | | | |
| 22. Visit | .34 | .37 | .51 | .39 | .47 | .38 | .25 | .32 | .39 | .45 | .53 | .51 | .42 | .39 | .46 | .52 | .49 | .33 | .32 | .24 | .36 | 1 | | | | | |
| 23. Read | .33 | .36 | .58 | .49 | .47 | .42 | .34 | .30 | .40 | .56 | .55 | .53 | .43 | .43 | .47 | .38 | .40 | .38 | .20 | .24 | .18 | .75 | 1 | | | | |
| 24. Share | .38 | .41 | .44 | .28 | .42 | .39 | .18 | .18 | .36 | .40 | .46 | .40 | .37 | .38 | .44 | .54 | .53 | .39 | .36 | .24 | .34 | .75 | .59 | 1 | | | |
| 25. Like | .31 | .33 | .57 | .41 | .44 | .40 | .29 | .35 | .43 | .48 | .51 | .47 | .43 | .44 | .47 | .40 | .46 | .37 | .31 | .31 | .29 | .78 | .81 | .69 | 1 | | |
| 26. Comment | .18 | .23 | .25 | .17 | .32 | .30 | .15 | .14 | .26 | .24 | .23 | .20 | .25 | .27 | .33 | .38 | .41 | .42 | .29 | .13 | .32 | .39 | .34 | .49 | .55 | 1 | |

To assess reliability, McDonald's (1999) omega coefficient (ω) was calculated for each construct as it allows for variable error variances and variable relationships between factors and constructs. Table 6 lists the AVE and reliability coefficients. Reliability coefficients greater than .80 indicated good reliability for all but one scale and a coefficient greater than .70 indicated adequate reliability for the remaining scale (Kline, 2011). The AVE for all constructs was greater than .50 providing evidence of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Also, significant factor loadings (reported in Table 7) further supported convergent validity (Hair et al., 2005).

Table 6

Reliability Coefficients of the Latent Constructs

| Construct | ω | AVE |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----|
| Facebook relationship strength | .89 | .63 |
| Relationship quality | .92 | .70 |
| Trust | .88 | .72 |
| Commitment | .93 | .82 |
| Intimacy | .86 | .68 |
| Identification | .87 | .69 |
| Reciprocity | .79 | .57 |
| Purchase intentions | .89 | .74 |
| Referral intentions | .80 | .58 |

The measurement model. The full measurement model was run to examine fit prior to fitting structural models. To identify the model, the variance of each construct was fixed to 1. Model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2_{(288, n = 113)} = 499.22$, scaling correction factor = 1.0255, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.07, .09)} = .08$; CFI = .89; TLI = .88; SRMR = .09. Ullman (2001) stated model modification in SEM could be undertaken either *a priori* or post-hoc; however, post-hoc modifications must be supported by theory and might result in capitalizing on chance. Because the *a priori* theoretical model showed acceptable fit, modification indices were not used to make adjustments to the model post-hoc. Parameter estimates are reported in Table 7 and Table 8. Variance accounted for (R^2) in indicators by latent factors in is reported in Table 9.

Table 7

Factor Loadings and Residuals for the Facebook Sample Measurement Model

| | Factor Loadings | | | Error Variances | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----|--------|-----------------|-----|--------|
| | Std. Est. | SE | p | Std. Est. | SE | p |
| Facebook relationship strength | | | | | | |
| Visit | .86 | .05 | < .001 | .26 | .09 | 0.007 |
| Read | .85 | .04 | < .001 | .28 | .07 | < .001 |
| Share | .76 | .05 | < .001 | .42 | .07 | < .001 |
| Like | .92 | .05 | < .001 | .16 | .09 | 0.087 |
| Comment | .52 | .08 | < .001 | .73 | .09 | < .001 |
| Trust | | | | | | |
| Trust 1 | .82 | .05 | < .001 | .32 | .08 | < .001 |
| Trust 2 | .83 | .05 | < .001 | .31 | .08 | < .001 |
| Trust 3 | .89 | .04 | < .001 | .21 | .07 | 0.001 |
| Commitment | | | | | | |
| Commit 1 | .88 | .03 | < .001 | .22 | .05 | < .001 |
| Commit 2 | .94 | .02 | < .001 | .12 | .04 | 0.004 |
| Commit 3 | .89 | .03 | < .001 | .20 | .05 | < .001 |
| Intimacy | | | | | | |
| Intimacy 1 | .89 | .05 | < .001 | .22 | .09 | 0.018 |
| Intimacy 2 | .86 | .05 | < .001 | .26 | .09 | 0.003 |
| Intimacy 3 | .72 | .09 | < .001 | .49 | .13 | < .001 |
| Identification | | | | | | |
| Identify 1 | .81 | .04 | < .001 | .34 | .07 | < .001 |
| Identify 2 | .85 | .05 | < .001 | .28 | .08 | < .001 |
| Identify 3 | .83 | .05 | < .001 | .30 | .08 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity | | | | | | |
| Reciprocity 1 | .78 | .06 | < .001 | .39 | .09 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 2 | .60 | .08 | < .001 | .64 | .10 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 3 | .85 | .05 | < .001 | .27 | .09 | 0.002 |
| Relationship quality | | | | | | |
| Trust | .87 | .05 | < .001 | .25 | .09 | 0.004 |
| Commitment | .90 | .05 | < .001 | .19 | .08 | 0.016 |
| Intimacy | .79 | .08 | < .001 | .37 | .13 | 0.005 |
| Identify | .90 | .04 | < .001 | .19 | .08 | 0.011 |
| Reciprocity | .70 | .09 | < .001 | .51 | .12 | < .001 |
| Purchase intentions | | | | | | |
| Purchase 1 | .91 | .04 | < .001 | .17 | .06 | 0.009 |
| Purchase 2 | .96 | .02 | < .001 | .07 | .04 | 0.033 |
| Purchase 3 | .68 | .07 | < .001 | .54 | .09 | < .001 |
| Referral intentions | | | | | | |
| Referral 1 | .63 | .07 | < .001 | .60 | .09 | < .001 |
| Referral 2 | .83 | .07 | < .001 | .31 | .11 | 0.007 |
| Referral 3 | .80 | .06 | < .001 | .36 | .09 | < .001 |

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; SE = Standard Error.

Table 8

Standardized Factor Variances and Covariances for the Facebook Sample Measurement Model

| | Std. Est. | SE | p |
|--|-----------|-----|--------|
| Relationship quality | 1.00 | | |
| Relationship quality with Facebook relationship strength | .63 | .08 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality with Purchase intentions | .62 | .08 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality with Referral intentions | .89 | .05 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength | 1.00 | | |
| Facebook relationship strength with Purchase intentions | .42 | .11 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength with Referral intentions | .63 | .08 | < .001 |
| Purchase intentions | 1.00 | | |
| Purchase intentions with Referral intentions | .68 | .09 | < .001 |
| Referral intentions | 1.00 | | |

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; SE = Standard Error.

Table 9

Variance Explained in Each Indicator by the Latent Factor in the Model

| | R ² | SE | p |
|---------------|----------------|-----|--------|
| Visit | .74 | .09 | < .001 |
| Read | .72 | .07 | < .001 |
| Share | .58 | .07 | < .001 |
| Like | .85 | .09 | < .001 |
| Comment | .27 | .09 | 0.002 |
| Trust 1 | .68 | .08 | < .001 |
| Trust 2 | .69 | .08 | < .001 |
| Trust 3 | .79 | .07 | < .001 |
| Commit 1 | .78 | .05 | < .001 |
| Commit 2 | .88 | .04 | < .001 |
| Commit 3 | .80 | .05 | < .001 |
| Intimacy 1 | .79 | .09 | < .001 |
| Intimacy 2 | .74 | .09 | < .001 |
| Intimacy 3 | .51 | .13 | < .001 |
| Identify 1 | .66 | .07 | < .001 |
| Identify 2 | .72 | .08 | < .001 |
| Identify 3 | .70 | .08 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 1 | .61 | .09 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 2 | .36 | .10 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 3 | .73 | .09 | < .001 |
| Trust | .75 | .09 | < .001 |
| Commitment | .81 | .08 | < .001 |
| Intimacy | .63 | .13 | < .001 |

(table continues)

| | R^2 | SE | P |
|----------------|-------|------|--------|
| Identification | .81 | .08 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity | .49 | .12 | < .001 |
| Purchase 1 | .83 | .06 | < .001 |
| Purchase 2 | .93 | .04 | < .001 |
| Purchase 3 | .46 | .09 | < .001 |
| Referral 1 | .40 | .09 | < .001 |
| Referral 2 | .69 | .11 | < .001 |
| Referral 3 | .64 | .09 | < .001 |

Note. SE = Standard Error.

Structural models. A series of structural models were run to examine the relationships between constructs, including any potential full or partial mediation. The least restrictive model, the partial mediation model (depicted in Figure 3), was run first.

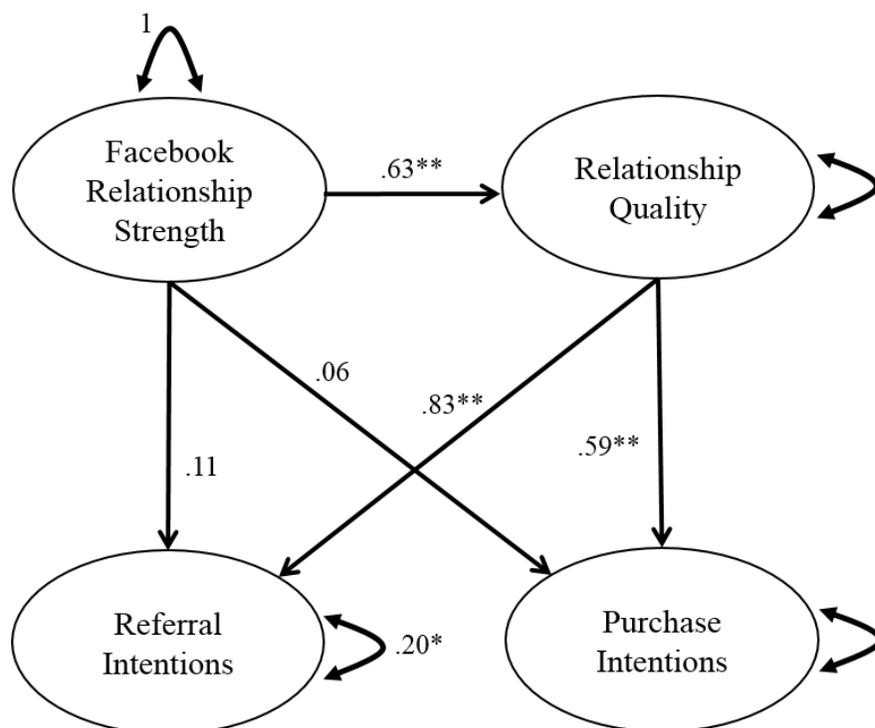


Figure 3. The partial mediation model for the Facebook sample with standardized coefficients.

Note. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

The model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2_{(288, n=113)} = 499.22$, scaling correction factor = 1.0256, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.07, .09)} = .08$; CFI = .89; TLI = .88; SRMR = .09. Direct and indirect effects of the partial

mediation model are reported in Table 10. Next, the least significant path, the direct effect from Facebook relationship strength to purchase intentions, was deleted from the model. A likelihood ratio test using the scaling correction factor was conducted to determine if this restriction resulted in a significant degradation in model fit. Model fit for this model was slightly worse, $\chi^2_{(289, n = 113)} = 498.81$, scaling correction factor = 1.0269, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.07, .09)} = .08$; CFI = .89; TLI = .88; SRMR = .09. The likelihood ratio test was not significant, and the more parsimonious model was retained, $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = .17$, $p = .68$. Next, the direct effect from Facebook relationship strength to referral intentions was removed from the model, and model fit degraded slightly, $\chi^2_{(290, n = 113)} = 499.83$, scaling correction factor = 1.0267, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.07, .09)} = .08$; CFI = .89; TLI = .88; SRMR = .09. A non-significant likelihood ratio test resulted in the retention of the full mediation model as it was the most parsimonious model, $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 3.33$, $p = .07$. Direct and indirect effects, standardized values, standard errors, and p -values for the full and partial mediation models are reported in Table 10. The retained model is depicted in Figure 4.

Table 10

Estimates of Direct and Indirect Effects in the Structural Models

| | Estimate | Std. Est. | SE | p |
|--|----------|-----------|-----|--------|
| Partial Mediation Model | | | | |
| Direct Effects | | | | |
| Facebook relationship strength → Referral intentions | 0.09 | .11 | .11 | 0.35 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Purchase intentions | 0.09 | .06 | .14 | 0.68 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality | 0.64 | .63 | .08 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality → Referral intentions | 0.73 | .83 | .09 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality → Purchase intentions | 0.93 | .59 | .12 | < .001 |
| Indirect Effects | | | | |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality → Referral intentions | 0.47 | .52 | .10 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality → Purchase intentions | 0.60 | .37 | .10 | < .001 |

(table continues)

| | Estimate | Std. Est. | SE | p |
|--|----------|-----------|-----|--------|
| Full Mediation Model | | | | |
| Direct Effects | | | | |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality | 0.65 | .64 | .07 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality → Referral intentions | 0.79 | .90 | .05 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality → Purchase intentions | 1.00 | .63 | .08 | < .001 |
| Indirect Effects | | | | |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality → Referral intentions | 0.52 | .58 | .08 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality → Purchase intentions | 0.65 | .40 | .08 | < .001 |

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; SE = Standard Error.

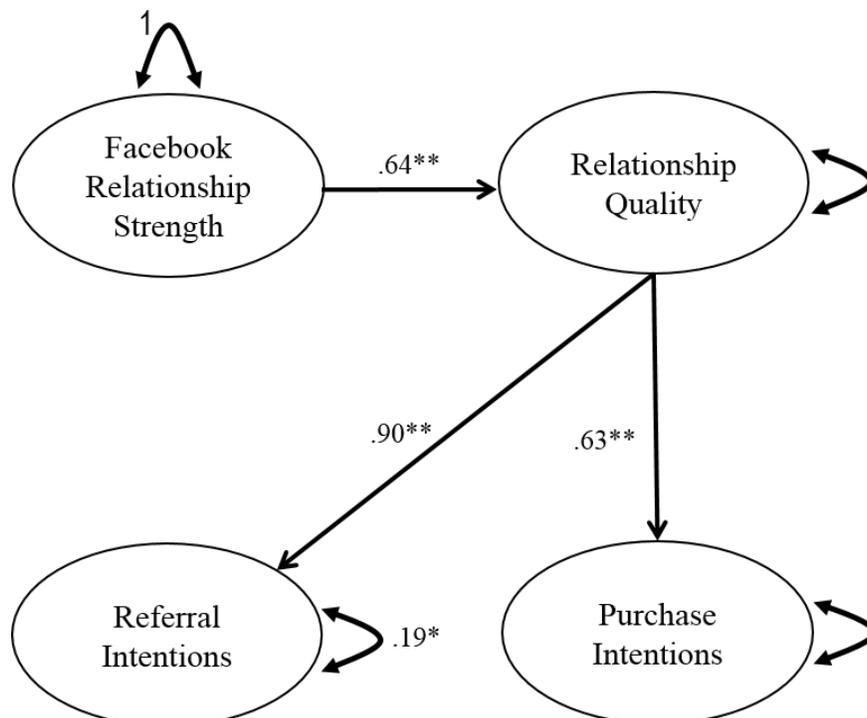


Figure 4. The retained full mediation model for the Facebook sample with standardized coefficients. Note. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$.

In the retained model, the direct effects indicated that a 1 standard deviation increase in Facebook relationship strength resulted in a .64 standard deviation increase in relationship quality. A 1 standard deviation increase in relationship quality resulted in a .90 standard deviation increase in referral intentions and a .63 standard deviation increase in purchase intentions.

RQ1: Which Facebook user behaviors increase the overall level of engagement of Facebook followers? The measurement model was used to answer the first research question. Brown (2006) suggested standardized loadings greater than .30 or .40 indicated salient factors. In this model, standardized factor loadings suggest all five indicators were moderate to strong indicators of Facebook relationship strength. The indicator like had the strongest relationship with Facebook relationship strength, while the indicator comment had the weakest. The R^2 values represented the amount of variance in the indicator explained by the construct Facebook relationship strength. The like indicator had the highest explained variance while the indicators share and comment had the lowest R^2 . Facebook relationship strength explained 85% of the variance in the indicator like, 58% of the variance in the indicator share, and 27% of the variance in the indicator comment.

RQ2: Does the level of engagement of Facebook followers improve the quality of their relationship with the team? To determine the relationship between Facebook relationship strength and relationship quality, the path between the two constructs was examined. The retained full mediation structural model explains 59% of the variance in relationship quality, $R^2 = .59$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$. Figure 4 illustrates the structural model relationships in the full mediation model that was retained, including the standardized regression coefficients and residual variance of the relationship quality construct. The positive, significant path between Facebook relationship strength and relationship quality (.64) indicated more engagement on Facebook predicted greater relationship quality.

RQ3: Does the level of engagement of Facebook followers influence their purchase and referral intentions? The structural model was used to examine whether Facebook fans' level of engagement with the team's Facebook page impacted their purchase and referral

intentions. The likelihood ratio test of partial and full mediation models resulted in retaining the full mediation model. Because of this, engagement on Facebook was not shown to have a significant direct impact on purchase or referral intentions.

RQ4: Does relationship quality mediate the relationship between Facebook engagement and purchase and referral intentions? Relationship quality did mediate the relationship between Facebook relationship strength and referral and purchase intentions. Table 10 reports the indirect effects, standard errors, and *p*-values for the partial mediation and retained model. The indirect effect from Facebook relationship strength to referral intentions through relationship quality was positive and significant (.58). The more individuals engaged on Facebook, the higher their relationship quality leading to intentions to refer the team's tickets and merchandise to others. Also, the effect through relationship quality to purchase intentions was positive and significant (.40), thus individuals who engaged on Facebook often had a higher relationship quality leading to greater intentions to purchase tickets and merchandise.

Type of content. *RQ5: What types of information do Facebook followers prefer to receive from teams on Facebook?* To answer the fifth research question, SPSS was used to run descriptive statistics and frequencies on respondents' answers to the question, "On a scale of 1-7, how important is the following information posted on Facebook by the (favorite team) to you?" Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 11. Table 12 reports frequency data.

Table 11

Means and Standard Deviations for Facebook Fans' Ratings of Types of Facebook Content

| Type of Post | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Posts about a sponsor of the team | 1.70 | 1.16 |
| Fan contests | 2.32 | 1.72 |
| Ticket giveaways | 2.87 | 2.10 |
| Merchandise giveaways | 2.67 | 1.92 |
| Fan polls | 2.22 | 1.70 |
| Questions posted by the team | 2.25 | 1.69 |
| Posts by the team requesting a like | 1.73 | 1.28 |
| Posts about the mascot | 1.83 | 1.37 |
| Posts about dancers/cheerleaders | 1.93 | 1.62 |
| Posts about the arena | 2.33 | 1.72 |
| Posts about personnel | 2.69 | 2.00 |
| Posts about an upcoming game | 2.88 | 1.92 |
| Posts about players | 3.36 | 2.20 |
| Behind-the-scenes information | 3.12 | 2.13 |
| Score-related posts | 3.12 | 2.13 |
| Post-game recaps | 2.99 | 2.14 |
| Posts about player movement | 3.32 | 2.22 |
| Posts about player injury | 3.15 | 2.10 |

Table 12

Frequencies of Ratings for Types of Facebook Content

| Type of Post | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| Posts about a sponsor of the team | 45.2 | 11.0 | 6.8 | 4.8 | 0.7 | 1.4 | 0.0 |
| Fan contests | 37.0 | 6.8 | 8.2 | 8.2 | 5.5 | 2.1 | 2.1 |
| Ticket giveaways | 30.1 | 8.2 | 6.2 | 8.9 | 5.5 | 4.1 | 6.8 |
| Merchandise giveaways | 30.8 | 9.6 | 6.2 | 10.3 | 6.2 | 2.1 | 4.8 |
| Fan polls | 39.0 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 3.4 | 2.7 | 2.1 |
| Questions posted by the team | 39.0 | 6.8 | 6.8 | 6.8 | 6.2 | 3.4 | 0.7 |
| Posts by the team requesting a like | 47.3 | 8.2 | 6.8 | 3.4 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 0.0 |
| Posts about the mascot | 43.8 | 11.0 | 5.5 | 4.8 | 2.7 | 1.4 | 0.7 |
| Posts about dancers/cheerleaders | 46.6 | 5.5 | 7.5 | 3.4 | 2.7 | 1.4 | 2.7 |
| Posts about the arena | 36.3 | 8.9 | 5.5 | 9.6 | 4.8 | 3.4 | 1.4 |
| Posts about personnel | 33.6 | 7.5 | 5.5 | 6.2 | 7.5 | 6.8 | 2.7 |
| Posts about an upcoming game | 26.7 | 8.2 | 8.9 | 11.0 | 6.8 | 4.1 | 4.1 |
| Posts about players | 26.0 | 3.4 | 6.2 | 11.6 | 6.2 | 8.9 | 7.5 |
| Behind-the-scenes information | 30.1 | 4.1 | 11.0 | 8.9 | 4.8 | 4.1 | 6.8 |
| Score-related posts | 26.7 | 6.8 | 7.5 | 9.6 | 4.8 | 8.2 | 6.2 |
| Post-game recaps | 30.1 | 6.2 | 6.2 | 6.2 | 10.3 | 4.8 | 6.2 |
| Posts about player movement | 26.7 | 4.1 | 4.8 | 11.6 | 8.2 | 5.5 | 8.9 |
| Posts about player injury | 27.4 | 5.5 | 4.1 | 11.6 | 11.0 | 4.1 | 6.2 |

Note: 1 = very unimportant; 7 = very important.

The five posts with the highest means were posts about players, player movement, and player injury, behind-the-scenes information, and score-related posts. Posts about sponsors, posts requesting a like, and posts about cheerleaders, dancers, and mascots were the least important types of content. There was a lack of ratings above four across all content types.

Qualtrics Panel Results

The descriptive statistics for the indicators in the Qualtrics panel sample are listed in Table 13. All indicators, other than the 5 which measure Facebook relationship strength, were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert-type scale. The indicators visit, read, share, like, and comment were measured on a 1 (never) to 8 (a few times a day) scale.

Table 13

Qualtrics Panel Variable Means, Standard Deviations, Skew Values, and Kurtosis Values

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Skew | Kurtosis |
|---|----------|-----------|-------|----------|
| I intend to attend the team's games during the 2014-2015 season (Purchase 1) | 4.33 | 2.12 | -0.30 | -1.26 |
| It is likely that I purchase tickets to the team's games during the 2014-2015 season (Purchase 2) | 4.25 | 2.12 | -0.23 | -1.29 |
| I intend to purchase the team's team-licensed merchandise in the next year (Purchase 3) | 5.04 | 1.73 | -0.71 | -0.41 |
| I intend to say positive things about the team to other people (Referral 1) | 5.72 | 1.23 | -0.87 | 0.45 |
| I plan to recommend the team to other people (Referral 2) | 5.39 | 1.40 | -0.75 | 0.11 |
| I will encourage my friends to purchase tickets or attend games (Referral 3) | 4.81 | 1.76 | -0.67 | -0.34 |
| I trust this team (Trust 1) | 5.38 | 1.37 | -0.72 | 0.19 |
| This team is reliable (Trust 2) | 5.18 | 1.47 | -0.64 | -0.09 |
| I can count on this team (Trust 3) | 5.06 | 1.50 | -0.59 | -0.20 |
| I am committed to this team (Commit 1) | 5.41 | 1.40 | -0.84 | -0.40 |
| I am devoted to this team (Commit 2) | 5.37 | 1.48 | -0.85 | 0.34 |
| I am dedicated to this team (Commit 3) | 5.45 | 1.42 | -0.81 | 0.21 |
| I am very familiar with this team (Intimacy 1) | 5.64 | 1.35 | -0.79 | -0.11 |
| I know a lot about this team (Intimacy 2) | 5.36 | 1.34 | -0.58 | -0.23 |
| I feel as though I really understand this team (Intimacy 3) | 5.08 | 1.45 | -0.52 | -0.08 |
| This team reminds me of who I am (Identify 1) | 4.48 | 1.72 | -0.40 | -0.58 |
| This team's image and my self-image are similar in a lot of ways (Identify 2) | 4.44 | 1.66 | -0.38 | -0.51 |
| This team and I have a lot in common (Identify 3) | 4.51 | 1.64 | -0.36 | -0.51 |
| This team unfailingly pays me back when I do something extra for it (Reciprocity 1) | 3.98 | 1.80 | -0.14 | -0.92 |
| This team gives me back equivalently what I have given them (Reciprocity 2) | 4.49 | 1.70 | -0.45 | -0.47 |
| This team constantly returns the favor when I do something good for it (Reciprocity 3) | 4.08 | 1.81 | -0.13 | -0.84 |
| How often do you visit your favorite team's Facebook page (Visit) | 3.34 | 2.00 | 0.44 | -0.98 |
| How often do you read content posted by the team on Facebook (Read) | 3.70 | 2.06 | 0.11 | -1.27 |
| How often do you share content posted by the team on Facebook (Share) | 3.09 | 1.97 | 0.51 | -0.99 |
| How often do you like content posted by the team on Facebook (Like) | 3.52 | 2.06 | 0.24 | -1.16 |
| How often do you comment on content posted by the team on Facebook (Comment) | 3.12 | 1.99 | 0.49 | -1.03 |

Evaluation of assumptions. To examine the normality assumption necessary to use maximum likelihood estimation, Q-Q plots for each indicator were examined. Additionally, kurtosis and skew statistics were examined. Skew ranged from -0.87 to -0.51 and kurtosis values ranged from -1.29 to 0.34. Skew and kurtosis statistics were divided by their standard errors (0.12 for all indicators on skew and 0.24 for all indicators on kurtosis) to determine if they deviated significantly from normality. Of the indicators, 22 had z-scores greater than + or – 1.96 for skew and 13 for kurtosis. It was determined that the data were not univariate normal, and therefore not multivariate normal, based on these examinations of the data. Instead of using the maximum likelihood estimator, the MLR estimator, which uses a scaling correction factor to adjust for non-normality in the data, was used. There were no missing data in the sample. The correlation matrix is reported in Table 14.

Table 14

Qualtrics Panel Correlation Matrix

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|--|
| 1. Purchase 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Purchase 2 | .85 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Purchase 3 | .56 | .53 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Referral 1 | .40 | .36 | .57 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Referral 2 | .50 | .45 | .64 | .71 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Referral 3 | .69 | .66 | .59 | .52 | .68 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Trust 1 | .41 | .35 | .49 | .60 | .64 | .53 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Trust 2 | .42 | .37 | .45 | .60 | .56 | .49 | .71 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Trust 3 | .44 | .42 | .52 | .64 | .61 | .55 | .72 | .77 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. Commit1 | .44 | .38 | .62 | .62 | .70 | .57 | .60 | .50 | .61 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11. Commit 2 | .39 | .32 | .61 | .64 | .65 | .52 | .61 | .52 | .62 | .82 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12. Commit 3 | .42 | .38 | .61 | .65 | .69 | .56 | .60 | .50 | .63 | .80 | .82 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13. Intimacy 1 | .46 | .38 | .58 | .65 | .64 | .50 | .59 | .47 | .56 | .64 | .65 | .67 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14. Intimacy 2 | .46 | .44 | .59 | .59 | .62 | .50 | .59 | .44 | .50 | .61 | .62 | .65 | .79 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15. Intimacy 3 | .39 | .37 | .52 | .56 | .58 | .49 | .61 | .53 | .62 | .61 | .63 | .68 | .64 | .66 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16. Identify 1 | .39 | .40 | .41 | .44 | .51 | .50 | .59 | .49 | .57 | .53 | .53 | .58 | .47 | .49 | .58 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17. Identify 2 | .49 | .45 | .51 | .51 | .58 | .57 | .69 | .58 | .67 | .58 | .56 | .59 | .53 | .52 | .59 | .72 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18. Identify 3 | .49 | .46 | .51 | .52 | .58 | .58 | .63 | .52 | .59 | .55 | .55 | .58 | .55 | .59 | .60 | .72 | .74 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 19. Reciprocity 1 | .53 | .47 | .45 | .37 | .47 | .58 | .53 | .54 | .60 | .48 | .42 | .45 | .39 | .42 | .51 | .61 | .68 | .63 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 20. Reciprocity 2 | .41 | .37 | .46 | .48 | .49 | .53 | .58 | .58 | .65 | .54 | .50 | .52 | .45 | .46 | .57 | .60 | .63 | .61 | .75 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 21. Reciprocity 3 | .49 | .44 | .43 | .39 | .45 | .54 | .56 | .54 | .62 | .46 | .42 | .44 | .42 | .45 | .52 | .63 | .66 | .65 | .82 | .77 | 1 | | | | | | |
| 22. Visit | .46 | .49 | .54 | .37 | .49 | .52 | .42 | .41 | .42 | .41 | .41 | .44 | .40 | .46 | .47 | .42 | .45 | .46 | .45 | .44 | .48 | 1 | | | | | |
| 23. Read | .49 | .49 | .56 | .40 | .52 | .54 | .42 | .39 | .44 | .44 | .44 | .47 | .44 | .48 | .46 | .39 | .43 | .45 | .43 | .42 | .46 | .88 | 1 | | | | |
| 24. Share | .48 | .50 | .52 | .31 | .48 | .53 | .42 | .39 | .41 | .39 | .41 | .45 | .40 | .44 | .46 | .46 | .44 | .47 | .43 | .42 | .50 | .83 | .83 | 1 | | | |
| 25. Like | .48 | .49 | .55 | .40 | .50 | .55 | .44 | .40 | .46 | .43 | .43 | .46 | .44 | .46 | .47 | .43 | .46 | .47 | .45 | .44 | .59 | .87 | .89 | .86 | 1 | | |
| 26. Comment | .49 | .51 | .50 | .33 | .46 | .52 | .42 | .39 | .41 | .39 | .39 | .43 | .41 | .47 | .43 | .43 | .43 | .46 | .45 | .42 | .50 | .84 | .81 | .88 | .88 | 1 | |

McDonald's (1999) omega coefficient (ω), reported in Table 15, was calculated for each construct to assess reliability. Reliability of the scales was good with coefficient values greater than .80 (Kline, 2011). The AVE of all constructs was greater than .50 (reported in Table 15), which provided evidence of convergent validity for each construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, significant factor loadings (reported in Table 16) supported convergent validity of the constructs (Hair et al., 2005).

Table 15

Reliability Coefficients of the Latent Constructs

| Construct | ω | AVE |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----|
| Facebook relationship strength | .97 | .86 |
| Relationship quality | .93 | .74 |
| Trust | .89 | .73 |
| Commitment | .93 | .81 |
| Intimacy | .88 | .71 |
| Identification | .89 | .72 |
| Reciprocity | .92 | .74 |
| Purchase intentions | .87 | .69 |
| Referral intentions | .84 | .65 |

The measurement model. Following the two-step modeling procedure advocated by Kline (2011), the measurement model was run prior to the structural models. To establish model identification, the variance of each construct was fixed to 1. Model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2_{(288, n = 416)} = 921.22$, scaling correction factor = 1.2649, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.07, .08)} = .07$; CFI = .92; TLI = .91; SRMR = .07. While modification indices provided by MPlus suggested correlating residuals of many indicators would improve model fit, acceptable model fit for the hypothesized model did not necessitate post-hoc model modifications. Table 16 lists all factor loadings and Table 17 reports factor variances and covariances in the measurement model. Table 18 reports the amount of variance accounted for (R^2) in each indicator by its respective latent construct.

Table 16

Factor Loadings and Residuals for the Qualtrics Panel Measurement Model

| | Factor Loadings | | | Error Variances | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----|--------|-----------------|-----|--------|
| | Std. Est. | SE | p | Std. Est. | SE | p |
| Facebook relationship strength | | | | | | |
| Visit | .92 | .01 | < .001 | .15 | .02 | < .001 |
| Read | .92 | .01 | < .001 | .15 | .02 | < .001 |
| Share | .91 | .01 | < .001 | .17 | .03 | < .001 |
| Like | .95 | .01 | < .001 | .09 | .01 | < .001 |
| Comment | .92 | .01 | < .001 | .16 | .02 | < .001 |
| Trust | | | | | | |
| Trust 1 | .85 | .02 | < .001 | .28 | .04 | < .001 |
| Trust 2 | .83 | .02 | < .001 | .32 | .04 | < .001 |
| Trust 3 | .89 | .02 | < .001 | .22 | .03 | < .001 |
| Commitment | | | | | | |
| Commit 1 | .90 | .02 | < .001 | .20 | .03 | < .001 |
| Commit 2 | .90 | .01 | < .001 | .19 | .03 | < .001 |
| Commit 3 | .90 | .02 | < .001 | .18 | .03 | < .001 |
| Intimacy | | | | | | |
| Intimacy 1 | .86 | .02 | < .001 | .25 | .04 | < .001 |
| Intimacy 2 | .87 | .02 | < .001 | .25 | .04 | < .001 |
| Intimacy 3 | .79 | .03 | < .001 | .38 | .05 | < .001 |
| Identification | | | | | | |
| Identify 1 | .82 | .02 | < .001 | .33 | .04 | < .001 |
| Identify 2 | .87 | .02 | < .001 | .24 | .03 | < .001 |
| Identify 3 | .86 | .02 | < .001 | .26 | .03 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity | | | | | | |
| Reciprocity 1 | .89 | .02 | < .001 | .21 | .03 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 2 | .86 | .03 | < .001 | .26 | .04 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 3 | .91 | .02 | < .001 | .18 | .03 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality | | | | | | |
| Trust | .90 | .02 | < .001 | .20 | .04 | < .001 |
| Commitment | .87 | .02 | < .001 | .25 | .04 | < .001 |
| Intimacy | .88 | .03 | < .001 | .24 | .05 | < .001 |
| Identify | .89 | .02 | < .001 | .21 | .04 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity | .78 | .04 | < .001 | .39 | .06 | < .001 |
| Purchase intentions | | | | | | |
| Purchase 1 | .93 | .01 | < .001 | .14 | .03 | < .001 |
| Purchase 2 | .90 | .02 | < .001 | .19 | .04 | < .001 |
| Purchase 3 | .63 | .04 | < .001 | .60 | .06 | < .001 |
| Referral intentions | | | | | | |
| Referral 1 | .76 | .03 | < .001 | .42 | .05 | < .001 |
| Referral 2 | .85 | .02 | < .001 | .28 | .04 | < .001 |
| Referral 3 | .80 | .03 | < .001 | .37 | .05 | < .001 |

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; SE = Standard Error.

Table 17

Factor Variances and Covariances for the Qualtrics Panel Measurement Model

| | Std. Est. | SE | p |
|--|-----------|-----|--------|
| Relationship quality | 1.00 | | |
| Relationship quality with Facebook relationship strength | .63 | .03 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality with Purchase intentions | .64 | .04 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality with Referral intentions | .93 | .02 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength | 1.00 | | |
| Facebook relationship strength with Purchase intentions | .59 | .04 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength with Referral intentions | .63 | .04 | < .001 |
| Purchase intentions | 1.00 | | |
| Purchase intentions with Referral intentions | .73 | .05 | < .001 |
| Referral intentions | 1.00 | | |

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; SE = Standard Error.

Table 18

Variance Explained in Each Indicator by the Latent Factor

| | R ² | SE | p |
|---------------|----------------|-----|--------|
| Visit | .85 | .02 | < .001 |
| Read | .86 | .02 | < .001 |
| Share | .83 | .03 | < .001 |
| Like | .91 | .01 | < .001 |
| Comment | .84 | .02 | < .001 |
| Trust 1 | .72 | .04 | < .001 |
| Trust 2 | .68 | .04 | < .001 |
| Trust 3 | .78 | .03 | < .001 |
| Commit 1 | .80 | .03 | < .001 |
| Commit 2 | .81 | .03 | < .001 |
| Commit 3 | .82 | .03 | < .001 |
| Intimacy 1 | .75 | .04 | < .001 |
| Intimacy 2 | .75 | .04 | < .001 |
| Intimacy 3 | .62 | .05 | < .001 |
| Identify 1 | .67 | .04 | < .001 |
| Identify 2 | .76 | .03 | < .001 |
| Identify 3 | .75 | .03 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 1 | .79 | .03 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 2 | .74 | .04 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity 3 | .82 | .03 | < .001 |
| Trust | .80 | .04 | < .001 |
| Commitment | .75 | .04 | < .001 |
| Intimacy | .77 | .05 | < .001 |

(table continues)

| | R^2 | SE | p |
|----------------|-------|------|--------|
| Identification | .79 | .04 | < .001 |
| Reciprocity | .61 | .06 | < .001 |
| Purchase 1 | .86 | .03 | < .001 |
| Purchase 2 | .81 | .04 | < .001 |
| Purchase 3 | .40 | .06 | < .001 |
| Referral 1 | .58 | .05 | < .001 |
| Referral 2 | .72 | .04 | < .001 |
| Referral 3 | .64 | .05 | < .001 |

Note. SE = Standard Error.

Structural models. Multiple structural models were run to examine relationships among constructs in the model. The partial mediation model, shown in Figure 5, testing all direct and indirect effects was run first.

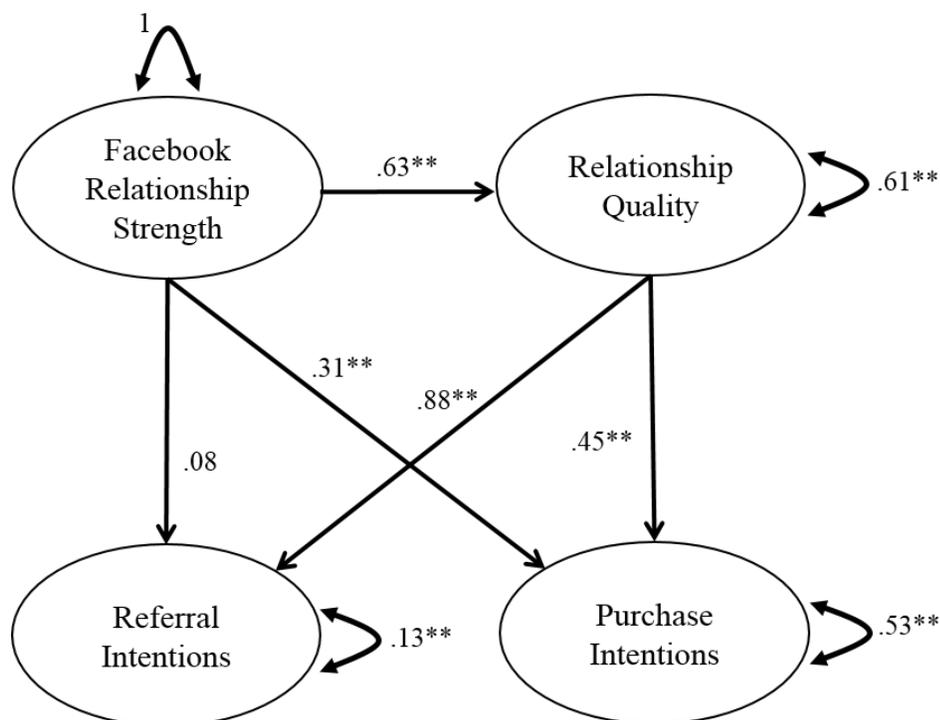


Figure 5. The partial mediation model for the Qualtrics panel including standardized coefficients. Note. ** $p < .001$.

The model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2_{(288, n=416)} = 921.22$, scaling correction factor = 1.2649, $p < .001$;

$RMSEA_{(.07, .08)} = .07$; CFI = .92; TLI = .91; SRMR = .07. Parameter estimates of direct and

indirect effects are reported in Table 19. The non-significant path from Facebook relationship strength to referral intentions was removed from the model, resulting in a degradation of model fit, $\chi^2_{(289, n=416)} = 923.98$, scaling correction factor = 1.2646, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.07, .08)} = .07$; CFI = .92; TLI = .91; SRMR = .08. However, a likelihood ratio test using the scaling correction factor revealed that the degradation was not significant, $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 1.36$, $p = .24$. To examine whether removing the direct effect from Facebook relationship strength to purchase intentions resulted in a significant degradation in model fit, the full mediation model was run. Model fit degraded slightly, $\chi^2_{(290, n=416)} = 946.46$, scaling correction factor = 1.2643, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.07, .08)} = .07$; CFI = .92; TLI = .91; SRMR = .08. A significant likelihood ratio test resulted in the retention of the model including the direct effect from Facebook relationship strength to purchase intentions as removing the parameter resulted in a significant degrade in model fit, $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 24.13$, $p < .001$. Direct and indirect effects, standardized values, standard errors, and p -values for the partial mediation and retained model are reported in Table 19. Figure 6 represents the retained model, including standardized path coefficients.

Table 19

Estimates of Direct and Indirect Effects

| | Estimate | Std. Est. | SE | p |
|--|----------|-----------|-----|--------|
| Partial Mediation Model | | | | |
| Direct Effects | | | | |
| Facebook relationship strength → Referral intentions | 0.04 | .08 | .05 | 0.10 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Purchase intentions | 0.33 | .31 | .06 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality | 0.35 | .63 | .03 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality → Referral intentions | 0.79 | .88 | .04 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality → Purchase intentions | 0.85 | .45 | .06 | < .001 |
| Indirect Effects | | | | |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality → Referral intentions | 0.28 | .55 | .04 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality → Purchase intentions | 0.30 | .28 | .04 | < .001 |

(table continues)

| | Estimate | Std. Est. | SE | p |
|--|----------|-----------|-----|--------|
| Retained Model | | | | |
| Direct Effects | | | | |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality | 0.36 | .64 | .03 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Purchase intentions | 0.30 | .28 | .06 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality → Referral intentions | 0.84 | .93 | .02 | < .001 |
| Relationship quality → Purchase intentions | 0.89 | .47 | .06 | < .001 |
| Indirect Effects | | | | |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality → Referral intentions | 0.30 | .59 | .03 | < .001 |
| Facebook relationship strength → Relationship quality → Purchase intentions | 0.32 | .30 | .05 | < .001 |

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; SE = Standard Error.

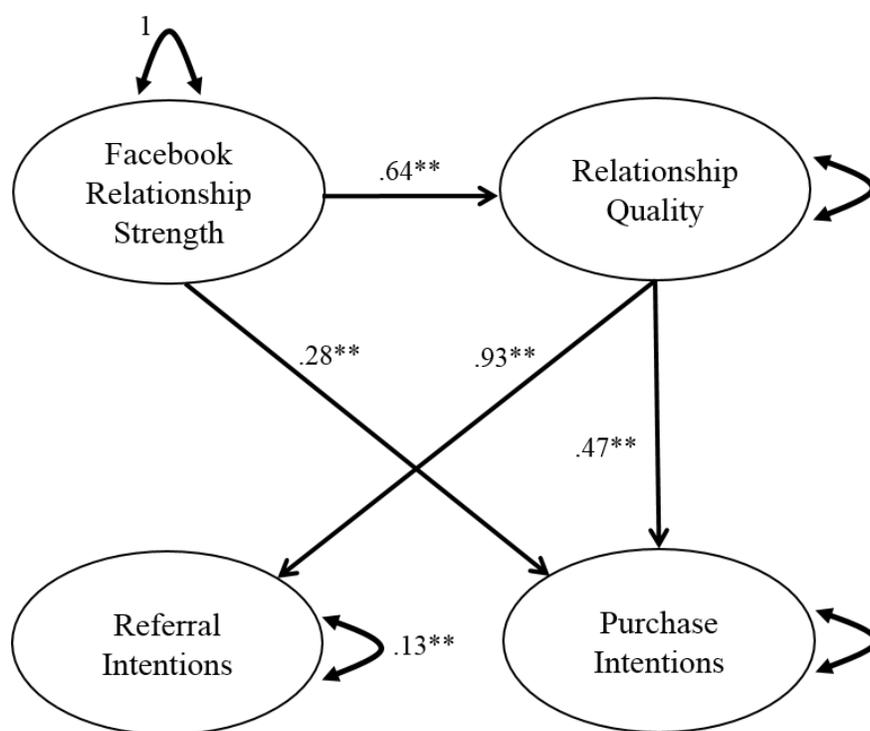


Figure 6. The retained structural model and standardized coefficients for the Qualtrics panel.

Note. ** $p < .001$.

In the retained model, the path from Facebook relationship strength to relationship quality indicated that for every 1 standard deviation increase in Facebook relationship strength, there was a .64 standard deviation increase in relationship quality. For every 1 standard deviation increase in Facebook relationship strength, purchase intentions increased by .28 standard

deviation. Finally, a 1 standard deviation increase in relationship quality resulted in a .93 standard deviation increase in referral intention and a .47 increase in purchase intentions.

RQ1: Which Facebook user behaviors increase the overall level of engagement of Facebook followers? To answer the first research question, results from the measurement model were examined. According to Brown (2006), standardized loadings greater than .30 or .40 indicate salient factors. The standardized factor loadings from the measurement model suggested all five indicators were moderate to strong indicators of Facebook relationship strength. The strongest indicator was like and the weakest indicator was comment. Using R^2 values, the amount of variance in the indicator explained by the construct Facebook relationship strength was examined. The indicator like had the highest R^2 , with Facebook relationship strength explaining 91% of the variance in this indicator. The indicator with the lowest R^2 was share, with 83% of the variance explained.

RQ2: Does the level of engagement of Facebook followers improve the quality of their relationship with the team? The path between Facebook relationship strength and relationship quality was examined to answer the second research question. The retained structural model accounts for 40% of the variance in relationship quality construct ($R^2 = .40$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$). Figure 6 illustrates the retained structural model including the standardized regression coefficient and the residual variance of the endogenous construct. In addition, the standardized coefficient between Facebook relationship strength and relationship quality indicated a significant and positive relationship. More engagement on Facebook led to stronger fan relationships.

RQ3: Does the level of engagement of Facebook followers influence their purchase and referral intentions? To examine whether Facebook fans' level of engagement with the team's Facebook page impacted their purchase and referral intentions, the paths in the retained

model were examined. As reported in Table 19 and shown in Figure 6, the direct path from Facebook relationship strength to referral intentions was not significant. However, the path between Facebook relationship strength and purchase intentions was significant and the standardized regression coefficient indicated a positive relationship. For every 1 standard deviation change in Facebook relationship strength, there was a .28 standard deviation increase in purchase intentions. Thus, more engaged fans had greater intentions to purchase tickets and merchandise.

RQ4: Does relationship quality mediate the relationship between Facebook engagement and purchase and referral intentions? While the direct effect from Facebook relationship strength to purchase intentions was significant in the partial mediation model, relationship quality also mediated this relationship. The indirect effect through relationship quality to purchase intentions was significant and positive (.30). More engagement on Facebook led to greater relationship quality, resulting in greater intentions to purchase tickets and merchandise. Additionally, the indirect effect through relationship quality to referral intentions was significant and positive (.59). More engaged Facebook fans were likely to have stronger relationship quality and greater intentions to refer others to attend games.

Type of content. *RQ5: What types of information do Facebook followers prefer to receive from teams on Facebook?* Descriptive statistics and frequencies on respondents' answers to the question, "On a scale of 1-7, how important is the following information posted on Facebook by the (favorite team) to you?," were run using SPSS. These were examined to answer the fifth research question. Means and standard deviations for each type of content are reported in Table 20. Frequency data are reported in Table 21.

Table 20

Means and Standard Deviations of Content Type Ratings

| Type of Post | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Posts about a sponsor of the team | 3.94 | 1.80 |
| Fan contests | 4.94 | 1.71 |
| Ticket giveaways | 5.22 | 1.79 |
| Merchandise giveaways | 5.13 | 1.77 |
| Fan polls | 4.63 | 1.78 |
| Questions posted by the team | 4.78 | 1.72 |
| Posts by the team requesting a like | 4.32 | 1.86 |
| Posts about the mascot | 3.90 | 1.89 |
| Posts about dancers/cheerleaders | 3.69 | 1.94 |
| Posts about the arena | 4.34 | 1.75 |
| Posts about personnel | 4.71 | 1.71 |
| Posts about an upcoming game | 5.13 | 1.74 |
| Posts about players | 5.27 | 1.65 |
| Behind-the-scenes information | 4.96 | 1.73 |
| Score-related posts | 5.16 | 1.71 |
| Post-game recaps | 5.03 | 1.69 |
| Posts about player movement | 5.13 | 1.69 |
| Posts about player injury | 5.18 | 1.65 |

Table 21

Frequencies of the Ratings of Type of Content Posted on Facebook

| Type of Content | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Posts about a sponsor of the team | 13.6 | 9.1 | 13.8 | 23.0 | 17.6 | 11.5 | 8.9 |
| Fan contests | 6.1 | 4.9 | 5.6 | 16.9 | 23.4 | 19.7 | 20.8 |
| Ticket giveaways | 6.6 | 3.7 | 4.2 | 15.7 | 15.0 | 21.8 | 30.4 |
| Merchandise giveaways | 5.9 | 4.4 | 6.1 | 14.5 | 19.2 | 18.5 | 28.8 |
| Fan polls | 8.4 | 6.1 | 6.6 | 21.1 | 22.2 | 15.9 | 17.1 |
| Questions posted by the team | 6.3 | 5.9 | 7.3 | 18.5 | 22.5 | 19.4 | 17.6 |
| Posts by the team requesting a like | 9.6 | 11.2 | 9.1 | 19.2 | 19.0 | 15.5 | 13.8 |
| Posts about the mascot | 14.8 | 12.9 | 11.2 | 17.8 | 19.2 | 12.4 | 9.1 |
| Posts about dancers/cheerleaders | 19.2 | 12.2 | 12.2 | 19.9 | 14.1 | 10.3 | 9.6 |
| Posts about the arena | 9.1 | 8.7 | 7.0 | 25.3 | 21.8 | 13.6 | 11.9 |
| Posts about personnel | 7.0 | 5.6 | 6.3 | 21.1 | 22.7 | 18.5 | 16.2 |
| Posts about an upcoming game | 5.9 | 4.9 | 5.4 | 12.4 | 20.8 | 22.5 | 25.5 |
| Posts about players | 5.6 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 13.3 | 20.4 | 26.5 | 25.5 |
| Behind-the-scenes information | 6.1 | 5.4 | 6.1 | 15.2 | 21.3 | 22.2 | 21.1 |
| Score-related posts | 6.1 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 14.5 | 22.5 | 20.6 | 26.2 |
| Post-game recaps | 5.6 | 4.7 | 4.9 | 16.2 | 22.7 | 21.1 | 22.2 |
| Posts about player movement | 5.4 | 5.2 | 3.5 | 14.1 | 21.5 | 24.6 | 23.2 |
| Posts about player injury | 4.9 | 4.0 | 4.9 | 13.1 | 22.2 | 24.4 | 23.9 |

Note: 1 = very unimportant; 7 = very important.

The four posts with the highest means included posts about players, ticket giveaways, player injury, and scores. Three types of posts tied for the fifth highest mean including posts about player movement, posts about upcoming games, and merchandise giveaways. Posts about dancers, cheerleaders, mascots, and sponsors were the least important types of content posted.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Relationship marketing can be a useful marketing strategy in sport because devoted fans are vital to success for professional sport teams (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Funk & Pastore, 2000; Kim et al., 2011b; Lachowetz et al., 2001) and sport teams already have customer bases who desire connections with teams (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). Engaging customers on social media, and specifically on Facebook, gives professional sport teams the opportunity to build relationships with customers (Abeza et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2011b; Williams & Chinn, 2010) that could result in long-term, stable customer bases. In sport, social media can be relationship marketing tools if they are used to build relationships with fans instead of merely disseminate information. However, little research has explored the usefulness of Facebook as a relationship marketing tool or attempted to understand its potential to build relationships with customers, especially in professional sport.

Hutter et al. (2013) highlighted that marketing communications have been transformed by social media, which have changed how consumers communicate with companies and each other. While there is a growing body of literature investigating Twitter as a communication tool, most often for professional athletes, research on Facebook remains limited, especially in professional sport. In fact, few studies examining the use of Facebook specifically by professional sport teams were found (e.g., Miranda et al., 2014; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2011). Multiple researchers (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Kim et al., 2011a; Kim et al., 2011b; Pentina et al., 2013) call for more research into the use of Facebook as a marketing tool in professional sport, including its potential effects on consumer behavior. Subsequently, this study sought to explicate whether the use of Facebook by teams in the NBA had an impact on customer

relationships and consumer behavioral intentions including purchase and referral intentions. This study endeavored to expand understanding of what content customers of sport teams consider important on Facebook, especially as a central tenet of relationship marketing is finding out what customers want and providing it to them (Abeza et al., 2013; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Two separate convenience samples, a Facebook sample and a Qualtrics panel, were used in this study. The following discussion addresses the results of each sample separately and then discusses the differences and similarities found in the separate groups.

The Facebook Sample

The Facebook sample findings partially support those of the general business literature, which suggest engagement on social media impacts consumer behaviors and business outcomes. In this sample, individuals who reported higher levels of engagement on Facebook, measured by how often they visited the page, read posted content, liked a post, commented on a post, or shared a post, also reported higher scores on the relationship quality scale. Rishika et al. (2013) found this same effect. While Ferrand et al. (2010), Goh et al. (2013), Hutter et al. (2013), Mangold and Faulds (2009), and Ramsaran-Fowdar and Fowdar (2013) found that using social media could have positive impacts on purchase behavior, no direct effects from Facebook relationship strength to referral or purchase intentions were found in this sample. The lack of direct effects on purchase or referral intentions mirrors the findings of Pöyry et al. (2013), who also found no direct impact of Facebook engagement on the likelihood to purchase products or refer others to the company. However, results from the Facebook sample indicate relationship quality does mediate the relationship between Facebook engagement and purchase and referral intentions, resulting in significant indirect effects on consumer behaviors. This supports the suggestion of Buhler and Nufer (2010) that strong relationships lead to customer

recommendations and positive word-of-mouth. Additionally, the mediated relationships between Facebook relationship strength and purchase and referral intentions provide support for the notion that it is the impact of engagement on relationship strength that makes social media effective marketing tools, as proposed by Jahn and Kunz (2012) and Pronschinske et al. (2012). Sport marketers should focus their Facebook marketing on increasing relationship quality between customers and teams, which increases the likelihood customers will attend games and purchase merchandise. This could be accomplished by expending resources to determine what information customers find important or determining what types of social media content will engage them. For example, teams could hire one of the many marketing research firms with expertise in social media to review and analyze their Facebook content and then consult with the firms' social media experts to improve their content strategy.

One of the goals of this study was to delineate the different impacts specific engagement behaviors have on Facebook relationship strength. In this sample, more passive engagement behaviors including visiting the page, reading content, and liking posts had a stronger relationship with the Facebook relationship construct. This should encourage sport marketers to drive traffic to their Facebook pages by posting meaningful and interesting content. For example, special interest stories or behind-the-scenes videos may capture the attention of sport consumers and encourage them to check the page again for future stories. Potentially, a repeated feature released at a consistent time will provide a meaningful reason for customers to regularly check the team's Facebook page and explore additional content. Furthermore, because the indicator like had the strongest relationship with the construct Facebook relationship strength, NBA teams should curate and post content that is valuable to customers, which will foster more likes. As mentioned previously, teams also need to put time and resources into determining what types of

content are important to their customers and then use this information to drive content strategy. A customer-focused content strategy will result in more customers visiting the page, reading content, and clicking the like icon.

While prior research advocates for encouraging conversations on social media (Heinonen, 2011; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray et al., 2012; Woodcock et al., 2011), commenting on a post had the smallest loading in this sample. Thus, encouraging dialogue may not be as important as social media pundits and previous researchers have suggested. However, encouraging commenting does allow sport teams to examine fan sentiment, tap into what fans want, and learn from fan suggestions and opinions, which may make it useful regardless of its impact on Facebook relationship strength. For example, if a team considers a new logo, marketers could post new logo options on Facebook and ask followers to submit feedback. Then, the team could examine this feedback and learn what fans think, not only of new designs, but of changing the logo in general. This provides insight into how consumers perceive the organization in terms of history and image. As another example, teams could post questions such as, “What are your takeaways from tonight’s game?” Then, staff could categorize consumers’ opinions and thoughts to determine general sentiment or address specific issues mentioned in the comments.

Sharing a post had the second smallest loading in this sample. Malhotra et al. (2013) proposed sharing content might be more important than other types of engagement on Facebook and might indicate a stronger connection to an organization, which was not supported by this study. NBA teams would be better served by measuring the strength of Facebook followers’ relationships based on how often they visit the page or like content. However, even if sharing content does not indicate a stronger individual customer connection to the organization, it may still be an important behavior to cultivate because sharing content expands the reach of teams’

information to friends of their Facebook followers. Content shares are a form of electronic word-of-mouth and may be perceived as more trustworthy by an individual's network making them important behaviors to encourage (Hopkins, 2013). This electronic word-of-mouth might be especially valuable because these comments impact profitability, specifically in the NBA, as Lachowetz et al. (2001) found that 25-40% of new season ticket holders were a result of referrals from current season ticket holders. Even though sharing content does not indicate a stronger relationship between individual customers and teams, encouraging this behavior simply by asking that the content teams post is shared increases the chances other consumers will see the content and decide to follow the team on Facebook. An increase in followers means an increase in the number of people who are visiting the page, reading content, and potentially liking content, all of which are behaviors that have a greater impact on Facebook relationship strength and ultimately can improve relationship quality.

Understanding what customers want and delivering it are important parts of relationship marketing strategy (Abeza et al., 2013; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Specifically, Askool and Nakata (2011) recommended organizations determine customer needs on social media. In an attempt to uncover NBA customers' needs, this study asked Facebook users what types of teams' Facebook posts were important to them. Interestingly, the types of information these customers want do not appear to be congruent with relationship marketing theory and are analogous to simple information dissemination. Instead of desiring content that connects them personally to the players and coaches and engages them in conversations, sport consumers in this study preferred content about player statuses and game results. Respondents rated posts about players, player movement, player injury, behind-the-scenes information, and scores as the most important. In sport, Thompson et al. (2014) also found behind-the-scenes content was important

to sport social media consumers. While posts about players and behind-the-scenes information build relationships with customers, the other three most popular types of posts simply share information. Potentially, sport consumers merely want to use Facebook as another communication channel.

Additionally, respondents were uninterested in information about sponsors, cheerleaders and dancers, and the mascot, suggesting customers connecting with NBA teams on Facebook are not interested in ancillary information not directly related to the team and its players. Individual teams should consider whether there is value in creating and posting content about these groups, which may depend on the history of their dance teams or mascots. Additionally, sport teams should consider whether mascots and dance teams are important to their fan base in general to determine if it makes sense to continue to support them.

It is necessary to note that, in general, respondents rated all types of information as unimportant to them. One explanation for this might be a low level of relationship quality, a low number of season ticket holders in the group (1%), or the low percentage of individuals attending games during the 2013-2014 season (83% attended no games). Means indicated this group does not engage with content often, which also suggests their attachment to the team might be low. Potentially, the overall low ratings of types of content reveals respondents are unsure what types of information they want teams to post on Facebook. Finally, it also may indicate fans chose to give simple information higher ratings of importance because they are unaware of the engagement Facebook can facilitate between sport organizations and fans. Schultz and Peltier (2013) indicated the lack in engagement might not be in consumers' desire to participate, but in marketers' strategy, proposing marketers are not effectively using Facebook to encourage interaction with customers. Overall, these findings suggest each NBA team must first learn its

customers' needs on social media and then create a directed and planned social media content strategy that meets those needs.

The Qualtrics Panel

Results from the larger Qualtrics panel add support to the general business literature encouraging businesses to foster engagement on social media (Goh et al., 2013; Gummerus et al., 2012; Heinonen, 2011; Hutter et al., 2013; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lipsman et al., 2012; Peters et al., 2013; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Rishika et al., 2013; Smith, 2013; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2013; Williams & Chinn, 2010). All of the factor loadings for the indicators visit, read, like, comment, and share were salient, suggesting these are good measures of Facebook relationship strength. The more often users reported engaging in these behaviors, the higher their relationship quality and more likely they were to have intentions to purchase tickets and merchandise. Specifically, a significant, positive direct effect from engagement on Facebook to intentions to purchase was found. This finding is similar to that of Rishika et al. (2013) in the retail (wine and like products) industry who found engagement on social media led to more frequent visits, and Goh et al. (2013) in the retail clothing industry who found engagement led to increased purchases. Additionally, the significant direct effect from engagement to purchase intentions contradicts that of Pöyry et al. (2013) in the travel industry, who did not find that engagement on social media led to increased intentions to purchase. Effects may be more likely in the sport industry than in the travel industry because sport consumers desire an opportunity to connect with their favorite sport teams (Buhler & Nufer, 2010), which may not be true in the travel industry. Because higher levels of engagement on Facebook have a direct relationship with intentions to purchase, sport marketers should expend resources examining what types of content encourage engagement.

Results indicate there is not a significant direct effect from Facebook engagement to referral intentions, which supports the same finding by Pöyry et al. (2013). However, there were significant indirect effects of Facebook relationship strength on purchase and referral intentions as mediated by relationship quality. Jahn and Kunz (2012) and Pronschinske et al. (2012) suggested social media might be effective in impacting customer behavior because of the impacts of engagement on relationship quality. This lends support to the idea that it is important to focus social media marketing efforts on building and improving relationships. Sport marketers should be encouraged to design a Facebook marketing strategy aimed at enhancing customer relationships.

Factor loadings on the Facebook relationship strength measure indicate small differences in the importance of different engagement behaviors. While sharing content had the weakest loading, it was only .01 lower than visiting the page, reading content, or commenting on content. Engaging in these behaviors may be equally important for building a stronger relationship with the customers' favorite team on Facebook. The indicator like had the strongest loading on Facebook relationship strength, suggesting encouraging likes is the most important factor for increasing the connection between the customer and team. Sport marketers can encourage customers to like content by posting information their fans find important and relevant (Malhotra et al., 2013).

From a relationship marketing perspective, learning and meeting customer needs is vital (Grönroos, 1996), thus NBA teams should ask fans what they want from the team on social media to successfully use this channel. This study made an initial attempt to determine the types of content customers are seeking from teams on Facebook. Respondents were most interested in content about players, including player injury and movement. Some player-related content may

serve as a means of building a relationship, such as posts about player backgrounds or off-season activities, while other posts about player injury and movement are strictly informational. Another important type of content to this group, score-related posts, also is akin to information dissemination. Potentially, teams can meet the needs of their customers by using social media strictly as just another communication channel, which is in direct contrast to current literature in many industries (Heinonen, 2011; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Nair, 2011; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Rishika et al., 2013; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2013) that suggests organizations use social media as more than a communication channel and instead attempt to engage customers in content creation and conversation. Another potential explanation for the customers' desire for information-related content on Facebook may be ineffective use of the channel for creating conversations or encouraging dialogue by professional sport teams, giving customers little understanding of additional value that can be offered through Facebook. If a customer's favorite NBA team does not post content designed to elicit conversation and participation, then the customer may not realize that even sport teams can use Facebook as a two-way channel instead of just another way to update scores or report player information. Potentially, sport customers do not know whether their favorite NBA team would be receptive to customers' participation and thus prefer not to engage in a relationship until invited to do so.

Interestingly, posts about ticket giveaways and merchandise giveaways also were important to this group. Berry (1995) identified financial strategies as the first level of bonding in relationship marketing. Because respondents value these strategies, it may signify they still are in the early stages of bonding to a NBA team. This may pose a conundrum for NBA teams, since Berry (1995) stated that in the absence of these price discounts, customers will not return. While customers might respond to these financial bonding strategies, teams need to balance their use of

these strategies on Facebook to avoid cheapening their product and increase the chances of moving customers to the next two types of bonding, social and structural. Finally, information about dancers, cheerleaders, and sponsors was not important to respondents. Although sponsors may be willing to pay for exposure on Facebook, teams should consider tempering their promotion of sponsors to avoid alienating fans who are connecting on social media for more information about the team and its players.

Comparing and Contrasting the Samples

The lack of measurement invariance for the two samples means that statistical comparisons of their differences are not valid. However, conducting the analysis with two separate and distinct samples does strengthen the comparable findings of the study and potentially the generalizability to the population. Additionally, the differences found can be discussed in reference to the descriptive characteristics of the samples.

The Facebook relationship strength measure demonstrated initial support for reliability and validity in both samples, which encourages the use of the 8-point scale with defined points and inclusion of the indicators visits, reads, likes, comments, and shares as measures of Facebook engagement. Researchers should continue to examine the validity of the measure by using it with different populations and sport leagues. A case for the validity of the measure can be built by continually using the measure and comparing its psychometric properties across studies. A sport marketer for an NBA team could create a survey using this measure and send it to its Facebook followers to determine the level of engagement for individuals. Results from a team-facilitated questionnaire allows the team to review the engagement behaviors its customers are engaging in to measure if posted content is eliciting the desired responses.

Both samples had a statistically significant, positive path from Facebook relationship strength to relationship quality, indicating a team could potentially improve relationship quality by increasing the level of engagement on its page. This supports the finding by Rishika et al. (2013) that a higher level of activity on a company's social media page, the greater the positive impact on relationship quality. This can be done by posting content relevant to their customers. Additionally, it appears in both samples choosing to like content is the most important engagement behavior. Marketers for NBA teams should focus their attention on garnering likes.

According to relationship marketing theory, encouraging two-way communication is important to building relationships (Grönroos, 2004). Results of this study suggest passive communication (receiving feedback by how many followers like a post) is more likely to build a strong Facebook relationship. From a relationship marketing perspective, it is surprising more active communication, such as commenting on posts, is not a stronger indicator of Facebook relationship strength. Interestingly, the difference in impacts of specific engagement behaviors is more pronounced in the Facebook sample than the Qualtrics panel. This could be due to differences in the make-up of these two groups. For example, 13% of the Qualtrics panel are season ticket holders and more than 50% attended a game during the 2013-2014 season, while only 1% of the Facebook sample have season tickets and 17% attended a game during the 2013-2014 season. As a whole, the Qualtrics respondents likely have a stronger attachment to teams, making them more likely to comment on posts, while the Facebook sample respondents are less attached to the team in general. This is important for two reasons. First, there are differences between season ticket holders and non-season ticket holders that could impact their engagement on Facebook and purchase or referral intentions, and these should be examined in the future. Likely, a team's marketing strategy on Facebook should differ depending on which segment the

team is trying to reach. Second, the relationship between Facebook relationship strength and relationship quality is likely not unidirectional, meaning individuals who have a stronger relationship with the team are more likely to engage on Facebook, and individuals who engage on Facebook build stronger relationships with the team. Baird and Parasnis (2011), Dzamic (2012), and LaPointe (2012) suggested one difficulty associated with trying to quantify the impacts of social media engagement on consumer behaviors was understanding the directionality of the connection between engagement and relationship quality. Still, some type of measurement is necessary to validate the resources expended to use social media by sport teams.

In both samples, sharing a post also had one of the weakest loadings. In relationship marketing theory, structural bonding occurs when customers intertwine themselves with the organization (Berry, 1995). Because sharing a post broadcasts a person's affinity for and allegiance to a team to his or her network, sharing could be a form of structural bonding. In fact, Malhotra et al. (2013) stated that sharing content might be more important than other engagement types on Facebook. However, the fact that this loading was weaker than the loadings of the indicators likes, visits, reads, and in the Qualtrics panel comments, suggests it is not indicative of a stronger relationship with the team. Potentially, this could be due to a lack of understanding why posts are shared by teams' Facebook followers. For example, a post requesting a share to be entered into a contest might be shared strictly for a chance at free tickets and not because the individual is demonstrating an allegiance to the team. Also, negative posts may be shared by individuals who are fans of a team but are not highly attached and, therefore, do not participate in other engagement behaviors on Facebook.

The tests of the partial and full mediation models resulted in retaining the full mediation model in the Facebook sample and the purchase intention partial mediation model in the

Qualtrics panel. This means that direct effects from Facebook relationship quality to purchase and referral intentions were not significant in the Facebook sample but at least one of the direct effects was significant in the Qualtrics panel (Facebook relationship strength to purchase intentions). This difference could be due to the fact that over 50% of the Qualtrics attended a game last year and 13% were season ticket holders, making it logical that there was a higher likelihood to have intentions to purchase during the 2014-2015 season, whereas the Facebook sample was 1% percent season ticket holders, and 83% had attended no games during the 2013-2014 season, making them less likely to purchase tickets.

In both samples relationship quality mediated the relationship between Facebook relationship strength and purchase and referral intentions. As a result, NBA teams could benefit from closely examining their goals for marketing using Facebook and considering a shift from traditional transaction-focused marketing to a more relationship-based marketing approach. Because building strong relationships results in increased profitability (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Payne & Frow, 2000) and long-term loyalty (Williams & Chinn, 2010), using social media marketing from a relationship marketing perspective is worthwhile. In professional sport, this may mean less emphasis on measuring social media marketing by sales generated from the strategy to the improvement in relationship quality. This finding also supports the suggestion by Kim and Trail (2011) that relationship quality could be used to assess the impacts of relationship marketing tactics. Kim et al. (2011b) recommended the use of the SCTQRS by sport marketers to measure their customers' relationship quality. This survey could be periodically distributed through teams' social media channels, such as Facebook, to measure changes in overall relationship quality. Additionally, teams could use customer relationship management software

to track changes for specific individuals, such as each season ticket holder, partial season ticket holder, or single-game ticket holder.

Overall, results indicate that engaging customers on Facebook is an effective strategy for NBA teams to meet relationship marketing goals. NBA customers who are more highly engaged on Facebook with their favorite NBA team also have higher relationship quality with that team. Engaging customers on Facebook also has a potential direct impact on their intentions to purchase tickets and merchandise. While a direct effect on referral intentions was not found, relationship quality was found to mediate this relationship and transport the effect from engagement on Facebook to both purchase and referral intentions. The relationship-building potential of Facebook should encourage sport marketers to utilize the channel.

However, while Facebook is a useful channel for building and enhancing relationships fans, the types of content and exactly how teams can use Facebook remains to be explained. An initial examination of what types of content customers want on Facebook reveals that information about players and scores are most important to them. This is not congruent with much of the literature suggesting organizations, including professional sport teams, utilize social media as more than just another communication channel (Heinonen, 2011; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Nair, 2011; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Rishika et al., 2013; Sterne, 2010; Thackeray et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2013). Teams may consider conducting focus groups and surveys to more deeply examine the reasons why sport consumers connect on Facebook and the types of content consumers are seeking to better craft content strategy. Because the literature strongly supports engaging customers in conversation via social media, teams also could consider whether customer expectations are related to the team's current use of Facebook. Potentially, adding more engaging content will shift customer perceptions of the purpose of teams' Facebook pages

and added value following pages can provide for customers. It is important for sport marketers to continue to examine types of content since content that is not interesting will not be shared or liked, negatively impacting the usefulness of social media as marketing channels (Peters et al., 2013).

Recommendations for Future Research

Opportunities for related future research abound based on the results of this study and the extensive literature review. Additionally, the lack of information on the use of social media as marketing tools, and specifically their use as relationship marketing tools, legitimizes the need for research into a variety of aspects related to the use of social media in professional sport.

Multiple future research projects follow.

1. Conduct a sentiment analysis of comments on Facebook posts in the NBA. Peters et al. (2013) suggested organizations use sentiment analysis to examine what customers are saying on Facebook and how they are saying it. This can give sport marketers insight into what their fans think and what they want in the future, which are important considerations for relationship marketing strategy. Using content analysis, future research could examine what customers are saying relative to types of content teams are posting to illuminate how the information is being used by customers. This could allow NBA teams to understand what customers want on Facebook and how to connect with them to build relationships.
2. Explore the reasons customers share teams' Facebook posts. While Malhotra et al. (2013) proposed that shares on Facebook may indicate a stronger connection to the organization, this was not supported by this study. Although sharing content is not the strongest indicator of Facebook relationship strength, according to the results in this study, shares

are valuable because they act as word-of-mouth and help teams increase the reach of their content. Future research could investigate the reasons sport consumers share Facebook posts to discover types of content that will encourage this behavior to increase the reach of each team's content.

3. Test the same model in other professional sport leagues. Egan (2004) posited relationship marketing strategy may work differently for different businesses. Because of this, future research should test this same model in other professional sport leagues, such as the National Football League, Major League Baseball, the National Hockey League, Major League Soccer, and the Women's National Basketball Association, to determine whether social media marketing, measured by engagement on Facebook, impacts relationship quality and consumer behavioral intentions. Corroborating the findings of this study will help sport marketers justify expending greater resources on social media marketing.
4. Conduct comparisons of the effects of engagement on Facebook on relationship quality and behavioral intentions between season ticket holders and non-season ticket holders. One of the difficulties with measuring social media marketing is not knowing if already loyal customers engage online or if engagement increases loyalty and impacts behavioral intentions (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Dzamic, 2012; LaPointe, 2012). This model can be used to examine the differences in means and direct and indirect effects between season ticket holders and non-season ticket holders, which could better illuminate this relationship. Additionally, if these groups respond differently to social media marketing on Facebook, teams need to create separate strategies to reach these groups on social media.

5. Identify the reasons sport consumers use Facebook and other social media. While some researchers have examined the motivations for sport consumers connecting with sport teams on social media (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Clavio & Walsh, 2013; Mahan, 2011; Phua, 2012), they have done so from a communications perspective. Using a relationship marketing framework, future research could explore why sport consumers connect on Facebook with their favorite sport teams. Knowing why sport consumers connect with teams enables sport marketers to determine how Facebook and other social media can be used to facilitate and enhance relationships with customers.
6. Explore the types of content teams should post. While this study made an initial attempt to determine what types of content customers desire on Facebook, further research is needed to more clearly delineate the differences in importance of posted content. As each team's use of Facebook has evolved, longitudinal analysis of posted content and the interaction with that content could help researchers and marketers better understand what customers desire from teams on this channel.
7. Examine other types of social media. Social media are proliferating and constantly evolving. While the engagement behaviors differ between social media platforms, the impacts of higher levels of engagement on relationship quality and behavioral intentions could still be examined.
8. Investigate the impact of social media engagement on customer lifetime value. Since researchers have suggested customers who engage on social media will purchase more, future research should determine if a consumers' actual revenue stream is higher due to their participation with the sport organization on social media. In the marketing literature, Manchanda, Packard, and Pattabhiramaiah (2014) termed revenue generated based on

consumers' involvement in an online community social dollars, finding that involvement in a firm-sponsored online community increased consumers' expenditures. Research should examine if this phenomenon exists in the sport industry.

Conclusion

Traditional sport leagues such as the NBA can no longer rest on their laurels as competition for consumers' discretionary spending increases (Kim & Trail, 2011; Rein et al., 2006). As a result, professional sport teams must embrace new marketing strategies and channels. This study lends support to the use of new media, in this case Facebook, as a marketing tool, which Buhler and Nufer (2010) stated allow teams to communicate with consumers and provide them with added value. Also, results suggest that building and solidifying relationships with customers can improve franchise profitability by increasing intentions to purchase and refer. If these relationships can endure, teams that are able to do this successfully will have competitive advantages (Buhler & Nufer, 2010).

Many marketers still consider social media just another traditional marketing communications channel, instead of recognizing the differences (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010), and still use social media as one-way channels (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Instead of promoting ticket specials and games, marketers should consider how customers are using Facebook and recognize that the two-way nature of Facebook expands its ability to connect to and retain customers.

Potentially, the most important finding of this study is that there is a relationship between engagement on Facebook and relationship quality. Sport professionals should consider shifting their measurement of Facebook to its impact on relationship quality instead of its direct effects on purchases, especially as improved customer relationships lead to positive word-of-mouth comments (Buhler & Nufer, 2010), improved customer retention rates (Berry, 1995; Bush et al.,

2007; Kim & Trail, 2011), increased customer loyalty (Williams & Chinn, 2010), increased revenues and reduced costs (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Gummesson, 1999), and increased profitability (Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Payne & Frow, 2000).

While this study focused on NBA teams, marketers in other professional sport leagues should consider its implications for their teams. While the reasons fans use social media may differ across leagues, the fact that it has an impact on relationship quality should encourage other teams to consider its use as a relationship marketing tool. Additionally, reevaluating how Facebook and other social media channels are measured is an important consideration across all leagues. Marketers are increasingly required to prove the return on marketing investments (Rishika et al., 2013). In the case of the return on social media investments, return on objectives (Thompson et al., 2014) might be a better measure than number of ticket and merchandise sales that are attributed directly to social media marketing. This study supports this idea, suggesting that if professional sport organizations shift marketing strategy from transaction-based to relationship-based, then an important objective would be to increase relationship quality. Social media marketing then can be assessed based on its ability to do so.

Facebook is dynamic which requires both practitioners and researchers to remain knowledgeable and up-to-date about how changes impact the ability to reach customers (Thompson et al., 2014). As teams' use of this channel evolves, customer expectations of their own interaction and communication with the team could change. To effectively use social media, organizations need to learn and then address their consumers' needs on this channel (Schultz & Peltier, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013). Additionally, results should encourage researchers to recognize Facebook as an important social media channel to research as this study found a connection between engagement on Facebook, consumer behaviors, and relationship quality.

This, coupled with the fact that Facebook is still the most popular social media site (Duggan & Smith, 2014) legitimizes its use as a marketing channel and solidifies its position as a robust research area.

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Appendix A



Information Statement

The Department of Health, Sport and Exercise Sciences at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand marketing in the sport industry. This will entail your participation in the following web-based survey. Your participation is expected to take less than 10 minutes.

Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of marketing in the sport industry. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings and no personal identifiable information will be saved by the web-based survey system.

*It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your response.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completing the survey indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email irb@ku.edu.

Sincerely,

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Appendix B

NBA Fan Engagement Survey

1. Are you 18 years old or older?

- Yes
- No

2. Are you a fan of the National Basketball Association (i.e., do you watch or follow NBA basketball)?

- Yes
- No

3. Do you use social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)?

- Yes
- No

4. Which of the following professional sports leagues are you a fan of? (Check all that apply)

- National Basketball Association (NBA)
- National Football League (NFL)
- National Hockey League (NHL)
- Major League Baseball (MLB)
- Major League Soccer (MLS)
- Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA)
- None of the above

5. Please select your most favorite NBA team.

- Atlanta Hawks
- Boston Celtics
- Brooklyn Nets
- Charlotte Hornets
- Chicago Bulls
- Cleveland Cavaliers
- Dallas Mavericks
- Denver Nuggets
- Detroit Pistons
- Golden State Warriors
- Houston Rockets
- Indiana Pacers
- Los Angeles Clippers
- Los Angeles Lakers
- Memphis Grizzlies
- Miami Heat
- Minnesota Timberwolves
- Milwaukee Bucks
- New Orleans Pelicans
- New York Knicks
- Oklahoma City Thunder
- Orlando Magic
- Philadelphia 76ers
- Phoenix Suns
- Portland Trailblazers
- Sacramento Kings
- San Antonio Spurs
- Toronto Raptors
- Utah Jazz
- Washington Wizards

6. Did you have season tickets for the (favorite team) for the 2013-2014 season?

- Yes
- No

7. Approximately how many (favorite team's) games did you attend during the 2013-2014 season? (Please enter numbers only.)

8. Approximately how many team-licensed merchandise items (of the (favorite team's) did you purchase in the past year (July 2013 – June 2014)? (Please include any product purchased with the official team logo or other official team trademark. Please enter only numbers.)

9. On a scale of 1-7, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements related to the (favorite team)?

14. On a scale of 1-7, how important is the following information posted to Facebook by the (favorite team) to you?

| | Very Unimportant (1) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Very Important (7) |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Posts about a sponsor of the team | <input type="radio"/> |
| Fan contests | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ticket giveaways | <input type="radio"/> |
| Merchandise giveaways | <input type="radio"/> |
| Fan polls | <input type="radio"/> |
| Questions posted by the team | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts by the team requesting a like | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts about the mascot | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts about the dancers or cheerleaders | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts about the arena | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts about personnel (such as coaches, athletic trainers, general manager, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts about an upcoming game | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts about players | <input type="radio"/> |
| Behind-the-scenes information (such as interviews, videos, or articles about practice) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Score-related posts (in-game and post-game) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Post-game recaps | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts about player movement (including signings, trades, and cuts) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posts about player injury (including rehabilitation) | <input type="radio"/> |

15. Are you

- Male
 Female
 Prefer not to answer

16. Please enter your age (numbers only).

17. Select your ethnicity.

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

18. What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Prefer not to answer

19. Do you have any children under the age of 18 living with you?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

20. Select your highest completed level of education.

- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree
- Prefer not to answer

21. Select your 2013 household income before taxes.

- Less than \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$124,999
- \$125,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to answer

22. In which state do you currently reside?

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Puerto Rico
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming
- I do not reside in the United States