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(MASCOT) NATION: EXAMINING UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT ON COLLEGE FOOTBALL TEAMS' FACEBOOK PAGES

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(MASCOT) NATION: EXAMINING UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT
ON COLLEGE FOOTBALL TEAMS' FACEBOOK PAGES

by

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ABSTRACT

In the sport of college football, engagement with fans drives revenue for the sports teams and the athletic department; the more fans buy, the more money the school gets. This study examines the ways college football teams use Facebook to engage their publics, and how that engagement builds a sense of community. Specifically, it explores six teams that represent new college football teams, mid-major teams, and state flagship institution teams. Ultimately, it seeks to explain how social media can be a force in establishing and maintaining an online community.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC.....	Atlantic Coast Conference
BCS.....	Bowl Championship Series
C-USA.....	Conference USA
CFB.....	College Football
FBS.....	Football Bowl Subdivision
FCS.....	Football Championship Subdivision
GSU.....	Georgia State University
NCAA.....	National Collegiate Athletic Association
Pac-12.....	Pacific 12 Conference
SEC.....	Southeastern Conference
SNS.....	Social Networking Sites
UGC.....	User-Generated Content
USC.....	University of South Carolina
UTSA.....	University of Texas-San Antonio

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

CULTURE AND COLLEGE FOOTBALL

The term *nation* encompasses the idea that peoples of said nation share a common culture, a community, a history, a geographic presence, national symbols, and enemies (Anderson, 2006). To succeed in creating unity, a nation needs a forum for discussion and dissemination of these binding ties (Anderson, 2006). In the digital media age, social media, specifically social networking sites, provide an important forum for discussion of community issues (Men & Tsai, 2012), similar to the function the printed newspaper serves in Anderson's model. Using college football Facebook pages as a research field, this study seeks to explore the way universities use social media to create and maintain brand communities, to understand the ways universities engage fans on Facebook pages, and thus to develop a model of engagement on Facebook.

College football teams represent a distinct community, one that exists as part of a cultural fabric. College football teams represent cities, regions, industries, and states in their competitive play (Borucki, 2003). In the realm of football, both college and professional, the concept of the "nation" has been appropriated as a metaphor in naming a team's fan community, as in "Gamecock Nation" for the fans of the University of South Carolina. The use of the term

“nation” in naming a football team’s brand community suggests a distinctive role of football in American culture; fan communities share histories, traditions, and even enemies. Benedict Anderson’s concept of nationalism, explicated in *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 2006), suggests that groups of people unite as “*Imagined Communities*,” or nations, because of a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (p. 7) established in and through the mass media. Social media, such as Facebook, facilitate discussion between brands and fan communities and allow user-generated content to contribute to the cultural discussion. Specific to college football, teams have incentive to promote the strength of these fan-nations, as teams with strong cultural connections have greater financial success (Smith, 2009; Caro & Benton, 2012). Thus, SNS provide a rich terrain for examining how messages are shared to create collective identity (Schweitzer et. al., 1992; Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996; Borucki, 2003; Smith & Schwarz, 2003).

Using content analysis, previous studies (Sanderson, 2010; Hutchins, 2011; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012; Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012; McAllister, 2012) have found that social networking site (SNS) posts include photographs, videos, and text, including questions, to promote audience engagement through sharing, commenting, cross-posting, and liking. However, no study has explored the creation of the identities and communities of sports teams through SNS visual and textual messages. While content analysis has great power in explaining what is posted to social media, participant observation offers the ability to explore the deeper meaning of what is posted. This study’s methodology partially answers the call of Postill and Pink (2012) for an ethnography of social media to explore meanings of modern communication, as well as Nightingale’s (2012) challenge to

media ethnographers to go beyond established knowledge in explaining cultural exchange online.

This study employs a digital participant observation, following the pattern of a netnography (Kozinets, 2010), of six college football teams' Facebook activity. These six teams represent three common categories in the college football landscape: emerging college football teams; established mid-major college football teams; and teams at major flagship state universities. Facebook provides an ideal place to examine this exchange because it is the most popular SNS, with about 1 billion users. To do this, I observed the Facebook pages for three football seasons, and zeroed in on four weekends in the 2012 season to analyze the posts' content qualitatively. Then, using the qualitative analysis and the participant observation field notes, I discussed the nature of content on the page, both university made and fan made. Finally, I compared the themes that emerged from the analysis of the three levels of competitive play. Using the findings from that analysis, I developed a model of Facebook brand communities.

Within the field of journalism and mass communication, scholars broadly have addressed social media and social networking sites in regard to news organizations, advertising, public relations (e.g. Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012; Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme, 2012). Thus, the present study fits within the scope of journalism and mass communication research, and addresses the idea of the one-to-many model of communication (Berlo, 1960). Berlo's SMCR model explains mass communication as a **Sender** sending a **Message** over various **Channels** to **Receivers**. The model itself has evolved over time; its flaw is that the model does not allow receivers to send feedback to the sender, or allow

for content re-appropriation or aggregation. However, the core of Berlo's model remains intact: mass communication involves a person sending a message to the audience over varying channels, each of which has appropriate norms. Herein lies the focus of this study: to understand messages sent via Facebook.

1.1 THE STATE OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL

In the 2004-05 season, 20 college football programs changed conference affiliation in Division I-A to capture greater television revenue and national visibility. The Atlantic Coast Conference, in an effort to improve its football reputation and to play a lucrative conference championship game, lured three universities from the Big East Conference. The Big East then rebuilt its ranks with schools from Conference USA. C-USA added schools from the Western Athletic and Mid-American conferences. Ultimately, these moves marked a tidal shift in college athletic economics, as schools recognized the possibilities of revenue generated by football telecasts. These moves began a 10-year realignment of college football teams in efforts to capture new revenue, expand their fan footprints, and ultimately, build their brands (Staples, 2011).

When the landmark Supreme Court decision *NCAA v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, et al.* (1984) determined that individual schools, not the NCAA, had ownership rights of the televised product, college football began its shift toward a television-driven game. In the current television rights model, schools with national fan bases, such as the University of Texas or the University of Alabama, draw large television audiences and therefore claim larger television payouts than schools with small, regional fan bases, such as Appalachian State University or the University of Montana (Dunnivant, 2004). However, even a

small television audience, and a small game day attendance, can be lucrative for a school's athletic department. Marshall University, a school in this study, has a regional fan base and averages about 25,000 fans per game in its 38,000-seat stadium (Marshall, 2013). Yet, based on its revenue from its television contract and the attendance at its games, the football program largely subsidizes the expenses for the non-revenue sports of the university (NCAA, 2010b).

In an effort to garner television revenue, universities without football programs are turning to the sport as a way to bolster their athletic budgets and are finding success by doing so (Bogaczyk, 2011). Five universities have launched Division I football teams since 2009: Old Dominion University, 2009; the University of South Alabama, 2010; Georgia State University, 2010; Lamar University, 2010; and the University of Texas-San Antonio, 2011 (National Football Foundation, 2010). No school launched Division I football in 2012. Three schools launched in 2013: Mercer University, the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, and Stetson University. Kennesaw State University is set to launch its program in 2014. As these schools begin football programs, they are building a fan base of students, alumni, and people in their communities who might not have a connection to the school.

The decision to add a football program to build community support for the university aligns with research showing football's ability to grow sponsorship and revenue at other universities (Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008; Gau, Wann, & James, 2010). By adding football, schools give their communities an opportunity for entertainment, many times at an affordable price (Chang & Canode, 2002; Coates & Depken, 2011). Further, the addition of football has a documented positive impact on fan attendance and interest in other university

sports (Depken, Williams, & Wilson, 2011), state appropriations (Humphreys, 2006), and the quality of students (Smith, 2009).

In 2010, more than 49.6 million people attended college football games, setting a new record (NCAA, 2010a). In Division I alone, schools reported \$1.3 billion in revenue from their football programs (NCAA, 2010b). The revenue generated from football not only pays for the football program's own bills but also finances non-revenue sports, scholarships for athletes, athletic service staff, and, at a few universities, even academic positions and research. Indeed, the revenue of football goes a long way to support college athletics at large. College football teams have four primary sources of revenue, aside from subsidy and donation: ticket sales; concession sales; merchandise licensing; and television contracts (NCAA, 2010b). Television deals are generally tied to the school's conference and are negotiated as a group.

Ticket and concession sales revenue depends on attendance at games. Merchandising revenue depends on people buying the branded apparel from official sources. However, all three revenue streams can be expanded by growing a larger fan base. More fans mean higher attendance, more merchandise sold, and greater desire to watch games on television, all creating more revenue.

In sum, the current state of college football is one driven by revenue and perceived access to revenue. Because conferences share television earnings, teams desire to be in a competitive league that will draw large television audiences. Further, teams seek access to major bowl games and their associated television payouts. The drive to achieve these goals has been the primary source of instability in college football for the past decade. Further, the imperative of television revenue highlights the importance of fan culture, as a legion of fans

can directly translate into financial rewards for a team and a university. As college football becomes increasingly revenue driven, teams must further fan engagement and loyalty to capture consumer dollars (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011); thus, college football should be using social media as one tool for engagement.

1.2 THE STATE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The term *social media* encompasses a range of Internet outlets where users generate content and share it publicly. Within social media, social networking sites allow users to connect directly with other users to share content and information (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011). Social media has become ubiquitous, with Facebook alone hosting more than 1 billion users, while Twitter has more than 500 million (Smith, 2013). As such, social media has become a major tool for marketers and organizations to connect with audiences (Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012).

In the digital media age, marketers and brand managers working in public relations and advertising commonly employ social media and social networking sites to build relationships relative to their brands or products and to build consensus regarding decisions about that brand or product (Sanderson, 2010; Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012). Social media managers often imagine their audiences to be the people with whom they interact most and in the branding context view the audience as fans (Litt, 2012).

The ability to interact with a brand through social media can drive brand loyalty. Hutton and Fosdick (2011), in a longitudinal study of world social media use, found 60 percent of respondents were more likely to buy from a brand they followed on a social networking site. While some social media sites have a single

purpose—for example, Flickr is designed solely for photo sharing--social networking sites such as Facebook are designed to share photographs as well as other information. Multitask networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, receive significantly more traffic than single-task content sharing sites, such as blogs, YouTube, and Flickr. Hutton and Fosdick also found that microblogs, such as Twitter, are the driving force behind the phenomenon of “media meshing,” in which a user engages the same media using multiple devices, one of which is connected to the Internet. For example, media meshing occurs when someone watches a show on television and responds to it on Twitter, using a hashtag (#) associated with the show, such as #superbowl or #bigbangtheory. Altogether, these engagement tactics can build a brand’s reputation simply by strengthening its communication with its audience.

1.3 USEFULNESS OF STUDY

This study seeks to answer how varying competitive levels of college football use Facebook to build, enhance, and maintain brand communities, and what types of messages on these page built fan engagement. This study furthers social media research by exploring how communities are established and maintained online — an essential part of advertising, public relations, and marketing. It helps social media practitioners, particularly those in college football, to understand how the

Social media research: The modern communication age has brought about a participatory culture in online engagement (Williams & Zenger, 2012). Through social media and SNS, users can create and curate content from sources worldwide. Users can “share, comment on, appropriate, and remix” (p. 3) a

range of texts. Thus, social media communication fits in a dialogic model for idea exchange. Williams and Zenger describe this communication relationship as “participatory popular culture,” in which users engage visuals and text created by others or themselves to express their voices online. Similarly, Carpenter (2012) found that online identity in participatory popular culture comes from cross-cultural texts being read in cultural-specific settings. By examining the exchange of culture on a social networking site, this study builds on the work of Postill and Pink (2012) examining culture online. This study is among the first to explore the cultural meanings of photographs and graphics, in addition to text, posted to social networking sites (Postill & Pink, 2012). Thus, this research incorporates visual inquiry in a field dominated by textual analysis. It comes at a time when social media use continues to increase, but research exploring effective strategies for its use is still in the early stages (Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012).

Social media managers: This study’s findings should be useful to social media managers. Social networking allows corporations and organizations to expose their audiences to a range of messages (Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012; Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012; McAllister, 2012), and sending the wrong message through social networking can have long-term damaging effects (Hutchins, 2011) on an organization’s identity and its brand identities. Social media content creators and managers must understand the meanings of the messages they create for mass consumption (Barnett, Copeland, Makemson, & Motley, 2011). By understanding the role of visuals in sending these messages, social media managers can more effectively engage their audiences, and therefore, expand their brand presence. For college football

communicators, such as sports information directors, marketers, and social media managers, this study explores the social media visual messages created by three categories of schools: new football programs, established mid-major programs, and state flagship programs. While these categories do not represent all the variance in college athletic programs, they are typical of many schools and offer lessons for a range of programs. Additionally, research shows universities do not sufficiently craft messages for engagement (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012; Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012; McAllister, 2012); this study will provide guidance for crafting visual messages to engage university audiences.

1.4 SUMMARY

Online communities allow brands and organizations to quickly connect with their audiences. Further, they allow the audiences to connect to one another and share insights about the brand. For organizations with cultural implications, social media can serve as a venue for the maintenance and creation of the community. College football has a financial incentive to expand its fan base, and social media can provide a forum for the discussion of the culture associated with being a fan of an individual college football team. This research seeks to understand the types of messages being sent for three unique brand situations in college football, and to understand ways universities can engage fans with their brand.

The next chapter of this study discusses previous research about social media, college football, *Imagined Communities*, and netnography. Then, Chapter 3 explains the study's methodology. Chapter 4 discusses the six cases analyzed in this research. In Chapter 5, I report the findings of the analysis, and posit a model

of Facebook communication. In Chapter 6, I discuss the meanings of these findings, and their implications for researchers and social media practitioners. Finally, the conclusion discusses limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
SOCIAL MEDIA, COLLEGE FOOTBALL,
IMAGINED COMMUNITIES, AND NETNOGRAPHY

The social media phenomenon has intrigued scholars from anthropology, business, communication, and sociology. Primarily, scholarship has focused on how social media has changed interpersonal and group interaction. Regarding social media's application in sports communication, scholars have considered the engagement of coaches, players, and fans in the social media world (DeSarbo & Madrigal, 2012). Other scholars have examined how colleges and universities use social media to reach donors and supporters, as well as alumni (Linvill, McGee, and Hicks, 2012). In sum, social media scholarship explains the technology as a force for broad, multidirectional engagement.

Researchers exploring college football have examined cultural phenomena regarding the sport. Research discussed here will show fans tend to associate college football with a community, region, or state, and base their own identities on the fortunes of the team (Schweitzer, Zillmann, Weaver, & Luttrell, 1992; Knobloch-Westerwick, David, Eastin, Tamborini, & Greenwood, 2009). Studies have found that schools with successful college football programs see increased

academic respectability, donations, funding, and community support (Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008; Gau, Wann, & James, 2010). Researchers have argued that college football allows fans to express their culture in comparison to peer cultures and peer fan groups (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996).

The concept of *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 2006) is central to this dissertation's analysis of the use of social media in creating communities around college football teams. In his seminal work about nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson theorizes the role of print capitalism in the creation of nation states and the spread and sustenance of nationalism. Because nations consist of large populations dispersed across large geographic expanses—people for whom it is impossible to gather together at once and declare themselves a “nation”—they necessarily come into being through acts of imagination. As Anderson writes, “[T]he members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). The imagined community is thus constituted and perpetuated through cultural exchange, in large part by the mass media, Anderson suggests. The language of media communicates meanings that create a “deep, horizontal comradeship” that is essential to the building of a community (p. 11). What's more, these media exist in marketplaces, and market imperatives, along with cultural values and systems, shape media messages and compel their distribution. Media producers and consumers thus engage in cultural exchange that allows an “imagined” community to come into being, complete with cultural symbols and discourses.

The literature review in this chapter further explores the studies mentioned above as well as the concept of *Imagined Communities* and how it

applies to the creation and sustenance of football “nations.” I will show how this study builds on this existing literature. Further, I will demonstrate that research exploring social media as a cultural communication tool is in its infancy and will explain the value of research in this area.

2.1 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social networking sites provide a forum for two-way, or dialogic, communication among an organization or brand and its followers (Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012). Dialogic communication allows for the voices of the many to negotiate ideas with the voices of power (Men & Tsai, 2012). However, the social media manager must facilitate the discussion (Men & Tsai, 2012). In a content analysis of the Twitter postings of 73 of the 100 largest non-educational U.S. nonprofit organizations, Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxon (2012) identified six components of Twitter engagement: dialogical communication; posting tweets; posting hyperlinks; posting public messages to other Twitter users (indicated by the @ symbol, for example, @IowaHawkeyes); re-tweeting posts made by other users; and using hashtags, which use the pound sign (#) next to a word to denote topics and classify posts into a single category. The authors found that NPOs are not fully embracing the interactive nature of Twitter and argued that further use of these features would help build brand engagement and thus a brand culture. However, in other societies, the brand community can develop beyond the direct influence of the marketing manager. In a content analysis of 50 corporate pages on social network sites from China (Renren) and the United States (Facebook), Men and Tsai (2012) observed

corporations in both countries using SNS for engagement with consumers. Primarily, the corporate posts focused on providing promotional information, educational information, and entertainment. In the cross-culture component of analysis, the researchers found Chinese consumers tend to respond to one another on corporate SNS pages, while U.S. consumers speak directly to the brand and receive direct brand response. In both cases, the consumers played a key role in shaping the social and brand culture. Other studies have found that Twitter use by leaders produces confidence in leadership (Hwang, 2012) and builds credibility (Smitko, 2012). Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) identified three functions of microblogging updates: providing information; building community; and encouraging action. They found brands had more success in community building through social networking than through traditional websites and argued that the dialogic nature of social networks allows for a common identity to emerge.

Through a content analysis, Waters and Jamal (2011) found that most non-profit organizations used Twitter for one-way communication. By studying the Twitter presence of 27 of the top 200 philanthropy groups in the United States, they concluded that these organizations do not effectively engage audiences through Twitter; however, Twitter posts often included links to other websites. Hwang (2012) found that people generally favor the use of Twitter by CEOs; Twitter use produced positive cognitive and attitudinal effects on public relations. Twitter use also increased positive perceptions of transformational leadership.

In a discourse analysis of tweets made by NPOs Care2 and United Way of Toronto, and the for-profit Ford Motor Company, Smitko (2012) postulated two

theories: the social network theory and the social-judgment theory. The social network theory suggests that knowledge about a person is built on relationships with that person, which builds social capital. Smitko offered the dialogic nature of the Tweets, with the brand/NPO talking with its followers and vice versa, as evidence for the creation of social capital and the social network theory claim. Social-judgment theory says that people can be persuaded by messages they see and hear from people they trust. By constructing tweets appealing to one's credibility of character, organizations can persuade followers to adopt their views.

Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxon (2012) identified six components of Twitter engagement among NPOs. First, organizations can follow the Twitter accounts of their followers, giving a perception of dialogical communication. Second, NPOs can post tweets, which would represent one of the categories previously explained. Third, they can post hyperlinks, both to their own site and to other sites. Fourth, they can post public messages to other Twitter users (indicated by the @ symbol, for example, @IowaHawkeyes.) Fifth, NPOs can retweet posts made by other users, furthering the dialogic perception. And sixth, the use of hashtags can classify posts into a single category. The authors found that NPOs are not fully embracing the interactive nature of Twitter and argued that further use of these features would help build brand engagement.

In a content analysis of 50 corporate pages on social network sites from China (Renren) and the United States (Facebook), Men and Tsai (2012) observed corporations in both countries using SNS for engagement. Primarily, they found corporate posts focus on promotional information, educational information, and entertainment. In the cross-culture component of analysis, they found Chinese

consumers tend to respond to one another on corporate SNS pages, while U.S. consumers speak directly to the brand and receive direct brand response.

Kelleher and Sweetser (2012) used in-depth interviews to explore social media adoption by university communicators. They found many adopters of social media tools worked in admissions or other offices where they interact regularly with young, social media-savvy students. Adopters cited two-way communication, interactivity, dialogue, and engagement as their primary reasons for using social media.

Linville, McGee, and Hicks (2012) performed a content analysis on the Tweets of 113 colleges and universities, and found that most schools use Twitter as a way to broadcast institutional news, and not to engage publics. Similarly, in a content analysis of leading universities worldwide, McAllister (2012) found schools do not engage followers often on social media, with many not allowing outsiders to post to the schools' Facebook pages.

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), using the same 73 Twitter feeds as their previous study, identified three functions of microblogging updates: information, community, action. Information posts relayed facts and new items. Community posts gave recognition and thanks, acknowledged current and local events, responded to messages, and asked for opinions. Action posts promoted events, asked for donations, sold products, called for volunteers, lobbied for the organization, asked followers to join another site, and shared ways to help the organization. With these strategies, nonprofit organizations engaged stakeholders through dialogic and community-building practices more successfully than through traditional websites.

Finally, Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme (2012), in a survey of social media managers, found that user-generated content drives brand conversations and consumer insights. They developed a model showing co-creation, empowerment, community, and self-concept determine the creation of user-generated content, which ultimately builds consumer-based brand equity. By creating content for a social media page of a brand, users build a common identity with that brand.

In sum, research regarding social media and social networking sites laud the platforms as a form of two-way communication. Further, the content of SNS helps consumers build deep relationships with a brand, as well as with one another, based on their connection to the brand. Some nonprofits have used social media to engage shareholders to talk about how their money and efforts in the organization are being used, giving an appearance of shared leadership and input. Corporations have used SNS to provide transparency and insight into the brand.

The ability to shape an organization and the transparency of that organization expressed through SNS both impact college football. As fans often are donors to the team or university, they want to see how their money is being used. Moreover, fans are consumers of the team, buying tickets, concessions, apparel, and memorabilia. Thus, college football blends the shareholder engagement nature of nonprofit SNS use and the consumer activity nature of corporate SNS use. As we will see in the next section, the engagement on both of these fronts feeds the cultural nature of college football fandom.

2.2 COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Scholars have long studied sport as a cultural and social force (Geertz, 1973; Sklair, 1991; Creedon, 1998; Borucki, 2003). For example, sports scholars have demonstrated the effects of a team's success on the mood of its community (Schweitzer, Zillmann, Weaver, & Luttrell, 1992; Knobloch-Westerwick, David, Eastin, Tamborini, & Greenwood, 2009). Sports, particularly football, can serve to establish unique self-identity when compared to rival teams (Smith & Schwarz, 2003). People conceive their own fan identity, as well as an identity comparable to peers (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996); for example, University of South Carolina fans might consider themselves cosmopolitan and consider fans of rival Clemson University as rural, partly because of Clemson's reputation as an agricultural school. Thus, prior sports research has established that individual teams play a role in community cultures.

College football, however, is both cultural and financial in nature. For an increasing number of universities, the decision to add a football program to build community support for the university aligns with research showing football's ability to grow sponsorship and revenue at other universities (Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008; Gau, Wann, & James, 2010). By adding football, schools give their communities an opportunity for entertainment, many times at an affordable price (Chang & Canode, 2002; Coates & Depken, 2011).

DeSarbo and Madrigal (2012) developed four personality types associated with college football through a survey of fans and nonfans at a university known for football excellence. Die-Hard Active fans followed teams online and in print. Social butterflies attended games, but did not follow the team in the media; this group was the second-most avid fan group. Young Belongers also followed the

team heavily and wore football colors and apparel to games. Anti-Athletic People did not follow the game at all. Logically, then, social media would seek to serve the Die-hard Active and Young Belonger fans, primarily, and might secondarily serve social butterflies, as these groups might want to know about player news, merchandise sales, and game activities.

Altogether, research about college football indicates a strong association with culture. Fans believe their teams represent their cities, states, regions, and lifestyles. Universities have capitalized on this cultural association to add or expand football programs. Universities have embraced this cultural component as a means to draw more fans to engage with the program, and ultimately build revenue. Not everyone is a football fan, however; Die-Hard Active Fans and Young Belongers (DeSarbo & Madrigal, 2012) follow the team online, and likely would follow their social media, as well. Thus, we know that two groups of fans dominate online media use, and therefore would be responsible for establishing and maintaining cultural norms for online fans. So, as this research explores the online cultural discussion on college football social networking sites, it must be considered that the fans engaging this content have strong emotional and social ties to the team. This is consistent with the findings discussed in Section 2.2 that indicated people who engage SNS also engage in a brand's culture (Hwang, 2012; Smitko, 2012; Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012). The connection among fans via the university's fan culture, then, creates a community, one that does not exist *per se*, but does in the minds of its members. The next section will discuss Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006), which explores the phenomenon of perceived group identity, which Anderson says leads to the creation of nations.

2.3 *IMAGINED COMMUNITIES*

In his landmark work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (2006) postulated that a nation is a community of people who imagine themselves to share not only common geographic borders but also common beliefs and a common culture. Central to Anderson's concept is the role of "print capitalism" in allowing a group of people, who can never all know one another, to imagine themselves as belonging together in community. In Anderson's argument, newspapers and other printed media were the dominant forms of communication at their moment, typically the 1500s-1950s. As the majority views spread through the widely distributed media, a consensus identity formed and a "nation" was established. Major tenets of Anderson's nationalism argument are simultaneity, politics, economics, ideology, geography, and war. Through these tenets, the nation, which might have existed in only the minds of its citizens, could have an identity (Anderson, 2006).

Official voices have a special privilege in the shaping of a nation. Officials can dictate the conversation and manipulate the messages to build a national consensus supporting official goals. Anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin (1994) argued that nationalism is a function of space and time and that memory is shaped by official messages, in particular, messages of the state. Stuart Hall (1996a, 1996b) followed Boyarin's work by enhancing the definition of Andersonian nationalism, saying that an "imagined nation" is constructed from the discourse of policy, history, and culture. He operationalized nationalism into five main elements: the national narrative, the historical narrative, invented tradition, foundational myths, and the idea of a simple people of a nation. In Hall's paradigm, national culture functions as an exercise of power, with nations

comprising people of different classes, races, genders, and cultures that either have to be absorbed or meshed into one society.

Modern technology has allowed for a greater emergence of subcultures and has encouraged many individuals to share in the mass cultural narrative. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2004) built on Hall's idea that globalization can enhance individualism within cultures. Because the technology of the modern world builds individualism, but diminishes groups, subcultures have been able to share in the greater cultural narrative. Appadurai proposed a framework that looks at five elements of culture: 1.) ethnoscaples; 2.) mediascaples; 3.) technoscaples; 4.) financescaples, and 5.) ideoscaples. These elements encompass changing culture and extend Andersonian philosophy into social organization. Appadurai said an examination of these five factors of culture will reveal the fractured individual groups that make up societies and will show the uniting tie for those groups. Similarly, Robertson (2011) argues that globalization has changed the way nations are formed and maintained. World unity, and global communities, allow for nations to span geography and cultures.

The modern era, through video, photographs, and instant media, depends on visuals to tell its story and record its culture. Green, Harvey, and Knox (2005) found that nations and national identity can be maintained using online networks, in a study of online communities' reactions to European Union initiatives in Manchester, U.K. Further, small, limited-power subgroups of a nation have the power to influence the greater nation at large (Alexander, Edwards, & Temple, 2007). These nationalistic changes coincide with the rise of visual culture explained by Mirzoeff (2002). He argues that visual culture is

“concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology.” (p. 5) Thus, contemporary society is a visual society, and as identity is constructed culturally, it therefore must also be constructed visually.

The concepts of Andersonian nationalism provide an intriguing framework for this study. In marketing materials, many college football programs identify themselves as a (mascot)-nation; for example, the University of Florida identifies as Gator Nation and The Ohio State University as Buckeye Nation. Considering Anderson’s definition of nationalism, these teams certainly can fit the bill. Team fans are a group of people who share belief in a common cause (supporting a team). They are similarly geographically organized; fans of teams generally live in the region where that team is located, and the stadium and facilities for the team can serve as a “capital” city for the nation. Fans unite against an enemy, in established and budding rivalries. National symbols, such as a fight song, colors, uniforms, and apparel, serve Anderson’s (2006) concepts of census, map, and museum, which act as ways to identify one nation from another, and to maintain identity.

Further, Anderson’s concept of print capitalism can be extended to the digital media age. Modern communication has expanded the number of senses engaged when consuming media. Kress (2003) builds the case that the rise of visual communication has quickened the pace of communication. With visual, digital communication, messages must embrace the multiple modes in which humans communicate (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010). Similarly, Britsch (2009) found visual discourse makes information more accessible, and allows more people to understand a culture. Thus, with the rise of mobile media

and the emphasis on cross-cultural communication, the access barriers to language and discourse once preserved in newspapers have been diminished. By examining social media, the dominant media of the current cultural moment, this study examines the ways visual discourse is used in and community-building applications in the context of a culturally charged brand community, university-maintained college football Facebook pages.

In sum, researchers have found that *Imagined Communities* no longer must rely on print capitalism to exist, and instead can embrace digital and social media to create and maintain their cultures. People with a shared interest can connect across space and time, and thus allows for many more niche communities to thrive; this is part of the theory of globalization, which states that as technology eases the distance separating people, they will connect more often and share cultures. Because college football has cultural importance, as we saw in Section 2.2, it follows that fans of college football would build and defend the culture that unites them as a community, thus becoming a defender of their *imagined* nation. Ultimately, social media, the venue for culture discussion, becomes a place for these citizens to promote their own culture, position it different than other cultures, and to maintain their own cultural traditions.

2.4 NETNOGRAPHY

Researchers in varying disciplines, primarily anthropology, have used ethnography as the method of choice to study culture. Horst and Miller (2012) argued that the anthropological approach to studying culture applies to online communities, just as it applies to social groups in the offline world. Because culture is largely created through communication, scholars should embrace the

study of online communities, where much modern communication within social groups takes place (Horst & Miller, 2012). Nightingale (2012) explored the need for new theories to explain social media cultural engagement and challenged anthropological media ethnographers to go beyond established knowledge in explaining cultural exchange online. Similarly, Postill and Pink (2012) argued for ethnography of social media to explore cultural discourse through modern techniques of communication. This study, which also seeks to understand the ways universities are shaping their brand communities, follows their tradition. However, as this study seeks to examine messages via a social networking site, it must embrace a digital form of ethnography, which has been termed netnography.

2.4.1 *Netnography vs. Ethnography*

Traditional ethnographic research embodies the participant-observer approach to inquiry (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Ethnography generally focuses on a group of people who share a culture, and the researcher “describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language” (Creswell, 2012, p. 90). To do that, researchers must immerse themselves in the field and interact with the occupants of the field space, taking notes and observing the scene of the interaction (Bernard, 2000). Ethnographers note patterns, rituals, customary social behaviors, and regularities among those in the field. In analysis, researchers use the views of culture members to give an emic perspective and report them verbatim; researchers then compare emic perspectives to the etic perspective—that is, the outside, scientific perspective of the researcher—to develop interpretations and explanations of social and

cultural practices and their meanings (Bernard, 2000; Creswell, 2012).

Researchers will engage artifacts, experiences, communication exchanges, and observations in their analyses to ultimately craft a portrait of the culture.

In his classic methodological guide, Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) set out a model for ethnographic inquiry; his plan requires that the researcher must first set the scene of the research, detail the intricacies of daily life, and then collect statements that provide the narrative for the culture. The goal of Malinowski's method is to view a culture through native eyes, and his practices remain the goals of modern ethnographic inquiry. Geertz (1973, 1977) argues that internal understanding of a culture surpasses all other forms of data interpretation because it includes both an internal and external critique and analysis of the events that define that culture. In the field of journalism and mass communication research, Singer (2009) cautions against simply describing the research scene in ethnographic research. She instead advises scholars to probe the research problem and critically analyze the situation, an approach that is in line with the anthropological roots of the method.

A netnography (Kozinets, 2002; Muniz & Schau, 2007) places the researcher within an Internet community and treats that community as the field for research. This method requires the researcher to observe the online community over an extended period of time, taking field notes similar to those a researcher would take in a traditional ethnography. Netnographic inquiry follows the pattern of ethnography by requiring the researcher to plan the study, identify the field, enter the field, gather information, and then analyze that information. However, in netnography, the field is an online community rather than a community situated in a physical place (Kozinets, 2010).

When scholars seek to observe cultural activities of a community that interacts in an online setting, they must embrace netnographic methods. Kozinets (2010) describes a continuum of research on two different types of communities that interact online: online communities and communities online. "Online communities" are groups that exclusively exist on the Internet; "communities online" represent the online interaction of a community that exists both online and offline. This study focuses on communities online, as fan interaction and game attendance represent a field of study that does not explicitly include mass communication. These communities online include fans who not only attend games and support teams but also interact on Facebook, as well as university officials, players, and coaches. Because these communities exist online, researchers must observe them online. Like ethnography, netnography is neither a total nor a perfect method, but it provides the methodological and conceptual tools to allow researchers to study the culture of communities that interact online (Kozinets, 2010).

2.4.2 *Netnography in practice*

Despite being a new methodology, netnographic studies have gained in prominence throughout research fields (Kozinets, 2010). In ethnography, a participant-observer researcher enters the field of research and exists as part of the community, making notes about his or her experiences and using conversations to understand a culture (Bernard, 2000). Similarly, netnography puts researchers in an online field to observe and participate while collecting data. Netnographers can use images and visuals shared in the online forum of the community, as well as personal communication with community members,

in their research. As an increasing amount of communication occurs online, the netnographic methodology offers the opportunity to approach this channel in its environment (Garcia et al, 2009). Netnographic studies have added to the literatures of law, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, psychology, business, marketing, geography, medicine, and mass communication (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography can combine online and offline worlds, and the decision to use the method independently, or paired with other ethnographic strategies, depends on the research question being asked (Garcia et al, 2009). Further, visual data from netnography supports the study's analysis, as many online messages contain both visual and verbal components (Garcia et al, 2009). Research can successfully blend participant observation with a second means of data collection and analysis, such as interviewing, content analysis, or survey, in a research project (Bernard, 2000). In doing this mixed-method analysis, the researcher can use each method to answer specific parts of research questions, and can work around difficulties and complications of ethnographic field work.

Netnographic research can be a valuable tool for marketers and brand managers. Kozinets (2006) notes that consumers use the Internet to discuss problems with products, solutions to problems, tips and ideas about product use, and suggestions for companies. Netnographies have the ability to reveal the human face of brand users and can give brand managers deep insight into the thoughts of core consumers. Similarly, Cova and Pace (2006) found that Nutella's approach to online communities focusing on fans of the brand, rather than the brand itself, enhanced the mythos of the Italian hazelnut spread. This consumer-first strategy enhanced the cult appeal of the spread. Further, Füller, Jaweck, and

Mühlbacher (2007) found that by posting on a brand-specific page, some users hope to impact the brand in some way, or to gain employment with the brand.

Other brand communities focus on maintaining standards and traditions associated with the brand. In his landmark study of Star Trek fans, Kozinets (2001) found that people discuss the maintenance of the franchise's ideals and its story canon. Through online forums and message boards, Trek fans discussed developments of characters and potential storylines and how these related to the focus of the television and film series. Similarly, Muniz and Schau (2007) found that fans of the Apple Newton personal digital assistant continued in cult-like devotion to the device long after Apple had stopped its production. Newton fans continued to provide technical support for the devices, as well as have in-person conferences to discuss their use.

The rise of social networking sites has allowed brand communities to enter the mainstream consciousness, as company and product managers have embraced Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and other social media as ways to engage consumers. Zaglia (2013) found that fans of brands exist in many sub-groups on social networking sites, and topics of interest vary among subgroups. Further, as people are members of many sub-groups, a communication pattern can be observed on the social networking site. This pattern follows Girvan and Newman's (2002) observance of the strength of weak ties, where subgroup members who have access to outside-subgroups tend to serve as a bridge between the two groups.

Several scholars have used netnography to address online communities related to brands. Ind, Iglesias, and Schultz (2013) used netnography to understand the process of co-creation for an online brand community. Co-

creation “brings consumers, managers, and employees together to participate in brand development and to create new products and services.” (p. 5) They found participation in the online brand community to be vital for the success of co-creation. Similarly, the brand must respond to the online brand community, listening to ideas and implementing some of them; this allows the community to feel ownership in the brand. Similarly, Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek (2011) found that co-creation encouraged brand loyalty. Using netnography, Zaglia (2013) found that Facebook group pages encouraged brand community development, as they let people express social identity, brand emotions, and commercial character. Facebook fan pages also encouraged brand community development, but to a lesser extent, as they typically have more members.

In sum, several scholars have explored online brand communities, and found that co-creation, engagement, and participation are valued in building group communications. The visual nature of social networking sites allows users to create content for the site, and users will support the creation of quality and useful content. Netnography allows researchers to study these visuals along with the textual messages shared in online communities. The present study follows the participant-observer approach of netnography to examine how fans of a brand’s Facebook page respond to its content.

2.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The preceding discussions of the literature about social media and *Imagined Communities* build the link between social networking sites and culture. Social media dominate modern communication and encourage many people to share in the communicative paradigm. Previous scholars have found SNS to be a

key component of engaging shareholders and consumers. Further, netnographic research has found that online brand communities allow brand followers to engage with the brand, and to take ownership, in a way, as an influence of brand decisions and content. College football provides a unique setting for online brand communication research, as it blends aspects of nonprofit organizations and corporations by engaging shareholders for donations, as well as encouraging consumption. Moreover, because people engage college football on a cultural level, the use of online brand communities extends the offline brand engagement of fans. Thus, online brand communities in college football represent the culture of a fan nation. Social networking provides a forum for cultural exchange, much as the newspaper does in the theory of print capitalism. The concept of online brand communities is well established, as is the desire for engagement by nonprofit organizations and corporations. Research has not addressed online brand communities in light of nation-building activity. Thus, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do varying competitive levels of college football use Facebook, currently the most popular SNS, to build, enhance, and maintain brand communities?

RQ2: How do teams use Facebook to engage fans throughout a football season?

These research questions address a gap in the literature in understanding the nature of culture on social media, specifically Facebook. Further, they address social media in the context of culturally associated brands, specifically college football. Finally, they explore the development and maintenance of a cultural brand community — that of college football fans.

Chapter 3

STUDY METHODOLOGY

NETNOGRAPHY AND GROUNDED THEORY

The nature of social media, the Internet, and online engagement requires an innovative approach to research designs (Pink, 2006, 2007). The grounded theory approach allows researchers to translate the understanding of messages being delivered via social media in a theoretical model. The participant observation approach examines the digital interaction and communication among people belonging to a specific cultural group (Kozinets, 2002). Participant observation allows the researcher to observe and analyze online discourse to understand how members of online communities interact and how they ascribe meaning to these interactions (Kozinets, 2002). Because source material gathered from online participant observation can vary, the researcher must determine how best to engage the source material in an effective way to properly answer a study's research question (Pink, 2006).

This study uses participant observation over a three-year period and a grounded theory analysis of postings by six college football teams and their fans on Facebook during four specific events in the course of a football season: the opening game of the season; the homecoming game; the game with the team's major rival; and senior day (the last home game of the season, when graduating

players are honored for their time with the team). The grounded theory methodology allows researchers to understand messages sent in the media. The grounded theory approach lets a researcher explore themes in data through a process of coding and memoing, where the researcher continually returns to the data to understand the meaning of the content (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). This study employs the grounded theory approach in order to develop deep understanding of the messages being sent via Facebook. Through observing Facebook communications, this study examines the ways university football programs and their fans create and maintain a brand community.

3.1 SITE OF RESEARCH

Using SNS as a field for inquiry became popular in the late 2000s, as leading sites Facebook and Twitter gained traction in marketing and communication (eg. Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012; Hwang, 2012; Smitko, 2012). Studies have used SNS to determine the content of posts (Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012), the reasons for posting (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012; Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012; McAllister, 2012), and the engagement of brand followers with communication (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012; Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme, 2012). These studies used Facebook, Twitter, and the Chinese SNS RenRen to explore online communities. Similarly, Zaglia (2013) compared the effectiveness of Facebook group pages and fan pages. Thus, the use of SNS as research fields has become commonplace in this scholarly area.

Using Facebook specifically allows this research to address both textual and visual messages from official and fan voices. Facebook is the world's largest

SNS, with more than 1 billion users, and allows users to post text, photographs, videos, and links (Radwanick, 2011). Conversely, Twitter, the second-largest social network, primarily uses text posts, including links; users can post photographs and videos, but they are stored in a separate page from the user's main feed. Further, university sports teams generally have one important Facebook page, but several important Twitter accounts, including ones for the coach, the team, the entire athletics program, the mascot, and the university itself. Both SNS facilitate engagement, but in different ways. Twitter is geared toward many-to-many messages, with users posting with hashtags, so all posts with the same hashtag can be read at once. Facebook, however, promotes a one-to-many model, as multiple users comment on a single post, and have conversations about it while the online community observes. Altogether, the nature of Facebook as a visual-friendly SNS focused on communal interaction makes the site the ideal setting to conduct this research.

3.2 SELECTION OF CASES

The netnographic methodology, like ethnography, begins with identifying a population for study (Pink, 2007; Creswell, 2012). To select the populations for this study, I began by making a list of universities that play Division I football (See Appendix A & B). I limited my inquiry to this group because its members spend the most money on marketing and collect the greatest revenue. Next, I used the NCAA's division of Division I teams into two groups, the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) (NCAA, 2012). While both factions of Division I play games that draw major crowds, the stakes are much higher in the FBS, as its conferences and schools collect millions

Table 3.1: Average school football and athletic spending by FBS conferences

	Football spending	Total athletic spending
Southeastern	\$19.5	\$79.4
Big Ten Conference	\$17.9	\$77.9
Big 12 Conference	\$15.9	\$66.9
Pac-12	\$15.4	\$60.3
Atlantic Coast Conference	\$15.1	\$61.5
Big East Conference	\$14.6	\$43.0
Conference USA	\$8.7	\$28.7
Mountain West Conference	\$8.6	\$30.8
Mid-American Conference	\$6.0	\$21.4
Western Athletic Conference	\$5.6	\$17.0
Sun Belt Conference	\$4.8	\$16.2

NOTES: Spending figures are in millions. Data from 2011-12 school year.
SOURCES: Miller, 2011; Whelliston, 2012.

in annual television revenue while FCS schools collect thousands (Bogaczyk, 2011). Most major and flagship public state universities (such as the University of Alabama, Texas A&M University, Boise State University, and the University of Memphis), as well as many private universities (such as Duke University, Rice University, Stanford University, and Northwestern University) play in the FBS. The tradition, alumni size, and prominence of FBS schools lead for them to draw bigger audiences on television, thus, the larger payout. The FBS is further divided into two groups, the six conferences that automatically qualify for a bid to the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) and the five conferences that do not. With these distinctions made, I chose to draw two teams from FBS, BCS AQ conferences, two from FBS, BCS Non-AQ conferences, and two teams new to college football from the FCS.

Using the breakdown of football spending and total athletic spending by conference (See Table 3.1), I identified conferences from which I would select teams for analysis. The six BCS-AQ conferences top spending, but the Southeastern Conference and the Big Ten spend substantially more on football and total athletics than the other BCS-AQ leagues. Thus, I selected the University of South Carolina and the University of Iowa from the SEC and Big Ten, respectively. Both schools command a statewide fanbase, and have rivalries with another in-state BCS team from a different conference.

Noted college basketball blog The Mid-Majority uses a formula defined by college basketball spending and total athletic department spending to define mid-majors (Whelliston, 2012). A mid-major is a team playing major college athletics, but spends less and is typically less successful than big spenders. Using the Mid-Majority's logic of separation by spending on total athletics, I determined that three BCS Non-AQ conferences sit between the high spenders and the low spenders: Conference USA, the Mountain West Conference, and the Mid-American Conference. I selected Marshall University and Miami University from C-USA and the MAC, respectively, because they consistently draw BCS opponents to their home stadiums and have rich histories in their football programs.

Choosing from the bottom tier of competitive play, I selected two teams transitioning from the FCS to the FBS. Teams cannot begin Division I play in the FBS; they must start in the FCS and transition over three seasons. Five schools have launched Division I college football programs since 2009: Old Dominion University, 2009; the University of South Alabama, 2010; Georgia State University, 2010; Lamar University, 2010; and the University of Texas-San

Antonio, 2011 (National Football Foundation, 2010). From them, I selected Georgia State and UTSA, because both schools are transitioning to FBS conferences immediately after launching their programs.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN: GROUNDED THEORY

In order to develop a model of online communities and engagement on Facebook, the present study employs the grounded theory method of collecting and analyzing data. While this study does not exclusively use the methods of grounded theory, it embraces open and axial coding, which are hallmarks of the grounded theory approach. In the grounded theory research methodology, one works from a hunch about how something might be occurring, and then follows through examining that hunch based on analysis of evidence and introspection (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser and Strauss (1967) conceptualized the method while studying dying patients in a hospital; they said that their approach is a way to generate a theory that explains a phenomenon. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained grounded theory as part of qualitative research methods, with observation, description, and understanding being important elements of the process.

Grounded theory works in a four-stage process. First, a researcher develops codes to mark similar data points. Strauss (1987) defines open coding, the first step of this process, as the initial, unrestricted organization of data into categories organized by the needs of the research question. In open coding, the researcher examines source material, including text, artifacts, interactions, events, and visuals to find commonality. After the initial open codes are made, the researcher then should review them to see if any fit together in a meaningful

way, in a process called axial coding, to create concepts. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), axial coding puts the data into context, and situate the notes into the causal timeline. Third, the research groups the concept codes into categories based on similarities. The fourth step uses the categorical groupings to build a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Central to the procedure for grounded theory is continual introspection through a process called memoing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As the coding process groups data into categories, the researcher must make notes, or memos, about each code group, reanalyzing and reconsidering the notions of meaning. Ultimately, the memos drive the theoretical development. Glaser (1998) says memos are a free-flowing, creative, personal discussion of the meanings of the research. Examples of this study's open codes and memos are available in Appendix C.

The use of the grounded theory approach allowed the research to embrace all kinds of textual and visual messages used in modern communication, and group them according to the established concepts of Anderson's theory of nationalism. This approach follows Charmaz's (2006) model of theoretical sampling, which dictates that existing literature can be used to build theory, and sampling of data should be determined by the directed need to build theory. In the present study, the open coding process grouped the data by the content its messages. Then, a second-level coding grouped those messages by the researcher's perceived intent of the messages, such as to inform, to excite, etc. The use of specific axial codes are not necessarily applicable to all schools in this study, as schools have different actions and intent in their messages. The open and second-level coding provided the thrust of analysis for each school in

the study. Finally, those codes were analyzed to answer the present study's research questions.

Using the record of activity on the Facebook accounts for each case, the researcher examined each football-related post in the four sampling periods through an open coding method, as prescribed by Strauss (1987). The exploratory nature of this research means no established categories are set for the data; thus, this study followed the grounded theory approach to data reduction, as explained in Lindlof and Taylor (2011), Strauss and Corbin (1990), Charmaz (2006), and Glaser and Strauss (1967). Strauss (1987) defines open coding as the initial, unrestricted organization of data into categories organized by the needs of the research question; this study asks how different levels of college football programs use social media to promote nation building among community and fan bases, and how does their Facebook content engage fans.

The grounded theory approach calls for researchers to sort data into categories in a process called open coding, and then to code within categories for common themes. The researcher coded Facebook posts for messages about team identity. For example, if a post of a photo showed the student section of a university all dressed in green, and the Marshall University athletic logo were included at the bottom of the photo, and the post included the text, "We Are...," that post would be coded as Color, for the green, Branding, for the logo, and Battle Cry for the "We Are...," which is a portion of the cheer "We Are...Marshall." Because different universities use different posting strategies, open coding allowed for the greatest flexibility in categorizing information. All open coding was completed using Atlas.TI Qualitative Data Analysis software.

Next, Strauss and Corbin (1990) call for axial coding to collapse themes into categories. Axial coding puts the data into context and situates the notes and memos into a causal timeline (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Here, the researcher collapsed the open codes based on his perception of the intent of the message. The grouping here allowed the researcher to summarize the primary message content and intentions of the page, allowing these intentions to be compared to the engagement observed in the participant observation analysis.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The participant observation research method allows for observation of communities with an online interaction component. It follows the ethnographic tradition of research, but specifically addresses the needs of ethnographers studying discourse and interaction online. In netnography, visuals can be used as part of the discourse, as the nature of the Internet and SNS allows for photographs, videos, and other images to be used as part of a message. The present study used the participant-observation aspect of netnography to understand the posting and engagement norms on the six university football Facebook pages. This section discusses ethnographic hypermedia (Pink, 2006) as a tool for analysis.

Scholars have begun to focus on the Internet as a field of research for ethnographic inquiry, with focuses on the user experience and online communities, among others (Pink, 2006). The field of ethnographic hypermedia studies the use of photographs, videos, text, and connections themselves, in the form of hyperlinks, to understand uses, habits, and content of online exchange (Pink, 2006). Pink (2006) advocates for netnographic researchers to examine

photographs and visuals culled from the Internet with a critical view, just as one would examine field notes. Because online ethnography is a new and growing field, the onus is on researchers to innovate in their methods of data collection (Pink, 2006).

One of the advantages of engaging netnographic hypermedia is that the researcher can easily collect visual artifacts from the research scene. Kenney (2009) advises including visuals in ethnographic work whenever possible, particularly when working online, while Pink (2006) suggests that research into online images can be used to understand the process users used to select images for posting to the online forum, as well as the rationale for sharing communications online via text. Specifically in ethnographic hypermedia, images contain much of the cultural ideas of a message, as often only photographic or video messages are posted to a SNS. Further, the polyvocal nature of SNS allows for the creations of visual, cultural artifacts by both official sources and by the masses. Thus, in ethnographic hypermedia, visuals are of equal importance as words in sending messages about cultural norms.

In analysis, this study collected the ethnographic hypermedia from the Facebook pages of its six case university football pages. Screen captures of every post made to the pages in the analysis period were made, including those by fans. Playback of videos and external links were not maintained, however, their content was noted.

3.4.1 Observation period

To gain the insight needed for analysis, the researcher followed the Facebook pages of the six schools for beginning with the 2011 season and

concluding with the 2013 season. This experience of following the teams on Facebook both during the season and the offseason helped the researcher to build an understanding of the teams, their traditions, and their norms. Further, he watched games of each team on television as often as possible to observe the game day atmosphere.

During the observation period, the researcher followed the team Facebook pages in his news feed as he would if he were a fan of the universities. He liked posts, and posted a few comments, but tended to observe more as a voyeur, similar to most other followers of a page. Items from all school pages were shown in his news feed, similar to the ways they would be shown in other users' feeds. Considering the Facebook algorithm that dictates what posts are shown to individual users, it is possible that the researcher's exposure was not 100 percent consistent with every other follower; however, the selective exposure that the researcher received put his experience on par with other typical users.

To counter the selective exposure dictated by the Facebook algorithm, the researcher made a monthly check-in on the teams Facebook pages during the off-season, and weekly during the season. Generally, the researcher missed very little in the news feed that was present on the team pages. The page check allowed the researcher to see engagement after it had largely finished its cycle with fans. Ultimately, the field notes were drawn from this monthly / weekly visit.

3.4.2 *Note taking*

Throughout the observation process, the researcher took handwritten field notes to identify patterns, ask questions, and develop understanding of the posts

to the Facebook pages. As Bernard (2000) advises, three types of field notes were used: methodological notes, descriptive notes, and analytical notes. The use of methodological notes was limited to reminders about times of games to determine the best time to collect the month or week's information. Analytic notes simply showed the ideas the researcher wanted to link with the data, such as the slowing of posting for losing teams and their posting strategy. The descriptive notes made up the bulk of the field data. In descriptive notes, the researcher summarized the month or week's posts and noted interesting things, such as important news.

The coding here seeks to distill the bulk of cultural data contained in posts into its primary cultural messages. Because many of the messages exchanged via Facebook use visuals as well as text, it is prudent to embrace coding as a means of data reduction. The coding process allows for a breadth of data to be analyzed, capturing an extended period of exchange, rather than the depth of a specific moment. Because this study seeks to understand the bulk of meaning of cultural messages, coding provides an expeditious and prudent way to maintain internal validity while still capturing the broad meanings of exchange (Bernard, 2000).

3.5 DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

Following the strategic sampling protocol, the researcher selected four game-events for analysis. While schools have an interest in building hype for every game, the selected four games have a special place on the schedule for each team: opening, homecoming, rivalry, and senior. These games typically have greater excitement than other games, as they mark the beginning (opener) and

Table 3.2: Key weekends for analysis

	GSU	UTSA
Opening	South Carolina State (Aug. 30)	South Alabama (Sept. 1)
Homecoming	Villanova (Oct. 20)	San Jose State (Oct. 20)
Rivalry	Old Dominion (Nov. 3)	Texas State (Nov. 24)
Senior	Old Dominion (Nov. 3)	Texas State (Nov. 24)
	Marshall	Miami
Opening	West Virginia (Sept. 1)	Ohio State (Sept. 1)
Homecoming	Tulsa (Oct. 6)	Massachusetts (Sept. 22)
Rivalry	Ohio (Sept. 15)	Cincinnati (Oct. 6)
Senior	Houston (Nov. 17)	Ball State (Nov. 23)
	Iowa	USC
Opening	Northern Illinois (Sept. 1)	Vanderbilt (Aug. 30)
Homecoming	Minnesota (Sept. 29)	Arkansas (Nov. 10)
Rivalry	Iowa State (Sept. 8)	Clemson (Nov. 24)
Senior	Nebraska (Nov. 23)	Wofford (Nov. 17)

ending (senior) of a season, as well as a day for alumni to return (homecoming), and a game built on shared tradition (rival). For Georgia State and UTSA, the rivalry and senior games coincided, so these schools have three weekends of analysis. For Marshall and Miami, longstanding rivalry games were selected over other rivalries.¹ Table 3.2 displays the opponent and game date for each category for the six teams. Data sampling for these games includes Facebook postings the

¹ Marshall considers its football rivals to be West Virginia, Ohio, East Carolina, and Miami (Ohio), but has the longest history playing against Ohio and Miami; Marshall played Ohio in 2012, but not Miami. Similarly, Miami considers its football rivals to be Cincinnati, Ohio, and Marshall but the game against Cincinnati has the longest history.

day before, the day of, and the day after the event, to encompass pre-game and post-game hype.

3.6 ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

To answer RQ1 — How do varying competitive levels of college football use Facebook to build, enhance, and maintain brand communities?— data from the grounded theory open coding was analyzed and grouped into axial codes. First, the researcher summarized each case’s findings to understand its key Facebook messages. With the axial groupings in place, the researcher then created a Content Analytic Summary Table (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) to highlight the key points of each case’s research findings. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña suggest using open and axial code categories to group findings; thus, for this table, the researcher presented the data in a three-column approach, with Axial Codes based on theoretical concepts in Column 1, Open codes in Column 2, and Notes about the nature of these open codes in Column 3.

A table comparing each school’s predominant axial codes, other axial codes, win-loss record, and research notes was created to identify commonality among the six cases. This table provided the basis for the answer of RQ1. The researcher noted the similarities and differences among the schools and discussed these differences to answer the research question. Then, the researcher generated a model showing the relationship of themes of message posts.

To answer RQ2, which asked how do teams use Facebook to engage fans throughout a football season, the researcher again returned to the field notes presented in the case summaries. Using the descriptions as a guide, the

researcher considered the kinds of posts that drew the most reactions on Facebook, specifically Likes, Comments, and Shares. Using the notes to indicate high or low fan engagement, the researcher identified the types of messages (as determined from the axial codes) that support fan reaction at each stage of the season. A model showing the types of messages each team used at differing points in the season was created. Finally, the model presented shows the relationship of themes in posts as they built engagement to show the type of messages brands should use to engage fans.

3.7 SENSITIZING CONCEPTS

Because the concepts for coding draw from extant theory and evidences, I explored the key concepts of Anderson's theory of nationalism. While Anderson addresses the communications in newspapers driven by print capitalism, I used the broad notions of nationalism in his theory, specifically Common Culture, Print Capitalism, Official Nationalism, Patriotism, and Racism, to build categories for my analysis. This section discussed these concepts to logically connect Andersonian theory to the coding scheme used to conduct this research.

3.7.1 Common Culture

One of the tenets Anderson identified in his theory of nationalism is the concept of a common culture. This means that all persons in a nation share experiences of life in said culture. Language, Presence, Religion and Simultaneous Consumption compose the common culture that defines a nation. Language means that people speak the same linguistic language, and also share common dialects and verbal expressions. For this study, Language might

reference a statement or phrase associated with a university; for example, the statement “The Battle for I-35” does not mean much to those outside the UTSA or Texas State University communities, but for them, it signifies a specific rivalry. Presence indicates a specific, shared geographic location. For example, the University of South Carolina claims to represent the state of South Carolina in athletics; however, as rival Clemson University has a claim to the state, as well, USC strongly represents central South Carolina, where the university is located. Religion, in Anderson’s terms, references the specific faith-based activity. College football does not specifically address religion in terms of deity, but some fan postings implore other fans to “have faith” in the coach or the team. Lastly, the Simultaneous Consumption component dictates that a nation consumes the same content at the same time, including news stories, written works of fiction and nonfiction, and other media. In college football, this means posts might reference the fact that fans watch the game, at home or in person, at the same moment in time, making game time a grand unifying moment.

In addition, Common Culture references the symbols of a culture that all of its citizens recognize (Anderson, 2006). National songs, flags, colors, and emblems also have universal understanding within a culture, as all represent the nation. For the present study, such symbolism could translate to colors, branding, mascots, chants, cheers, songs, and other traditions.

3.7.2 *Print Capitalism*

Anderson positions print capitalism as germane to his nationalism theory. Print capitalism dictates that media will produce the content that attracts the largest audience. Thus, if people seek to identify a nation through print

communication and people purchase that nationalistic content, then publishers will create more similar content. Anderson said printed language facilitates nationalistic discussion, and publicly accessible media are necessary as a forum for that discussion. Print capitalism, he said, combines capitalism, technology, and the delivery of human linguistics (Anderson, 2006). However, because the discussion of nationalistic ideals occurs in the printed media, wealthy and empowered people have a privileged voice; they are literate and have the means purchase the news media and the position to respond in print. The concepts of print capitalism have drastically changed in the digital media age; no longer do media need to be printed, and niche outlets can serve the smallest interests without financial consequence. But, the print capitalism concept of the voice of the people being shared is amplified via SNS. For example, this study considers all voices posted to the teams' pages. All fans have equal ability to post to pages, and often are encouraged to do so. Thus, the polyvocal nature of print capitalism remains in the digital media age. Further, thinks like encouragement to watch the game on television or listen on the radio also serve as print capitalism, as consuming media translates to advertising dollars, which means more revenue for the university.

3.7.3 *Official Nationalism*

Government officials can dictate official nationalism through policy. By dictating holidays, monuments, markers, and memorials, governments can encourage people to recognize a specific moment or event. Further, through diplomacy, governments can position themselves with allies and friends. Government also can dictate official messages, statements, and regulations

regarding news and controversies. In this study, official “nationalism” comes from universities, which send the official messages on the SNS team pages. In addition, universities join conferences, which parallel alliances. For example, Marshall University designates November 14 as a holiday because that date was the 1970 Marshall plane crash, which killed most of the football team. Marshall has several monuments on campus and throughout the city to commemorate the crash and its victims. On social media, Marshall can dictate the message associated with the crash anniversary.

3.7.4 *Patriotism and Racism*

The notions of patriotism and racism, as an intertwined concept, build the nationalistic message by identifying the self and the other. Anderson notes the central idea among evidence of patriotism and racism is a concept of unisonance, which is that everyone who is a part of this imagined nation shares these views and knows these common words, songs, and symbols. Cultural products, such as poetry, fiction, music, and the arts, as well as national symbols, such as a national anthem or a flag, and even common popular songs and popular prayers serve as a reminder of a shared cultural experience, and thus produces pride in one’s nation. Further, some of these artifacts vilify enemies, or at least stand them apart as something to be feared, untrusted, and avoided. For college football, the concepts of patriotism and racism can be expressed in a variety of ways. Teams have colors, songs, cheers, and chants that all parallel national colors and anthems. Teams have rivals, which tend to be vilified; an old USC joke asks “What’s the difference between culture and agriculture? About 150 miles (the distance between USC’s campus and rival Clemson, an agricultural university.)

Fans on the SNS pages see these comments, positive and negative, and are included in the sweeping nationalistic fan conversation.

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD

While netnography is a superb method for collecting data about online communities, it is not without its faults. Based in the interpretivist paradigm of research, netnography calls on scholars to observe and investigate the nature of a situation and determine meaning from those observations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Thus, this research strives to describe and explore results from these specific cases, in this specific situation. External validity and projection are not goals of this method, and thus limits its usefulness in this regard. Further, netnography, like ethnography, presumes the cases have an interesting story to tell and that the explanation of that story is tied to theory. While I decoded messages to have a certain meaning, it is plausible other scholars could find different meaning.

By selecting six schools representing three levels of competitive play in college football, I have tried to be inclusive in showing different facets of college football fandom. However, these cases do not and cannot represent all of college football. This study explores a limited range of college football SNS activity to expand theoretical understanding about nationalism as applied to the creation and sustenance of “football nations.”

Further, by limiting the analysis to one season, and to one SNS, Facebook, this research only captures a portion of the nationalistic messages contained on these pages. Sampling from the wealth of data is necessary to facilitate data analysis.

3.9 ETHICAL STATEMENT

No human subjects were used during this research. The researcher consulted with a research official with the Institutional Review Board at the University of South Carolina who said because the present study did not recruit participants or identify Facebook users, it is not considered human subject research and therefore not reviewable by the IRB. The researcher is an alumnus of Marshall University and is completing doctoral studies at the University of South Carolina. However, he did not give special preference or privilege to these universities.

3.10 VALIDITY

Because the cases selected for this study are not representative of the population as a whole, but was purposively sampled to account for specific variance, external validity is not an option. Internal validity assures that variables are consistent with the examined measures. The present study maintained internal validity in two ways. First, it used Anderson (2006) to sensitize the concepts of his theory of nationalism; four concepts relevant to the present study were discussed in Section 3.2. Thus, the researcher was primed to seek specific messages in the college football posts. These sensitizing concepts were used for the final groupings of the concept evidences recorded as open codes. The consistency of the open codes is the second way validity was

addressed. As codes were created, a detailed code book was kept identifying the meaning of each code.

The four sensitizing concepts, Official Nationalism, Print Capitalism, Common Culture, and Patriotism and Racism, address four aspects of Anderson's (2006) theory of nation building. These concepts are ways that institutions and the media present information to drive the nationalistic message. As such, a close reading of these concepts in Anderson was completed before any coding began. With all four concepts explained, open coding began with an eye toward concepts that were reflected in these concepts.

The open coding process viewed each post individually, and the researcher noted the occurrence of various evidences of Anderson's concepts. For example, Color was viewed to be part of the Common Culture concept, as all fans were encouraged to wear blue to a Georgia State game. Thus, a code "Color" was created and detailed in the code book, with an image used as a guide for what constitutes a "Color" code. This assured that posts coded one way for Georgia State would not be coded differently for UTSA, and so on. The detailed code book is available in Appendix C.

Finally, the open codes were grouped by the sensitized concepts drawn from Anderson (2006). By considering the content of the post in the first round coding, and then grouping those contents in the coding based on the sensitized concepts, it assures codes can be freely assigned, and not geared toward building findings specific to the extant categories.

Chapter 4

CASE PROFILES

IDENTIFYING THE UNIVERSITIES

Six schools were selected for analysis in this research. Georgia State University and the University of Texas-San Antonio were selected to represent new college football programs. Marshall University and Miami University represent mid-major college football programs. And the University of Iowa and the University of South Carolina represent major college football programs. The following sections give a brief history of each team and a synopsis of their 2012 seasons.

4.1 NEW COLLEGE FOOTBALL PROGRAMS

New college football programs have a special interest in expanding their fan culture. These schools already have a fan base because of existing sports, including basketball (the second-highest grossing revenue sport for most NCAA programs). However, research (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996; Smith & Schwarz, 2003) has shown that football has the strongest association with fan culture and fan activity. This section discusses Georgia State University and the University of Texas-San Antonio.

4.1.1 *Georgia State University*

The Georgia State Panthers began competitive football play Sept. 2, 2010, with a 41-7 win over Shorter University; the game drew the largest ever crowd for a program's first game, with 30,237 fans in attendance. Georgia State had some success in their first season, posting a 6-5 record. The second season would prove more difficult, as the team faced more Division I opponents, and finished 3-8. Georgia State, following the trend of other new programs and sensing shifts in the college football landscape, began to seek a home in the FBS in 2011. On April 14, 2012, the Panthers agreed to rejoin the Sun Belt Conference as a full member, with the football team playing a full Sun Belt schedule in 2013, and being eligible for the conference championship and a bowl berth in 2014. In the 2012, Georgia State played its only year as a football member of the Colonial Athletic Association. With a move to the FBS and the Sun Belt Conference pending, the Panthers were ineligible for the FCS playoffs and the CAA championship; officially, GSU finished with a 0-0 CAA record, despite playing eight CAA opponents because they were transitioning out of the CAA to the Sun Belt Conference, and thus were not eligible for CAA events under CAA rules. Ultimately, the Panthers posted a 1-10 record for the season, with the lone win coming on the road against Rhode Island. Coach Bill Curry retired after the season, ending the Curry era of the program.

Georgia State opened the season against South Carolina State University on August 30. The Bulldogs defeated the Panthers 33-6 at the Georgia Dome in front of a crowd of 18,921. In the game, GSU punter Matt Hubbard punted four



Panthers

Colors: Blue and White
Mascot: Pounce

Atlanta, Georgia
Founded: 1913
Enrollment: 32,000
Endowment: \$149.3 million
Stadium: Georgia Dome (71,228)
2011 Average Attendance:
 14,286
Coach: Bill Curry
Record: 92-118-4 (18 years)
Record at GSU: 9-13 (2 years)

TELEVISION MARKETS

Primary:
 ■ Atlanta (Rank 9; 2,407,080)
Other top-100:
 ■ Savannah (Rank 92; 329,460)



CONFERENCE
Colonial Athletic Association (2012-)

Previous conferences: FCS Independent (2010-11).
 Note: Will join Sun Belt Conference (FBS) in 2013.

Figure 4.1: Georgia State University profile. SOURCE: Georgia State University (2013).

Table 4.1: 2012 Georgia State football schedule and results

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Attendance
8/30	South Carolina State	Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA	L, 33-6	18,921
9/8	at #23 (FBS) Tennessee	Neyland Stadium, Knoxville, TN	L, 51-13	87,821
9/15	UTSA	Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA	L, 38-14	11,496
9/22	Richmond*	Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA	L, 35-14	9,476
9/29	at William & Mary*	Zable Stadium, Williamsburg, VA	L, 35-3	11,125
10/6	#14 New Hampshire*	Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA	L, 44-21	9,531
10/13	at Rhode Island*	Meade Stadium, Kingston, RI	W, 41-7	6,013
10/20	#24 Villanova*	Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA	L, 49-24	12,136
10/27	at #9 James Madison*	Bridgeforth Stadium, Harrisonburg, VA	L, 28-21	22,813
11/3	#5 Old Dominion*	Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA	L, 53-27	12,293
11/10	at Maine*	Alfond Stadium, Orono, ME	L, 51-7	2,979

NOTES: Rankings by Associated Press poll as of game day. * Denotes Colonial Athletic Association game. Source: Georgia State University (2013).

times for a 62.2-yard average, with his third punt flying for a school-record 80 yards. The following week, Georgia State played its third game ever against a FBS opponent in a 51-13 loss to the University of Tennessee. The Panthers continued its stretch of defeats, falling at home to UTSA and Richmond, at William & Mary, and then at home again to New Hampshire. During the losing streak, GSU home game attendance dropped to a low of 9,476 for the game against Richmond, and 9,531 against New Hampshire, both about half the attendance of the season opener.

GSU defeated the University of Rhode Island 41-7 on October 13, in Kingston, R.I. This would be the only win for Georgia State all season. After the win at Rhode Island, the Panthers returned to the Georgia Dome to face FCS No. 24-ranked Villanova University in the homecoming game. The Wildcats defeated

the Panthers 49-24 in front of a crowd of 12,163. Georgia State closed out its home season with a 53-27 loss to FCS No. 5 Old Dominion on November 3, in front of 12,293 fans. The game celebrated Coach Bill Curry, who had announced his retirement effective at the end of the season. The GSU locker room was named for Curry in a pre-game ceremony. The Panthers closed their lone season as a member of the CAA with a loss at the University of Maine. GSU's season record shows the team's struggles to gain traction in the FCS powerhouse Colonial Athletic Association. Georgia State spent the year in transition, not only in conferences and levels of competitive play, but ultimately with coaches as well.

4.1.2 *University of Texas-San Antonio*

The University of Texas system's Board of Regents on December 18, 2008, approved UTSA's plans to add Division I football. Prior to the decision to add football to UTSA, San Antonio was the largest city (seventh) in the country to not have a team playing Division I football in its metropolitan area.² To open the 2011 season, the Roadrunners packed 56,743 fans into the Alamodome to watch the team's inaugural 31-3 win over Northeastern State University, topping GSU's attendance record. UTSA played the 2011 season as an FCS independent, and posted a 4-6 record for the season. UTSA's first win against a Division I opponent came over Georgia State on October 29. In 2012, the Roadrunners began play in the FBS Western Athletic Conference. However, as the WAC dropped football as a result of ongoing realignment, the Roadrunners found a home in Conference USA, where they moved for 2013.

² Charlotte was the next largest at 17th; the University of North Carolina-Charlotte added football in 2013. Now Detroit (18) is the largest without football.



Roadrunners

Colors: Orange, White and Navy Blue

Mascot: Rowdy

San Antonio, Texas

Founded: 1969

Enrollment: 30,968

Endowment: \$81.8 million

Stadium: Alamodome (65,000)

2011 Average Attendance: 35,521

Coach: Larry Coker

Record: 60-15 (6 years)

Record at UTSA: 4-6 (1 year)

TELEVISION MARKETS

Primary:

■ San Antonio (Rank 36; 844,910)

Other top-100:

■ Austin (Rank 47; 707,430)

■ Dallas-Ft. Worth (Rank 5; 2,594,630)

■ Houston (Rank 10; 2,177,220)



CONFERENCE

Western Athletic Conference (2012-)

Previous conferences: FCS Independent (2011).

Note: Will join Conference USA in 2013.

Figure 4.2: University of Texas-San Antonio profile. SOURCE: UTSA (2013).

Table 4.2: 2012 UTSA football schedule and results

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Attendance
9/1	at South Alabama	Ladd Peebles Stadium, Mobile, AL	W, 33-31	17,144
9/8	Texas A&M-Commerce	Alamodome, San Antonio, TX	W, 27-16	30,416
9/15	at Georgia State	Georgia Dome, Atlanta, GA	W, 38-14	11,496
9/22	NW Oklahoma State	Alamodome, San Antonio, TX	W, 56-3	25,742
9/29	at New Mexico State*	Aggie Memorial Stadium, Las Cruces, NM	W, 35-14	14,341
10/13	at Rice	Rice Stadium, Houston, TX	L, 34-14	28,677
10/20	San Jose State*	Alamodome, San Antonio, TX	L, 52-24	30,862
10/27	Utah State*	Alamodome, San Antonio, TX	L, 48-17	23,519
11/3	at #23 Louisiana Tech*	Joe Aillet Stadium, Ruston, LA	L, 51-27	23,645
11/10	McNeese State	Alamodome, San Antonio, TX	W, 31-24	25,784
11/17	at Idaho*	Kibbie Dome, Moscow, ID	W, 34-17	9,030
11/24	Texas State*	Alamodome, San Antonio, TX	W, 38-31	39,032

NOTES: Rankings by Associated Press poll as of game day. * Denotes Western Athletic Conference game. Source: University of Texas-San Antonio (2013).

The Roadrunners opened the season on the road, at the University of South Alabama. A crowd of 17,144 watched from Ladd Peebles Stadium as UTSA edged the Jaguars, also amid transition from the FCS to FBS. The win was the first road victory for UTSA, as well as the first against an FBS team. The Roadrunners followed up with wins over Texas A&M-Commerce, at Georgia State, against Northwestern Oklahoma State, and at New Mexico State. A trip to Rice Stadium in Houston to face the Rice University Owls tripped up UTSA's undefeated streak. The Owls, a future conference mate for UTSA, dropped the Roadrunners 34-14.

For the homecoming game, UTSA fell to San Jose State University 52-24. The Roadrunners hosted the powerful Spartans in a WAC game played in front of a crowd of 30,862. UTSA's troubles continued with losses to eventual WAC

champion Utah State, and at No. 23 Louisiana Tech. UTSA got back on track with a 31-24 win over McNeese State at the Alamodome. The Roadrunners followed that with a 34-17 win over Idaho at the Vandals' Kibbie Dome. The Battle for I-35 rivalry game against Texas State University marked the end of the 2012 campaign. A crowd of 39,032 looked on from the Alamodome as the Roadrunners held on for a 38-31 win over the rival Bobcats. This game marked the first meeting of the schools, separated by 55 miles of Interstate 35. Yet, the rivalry has existed for other sports, including basketball, since 1991.

4.2 MID-MAJOR COLLEGE FOOTBALL PROGRAMS

Though not an official designation, a mid-major is a program that does not have the financial resources of the wealthiest programs, but still plays at the same level. Marshall University shares geographic territory with five other FBS teams: West Virginia University, the Ohio State University, Ohio University, the University of Kentucky, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech). Similarly, Miami University shares its location with the Ohio State University, the University of Cincinnati, the University of Kentucky, the University of Louisville, Indiana University, Bowling Green State University, and the University of Toledo. While not all of these neighboring schools are athletic powers, Marshall and Miami must compete with them for fans.

4.2.1 Marshall University

Marshall began playing football in 1892, initially known as the Indians, wearing blue and black. After decades of unsettled nicknames, including the



Thundering Herd

Colors: Green and White

Mascot: Marco

Huntington, West Virginia

Founded: 1837

Enrollment: 14,000

Endowment: \$83.8 million

Stadium: Joan C. Edwards Stadium (38,019)

2011 Average Attendance: 25,874

Coach: Doc Holliday

Record: 12-13 (2 years)

Record at MU: Same

TELEVISION MARKET

Primary:

■ Charleston-Huntington (Rank 65; 505,200)



CONFERENCE

Conference USA (2005-)

Previous conferences: Independent (1895-1925); West Virginia Athletic Conference (1925-33); Buckeye Conference (1933-39); West Virginia Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (1939-48); Ohio Valley Conference (1948-52); Mid-American Conference (1953-69); Independent (1969-75); Southern Conference (1977-97); Mid-American Conference (1997-2005).

Figure 4.3: Marshall University profile. SOURCE: Marshall University (2013).

Table 4.3: 2012 Marshall football schedule and results

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Attendance
9/1	at #11 West Virginia	Milan Puskar Stadium, Morgantown, WV	L, 69-34	59,120
9/8	Western Carolina	Edwards Stadium, Huntington, WV	W, 52-24	25,317
9/15	Ohio	Edwards Stadium, Huntington, WV	L, 27-24	33,436
9/22	at Rice*	Rice Stadium, Houston, TX	W, 54-51 (2OT)	14,204
9/29	at Purdue	Ross-Ade Stadium, West Lafayette, IN	L, 51-41	45,481
10/6	Tulsa*	Edwards Stadium, Huntington, WV	L, 45-38	27,189
10/20	at Southern Miss*	M.M. Roberts Stadium, Hattiesburg, MS	W, 59-24	24,093
10/27	UCF*	Edwards Stadium, Huntington, WV	L, 54-17	22,563
11/3	Memphis*	Edwards Stadium, Huntington, WV	W, 38-28	22,041
11/10	at UAB*	Legion Field, Birmingham, AL	L, 38-31	11,981
11/17	Houston*	Edwards Stadium, Huntington, WV	W, 44-41	18,831
11/23	at East Carolina*	Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, Greenville, NC	L, 65-59 (2OT)	46,317

NOTES: Rankings by Associated Press poll as of game day. * Denotes Conference USA game. Source: Marshall University (2013).

Judges, Boogercats, Big Green, and Herd, students and faculty dubbed Marshall athletics the Thundering Herd in 1965. In 1970, a charter airplane carrying most of the Marshall football team, coaches, and athletic staff, as well as several prominent boosters, crashed into the hillside beneath Tri-State Airport near Huntington, killing all 75 on board; the disaster was chronicled in the 2006 Warner Bros. motion picture *We Are Marshall*. Following the crash, Marshall was one of the worst college football teams in the country, and did not post a winning season until 1984. Between 1987 and 1996, Marshall went to five Division I-AA (FCS) national championship games and won two (1992, 1996). In 1997, the Herd moved to Division I-A (FBS) and immediately found success in the Mid-American Conference, playing for the conference championship every season

from 1997-2002, and winning five of them. After moving to Conference USA in 2005, the Herd struggled, before returning to bowl games in 2009 and 2011.

Marshall began its 2012 season at in-state rival West Virginia for the conclusion of a seven-game series. The Herd couldn't gain traction in the game, with the Mountaineers posting a 69-34 win. Marshall followed with a win over Western Carolina from the FCS. The next week, Ohio University knocked off the Herd in the Battle for the Bell rivalry, 27-24. Marshall posted its first-ever win in the state of Texas with a defeat of Rice, 54-51, in double overtime. Following losses at Purdue and Tulsa, Marshall throttled Southern Mississippi, who went winless all season. The Herd fell to the University of Central Florida, at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, and defeated the University of Memphis and the University of Houston to set up a win-or-go-home season finale at East Carolina. Both the Herd and the Pirates entered the game with 5-6 records. With a bowl game on the line, both teams battled through the game, with ECU taking the 65-59 win in double overtime.

4.2.2 *Miami University*

Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio, began play in college football in 1888 with a game against the University of Cincinnati; that game marked the beginning of the oldest non-conference rivalry in the country. Initially known as the Redskins, Miami began playing in the Mid-American Conference in 1947. Miami has won 15 MAC championships, and has won the MAC East Division five times. The RedHawks have gone 7-3 in bowl games. Miami is most famous for its status as the "Cradle of Coaches." Dozens of successful football coaches, at



RedHawks

Colors: Red and White

Mascot: Swoop

Oxford, Ohio

Founded: 1809

Enrollment: 16,300

Endowment: \$403 million

Stadium: Yager Stadium (24,286)

2011 Average Attendance:
16,174

Coach: Don Treadwell

Record: 4-8 (1 year)

Record at MU: Same

TELEVISION MARKETS

Primary:

■ Cincinnati (Rank 35; 923,830)

Other top-100:

■ Dayton (Rank 63; 527,030)



**MID-AMERICAN
CONFERENCE**

CONFERENCE

Mid-American Conference (1947-)

Previous conferences: Ohio Athletic Conference (1911-28);
Independent (1928-47)

Figure 4.4: Miami University profile. SOURCE: Miami University (2013).

Table 4.4: 2012 Miami football schedule and results

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Attendance
9/1	at #18 Ohio State	Ohio Stadium, Columbus, OH	L, 56-10	105,039
9/8	Southern Illinois	Yager Stadium, Oxford, OH	W, 30-14	17,725
9/15	at Boise State	Bronco Stadium, Boise, ID	L, 39-12	34,178
9/22	Massachusetts*	Yager Stadium, Oxford, OH	W, 27-16	15,159
9/29	at Akron*	InfoCision Stadium, Akron, OH	W, 56-49	8,211
10/13	at Cincinnati	Nippert Stadium, Cincinnati, OH	L, 52-14	35,097
10/20	at Bowling Green*	Doyt Perry Stadium, Bowling Green, OH	L, 37-12	17,071
10/27	#23 Ohio*	Yager Stadium, Oxford, OH	W, 23-30	19,326
11/3	at Buffalo*	University at Buffalo Stadium, Amherst, NY	L, 27-24	10,817
11/10	Kent State*	Yager Stadium, Oxford, OH	L, 48-32	13,301
11/17	at Central Michigan*	Kelly/Shorts Stadium, Mt. Pleasant, MI	L, 30-16	7,223
11/23	Ball State*	Yager Stadium, Oxford, OH	L, 31-24	8,154

NOTES: Rankings by Associated Press poll as of game day. * Denotes Mid-American Conference game. Source: Miami University (2013).

the college and professional level, either played for or coached at Miami University. Famous coaches from Miami include Woody Hayes, Bo Schembechler, Paul Brown, John Harbaugh, and Ara Parseghian. Overall, Miami lists 32 former RedHawks who have gone on to head coaching jobs elsewhere; 12 former Miami coaches or players have gone on to win national Coach of the Year awards in either college or professional football.

Miami traveled to Columbus, Ohio, to face the Ohio State University in Coach Urban Meyer's debut with the Buckeyes, and fell 56-10. Miami rebounded with a 30-14 win over Southern Illinois of the FCS. A cross-country trip to the blue turf of Boise State University the next week sent Miami home with a 39-12 loss. Miami followed with wins over MAC foes Massachusetts and Akron.

Cincinnati took home the Victory Bell in the rivalry matchup with Miami, 52-14.

Following a loss at Bowling Green, Miami would upset No. 23 Ohio University in the Battle of the Bricks rivalry game 23-21. But the upset win was the last of the season, as Miami dropped games to Buffalo, Kent State, Central Michigan, and Ball State, posting a final record of 4-8.

4.3 MAJOR COLLEGE FOOTBALL PROGRAMS

The University of South Carolina and the University of Iowa share several commonalities. Both schools have about 30,000 students at their main campuses and are one of two major public universities in their respective states, with the competing schools being in opposing BCS Conferences (Iowa State University, Big 12; Clemson University, ACC). Both schools have played in high-standing bowl games and draw on their states, regions, and nationwide for fans. Both schools also have one Heisman Trophy winner, Nile Kinnick at Iowa and George Rogers at South Carolina.

4.3.1 University of Iowa

The University of Iowa played its first intercollegiate football game in 1889. Ten years later, Iowa joined the Western Conference, which became the Big Ten conference. Early in the 20th century, the Hawkeyes were dominant, reeling off 23 and 20 game winning streaks. Kinnick won the Heisman in 1939; Iowa Stadium was renamed for him in 1979. The Hawkeyes have played in 26 bowls, including five Rose Bowls, which hosts the Big Ten conference champion in the postseason. Iowa owns a 14-11-1 postseason record. In all time, the Hawkeyes have finished ranked in the final Associated Press poll 21 times, with the highest finish being No. 2 in 1958.



Hawkeyes

Colors: Black and Gold

Mascot: Herky the Hawk

Iowa City, Iowa

Founded: 1847

Enrollment: 30,561

Endowment: \$1.1 billion

Stadium: Kinnick Stadium
(70,585)

2011 Average Attendance:
70,585

Coach: Kirk Ferentz

Record: 101-81 (15 years)

Record at UI: 89-60 (12 years)

TELEVISION MARKET

Primary:

■ Des Moines-Ames (Rank 72;
432,820)

Other top-100:

■ Omaha (Rank 76; 418,290)

■ Cedar Rapids-Waterloo-
Iowa City-Dubuque (Rank 89;
346,010)

■ Davenport-Rock Island-Moline
(Rank 100; 309,800)

BIG CONFERENCE
Big Ten Conference (1899-)

Previous conferences: None.

Figure 4.5: University of Iowa profile. SOURCE: University of Iowa (2013).

Table 4.5: 2012 Iowa football schedule and results

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Attendance
9/1	Northern Illinois	Soldier Field, Chicago, IL	W, 18-17	52,117
9/8	Iowa State	Kinnick Stadium, Iowa City, IA	L, 9-6	70,585
9/15	#7 (FCS) Northern Iowa	Kinnick Stadium, Iowa City, IA	W, 27-16	70,585
9/22	Central Michigan	Kinnick Stadium, Iowa City, IA	L, 32-31	70,585
9/29	Minnesota*	Kinnick Stadium, Iowa City, IA	W, 31-13	70,585
10/6	at Michigan State*	Spartan Stadium, East Lansing, MI	W, 19-16 (2OT)	70,211
10/13	Pennsylvania State*	Kinnick Stadium, Iowa City, IA	L, 38-14	70,585
10/27	at Northwestern*	Ryan Field, Evanston, IL	L, 28-17	44,121
11/3	at Indiana*	Memorial Stadium, Bloomington, IN	L, 24-21	40,646
11/10	Purdue*	Kinnick Stadium, Iowa City, IA	L, 27-24	70,585
11/17	at #23 Michigan*	Michigan Stadium, Ann Arbor, MI	L, 42-17	113,016
11/23	#17 Nebraska*	Kinnick Stadium, Iowa City, IA	L, 13-7	69,805

NOTES: Rankings by Associated Press poll as of game day. * Denotes Big Ten conference game. Source: University of Iowa (2013).

Iowa began its 2012 season with a 18-17 win over Northern Illinois University at Soldier Field in Chicago as a crowd of 52,117 watched. The next week, the Hawkeyes lost 9-6 to rival Iowa State before a sold-out home crowd. Iowa rebounded with wins over Northern Iowa (FCS) but then dropped a 32-31 decision to MAC member Central Michigan. Iowa opened Big Ten conference play with wins over Minnesota and Michigan State, but lost every game after, against Pennsylvania State, Indiana, Purdue, Michigan, and Nebraska, to close the season with a 4-8 record.

4.3.2 *University of South Carolina*

The University of South Carolina first fielded a college football team in 1892; they played one game, a Christmas Eve, 44-0 loss to Furman in Charleston.



Gamecocks

Colors: Garnet and White
Mascot: Cockey

Columbia, South Carolina
Founded: 1801
Enrollment: 29,957
Endowment: \$414 million
Stadium: Williams-Brice Stadium (80,250)
2011 Average Attendance: 79,131
Coach: Steve Spurrier
Record: 197-75-2 (22 years)
Record at USC: 55-35 (7 years)

TELEVISION MARKETS

- Primary:*
- Columbia (Rank 74; 404,830)
- Other top-100:*
- Charlotte (Rank 25; 1,140,900)
 - Greenville-Spartanburg-Asheville-Anderson (Rank 37; 860,930)
 - Charleston (Rank 98; 311,260)



CONFERENCE
Southeastern Conference (1991-)
 Previous conferences: Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association (1900-01, 1911-21); Southern (1921-53); Atlantic Coast (1953-71); Independent (1971-91).

Figure 4.6: University of South Carolina profile. SOURCE: University of South Carolina (2013).

Table 4.6: 2012 South Carolina football schedule and results

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Attendance
8/30	at Vanderbilt*	Vanderbilt Stadium, Nashville, TN	W, 17-13	38,393
9/8	East Carolina	Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC	W, 48-10	77,006
9/15	UAB	Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC	W, 49-6	77,963
9/22	Missouri*	Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC	W, 31-10	80,836
9/29	at Kentucky*	Commonwealth Stadium, Lexington, KY	W, 38-17	49,810
10/6	#5 Georgia*	Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC	W, 35-7	85,199
10/13	at #9 LSU*	Tiger Stadium, Baton Rouge, LA	L, 23-21	92,734
10/20	at #3 Florida*	Ben Hill Griffin Stadium, Gainesville, FL	L, 44-11	90,833
10/27	Tennessee*	Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC	W, 38-35	80,250
11/10	Arkansas*	Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC	W, 38-20	78,772
11/17	#9 (FCS) Wofford	Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC	W, 24-7	79,982
11/24	at #12 Clemson	Memorial Stadium, Clemson, SC	W, 27-17	84,513
1/1	#19 Michigan	Raymond James Stadium, Tampa, FL	W, 33-28	54,527

NOTES: Rankings by Associated Press poll as of game day. * Denotes Southeastern Conference game. Source: University of South Carolina (2013).

USC played in the Southern Conference, which had more than 20 members at its height, from 1922-52. South Carolina left to help form the Atlantic Coast Conference in 1953. USC was competitive in the ACC, and won the conference championship in 1969. Two years later, in 1971, South Carolina left the ACC to compete as a major independent in football. Rogers won the Heisman in 1980, and was the first pick in the 1981 NFL Draft; he was chosen by the New Orleans Saints. In 1992, South Carolina and the University of Arkansas joined the SEC to help the conference become the first with 12 teams and two divisions, and to host a championship game. The move to the SEC proved difficult for USC, until the 2000 season, where the Gamecocks started to ascend in the conference ranks. With the arrival of Steve Spurrier as head coach in 2005, the Gamecocks have become one of the powers of college football.

South Carolina opened its season on the road for a Southeastern Conference game against Vanderbilt; the Gamecocks topped the Commodores 17-13. USC went out of conference, playing two teams from Conference USA, East Carolina and UAB, beating both. The Gamecocks returned to their conference, beating Missouri, Kentucky and No. 5 Georgia. A October road trip gave South Carolina its only losses of the season, with back to back losses at No. 9 LSU and No. 3 Florida. Carolina closed out the conference slate with wins over Tennessee and Arkansas at home. After a win over Wofford (FCS), South Carolina defeated archrival Clemson, ranked 12th, on the road 27-17. The Gamecocks defeated No. 19 Michigan 33-28 in the Capital One Bowl, in Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida. The Gamecocks posted its second consecutive 11-win season, finishing 11-2.

4.4 SUMMARY OF CASES

The cases here represent three distinct scenarios in college football. GSU and UTSA are new college football programs, and are building their football fan base and traditions. Marshall and Miami are established programs with extensive traditions, but share fan territory with other universities, but still invest in athletics and football. Iowa and South Carolina are major state flagship universities, and have massive fan bases and rich traditions. All of the schools have active Facebook and Twitter pages, and have websites associated with CBS Sports College Network. Some of the schools also have Instagram and YouTube pages. These schools are selected to be representative of what schools at their level are doing, and not to present the best or worst of what is happening on college football Facebook pages.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS

OFFICIAL VOICES AND FAN ENGAGEMENT

Examination of the six teams' Facebook activity revealed a vibrant culture for each page, mostly driven by the university's official voice. For most cases, Facebook pages served as a venue for team discussion, with fans cheering on their team, posting photographs, and asking questions about games, players, tickets, and television broadcasts. This chapter explores the themes that emerged from the grounded theory analysis and participant observation. The findings of the grounded theory analysis and the netnographic participant observation are presented for each school, with the categorical groupings of messages for posts for each school being established after the discussion of the open codes and their meanings. Then, with all six cases explained, the analysis compares the findings from each school to answer Research Question 1. Then, it considers the engagement recorded in the netnographic field notes to show what kinds of posts build engagement in each situation, answering Research Question 2. It presents a model explaining fan engagement throughout the season for each team. Finally, the findings are summarized in a model that shows themes that best build fan engagement on Facebook.

5.1 NEW COLLEGE FOOTBALL PROGRAMS

The analysis of Georgia State University and the University of Texas-San Antonio sheds light on the ways new college football programs use Facebook to engage fans and build a fan culture. Georgia State University's Facebook page had 20 posts during the analysis period, while UTSA's had 60.

5.1.1 *Georgia State University*

Georgia State's Facebook page featured a variety of messages that sought to engage fans with the brand. During the analysis period, Georgia State made 17 posts to its Facebook page, and Georgia State fans made three. Researcher field notes indicate this university-driven page is typical for GSU; fans rarely posted directly to GSU's page throughout the observation period, but tended to respond to things the university posted. As such, posts from the university were the dominant voice in the discussion of the GSU page. The fans who spoke on the page tended to be a bit older than typical college students; Facebook analytics show that the 18-24 year old group of fans are the largest age range on the page. Data from the present study indicates that those who tend to engage posts on the page skew older than that, as it seems young alumni and others in their mid- to late-20s tend to be the ones who Like and Comment on posts on the page.

Fans typically would respond with Likes, Shares, and Comments, in descending order of frequency. The university showed energy and optimism about the team at the beginning of the season, posting 11 times (plus two fan posts) during the opening weekend, featuring message about wearing GSU blue, cheering the Panthers, and plans for the game. But, as the season wore on, university posts tended to only show information about the games, and not to

Table 5.1: Georgia State coding frequencies

	Opener	Homecoming	Rivalry/Senior	Total
Chant	0	1	0	1
Coach	1	0	0	1
Color	8	1	0	9
Contribute	3	1	0	4
FanChat	2	0	1	3
Game	2	4	1	7
Mascot	7	2	1	10
Opponent	2	0	0	2
Share	5	0	0	5
Stadium	5	1	1	7
TOTAL	35	10	4	49

NOTES: Total posts coded=20. Opener=12. Homecoming=5. Rivalry/Senior=3. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

encourage fan attendance; fans, however, still Liked and Shared posts, but with slightly less frequency than during the opener. University posts generally addressed team colors, the Panther nickname, the Georgia Dome, and games, all in various ways. Table 5.1 shows the frequency of occurrence of the codes found in the grounded theory analysis.

In its posts, Georgia State consistently branded the team with the Panthers nickname and mascot, rather than the university's own name. The first post during the analysis period wrapped up a 30-day campaign called "Meet the Panthers." The post campaign counted down the 30 days before the season kickoff, and profiled GSU platers and Coach Bill Curry with a Q&A on Facebook. A message posted October 19, during homecoming weekend, where GSU asked "Panther fans, what special homecoming twist are you adding to your tailgate?" Here, the post has two functions. First, it identifies people reading the post as



Figure 5.1: Georgia State cover photo. This post is the change of GSU's Facebook cover photo, made August 31, 2012. It was coded as Color and Mascot.

Panthers fans, and second, it presumes that the reader is going to the game, and will tailgate; the implication by this post is that Panther fans will go to the game, and will tailgate before it. Fans tended to respond well to the Panthers brand. In comments on posts about the season opener, fans posted "Wearing Panther BLUE!!" and "Go Panthers! We'll be cheering for you all season long!" A fan post also used the Panther name, saying "See y'all tomorrow night at The Georgia Dome. Let's BLEED BLUE, PANTHER FAMILY!"

In the researcher's field notes, the question of why this mascot branding was so was raised. "Perhaps they are the Panthers to fit in with the Falcons, Hawks, and Braves?" reads one note. The embrace of exclusively Panthers could be an attempt to draw in unaffiliated fans, that is, those who do not have an association with GSU outside of football. By seeing the team as "Panthers" rather

than affiliated with a university one did not attend, a potential fan could identify with the team as being “the local team.”

The use of GSU’s blue color also had an prominent role in posts on Georgia State’s page, both by the university and by fans. In the postings leading up to the Panthers’ season opener, fans were encouraged to wear blue to the game. The Panthers’ season opener coincided with National College Colors Day, which is the Friday before Labor Day weekend, the start of college football. On National College Colors Day — which is sponsored by the Collegiate Licensing Company, a college trademark, licensing, and marketing company — fans are encouraged to wear the colors of their favorite college team. Building on this, Georgia State pushed for a crowd dressed all in blue for the opener. A GSU post on August 29 reminded fans (sic): “ONE DAY TILL GSU FOOTBALL SEASON! Like this status if you plan on being at the Dome tomorrow night in your BLUE to watch the Panthers kick off the 2012 season!” A fan asked “Can we still come if we don’t have on blue??!! Our Panther shirts are black!! lol.” GSU replied “If you get there early you can get some of the BLUE shirts we are giving away, but we only have a select amount, so be sure to get there early!” Georgia State changed its cover photo on August 29, the day before the game; the new photo featured 16 thumbnail photos organized in two rows, with “Georgia State,” with a panther replacing the “A” in State, between the rows. The photos were arranged on a blue background, and all photos had been changed to a blue duotone (See Figure 5.1).

The roots of this campaign can be seen in the analysis period when the university heavily used color messages posts. “Color appears to be a unifier for fans; it reminds me of the Pittsburgh Steelers’ Terrible Towel, when fans were

told to bring a yellow towel to a game, and 'if you can't buy one, then dye one.' GSU wants its fans in blue at all costs, so much so that they are giving away branded apparel," the researcher said in the field notes. Moreover, the blue branding also uniquely identifies Georgia State in Atlanta, where no other college team uses blue as a primary color. By using the blue color, GSU is showing that anyone who puts on that blue is a part of Georgia State. Because GSU is trying to position itself as Atlanta's team, using the blue color works as a unifier for everyone from the city and the university.

The importance of Color and Mascot in Georgia State's posts show their role in establishing and building a fan culture. Color and Mascot both have small buy-ins for fans; a T-shirt with a Panthers logo is inexpensive and easy to purchase, compared to season tickets or travel to an away game. Further, as the university gave away shirts to the early-arriving fans at the stadium for the season opener, the expectation is that fans will embrace the shirts, which are blue, and feature the Panthers mascot.

GSU and fans consistently mentioned the Georgia Dome specifically in posts throughout the season. Instead of talking about seeing fans at the "game," GSU posts referenced seeing them at the "Dome." For example, the August 29 post calls fans to Like the post if they "plan on being at the Dome tomorrow night." The post's "Like" count totaled 128, which was one of only two post that had more than 50 Likes.

The Panthers' home venue is one of Atlanta's most famous; the Georgia Dome is the home of the NFL's Atlanta Falcons. It hosts the Chick-fil-A Kickoff game, and the Chick-fil-A Bowl, both featuring high-profile college football teams. The Southeastern Conference has played its championship game there

every season since 1994. The Georgia Dome has hosted the NFL's Super Bowl in 1994 and 2000. Lastly, the 2002, 2007, and 2013 NCAA Final Four Men's Basketball National Championship games were played in the Dome. Thus, the facility has strong brand resonance within Atlanta. When Georgia State began its football program in 2010, the Georgia Dome proved a natural fit for the program. For the program's inaugural game, 30,237 fans cheered on the Panthers — a record crowd for a new football program's first game (Georgia State, 2013). Field notes show the researcher pondering the association of GSU with the Georgia Dome brand. "I think by always referencing the Georgia Dome, the Panthers are building instant recognition, based on the association with the dome." Ultimately, the stadium message in posts helped to position Georgia State as in the center of Atlanta's sports scene.

Game postings, statuses about games, their previews, and results, represented a large share of Georgia State's page. These posts generally serve to remind fans about the game, and to promote the game to its followers. Only GSU made game-related posts, and these typically served to inform fans. Game posts generally included a message that referenced color or the stadium, reminding fans to wear blue to the game or showing the game's location at the Georgia Dome. "This stuff seems typical, but is this the right place/way?" the researcher wondered in code memos. The Facebook posts about the game does little to engage fans, such as ask them if they are going, asks about their tailgate plans, or start cheers. At the end of the observation period, the #AllBlueAllIn hashtag helped to start engagement by giving fans a hashtag to use to talk about the game; fans embraced this kind of engagement by using the hashtag to talk about Georgia State athletics.

Other themes noted more infrequently include Share, Contribute, Opponent, Chant, and Coach. Share asked followers to bring friends to Georgia State activities, or to put information about Georgia State on their pages. Contribute asked fans to support the university financially. Opponent posts talked about the opposing team at Georgia State games. Cheer posts included fan sayings for GSU, including “Bleed Blue” and “Let’s Go State.” Lastly, Coach posts referenced a player of the coaching staff directly.

Throughout the three years of observation, the researcher noted that GSU, almost weekly, posted a trivia challenge, scavenger hunt, or a featured photo of a fan. Georgia State is trying to build fan activity into the page. However, that activity was not always present during all weekends of analysis. The Facebook page weekly has a feature about an athlete playing for GSU, drawing from all sports. This coach and player focus gives fans an opportunity to see who the names are representing Georgia State week in and out.

For non-football sports, Georgia State focuses posts about its coaches and players. During the winter months, men’s basketball head Coach Ron Hunter routinely is shown in video or in a story posted to the GSU page discussing his team. One such post showed an interview with the coach talking about Samaritan's Feet, an organization that donates shoes to impoverished children worldwide. Hunter started working with the program when he was a coach at IUPUI, and continues to do so at GSU, where he coaches one game a year barefoot to promote awareness and as part of a shoe collection drive. Fans tuned in here, asking how to donate to help the program in comments, and sharing the content to their own pages.

Finally, researcher field notes suggest that Georgia State is working specifically to engage its students to use the Facebook page. Many times posts are directed specifically to them, with a leader “STUDENTS:” introducing the post. Often, these student-g geared posts are encouraging attendance at an athletic event, and discusses tickets. Further, some of the fan engagement efforts discussed above specifically address students, including one instance of a scavenger hunt on campus. The winner would receive VIP tickets to an athletic event, and the winning student was shown holding the tickets in a photo posted to the Facebook page. During the analysis period, students were told they could get unlimited free tickets to the GSU opening game, and the post received 28 Likes and five Shares; for this post, students asked questions about the ticketing process, and GSU responded quickly to their questions, tagging the students who asked in the response.

In axial coding, the researcher grouped codes noted in the posts into three categories, Spirit Emblems, Call To Action, and Information (See Table 5.2). Spirit Emblems includes mascot, chant, and color, all of which were used in ways that have symbolic association with GSU. Call To Action includes Share and Contribute, where fans are asked to share a status or information, or to give photos to GSU’s page. Information posts include Coach, Game, Opponent, and Stadium; these posts all served to update, explain, or inform fans about these topics. Fan Chat did not fit the axial codes, and thus was left uncoded. As indicated by the frequencies, GSU’s page tended to focus on posts with Information and Spirit Emblems, while Call To Action posts happened less often.

Table 5.2: GSU open and axial code groupings

Axial Codes	Open Codes	Frequency	Notes
Spirit Emblems	Mascot	10	Exclusively uses “Panthers” to refer to team.
	Chant	1	“Bleed Blue,” “Let’s Go State,” and “All Blue All In.”
	Color	9	Blue. Includes blue crowd photos, encouragements for fans to wear blue, and tagline “All Blue All In.”
Call To Action	Share	5	Post information to your wall. Bring friends to games.
	Contribute	4	Asked fans to share game photos with the university.
Information	Coach	1	Coach is figurehead for football team. Was profiled on Facebook before first game.
	Game	7	References in-game activity, as a news bulletin with a score update.
	Opponent	2	Opponent of the week. Facts about other team.
	Stadium	7	References specific to Georgia Dome, which is an iconic Atlanta building.
Fan Chat	Fan Chat	3	Fan posts showed one person’s thoughts about the GSU season, and photos of fans wearing GSU gear.

NOTES: Total posts coded=20. Opener=12. Homecoming=5. Rivalry / Senior=3. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the total n of posts. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

The researcher’s field notes indicate the shift in on-the-field play changed the posts on GSU’s page. “As the team struggles, GSU leans more toward information about games, and fans aren’t responding as well.” One noteworthy post at the end of the season honored Coach Curry’s final game; the post had 21 Likes and four Shares. However, field notes reveals the engagement of fans did not precipitously fall, as was indicated in the football posts. Rather, the fall was limited to the weekends, and posting about football itself. Meanwhile, GSU focused its posts on basketball and other sports, which were more successful, and did only the minimum for football posts. Thus, as the team failed, GSU put its efforts to cheer into more successful ventures.

The impact of GSU leaning toward an informational approach to posting content to its Facebook page reaches the core of fan engagement: is Information what fans want on Facebook? Judging by Georgia State, fans respond evenly to all kinds of posts on the page, but the blend of Informational and Spirit Emblem content does not strongly indicate a fan preference for engagement based on post type. However, the fall of the frequency of posts as the team struggled could have a relationship with the Informational-Spirit posting strategy. Further analysis in other cases explores this relationship.

This research shows that Georgia State is developing the roots of a fan culture. By using Panthers, Blue, and The Georgia Dome as elements of group identity, GSU is telling fans that it wants them to see the team as an integral part of Atlanta sports, and that to be a part of GSU, one must wear blue and support the Panthers. The emerging *Panther Nation* then is marked by their blue gear; fans have bought in to this concept, as judged by the success of the hashtag #AllBlueAllIn at the end of the observation period. The Panthers moniker, too, has held on; Panthers has taken on a parallel meaning to Georgia State. GSU is the Panthers, and the Panthers are equivalent to GSU; fans have already taken to this, with all fan posts in the analysis period referencing the team as Panthers. Georgia State's *Panther Nation* is developing its identity, and further engagement with fans about what it means to be a Panther would help this cause. As it stands, the university's voice rings loudest and clearest when answering that question.

Ultimately, the analysis of Georgia State brings this study to conclude that the university embraced its blue color and panther mascot as the emblems of its fan community. After encouraging fans to wear blue, and posting blue-

dominated photos on its page, GSU saw the embrace of the color as a mark of association with the team, ultimately leading to the 2013 #AllBlueAllIn campaign. The panthers nickname puts another animal mascot on the Atlanta sports scene, and by referencing the Panthers rather than Georgia State, the team can be thought of as another team in the city, and not a team specific to GSU. Lastly, a successful team builds activity on Facebook; when a team struggles, the community discourse on its Facebook page dwindles, as well.

5.1.2 *University of Texas-San Antonio*

Like Georgia State, UTSA dominated the postings to its Facebook page. Primarily, UTSA's posts included focuses on a hashtag, the game, and an insider's view into the program. The Roadrunners' Facebook page had more activity at the beginning of the season than during the other analysis periods, with 43 posts coming on opening weekend, largely because of a photo gallery of the team's trip to the University of South Alabama. The homecoming weekend had 5 posts, while the rivalry/senior weekend had 12. Posts from homecoming weekend had a strong presence for conference, as it was the Roadrunners' first home game as a member of the Western Athletic Conference, a league it joined to gain entry into the FBS. The finale had several game posts, as well as two posts addressing the rivalry with Texas State University.

Researcher field notes indicate this university-driven page is typical for UTSA; fans occasionally posted directly to UTSA's page during the observation period, but most typically responded in comments to things the university posted. Posts made by the university provide the dominant voice in the brand discussion occurring on the UTSA page. Facebook analytics show that the 18-24

Table 5.3: UTSA coding frequencies

	Opener	Homecoming	Rivalry/Senior	Total
Branding	3	3	1	7
Chant	1	0	0	1
Coach	1	0	1	2
Color	1	2	3	6
Conference	0	4	0	4
Contribute	0	1	0	1
FanChat	3	0	2	5
Game	13	0	6	19
Hashtag	12	4	9	25
Insider	19	0	0	19
KeyOthers	1	0	0	1
Mascot	1	0	0	1
Opponent	2	0	1	3
Player	8	0	0	8
Radio	2	1	1	4
Rival	0	0	2	2
Share	0	0	0	0
Stadium	1	3	2	6
Tailgate	1	1	0	2
Television	5	2	0	7
TOTAL	74	21	28	123

NOTES: Total posts coded=60. Opener=43. Homecoming=5. Rivalry/Senior=12. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

year old group of fans are the largest engaged group on the page. Data from the present study indicates that those who tend to engage posts on the page agrees with the analytics. Fan posts tended to start chants or cheer the team in some way.

Fans typically would respond with Likes and Comments, and less often Shared posts. The university began the season with excitement in its posts about

the team, primarily with a photo gallery showing the team traveling to its season-opening away game. The Roadrunners were successful on the field, but UTSA posted less often for subsequent games. In general, university posts provided information about the games, cheers on the Roadrunners, and showed fans scenes of the UTSA program. Table 5.3 shows the frequency of occurrence of the codes found in the grounded theory analysis.

The researcher noted hashtags (#) 25 times in UTSA's 60 posts. Hashtags, commonly associated with Twitter, became active in Facebook in 2013, but were not active during the time of inquiry. Therefore, their presence on Facebook indicates the hashtag message is part of a larger, overall strategy to unite fans in a chant, via social media. The Roadrunners' posts generally used the hashtags #getrowdy or #birdsup; however, others, primarily as #UTSA, #BeatTXST, and #SJSUvsUTSA, were used prominently at various, appropriate points during the season. In field notes, the researcher questioned the usage of hashtags. "Why are they doing this? It clearly doesn't work. It might be a good way to get fans to buy in to Twitter, but this is Facebook."

Hashtag post always co-occurred with messages about either a game, the opponent, television, or an insider view, among other cross-codes. This indicates that while the hashtag is an element of the message tactic being used by UTSA, it must coincide with some other form of content. Instead, #getrowdy and #birdsup extends across the brand, allowing UTSA to use these message tags as rallying cries throughout social media. Having the hashtag in place works as a tool for establishing identity, as friends and followers will see UTSA fans using the hashtags in their posts, which builds the brand for UTSA and identifies the reach of the UTSA imagined community (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996;

Smith & Schwarz, 2003; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012). Later in the season, UTSA showed that it did intend for fans to use the hashtags on Twitter with a post directing them to the site. “This builds a bridge between Facebook and Twitter, and might get fans to engage multiple platforms,” the researcher said in field notes.

The code Insider appears 19 times in the posts on UTSA’s Facebook page. Insider codes are messages, generally photos, that show fans and followers a behind-the-scenes look at the activity associated with the football team. For example, posts coded as Insider include photographs of the team’s trip to the University of South Alabama for the season-opening game. In the album of photographs from the trip, images show the team boarding an airplane, checking into a hotel, and UTSA-branded game day gear being loaded for the trip. Two images from this album are shown in Figure 2.4. The first shows UTSA football jerseys, with nameplates on the back, boxed for the trip. The nameplates, a new element to the uniform, feature the name of the player wearing the jersey. The second photo shows UTSA coaches flying in the first class section of the chartered jet that will fly the team to Mobile, Alabama. “These kinds of posts seem to me like something the fans would want to see on Facebook,” the researcher wrote in the field notes. “This lets Facebook followers see something here they wouldn’t see in the media, or just from the stadium. This really lets followers see *inside* the program, like they would if they were *actual* friends.”

In both cases, the photographs shown in Figure 5.2 are not visually striking. They show typical scenes of equipment being transported, and people flying inside a jet. Yet these photographs show scenes the average fan would typically never see. While it is presumed the team flies on a chartered jet to far-

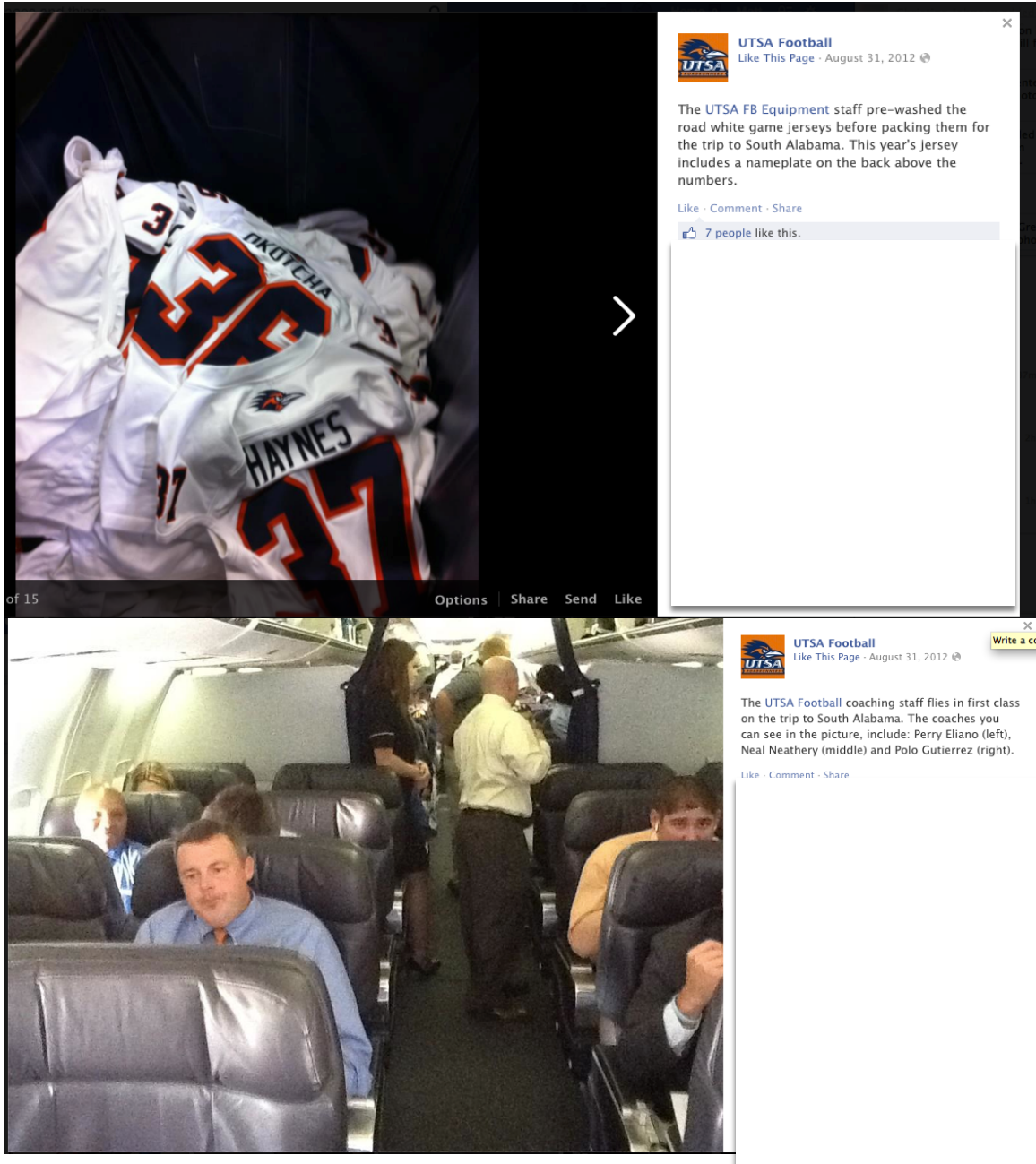


Figure 5.2: Example of UTSA Insider code. These posts are part of an album of photos from the season-opening trip to the University of South Alabama, posted August 31, 2012. Both photos are examples of Insider codes.

flung away games, the posted photo shows the airplane itself, full of players and coaches, and abuzz with activity, in a scene that might have only existed in the minds of some fans. Moreover, the photo, on its face, could be any airplane,

anywhere in the country, because the scene has no distinguishing features. But, because the photograph's caption identifies it as the Roadrunners' flight, the image has an association with the greater idea of UTSA's football team. Insider images, then, allow the average fan greater access to the inner scenes of the team, and the football program. By seeing these scenes, fans have a deeper knowledge about the program itself, and therefore become more invested in its success (Hwang, 2012; Smitko, 2012).

Similar to the posts by Georgia State, Game posts played a large role in overall UTSA social media postings. For UTSA, posts about games were limited to the season opener and the rivalry game. Posts generally gave a score update for the game, along with a #birdsup or #getrowdy hashtag. The in-game posts serve to update fans about the game action, and to generate Likes and comments. For example, a photo of Kicker Sean Ianno after he kicked the game-winning field goal in the season opener at South Alabama drew 194 Likes, 10 Comments, and 17 Shares. Similarly, a status "END OF THIRD QUARTER: #UTSA 31, Texas State 24. #getrowdy" posted November 24 drew 77 likes and two comments. These updates serve to show how the team is faring in game play for fans who might not be at the game, or available to watch or listen; these posts let them know about game action and be in the know about their team, regardless of their locations. "It's obvious they should do this, but I wonder if this is the best venue / way?" the researcher said in field notes. Fans might tune in to the Facebook page to get information about the team and the current score of the game, but because the audience is primarily student-aged fans in San Antonio, according to Facebook analytics, a game-centric focus of the page seems counter-

intuitive, because fans likely are watching the game in person, at least for home games. However, game posts do deliver expected content to the Facebook page.

Lastly, the codes Player, Television, Branding, and Color all occurred a few times on UTSA's Facebook page. Players often were the focus of a post; generally, a photo of a specific player would be posted, along with a message about his performance in the game. Television posts told followers of UTSA's page about the time and network where each game will air. Branding refers to posts with UTSA logos; these also generally co-occurred with other themes. Color coded posts are images posted with heavy amounts of blue or orange to show the prominence of UTSA's choice colors. These generally occurred in photo posts, and showed fans in the stadium. In other occurrences, Color codes appeared in posts where fans were encouraged to wear Orange to a game, specifically the Orange Out game against Texas State. Ultimately, all of these things showed fans the habits and traditions of others in the UTSA community, either by wearing the brand and its colors, watching on TV, or playing in the game.

The emergence of conference posts for UTSA also shows the pride in association with a FBS conference. As a member of the Western Athletic Conference, UTSA is associated with a long-established football conference. In its history, the WAC sent teams to BCS bowl games three times. However, the 2012 season was the last for FBS football for the WAC, as the departure of teams for the more powerful Mountain West Conference and Conference USA (including UTSA) forced the conference to rebuild its ranks with schools that put less emphasis on football. Yet, the association with such a longstanding affiliation allows UTSA to be part of a larger brand. Therefore, showing the association

with the WAC puts UTSA in a group of schools with high brand recognition and prominence.

Researcher field notes for UTSA indicate a “big time” presence on Facebook. In the researcher’s view, the usage of Facebook by UTSA more closely resembles Marshall, Iowa, or South Carolina than its peer in GSU. UTSA has constant updates, effective usage of branding and color, and ample use of photography. Videos of coaches are also available, at times. “The things I am seeing on her give off a vibe of belonging in Division I, rather than being a new entrant into D-I. This program clearly has aspirations to thrive in college football, and not just exist there to capture revenue.”

However, the researcher noted that UTSA was unique in its use of links to news media coverage of its team. Links to clips from the San Antonio television news were quite common on the page. “It seems to me that UTSA wants its fans to consume UTSA content, regardless the venue,” the researcher said in field notes. Obviously, high views on the UTSA video will tell the news station that people care about UTSA and want more UTSA coverage, thus serving the needs of marketing.

Watching UTSA transition from FCS team to the WAC to Conference USA has also shown the team’s rise on the national scene. The Roadrunners likely will get a bowl bid in 2014 as they complete their transition period to the FBS. Along the way, rhetorics on the UTSA page discussed the importance of playing at Division 1, to the importance of playing in the FBS, and now to the importance of playing in a competitive Conference USA. C-USA has long had a presence in Texas, with four Texas teams as members every season since 2005, and has had at least one team in Texas for most of its existence. So, the C-USA brand is valuable

Table 5.4: UTSA open and axial code groupings

Axial Codes	Open Codes	Frequency	Notes
Spirit Emblems	Branding	7	Focuses on colors and bird's head logo.
	Chant	1	UT-SA.
	Color	6	Posts feature these colors prominently, and fans are encouraged to wear specific colors to games.
	Mascot	1	Reference to "Runners" in post.
	FanChat	5	Posts of fans on page starting UT-SA cheer, or other cheers.
Media	Radio	4	Information for people to listen to game on radio.
	Television	7	Information for people to watch UTSA game on television. Also to Coach's Show and news reports.
People	Coach	2	Coach Larry Coker is quite famous.
	KeyOthers	1	Photos of athletic director and other coaches associated with the football team.
	Player	8	Posts about specific players on the team.
Information	Opponent	3	Opponent of the week. Facts about other team.
	Conference	4	Places UTSA as part of WAC.
	Rival	2	Texas State. Battle for I-35.
	Stadium	6	Alamo Dome. Famous building in San Antonio.
	Game	19	References in-game activity, as a news bulletin with a score update. Reminds fans to attend,
Connection	Hashtag	25	#GetRowdy and #BirdsUp
	Insider	19	Behind-the-scenes look at UTSA football, including charter jet, equipment, locker room.
Contribute	Tailgate	2	Post asked fans to share photos of tailgates
	Contribute	1	Asked fans to buy tickets.

NOTES: Total posts coded=60. Opener=43. Homecoming=5. Rivalry / Senior=12. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

to UTSA because it positions the team with peer, recognized universities. The associations with these conferences have been shown in press conferences, quotes, and simple conference leaderboards.

Ultimately, UTSA wants to show that its program is valid and competitive in the football-crazy state of Texas. This is done through insider views,

associations with conferences, branding, and coverage in the media. For UTSA, the notion of being a “new” football team is something the Roadrunners seem to have dismissed. The university wants us to think UTSA football has been around forever, and that it is and has been an important part of San Antonio culture. This strategy will help as UTSA transitions to C-USA and aspires to succeed in the FBS.

In axial coding, the researcher grouped open codes noted in the posts into five categories, Spirit Emblems, Media, People, Information, and Connection (See Table 5.4). Spirit Emblems includes branding, chant, color, mascot, and fan chat, all of which were used in ways to generate or show a symbolic association with UTSA. Media posts informed fans about the broadcast of games on TV or the radio. People posts showed photographs of coaches, players, and key others as they participated in football activities. Information posts include Opponent, Conference, Rival, Stadium, and Game; these posts typically served to explain or inform fans about these topics. Last, Connection groups Hashtag, Insider, and Tailgate, all of which tried to connect fans to the team, and with each other. Contribute was left out of axial coding, as it did not fit in the categories. As indicated by the frequencies, UTSA’s page tended to focus on posts with Connection, Information and Spirit Emblems. The researcher’s field notes indicate the university consistently tried to engage fans on its page. “UTSA wants fans to Tweet, to share, and to see and be seen on its social media. They do seem to be pushing fans to Twitter for this content.” Although UTSA started the season with a strong presence in photographs, that activity faded after the first two games. UTSA was successful on the field, and fans still engaged the posts made to the Facebook page, despite their decreased frequency. Field notes

indicate that late-season posts still hit on the same key messages shown in the first week. “They still want people to tune in, to cheer, wear orange, and send photos. Why aren’t they posting those photos on here? Why aren’t they posting their own photos on here more?” the researcher questioned in notes. UTSA officials spent considerable time creating and posting the season-opener photo gallery, which provided the “insider” posts about the program. Fans tuned in to that gallery, with Likes on every photo, and share and comments on several. Thus, it seems this content does engage fans, but it was not delivered later in the season.

UTSA’s strategy can best be described as one of an engaging informant. The university wants fans to know information about its games, programs, athletes, and coaches, and wants the fans to engage by cheering, wearing UTSA orange, attending games, tailgating, and sharing photographs of themselves doing these activities to UTSA’s Twitter page. This strategy, seemingly, is effective, as fans do engage the content UTSA posts and do share their photos on Twitter. The issue raised by this research questions the cross-platform integration of UTSA’s media. Should UTSA be specifically directing its Facebook fans to use the Twitter page? This research concludes, that yes, of course, UTSA is right in encouraging its Facebook fans to engage the Twitter feed; however, engagement on Twitter should not come at the expense of engagement on Facebook. The university should use both platforms to engage fans, ideally in the ways fans using those platforms want to be engaged. Bertino (2014) indicates that Twitter users tend to engage up-to-the-minute information, and that Facebook users engage content that elicits an emotional reaction, or something that someone might store as a memory. It follows, then, that UTSA should use its Twitter for

game updates, photographs, and information, and then should post galleries of game photos to its Facebook page, much like it did for the season opener.

This research indicates that UTSA has developed a rich fan culture, despite being an emerging football program. Fans actively engage UTSA content, and attend games decked out in orange to cheer on the Roadrunners. The emerging *Roadrunner Nation* then is marked on its social media, with photos of fans dressed in orange Roadrunner gear. Fans have bought in to this concept, as judged by the success of the hashtags #GetRowdy and #BirdsUp among fans and the university at the end of the observation period. UTSA's *Roadrunner Nation* has a fully realized identity, with fans engaging the university on multiple social media platforms, and participating in offline ways to express the culture. Though the university's voice rings loudest on UTSA's Facebook page, it still has developed a relationship with its fans to earn their buy-in.

Ultimately, the analysis of UTSA brings this study to conclude that the university has embraced hashtags as a means to engage fans, and shares information about its teams and their happenings on its Facebook page; moreover UTSA uses Facebook as a way to show fans direct messages about its athletic programs, with insider views into the workings of the teams and athletic department. The immediate success of UTSA in football, plus its fast track to the FBS, might have helped fans to tune in to UTSA's social media; but the university delivered fans with engaging content. The success of UTSA in making its fans engage its content supports the notion that content asking fans to respond in some way, with a photo or Like, and by showing them aspects of the football program not seen by the general public, can keep fans tuned in.

5.2 MID-MAJOR COLLEGE FOOTBALL PROGRAMS

The analysis of Marshall University and Miami University offers perspective about the communications of a class of college football teams known as mid-majors. These schools play college football at its highest level, but do so without the financial resources and affiliation with a conference with big television money and major bowl tie-ins. Mid-majors in college football are teams that can succeed when playing college football's elite, but are not in the best position to do so. Marshall and Miami also address a key variable for mid-majors, which is access to the fan domain of other programs. Both schools are positioned in markets where they compete for fan attention with at least five other universities. Thus, for these schools, maintaining a strong and unique identity is an essential part of their competitive football experience. Marshall and Miami both have rich football histories, and use those to their advantage on their Facebook pages. During the analysis period, Marshall's page received 39 posts while Miami's received 23.

5.2.1 *Marshall University*

Marshall's Facebook page acts as a forum for fan exchange, and is facilitated by university-created information. Posts made by fans made up about half of the activity on Marshall's page, accounting for 19 of the 39 posts; no other university in this study had as high a proportion of fan posts to the university page. Fans used the Facebook page to start chants and cheer on the the team, ask questions about television broadcasts, and complain about a new season ticket program. University posts, conversely, focused on messages about the game and players. Like GSU and UTSA, overall posting to Marshall's page dropped after

the season opener; however, this was a result of decreased fan posting, as the university was consistent for all games in the analysis period. The season opener, which featured the final edition of a rivalry game against West Virginia University, garnered the most posts, with 17. The rivalry game, against Ohio University, caused fans to chime in to talk about the game. Homecoming posts contained themes of Color, Mascot, and Branding, among others. By the seniors' finale, fans were thanking the leaving players, with a few other themes present.

Researcher field notes indicate this blend of fan-university content is typical for Marshall; fans generally posted directly to Marshall's page during the observation period, as well as responded by Liking, Commenting, and Sharing posts. Facebook analytics show that Marshall Facebook fans tend to be older than students or young alumni, with the 35-44 year old group of fans located in Huntington are the largest engaged group on the page. Data from the present study also indicates that the Marshall Facebook audience trends toward middle-aged fans.

Fans typically would respond to university posts with Likes and less often Comments and Shares. The university posted about five times during each analysis weekend; fans posted more often during the season opener than during later weekends. The Thundering Herd was competitive on the field, staying in contention for a postseason bowl until the last game. Fans continued to tune in to Marshall's Facebook page all season, but posted directly less often later in the season. In general, university posts provided information about the games and Marshall players, and fans cheered on the team. Table 5.6 shows the frequency of occurrence of the codes found in the grounded theory analysis.

Table 5.5: Marshall coding frequencies

	Opener	Homecoming	Rival	Senior	TOTALS:
Alumni	1	0	0	0	1
Boosters	0	0	2	1	3
Branding	1	2	0	1	4
Chant	1	0	0	0	1
Cheer	2	0	1	1	4
Coach	1	0	0	1	2
Color	1	3	0	0	4
Complain	0	0	2	0	2
FanChat	12	2	3	2	19
Game	1	2	2	1	6
Mascot	0	2	0	0	2
Opponent	2	1	0	0	3
Player	3	1	1	1	6
Pride	1	0	0	0	1
Rival	2	0	0	0	2
Stadium	0	2	0	1	3
Television	3	0	0	0	3
TOTALS:	31	15	11	9	66

NOTES: Total posts coded=39. Opener=17. Homecoming=8. Rivalry=7. Senior=7. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

On the Herd Facebook page, Marshall fans accounted for the most posts. Fan posts addressed 12 themes, but used Cheer and Television most often. This stands apart from the themes of Player and Game, which were used most often by the university. Fan posts never addressed Player or Game, and university posts only addressed Cheer once, and Television never. The three Fan-Cheer posts all included a “Let’s Go Herd” or “Go Herd” message either as the post entirely, or as part of a post. Fan-Television posts all asked what station would telecast the upcoming game. Once, a fan asked if any other alumni in the Omaha, Nebraska, area would be interested in joining him to watch the game; no one responded, but other fans did tell him the network airing the telecast. Other

themes co-occurring with Fan posts included Opponent, Rival, Color, and Complain, which each co-occurring twice, and once each for Alumni, Chant, Pride, Boosters, Mascot, and Coach. Fan-Opponent posts addressed the opposing team for that week's game. Fan-Rival posts addressed the game against West Virginia. Fan-Color posts were photos of a drum major and of the crowd at the stadium, both prominently featuring green. Fan-Complain and Booster posts addressed a change in the points plan for donations with the purchase of season tickets. The Alumni post occurred in the post by the Omaha fan. The Fan-Chant post included the Marshall chant "We Are...Marshall." The Fan-Pride post said he still was proud of the team, despite the loss to West Virginia. The Fan-Mascot post was a photo of a hedge trimmed into the shape of Marshall's bison mascot. Lastly, the Fan-Coach post was a link to a television interview with former coach Jack Lengyel, who coached the team following the 1970 plane crash.

Researcher field notes about Marshall fans' tendency to chime in on Facebook indicate the activity during the analysis period as typical. "Marshall fans always are talking on this page. No other school I'm studying has that. Every week they are here cheering or asking questions." Marshall's fans are not necessarily more tuned in than other fans, but they are more willing to speak out to the university directly. The university tended to respond to questions and issues quickly, if other fans did not respond first.

Posts about games found in Marshall posts are similar to those found on Georgia State and UTSA posts, reflecting in-game updates, as well as time, date, and place information for the upcoming game. Player posts reflect specific attention to a player in the game with a photograph or with a text post. Both Game and Player codes were found six times.



Figure 5.3: Example of Marshall Branding and Color codes. This post from October 6 shows an archive photo of Marshall players entering the field in green uniforms in a cloud of smoke; the post came the day of the Homecoming game against Tulsa.

Codes for Branding, Cheer, and Color each were recorded four times, with three Cheer posts being done by fans. Branding posts are photos that use the logo as part of the photo, or of the logo itself. Color posts are photos that feature the color green. Figure 5.3 shows a post coded for Branding and Color. The post promotes that day's game, and tells fans what time kickoff will be. The included image shows nine Marshall football players entering the field in a cloud of fog. The players are wearing bright green jerseys, with the M logo on their helmets in green. The stadium crowd behind the players is also largely green clad. A transparent M logo is superimposed over the fog in the bottom right corner. This photo is part of a series the university posted to its albums of Facebook Cover Photos, all of which show fans and players in green and the M logo. One of these, similarly, shows a male cheerleader waving a giant white flag emblazoned with

the M logo. The remaining Cheer posts were similar to the Fan-Cheer posts, with the university sharing a “Let’s Go Herd.”

Codes for Boosters, Coach, Mascot, Opponent, and Stadium occurred less frequently. The university made three Stadium posts, all of which addressed the location of games. Boosters, Coach, Mascot, and Opponent were recorded only once each in university posts. The Boosters post announced the change in the points plan for season ticket holders. The Coach post referenced a story about the offensive coordinator. The Mascot post was the part of the series referenced in Figure 5.3; it showed an American bison running onto the football field, with the transparent M logo superimposed over its fur. Finally, the Opponent post referenced the game against “in state rival WVU” in a post announcing the game time and television network.

Researcher field notes indicate that Marshall’s page, like UTSA’s, tends to feature links to stories written by the university’s athletic department. These news-style pieces profile a player or coach, or sometimes discuss facilities upgrades, donations, or scheduling. For Marshall, this kind of content appears most often as the official university voice on the page, and addresses every sport the Herd plays. These university news stories supplement news coverage of the university and its athletic programs, and could serve an agenda-setting function in the media.

As Facebook has begun accepting hashtags in its posts, Marshall has embraced #WeAre, the start of the “We Are...Marshall” chant and #TheHerd. This is helping to categorize content posted to social media, whether or not it is directly posted to Marshall’s page. Moreover, a design change in Facebook no longer intermingles fan posts with the university’s posts on the page. Instead,

they are captured in a box at the top of the page. Fans still frequently engage Marshall's page by posting to it; however, this change has not been in place yet for a football season, so it remains to be seen how fans will react during the university's showcase sport. The use of hashtags, however, still collect all posts, university made and fan made, onto a single place, so as fans adopt the #WeAre #TheHerd hashtags, the interaction that occurred on Marshall's pages can be preserved. The university must take the lead here, though, to get fans to embrace these hashtags on Facebook.

Marshall has kept up with its cover photo changes, as well as creation of cover photos for fans to use. Marshall's cover photo changes regularly to feature different aspects of Marshall's athletics programs. Other photo posts made since the analysis period heavily favor the insider view of the program. This shift in content positions Marshall closer to South Carolina, UTSA, and Iowa with its posting strategy.

In sum, the voices of fans dominated posts on Marshall's Facebook page. Fans embrace of Chant, as well as the discussion of Television, show the reach of fan interest. Marshall fans chimed in on the Facebook page to cheer on their team. As Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) found, use of microblogging features on social media and soliciting response leads to community-driven group identity. In Marshall's case, the community identity is to cheer on the team, watch the games, and wear green.

In axial coding, the researcher grouped open codes noted in the posts into four categories, Spirit Emblems, Fan Voice, People, and Information, (See Table 5.6). Spirit Emblems includes branding, chant, color, mascot, and cheer, all of which were used in ways to generate or show a symbolic association with

Table 5.6: Marshall open and axial code groupings

Axial Codes	Open Codes	Frequency	Notes
Spirit Emblems	Mascot	2	References to "The Herd" or "Thundering Herd."
	Chant	1	References "We Are...Marshall" chant in games.
	Cheer	4	Cheers besides "We Are...Marshall" such as "Let's Go Herd."
	Color	4	Everything is green.
	Branding	4	Use of M with "The Herd." Photos of Marshall flag, players, and bison used for Facebook cover photos.
Fan Voice	FanChat	19	Posts of chant and cheer. Also questions about game on television. Mentions of pride in team.
	Pride	1	Fans talk a lot about "pride" in the team.
	Complain	2	One complaint by a fan about new points plan for donations.
People	Coach	2	Coach Doc Holliday. Interviews and coach's thoughts postgame.
	Player	6	Specific mentions of player.
	Alumni	1	Marshall alumni use game as rallying event, especially homecoming.
Information	Boosters	3	Post about points plan for donations.
	Game	6	Reminders about the game. In-game score updates.
	Opponent	3	Posts about facts about opponent of the week.
	Rival	2	Two rivals mentioned, WVU in Opener and Ohio in rivalry week.
	Stadium	3	Joan C. Edwards Stadium.
	Television	3	Channel and time of game telecast.

NOTES: Total posts coded=39. Opener=17. Homecoming=8. Rivalry=7. Senior=7. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

Marshall. Fan Voice posts included Fan Chat, Pride, and Complain, as these posts all were ways fans expressed themselves on Marshall's page. People posts showed photographs of coaches and players, as well as messages addressed to alumni and boosters, as these people have a function in the football program. Finally, Information posts include Game, Opponent, Rival, Stadium, and Television; these posts typically served to explain or inform fans about these topics. As indicated by the frequencies, Marshall's page typically had posts

addressing Fan Voice, Information, and Spirit Emblems. The researcher's field notes indicate the split here, with the university providing information, and the fans providing the spirit emblem discussion. "Marshall fans are all about emotion, cheering on the team and showing their colors; the university leans on information, so there is a balance." Marshall fans posted to the page throughout the observation period, but the activity spiked leading up to the season opener in the analysis period. Marshall remained in contention all season, and fans still engaged the posts made to the Facebook page, despite their decreased frequency. Field notes indicate that late-season posts from the university and fans kept true to the messages sent at the season opener. "They have struggled all year, but they weren't out of a bowl spot until the last second of the last game. If they weren't in it, would fans still tune in? I think so." the researcher pondered in notes. Marshall's informational approach does not do much to build fan engagement, as it asks no questions or makes no requests, but fans engage anyway. The cover photos Marshall created for were very popular, with several shares, and several fans adopting those cover photos as their own.

Marshall's strategy can best be described as being information driven. The university wants fans to be up to date with information about its games, programs, athletes, and coaches. Fans, however, use Marshall's page as a venue for discussion and cheering. Together, Marshall and its fans have built a page filled with rich expressions of fan culture, with photographs, cheers, and information about the team. The dichotomy of Marshall's page, with university providing the informative voice and fans providing an emotional voice, is unique in this study. The implications of this dichotomy suggest that Marshall fans have a strong sense of the identity of university fans, and take it upon themselves to

perpetuate that identity. For the university, its role as informant creates a clear voice for fans to learn about the team.

As a mid-major football program, Marshall must compete against teams with more money and clout for fans. The fan culture on its Facebook page, however, suggests that the university and its fans see this as a non-issue, instead leaning on its own traditions, rituals, and news. The changing world of college athletics certainly affects Marshall, but Herd fans do not see their team as inferior or disadvantageous. Fans are proud of the university, and the university has positioned itself as any other major university. The *Herd Nation* is a group of proud fans who engage each other, and their university in order to cheer the team. Herd fans have a fully realized identity that encourages online engagement and offline participation. The voices of fans and the university find balance on the Facebook page, as fans provide the cheers, and the university provides the stories.

Ultimately, the analysis of Marshall brings this research to conclude that the university tends to present information on its Facebook page, which fans engage, and fans post cheers and other spirited messages. Fans express pride in posting about their team, thus, their association with the university is in display through photos, cover photos, and posts directly to the university page. Fans still tuned in to the information content, even as the team struggled, and continued to post their own spirited content but at less frequency.

This pattern leads the researcher to conclude that fans with a strong association with the brand will post to its page through good times and bad, but will post more often in the good. Further, fans expect information from university on the page, and engage it consistently. The outlier case of fan

postings found at Marshall give insight into the understanding the relationship between pride and Facebook activity.

5.2.2 *Miami University*

Miami's Facebook page, hosted by Swoop, the RedHawks' mascot, primarily serves as a venue for university-created messages, which fans engaged very passively. Of the 23 posts on Miami's page during the analysis period, 21 of them came from the university; this frequency was typical throughout the observation period, where Miami fans tuned in to the university's posts, but made very few statements themselves. The university used this page, primarily, to remind fans about game times and to update them about the score of the game. As with the previous schools, posting to Miami's page decreased after the season opener. The opening game, which pitted the RedHawks against football powerhouse Ohio State University, drew nine posts. The homecoming game against the University of Massachusetts also had nine posts. The rivalry game, against the University of Cincinnati, drew only four posts. By the seniors' finale, the university only posted once, reminding fans about the game's kickoff, as well as about a women's basketball game.

Researcher field notes indicate this university-driven content is typical for Miami; during the observation period, the university tended to share photographs and text messages about the university, its teams, and its athletes. Fans typically responded by Liking posts, with Comments and Shares occurring much less frequently. Sometimes, fans would not acknowledge a post at all, which occurred during the analysis period, as well. Facebook analytics show that Miami Facebook fans tend to student-aged, with the 18-24 year old group of fans

Table 5.7: Miami coding frequencies

	Opener	Homecoming	Rival	Senior	TOTALS:
Branding	0	1	1	0	2
Cheer	5	0	0	0	5
Color	0	5	1	0	6
FanChat	1	0	1	0	2
Game	4	1	1	1	7
Hashtag	3	1	2	0	6
KeyOthers	0	1	0	0	1
Opponent	1	0	0	0	1
Pride	0	1	0	0	1
Rival	0	0	2	0	2
Stadium	0	1	0	0	1
Student	1	0	0	0	1
Tailgate	0	1	0	0	1
Television	0	0	1	0	1
TOTALS:	16	12	9	1	37

NOTES: Total posts coded=23. Opener=9. Homecoming=9. Rivalry=4. Senior=1. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

located in Cincinnati being the largest engaged group on the page. Miami's Oxford campus is about 40 miles outside of Cincinnati, but is considered part of the Cincinnati metropolitan area. It follows, then, that the most engaged posters likely are students living in Cincinnati and commuting to Oxford, or are young alumni living in Cincinnati starting their careers. Data from the observation period supports the latter conclusion, as posters and commenters tended to not be current students.

Fans typically responded to university posts with Likes and less often Comments and Shares. The RedHawks struggled on the field, which might explain some of the loss of engagement. Table 5.7 shows the frequency of occurrence of the codes found in the grounded theory analysis. Miami's

Facebook page featured posts that fit into 14 coded themes. Game posts were recorded most often, with the code being used in seven of Miami's 23 posts. Hashtag and Color appeared six times each, and Cheer appeared five times.

Miami's Game posts, similar to GSU, UTSA, and Marshall, simply gave the date and time of the upcoming game. Posts coded as Cheer on Miami's page were primarily done by the university, and read "Let's go 'Hawks" as part of another post, typically a Game update. Hashtags were included in posts to encourage fans to tweet, including #AllIn and once each for #BattlefortheVictoryBell and #AllInFridays. Color posts featured the color red prominently. Fans were encouraged to wear red as part of All In Fridays, and a few organizations posted photos of their staffs in red. The Homecoming theme, Red, White and MU, also embraced color. Figure 5.4 shows a post from the Homecoming game; under the post "Red, White & MU" is a photo of Miami's Yager Stadium, with a crowd decked in red, with red fireworks exploding upward. Featured prominently in the photo is the back of the Miami scoreboard, with the red block M, and a banner commemorating the Cradle of Coaches, a Miami tradition that the university has been the birthplace of the careers of several successful coaches in college and professional athletics.

Codes for Branding, FanChat, KeyOthers, Opponent, Pride, Rival, Stadium, Student, Tailgate, and Television occurred only one or two times. The Branding post shown in Figure 5.4 was one of two, with the other being a video from the rivalry game with the Miami logo as the linked image shown for the video. Fans posted once during the opener and once during the rivalry, both encouraging the team in those games. Key Others were shown once, as the homecoming court announced during the Homecoming game; students seeing



Figure 5.4: Example of Miami Color, Branding, and Stadium codes. This post from September 22 shows Miami's Yager Stadium at the homecoming game.

this post might look to see if they know members of the court. The opponent code was found once, with a specific mention of Ohio State University's home stadium, referenced as "The 'Shoe" in the opener; Ohio State's iconic stadium is known throughout Ohio, and Miami's association with the state's most successful program is noteworthy for fans. Pride was found in a homecoming post, with an announcement of the unveiling of a statue of Paul Brown as part of the Cradle of Coaches exhibit. Rival was found twice during the posts about Cincinnati, where the Bearcats were addressed as rivals. Stadium was recorded once, with the image in Figure 5.4. Students were mentioned once, in the opener,

when Miami linked to an article in the student newspaper that encouraged students to be All In for Miami. During homecoming, Tailgate was found, in a post that read “Tailgate Town opens at 10 am.” Lastly, Television was found once, during a the rivalry game, in a post that read “tune in on Fox Sports Ohio.”

Researcher field notes indicate that Miami’s page changed toward the end of the observation period, posting more stories, photographs, videos, and graphics seeking to engage fans. Miami has gone from its social media being an information outlet to a home of engagement. “They’re showing why Miami is great, with pretty photos, and information about sports teams and academic programs,” the researcher noted in August, 2013. Fans tuning in to Miami’s page can see photos and videos of events, posts cheering on RedHawks athletic teams, and posts shared from other Miami athletics Facebook channels. This stands counter to the analysis period, when the university did minimal work to inform fans, let alone engage them. This new, conscious effort to use Facebook as a mouthpiece for the university and its teams, and gives Miami a direct line to communicate with its fans.

Miami has maintained one general athletics Facebook page, and has several for other sports, but not for football or men’s ice hockey. This could be because these two are Miami’s premiere sports, and thus fans can only engage the official general athletics page for content about them, and thereby will consume content about all other RedHawks teams.

During the analysis period, researcher field notes call Miami’s page was “dull and lifeless.” Several times the researcher wondered if the page being analyzed was actually the university-maintained page; it was, of course, as it was linked from Miami athletics’ website. Fans and the university did not engage the

page in an effective way, and the page amounted to a missed opportunity in content. The scant postings by the university and its fans made Miami seem like it did not care about athletics or its traditions; in reality, those things are false.

As Miami began its change toward a more engaged page, fans started to tune in. Thus, it seems that social media follow the *Field of Dreams* mantra “If you build it, they will come.” Miami’s page hardly has the number of followers of any of the other schools in this study, with only about 7,000 people Liking Miami, with about 14,000 for the next smallest, GSU. However, as this posting strategy continues through the 2014 football season, its likely more fans will tune in. In fact, some already are; at the end of the observation period, at least one fan generally posted to Miami’s page each week.

Altogether, Miami’s posts primarily served to keep fans informed about the happenings of the RedHawks football team. A few posts cheered the team and showed Miami colors, both of which are activities that show Miami school spirit. The excitement and energy of posts that came with the opener continued through homecoming three weeks later. The enthusiasm what faded a bit for the rivalry road trip to Cincinnati, even though the RedHawks were very much alive for a bowl game. The wane in energy might have been from blowout losses to Ohio State and Boise State, and the expectation of a blowout loss to the rival Bearcats. Indeed, Miami did lose to Cincinnati, and struggled mightily the rest of the season. By the time of the senior game, Miami had been eliminated from the postseason and a single post reminded fans of the game time.

In axial coding, the researcher grouped open codes noted in the posts into three categories, Spirit Emblems, Fan Voice, and Gameday, (See Table 5.8). Spirit

Table 5.8: Miami open and axial code groupings

Axial Codes	Open Codes	Frequenc y	Notes
Spirit Emblems	Branding	2	Use of red M.
	Cheer	5	Let's Go Hawks!
	Color	6	Homecoming Red Out. Red seats and red clothes. Red, White & MU.
	Pride	1	Pride in Miami and Cradle of Coaches.
Fan Voice	FanChat	2	Fans encouraging team during game.
	Hashtag	6	#BattlefortheVictoryBell #AllIn
	KeyOthers	1	Showed Resident Life counselors in Miami gear.
	Student	1	Showed student fraternity houses. Homecoming court.
Gameday	Stadium	1	Image of stadium during games.
	Tailgate	1	Asked fans about their tailgate plans.
	Game	7	Reminders about game day. Updates in-game.
	Television	1	Shares TV station for game telecast.
	Rival	2	Battle for the Victory Bell against Cincinnati.
	Opponent	1	Posts about opposing teams.

NOTES: Total posts coded=23. Opener=9. Homecoming=9. Rivalry=4. Senior=1. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

Emblems includes branding, cheer, color, and pride, all of which showed a symbolic association with Miami. Fan Voice posts included Fan Chat, Hashtag, Key Others, and Student, as these posts all were ways the university tried to engage or show fans on its page. Finally, Gameday posts include Game, Rival, Opponent, Stadium, Tailgate, and Television; these posts typically made a statement about an upcoming game, and informed fans about these topics. As indicated by the frequencies, Miami's page typically delivered posts with Spirit Emblems or Gameday information. The researcher's field notes indicate mix of some spirit and some information is emblematic of Miami's page throughout most of the observation period. "Who do they think they are? Really. Swoop doesn't know if his messages should cheer or inform. Just when it looks like they

are going to do A, they do B. They need a strategy.” Miami’s football team struggled in 2012, and as the season wore on, fans engaged decreasingly. Field notes indicate that late-season posts from the university dropped from hundreds of likes to as few as 21. “Once the season was declared a bust, Miami just turned it off, and moved on to basketball and hockey. But the fans are still present; why aren’t they even trying to get their attention?” the researcher questioned in notes. Miami’s blend of gameday information and spirit symbols likely did not appeal to fans, as actual game attendance dipped from about 17,000 a game early in the season to 8,154 for the season finale. Because the informational approach does not do much to build fan engagement, the university must work to engage fans by asking questions, posting fan photos, or other images that will inspire fans. The spirit emblems Miami does use tended to be textual messages, such as cheers and chants, instead of impressive visuals.

Miami’s strategy can best be described as being information driven. The university wants fans to know about the game, and want to show them some of Miami’s traditions. Fans have bought in, and typically only Like the posts on Miami’s page. In fact, sometimes when Miami would make posts meant to excite, such as the team’s entrance video before the homecoming game, fans did not respond, at all. Thus, it could be that fans were so ingrained in getting information from Miami that they never say the page as more than a form of media about the team, rather than a community.

Like Marshall, Miami competes against teams with more money and clout for fans and attention. For Miami, this pressure is increased, as the University of Cincinnati is fewer than 50 miles away. Thus, Miami must use its alumni as its primary fan base and hope to capture some of the local audience for fans. The fan

culture perpetuated on its Facebook page during the analysis period suggests that Miami does have its traditions, but fans and the university do not put this culture first. Instead, football is just another event on the Oxford campus, no more special than a guest speaker; this, however, is not the case, as Miami has a proud history in college football and has been nationally competitive in the last decade. But even as college athletics moves toward a bias favoring large, rich schools, Miami is content as its small stature. The university leans on its traditions, and is not intent to upset the athletics program to advance the cause of the football team. This might seem counterintuitive, as the system of college football encourages teams to be bigger and better. However, Miami is content in its own role, and its Facebook indicates that Miami will compete on its own terms. The *RedHawk Nation* embraces alumni and tradition as much as it embraces the game of football. RedHawk fans on Facebook are interested in news about their team, but don't make participating in the online discourse a priority. The voice of the university dominates the Facebook page, with fans following along.

Ultimately, the analysis of Miami brings this research to conclude that the university uses Facebook in limited means, but is working toward opening a place for dialog and engagement with fans. The fans themselves want to know about their team, but do not have a lot to say about it — a stark contrast to Marshall. As the team struggles, the fans tuned out the university's messages, and the university stopped talking; thus, Miami's fans need their team to be successful to engage. This pattern leads the researcher to conclude that fans here have a weak association with the brand, and thus tune out content when the brand itself falters. Further, fans have developed an expectation for information

from university, and tended to not embrace non-informational content, until the page itself tended to balance information and non-informational content. In sum, Miami's page provides a lesson in posting strategy, namely, a brand must have one. The absence of a posting strategy will violate fans expectations and, coupled with a weak product, bring fans to disengage.

5.3 MAJOR COLLEGE FOOTBALL PROGRAMS

The analysis of the University of Iowa and the University of South Carolina offers perspective on the communications of major, flagship state universities in powerful Bowl Championship Series conferences. These schools play college football at its highest level, and have the benefit of millions in television revenue, massive, sold-out home games, and major bowl tie-ins. Iowa and South Carolina each have one major rival in state, and have rivalry-like relationships with several schools in their conferences. Both schools are positioned in smaller television markets, but draw audiences statewide. Their traditions of athletic success make them a big ticket in their states, and their large student populations always show up on game day. For these schools, social media is about engagement more than establishing and maintaining identity, as fans for both schools are plentiful. During the analysis period, Iowa's page received 125 posts while South Carolina's received 326.

5.3.1 *University of Iowa*

Iowa's Facebook page tends to be a venue for university-created messages, with substantial fan reaction. Of the 125 made to Iowa's Facebook page during the analysis period, only four came from fans; this level of fan

Table 5.9: Iowa coding frequencies

	Opener	Homecoming	Rival	Senior	TOTALS:
Alumni	0	0	0	2	2
Boosters	0	0	14	0	14
Branding	0	1	1	0	2
Children/Family	0	0	1	0	1
Coach	1	1	5	0	7
Color	0	3	6	0	9
FanChat	0	1	3	0	4
Game	11	19	21	0	51
Hashtag	1	0	1	2	4
Insider	2	3	8	0	13
KeyOthers	0	2	4	0	6
Mascot	0	0	3	0	3
Opponent	1	0	0	0	1
Player	4	6	11	0	21
Pride	0	1	8	2	11
Rival	0	2	0	0	2
Student	0	0	1	0	1
Television	0	0	2	0	2
TOTALS:	20	39	89	6	154

NOTES: Total posts coded=125. Opener=18. Homecoming=35. Rivalry=68. Senior=4. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

posting was typical throughout the observation period, as Iowa fans generally did not post to the university's page. Thus, Iowa's page served as a mouthpiece for the university, primarily, to show photographs of games and news about the team. Unlike the previous schools in this study, posting to Iowa's page actually increased after the season opener, spiking for the rivalry game, and staying high for homecoming. However, posting plummeted by the finale.

Researcher field notes indicate university-driven content is typical for Iowa; during the observation period, the university tended to share photographs and university-written media about its teams and athletes. Fans typically

responded by Liking and Commenting on posts, with Shares occurring occasionally. Facebook analytics show that Iowa Facebook fans tend to be student-aged, with the 18-24 year old group of fans being the largest engaged group on the page. However, the most engaged fans are from Des Moines, about 115 miles away from the campus in Iowa City. Likely, then, is that young alumni from Iowa are starting their careers in Des Moines, and that young fans with no affiliation with the university are following the Facebook page.

Fans typically responded to university posts with Likes and Comments. The Hawkeyes started the season 2-1, through its opener, rivalry game, and homecoming. However, by the end of the season, Iowa was on a five-game losing streak and would miss a post-season bowl for the first time in more than a decade. As the team declined, fans disengaged and the university stopped posting about the team. Table 5.9 shows the frequency of occurrence of the codes found in the grounded theory analysis. Iowa's Facebook page featured posts that fit into 18 coded themes. Game posts were recorded most often, with the code being found in 51 posts. Player appeared second most often, with 21 occurrences. Booster was found 14 times, Insider 13 times, and Pride 11 times.

Game posts for Iowa were similar to those made by previous universities in this study. However, it is noteworthy that game updates were only used in the Opener, Rivalry, and Homecoming games. All of these games were played in September, and Iowa was still in contention for the postseason for all of them. But, when Iowa had been eliminated from bowl contention by the finale, postings about the game were not found.

Fans typically engaged the game posts that updated the score during a game. During the rivalry game against Iowa State, 484 fans Liked and 202 fans

commented on a post at halftime saying the score was 9-3, with Iowa State in the lead. Fan comments included “Let’s get that trophy back Iowa!!!!!!” to (sic) “lets go hawks! ill catch too much shit if this goes south” and (sic) “Go to the tight end everytime hes the one with the golden hands.” Fans liked to cheer the team and provide armchair coaching here. Of course, Coach Ferentz is not turning to the Facebook page for a critique of his strategy, not is he soliciting fans for their opinion about what to do in a game. Instead, fans here likely are expressing they things they would (or do) scream at their television sets or discuss with friends. This kind of interaction illustrates the phenomenon of media meshing observed by Hutton and Fosdick (2011). Iowa fans use game posts as a place to share their own thoughts. Iowa fans turn to Facebook (and Twitter) to express their emotions during the game. While fans at Marshall typically posted directly to the university’s page, and fans of other schools in this study commented with much less frequency, Iowa fans have made these game-post comments their primary means of expression to the university.

This *two-screen experience* for Iowa football fans lets those watching on television (and those at the stadium) interact with the Iowa community writ large, instead of the Iowa fans next to them. In real time, fans can post to social media, see other fans post, and react to each other. This simultaneity shows fans they are part of something much greater than what they presently see, as fans can be spread across thousands of miles and time zones, but all be engaging the same media at once. Thus, social media, and the interaction about something seen on televisions and shared over the Internet, produces a binding tie in McLuhan’s Global Village (1964).



Iowa Hawkeyes
September 8, 2012

Sep 8, 2012 7:06pm
James Morris Postgame Interview



Like · Comment · Share

37 36 2

37 people like this.

Figure 5.5: Example of Iowa Player, Branding, and Insider codes. This post from September 8 shows Iowa's James Morris giving a postgame interview after the loss to rival Iowa State. The Iowa logo is seen in the background.

Player codes for Iowa typically were found in photograph posts of players in games and after games, or video interviews with players after games. For example, one post made after the Homecoming game shows a photo with the text "James Morris after his 10-tackle performance in Iowa's 31-13 victory in Kinnick Stadium." Another Player post shows a photo of Damon Bullock's helmet for a throwback uniforms game in the rivalry matchup against Iowa

State. Figure 5.5 shows James Morris giving a postgame interview after the rivalry game loss to Iowa State University. The interview was conducted by the university, and shows Morris standing in front of an Iowa Hawkeyes poster in the athletic training room. The post also was coded an Insider view into the Hawkeye locker room.

Similar to the game posts, fans vented their frustrations after a 9-6 loss to ISU on post-game videos of players. Iowa posted a video of tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz dressed in a suit talking in the locker room after the game; 22 fans Liked it, and 11 commented. One fan said (sic) “cant even get myself to watch this video!” while another said “Throw him the damn ball!”, which drew seven Likes itself. Again, fans used these posts to coach from the armchair, cheer on a specific player, and discuss the game. On occasion, the commenters responded to each other, but generally, fans offered their own commentary that did not build on or discuss previous posts.

Boosters codes were found in posts from a rivalry week event with the Johnson County boosters club. The photo album posted to Iowa’s Facebook page showed photos of Iowa donors mingling with cheerleaders, coaches, players, and the band. One post showed Hawkeyes Coach Kirk Ferentz and University of Iowa President Sally Mason dressed in black and yellow as they address the crowd at the Johnson County I-Club Breakfast. The University of Iowa is located in Johnson County, so the booster fans here likely have the most interaction with the team, being business owners who sponsor the team and buy advertisements at its games. However, as the Facebook analytics show, the majority of engaged Iowa fans live in Des Moines, not Johnson County, so it is likely these photographs did not reach the appropriate audience. Showing photos of key

investors at a booster event does make sense from a public relations standpoint, however. But, making these photos the main postings for a weekend does not do well to engage fans tuned in for information about the upcoming rivalry game.

Posts coded as Insider show scenes inside Iowa football that are not publicly visible. Typically, these posts were photographs. For example, the Hawkeyes wore “throwback” uniforms for the rivalry game against Iowa State, which means they wore new uniforms styled like ones from an earlier era. These featured metallic gold fabric on the sides of the jersey, and metallic gold pants, contrary to the normal mustard yellow worn by the team now. Several posts showed these uniforms hanging in the locker room prior to the game. Another post before the rivalry game showed a video promoting the game, which was the home opener for the season, as well. The Iowa Athletic Department also created a monthly newsletter, *Hawk Talk*, which itself produced videos giving more information about Iowa athletics. *Hawk Talk* posts all give an inside view of football and other sports, and focuses on the coaches and players.

The theme of Pride also was recorded prominently in posts on Iowa’s page. Unlike posts at Marshall, where fans expressed Pride, Iowa’s Pride posts came entirely from the university. Here, the university showed pride-evoking symbols associated with the Hawkeyes, such as Iowa players lifting Floyd of Rosedale, a bronze pig trophy shared by Iowa and the University of Minnesota that is given to the winner of their annual meeting. Another Pride post showed a fly-over of military planes before a game. Only for the seniors’ home finale did the university post a textual message saying it was proud of players and the team. “Thanks to all the #Hawkeye fans that came out today to cheer on our

Seniors and thanks to all the #Hawkeye fans who supported us this year” and “There is no question we have the be best fans in the nation.”

For a few instances, the codes of Color, Coach, Key Others, Fan Chat, Hashtag, Mascot, Rival, and Television were recorded. Color posts, similar to those from other universities’ pages, featured prominently the colors of the team, in this case, black and yellow; one post showed a crowd at the stadium dressed in yellow and waving yellow towels in the air. Coach posts showed Coach Ferentz on the sidelines or talking to boosters. Key Others posts showed people who were important to the football program, such as University of Iowa President Sally Mason. Another post showed Hawkeye All-America Quarterback Chuck Long and former Hawkeye Coach Hayden Fry. Fans did not post to Iowa’s page, but were encouraged to “Like if you’re excited about Floyd’s return!” regarding the trophy for the Iowa-Minnesota game winner; 5,172 fans did, about 3,000 more than the second most popular post from the game. Hashtags, such as #Hawkeyes and #GoHawks, were used on a few posts to connect fans to the @IowaFBLive Twitter feed. Mascot posts all show photos of Herky, the Iowa mascot. Rival posts specifically address the game against Minnesota, and not the actual rivalry against Iowa State; with both showing photos of Floyd of Rosedale. Both Television posts referenced the Big Ten Network in some way; BTN is the television network owned by the Big Ten to show games that did not make it to a national network telecast. One post says the dispute between BTN and Dish Network, a satellite television provider, had been resolved, and the other mentioned that Chuck Long would be calling the Iowa-Minnesota game on the BTN. Two Alumni posts mentioned former Hawkeye Riley Reiff, who was playing for the Houston Texans in the NFL. Lastly, explicit

Branding was found twice, once as shown in Figure 5.5 and again on a band uniform during the homecoming game.

Three themes were found once on Iowa's page. Children/Family was found in a post of a young boy sitting on Herky's lap at the Johnson County I-Club Breakfast. Opponent was found in a photograph post from the opener that showed a Northern Illinois Fan walking with a Iowa fan, both dressed in apparel from their teams. The post asked "Which football fan do you think will be smiling after Saturday's game?" The Student code was recorded in a photo of an Iowa band field commander and a majorette at the Johnson County I-Club Breakfast.

Researcher field notes indicate that Iowa's page has similarly over time to include more photographs and news stories. Fans started to engage Iowa's page by posting to it, but now, Facebook's 2014 format change has relegated them to the top right corner. However, by shifting the overall content strategy to include more emotion posts, including galleries of photos from all sports and, more specifically, cover photos for fans to use about the team's 2013 season bowl appearance, and for every 2013 game. "This is the content I think fans want," the researcher said in field notes. "Photos that reflect the fans, show the team in action, and show Hawkeyes in triumph. Fans will engage these, and want to tune in to get this content that they can't get anywhere else." The revised posting strategy delivers content to fans that they do not, and can not, get from other media. Thus, the exclusivity of Iowa's Facebook page makes it a venue for fans to gain information about the team directly from the source, and to see the university as an inside source for this information.

The shift in strategy coincides with the success of the 2013 Iowa football team. The Hawkeyes did much better in 2013 than in 2012, and the Facebook page was more akin to its peer, South Carolina, offering posts that shows happy fans cheering their successful teams. Indeed, the entire 2013 Facebook campaign parallels the excitement on the page seen during the opener, homecoming, and rivalry games studied in the 2012 season. So it is possible that Iowa's use of Facebook would have been maintained in 2012 if the team had been successful. Or, perhaps, the university's officials made a conscious decision to bolster the Facebook page regardless of the outcome on the field. The researcher's hunch is that the latter is true, as posts from 2011 and 2012 were primarily geared toward football, while posts in 2013 tended to embrace all sports, with football having a dominant presence.

Thus, the change in Iowa's page has made Facebook a better venue for community-building messages. The page now embraces all of Hawkeye sports, and works to show the active roles of players and coaches, as well as the faces of cheering and proud fans. Iowa's page has evolved into a destination for Hawkeye slanted information over time by letting the presence of fans emerge amid information about the athletics program.

In sum, Iowa's page largely serves to inform fans about games and game activities. However, use of Players, Boosters, and Insider posts give Facebook followers a place to connect to individuals within the Iowa football organization. Iowa Facebook followers have a direct line of information from the university, and get school-spirited messages mixed in. The Facebook page's post traffic was highest during the rivalry game, which also included a gallery of photos of a booster event. Fans were not engaged in posting to Iowa's page, but did

frequently Like and Comment on posts. For Iowa, the university starts conversations on the Facebook page, but fans would carry it forward.

In axial coding, the researcher grouped open codes noted in the posts into four categories, Spirit Emblems, Connection, People, and Gameday, (See Table 5.10). Spirit Emblems includes branding, color, mascot, rival, and pride, all of which showed a symbolic association with Iowa or built on one of its traditions. Connection posts included Fan Chat, Hashtag, Insider, and Game, as these posts all were ways the university tried to engage or encourage them to talk to each other. People posts included posts coded as coach, alumni, boosters, player, student, and key others; people posts showed those centrally important to the Iowa football program in their role. Finally, Gameday posts include Television, Opponent, and Children/Family; these posts informed fans about the topics, and showed how they all were part of an upcoming game. As indicated by the frequencies, Connection and People posts dominated Iowa's page. Researcher's field notes indicate that the focus on games and game coverage, as well as players, was typical for Iowa in 2011 and 2012, but the page in 2013 began to shift toward Spirit Emblems. "Iowa has figured out that its fans want to engage content about the game and its players," the researcher said in field notes. "But now, they also realize that fans want to see themselves in the university's Facebook. What are the other fans doing? How is everyone cheering on Iowa? Facebook is a *social* media. Fans want to see other fans, and Iowa is starting to make this a priority."

Iowa started the 2012 season strongly, but lost the final six games of the season. Fans grew weary of the team, as did they university. After the team

Table 5.10: Iowa open and axial code groupings

Axial Codes	Open Codes	Frequency	Notes
Spirit Emblems	Branding	2	Use of bird logo for profile.
	Color	9	Fans dressed in black and yellow. Crowd shots of everyone in yellow.
	Mascot	3	Photos of Hawkeye mascot "Herky."
	Pride	11	People sharing posts about pride in Hawkeye team.
	Rival	2	Iowa State. Cy-Hawk Trophy.
Connection	FanChat	4	Fans commenting on team performance.
	Hashtag	4	#GoHawks
	Insider	13	Photos of locker room. Boosters Club.
People	Game	51	Game reminders and in-game updates.
	Coach	7	Showed Coach Ferentz speaking to players, boosters. Coach asked questions on Facebook thread.
	Alumni	2	Cheer former Iowa players.
	Boosters	14	Johnson County booster event.
	Player	21	Interviews with players.
	Student	1	Photos of student fans. Band and cheerleaders.
	KeyOthers	6	Assistant coaches.
Gameday	Television	2	Encouraged fans to subscribe to Big Ten Network. Time and channel for telecasts.
	Opponent	1	Opponents of the week.
	Children/ Family	1	Fans encouraged to bring children to games.

NOTES: Total posts coded=125. Opener=18. Homecoming=35. Rivalry=68. Senior=4. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

could no longer become bowl eligible, the university backed off its postings about the football team, and fans generally decreased their engagement in the page. "They know the season is a bust, so it looks like they just stopped caring," the researcher said in field notes. "But this is big time college football. Iowa fans shouldn't be fair-weather. This is their team; surely they still care?!" Even though the university shifted its focus away from the football team on Facebook, a few

fans still engaged the season's final posts to the page. One post "There is no question we have the be best fans in the nation #GoHawks" still drew 479 likes and 49 comments, though comments primarily discussed the coaching staff's shortcomings. Clearly fans do desire this forum for discussion, and embrace positive messages, and Iowa's decision to cut this short as the team struggled effectively removed fans from its pages, albeit possibly in an attempt to squelch negative chatter.

Iowa's strategy can best be described as information-person driven. The university wants fans to know about its athletes and its games, and to a lesser extend wants to to show Iowa traditions traditions. Fans have responded by taking over Iowa's posts as a forum for cheers and discussion of the team. Because Iowa students are not following the page, Iowa is working to engage fans who have no other association with the university. By showing some football-related aspects of the university, such as the insider view of locker rooms, or a booster club event, fans who have no other association with the university can see some of the inner workings of the school, its facilities, and its people; thus, the casual fan can see Iowa as more than just a football team, but also as a university.

Ultimately, the analysis of Iowa's page brings this research to conclude that the university used Facebook to inform fans and engage them through interaction about games and athletes. The university takes the lead on communications, but fans speak out in comments on university-made posts. As the team struggled late in the season, Iowa's decision to post primarily information-based messages about the athletes and team did not stay on course, and fans disengaged from the page as the university decreased posting. This

pattern leads the researcher to conclude that fans choose to engage the brand to talk about the team, its games, and athletes, and to cheer and express pride. When there is no good news to cheer about, fans disengage. In sum, Iowa's page shows that even a major brand with loyal followers can lose engagement with a bad product if the engagement strategy is based on information specifically about that product. When Iowa was better at football, fans tuned in. Additionally, Iowa shows that fans will embrace a strategic shift to talk more about the brand culture, and less about the brand itself, and doing so has a positive impact on engagement, regardless of the quality of the brand.

5.3.2 *University of South Carolina*

South Carolina's Facebook page is driven by photographs and other messages from the university. Of the 326 made to USC's Facebook page during the analysis period, only 11 came from fans; throughout the observation period, South Carolina fans typically engaged the university's page through Likes and Comments on posts, rather than posting directly to USC's page. South Carolina's page primarily served as a mouthpiece for the university, showing photographs of games and news about teams for all of USC sports, not just football. South Carolina consistently maintained its Facebook page all season, although home games did garner more posts than away games did.

Researcher field notes indicate this form of university-driven content is typical for South Carolina; during the observation period, USC generally shared photographs of fans, facilities, athletes, and coaches as well as memes, stories, and news bulletins. Fans typically responded by Liking, Commenting, and Sharing posts, in descending order of popularity. Facebook analytics show that

Table 5.10: South Carolina coding frequencies

	Opener	Homecoming	Rival	Senior	TOTALS:
Alumni	5	10	0	2	17
Branding	11	15	6	9	41
Chant	2	1	1	2	6
Cheer	2	2	4	4	12
Children/Family	0	24	9	30	63
Coach	4	1	2	1	8
Color	19	18	0	5	42
Conference	1	1	0	0	2
Crowd	0	18	2	10	30
FanChat	2	4	1	4	11
Game	8	7	7	7	29
Hashtag	0	0	0	1	1
Insider	25	11	11	0	47
KeyOthers	2	19	0	0	21
Mascot	4	3	0	7	14
Opponent	1	0	0	0	1
Player	18	10	14	16	58
Pride	3	9	10	7	29
Radio	0	2	1	1	4
Rival	0	0	9	0	9
Student	0	17	0	15	32
Tailgate	20	11	10	5	46
Television	7	1	2	1	11
Tickets	1	0	0	0	1
TOTALS:	135	184	89	127	535

NOTES: Total posts coded=326. Opener=66. Homecoming=110. Rivalry=59. Senior=91. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

USC Facebook fans tend to student-aged, with the 18-24 year old group of fans living in Columbia, S.C., being the largest engaged group on the page. Therefore, it is likely that those who follow the Gamecocks on Facebook tend to be students, young alumni living in Columbia, and Columbia residents who have no academic affiliation with the university.

Fans primarily responded to university posts with Likes and used Comments and Shares less often. The Gamecocks had a very successful year in 2012, finishing the season 11-2. As Carolina succeeded on the field, the university succeeded in engaging fans on Facebook, as fans Shared posts boasting of Carolina's successes and photos of the team. Table 5.11 shows the frequency of occurrence of the codes found in the grounded theory analysis. South Carolina's Facebook page had the most activity, and featured posts that fit into 24 coding themes. Posts about Children/Family and Player lead all others on USC's page. However, post with Branding, Color, Crowd, Game, Insider, Pride, Student, and Tailgate also were common. South Carolina's posting frequency was relatively constant throughout the season; this could be because the team was very successful on the field, and was the only school from the group studied to play in a bowl game. The season opener, on the road against SEC foe Vanderbilt University, saw 66 posts to USC's Facebook page. South Carolina played Homecoming, Senior Day, and its Rivalry game in successive weekends to close the season in November. Homecoming had the most posts, with 110. The senior game the following week had 91 posts, and the season-ending road trip to rival Clemson had 59 posts.

The occurrence of Children/Family codes on USC's Facebook page largely are photographs of families and children at football games and events. For example, one photo coded as Children/Family and Insider shows a mother and son, both dressed in USC apparel, sitting inside Williams-Brice Stadium during a tour before the homecoming game. Another photo from that weekend shows a boy in a long-sleeved garnet T-shirt on the field at Williams-Brice standing with Cockey, the USC mascot. A third photo from the Homecoming game shows a

young child in a USC jersey riding her father's shoulders as he walks by a USC-decorated inflatable bounce house. A post during the Clemson rivalry game shows a family of USC and Clemson fans gathered under a USC tent to tailgate before the game. "This seems like Facebook 101, but USC is the only one in the study that gets it," the researcher said in field notes. "People tune in to Facebook to see themselves, their families, and their friends. University football games are places where these people gather. Of course schools should capture these moments and share them."

Player codes occurred on posts throughout the season, and showed photos of players getting ready for a game, in action in the game, and after the game; additionally, specific players were named for their efforts in the game. A post from the opener against Vanderbilt reads "TOUCHDOWN GAMECOCKS!!! Marcus Lattimore scored his first TD of the 2012 season with a 29-yard run! Gamecocks lead 7-0 with 4:55 to play in the 1st quarter. Stay tuned to this status for continued discussion. GAAAAME....." Several fans chimed in with "Cocks!" in various spellings to complete the chant. Lattimore was a star running back on the 2012 USC team. Another post shows T.J. Johnson and Jadeveon Clowney walking past fans to enter the stadium for the season opener. Both Johnson and Clowney were wearing black USC polo shirts.

Naming a player helps build connections between fans and the players themselves; someone can rooting for the Gamecocks, and also for Marcus Lattimore, who grew up in Duncan, South Carolina. Ultimately, this lets fans develop a personal connection to players, as they did with Lattimore, whom was injured in a game outside of the analysis period; hundreds of fans attended a Lattimore rally to celebrate his 21st birthday two days after his injury. Thus, by

showing players' role in games, Facebook posts help to connect fans to players identities, as well as the teams.

Branding posts show the USC Block C logo, or the rooster logo. A post from August 31 shows a USC pop-up tent for tailgating, with a USC logo on its roof and a banner with "Road Warriors" and the USC Block C logo, and the SC baseball logo. Another post shows a USC football helmet and receiver's gloves emblazoned with the South Carolina rooster logo being visible when the gloves are side-by-side. Other posts show fans wearing "Carolina" gear with the logo and colors of the university.

The University of South Carolina uses the colors of garnet and black for its athletic teams. Color posts all are photographs showing fans in Carolina colors. One posts shows two male fans wearing bright garnet polo shirts with the Carolina Block C logo over the left chest. Together, they hold a ceramic rooster, also painted garnet, outside of their tailgate tent. Another post, following the Homecoming game, shows a garnet flag with the Carolina C logo, and the words "It's great to be a Gamecock" printed on the flag. It flies over a crowd of players in garnet uniforms.

Crowd posts on USC's page all are photographs showing fans cheering at the game. Fans typically are wearing some kind of Carolina gear, though not always garnet. Shots range from a close-up group of fans, where one can see individual faces, to wide, stadium shots that show an entire section, all appearing as USC's garnet color. Photos show fans of all ages, including students.

Game posts are similar to those in every other university in this study. However, South Carolina's Game posts offer specific information about the game

activity. The post mentioned in the Player section is an example. South Carolina generally names the player who prompted a score, or other play, and then gives a score update and generally offers a Chant or Cheer, such as “GAME.....” to start the “Game...Cocks” chant, or “Let’s Go Gamecocks!” as a cheer. “These things seem like the heart and soul of a college athletic team’s page,” the researcher said in field notes. “But this is different. It packages the information with a cheer, sometimes with a photo, and always mentions a player by name. This gives the fan an opportunity to see the score, connect with a player, and cheer for their team, no matter where they are in the world.”

Insider posts for South Carolina, similar to those at other universities, show Facebook followers inside the athletics. One image shows Marcus Lattimore’s jersey hanging in his locker before the game at Vanderbilt; Lattimore had missed part of the previous season because of an injury. Another post from the opener shows Carolina players departing their bus to walk into the stadium for the game. Later in the season, photos show an empty Memorial Stadium at Clemson before the rivalry game. Another post shows Carolina’s white uniforms hanging in a locker room at Clemson, with lockers painted in Clemson orange.

Pride posts centered on visuals of places significant to the University of South Carolina. One from August 31 showed a video of the ad USC would air during the game against Vanderbilt. The ad titled “University of South Carolina Rich Legacy” shows the Horseshoe, the central area of the university’s campus, as part of the video. Another post, from a fan, shows four children dressed in Carolina garnet. The post reads “ My family and I are die hard Carolina fans! These are my beautiful Carolina Gamecocks babies sporting their Carolina pride in our family photos!” Another photo, posted by the university but submitted by



Figure 5.6: Example of South Carolina Tailgate and Branding codes. This post from November 17 shows South Carolina fan Erik Carlson with three Gamecock cheerleaders before the Senior Day game against Wofford. All are wearing the USC athletics logo.

a fan, shows a Gamecocks flag, with the C logo, hanging at a beach bar in American Samoa. Fans are encouraged to send photos to a “Cocky Across the Globe” album. Lastly, a post advertising Facebook Cover Photos with shots of Carolina football players in games, encourage fans to “Show Your Gamecock Pride!” with one of the cover photos.

Posts coded as Student come from the two home games in the analysis period, Homecoming and Senior Day. Posts show photographs of students cheering from the student section or gathering before the game. One post from the Senior Day game shows students beneath the scoreboard dancing to Darude’s “Sandstorm” while waving white towels. Another shows two women dressed in Carolina jerseys with the Block C logo painted on their faces standing in the student section.

Tailgate posts observed on South Carolina's page always showed photographs of fans before a game. Tailgate posts were observed on all four weekends of analysis. Fans gathered at tents for local alumni clubs, as well as fans who traveled to the game, before the season opener at Vanderbilt. Homecoming and Senior Day tailgates showed fans gathered on the State Fairgrounds outside Williams-Brice Stadium, all decked out in Carolina gear, talking and eating, and children playing. Figure 5.6 shows Gamecock fan Erik Carlson wearing a Gamecocks apron and chef's hat posing with three USC cheerleaders before the Senior Day game against Wofford. Tailgates at the rivalry game against Clemson showed Carolina and Clemson fans together, eating and talking before the game. Photos here showed tents for both schools side by side.

Six codes were found less often but still prominently on USC's Facebook page. Alumni posts showed various alumni clubs getting together for away games at Vanderbilt and Clemson; other alumni posts show class reunion groups assembled on the field for Homecoming. Cheers, such as "Go Cocks" or "Let's Go Gamecocks" occurred 12 times on posts, but never as the entire message. Fans, coded as Fan Chat, posted photo and text messages to USC's page; one showed two infant daughters wearing "Lil' Gamecocks Fan" bibs before the season opener. In another post, a fan said "Thank you Seniors! You guys are awesome! Now go beat those Tigers next week! GGGAAAMMEEEE CCCOOOCCCKKKSSS!!" Key Others was recorded for posts showing other important people to the University of South Carolina. One posts showed football administrator Charles Waddell and men's basketball Coach Frank Martin on the field at Vanderbilt for the opener; another post showed USC alumnus and musician Darius Rucker performing at the Homecoming game. Mascot posts

showed Cocky performing at the game; several posts showed him posing with fans, and one showed him conducting the band. Lastly, Television codes reminded fans about the game, and what network was showing the telecast.

Eight codes were found fewer than 10 times on South Carolina's page. Chant posts generally used "GAME..." to start the "Game...Cocks" chant; the university typically did this with every game update. Game update posts that did not include the "GAME..." chant typically used a "Let's Go Gamecocks" Cheer at the end. Posts coded as Conference reference USC's place in the SEC, once by telling SEC fans how to help with Hurricane Sandy relief, and once by showing the SEC logo alongside the USC logo on an equipment truck. Hashtags were used once, to lead fans to a gallery of photos tweeted with the #Gamecocks hashtag from the Senior Day game; other schools encouraged Facebook fans to use Twitter, but South Carolina mostly kept the platforms separate. Opponents and Tickets were only directly mentioned once in a post that encouraged fans to purchase single-game tickets, and listed the home opponents. Radio posts reminded fans to tune in on the Gamecock IMG Sports Network to listen to the game. And the rival posts all addressed the rivalry with Clemson.

Researcher field notes indicate these four weekends of analysis truly parallel the content on the Gamecocks' Facebook page for the entire observation period. From football and soccer in the fall to men's and women's basketball in the winter, and baseball, softball, and equestrian in the spring, the Gamecock Facebook page consistently blends athletes, coaches, fans, pride, and information. Being a fan on Carolina's Facebook page is simply an extension of being a Carolina fan in real life. South Carolina's page has the most Likes of all pages studied, with more than 520,000 fans following the page.

The strategy for South Carolina's page changed only slightly throughout the observation period. The page has always shown stories about players and coaches, photos of fans tailgating and cheering, and the colorful mascot Cockey posing with fans and players. USC's page has generally used an emotional slant on information posts, but generally tends to post emotion-driven items.

One thing that did grow over time was the creation of original Facebook content. USC in 2012 began to make posts that showed an athlete in action with a message indicating why the post was being made. One prominent example from 2013 shows the Gamecocks home winning streak, dating to the 2011 season. The post came during the week of the rivalry game against Clemson, with the Tigers logo being shown as "Next." Indeed, Shaw started and the Gamecocks won, and the post saw more than 550 shares and 5,000 Likes. This kind of content creation has created a sharable post for fans to brag about their team on their own pages, and is an idea other schools would be well served to adopt.

In sum, posts of photographs showing fans celebrating Gamecock football with friends and family dominate South Carolina's Facebook page. By focusing on Children/Family posts, the university shows the football team is a tradition to share with the family, thereby creating Carolina fans of all ages. Using Insider posts, fans following on Facebook get to see the world of Gamecock football intimately. With Player posts, fans get to follow the individual careers of the athletes, and not just the team at large. All of these work to bring the Facebook follower inside the Carolina program, and to make them feel like an important part of the community. Thus, the emotional appeal of USC's Facebook page is that the page reflects the audience, which are people just like them. Further, the page maintained its posting frequency throughout the season. South Carolina's

football team is the only one in this study to advance to the postseason; thus, the activity on the team's Facebook page did not wane because of the team's on-the-field success (or lack thereof). Ultimately, the emotional-driven posts and the team's success kept activity on the page high.

In axial coding, the researcher grouped open codes noted in the posts into four categories, Spirit Emblems, Connection, People, and Gameday, (See Table 5.12); these categories mirror those found on Iowa's page. Spirit Emblems includes branding, color, mascot, chant, cheer, and pride, all of which illustrated their symbolic association with the Gamecocks and their traditions. Connection posts included Fan Chat, Hashtag, Insider, as these posts all indicated ways the university tried to engage fans or encourage them to talk to each other. People posts included posts coded as Coach, Alumni, Player, Student, and Key Others; people posts showed those centrally important to the South Carolina football program performing in their roles. Finally, Gameday posts include Conference, Tailgate, Rival, Opponent, Television, Radio, Tickets, Children/Family, Crowd, and Game; these posts provided the bulk of South Carolina's content and informed fans about an upcoming or occurring game. As indicated by the frequencies, Gameday posts were the most common, with Spirit Emblems and People following. Researcher's field notes indicate that the focus on players in game coverage and photographs of fans at games was typical for South Carolina throughout the observation period. "South Carolina's postings hit at the core of social media: information and connection," the researcher said in field notes. "USC is telling people about its games and its athletes, and it is showing fans enjoying that event, cheering for the team, wearing the apparel, and interacting with their families, all with USC as the backdrop."

Table 5.12: South Carolina open and axial code groupings

Axial Codes	Open Codes	Frequency	Notes
Spirit Emblems	Branding	41	C logo on flags.
	Color	42	Garnet. Players and fans in all garnet.
	Mascot	14	Photos of chicken costumed mascot Cocky.
	Chant	6	Game...Cocks.
	Cheer	12	Go Cocks.
Connection	Pride	29	University symbol tied to state symbol. Fans are "proud" of their team.
	FanChat	11	Fans post cheers, chants, and messages to team and players. Encouraging fans to have faith in players and team. Includes military posts.
	Hashtag	1	Tells fans what hashtag to use to tweet about the game.
People	Insider	47	Photos of locker rooms, tour inside stadium.
	Coach	8	Steve Spurrier is a famous coach.
	Alumni	17	Alumni groups returned at homecoming.
	Player	58	Players highlighted in game posts. Also support for injured Marcus Lattimore.
	Student	32	Photos of student fans tailgating and at game.
Gameday	KeyOthers	21	Other coaches, university officials shown in photos.
	Conference	2	Association with SEC.
	Tailgate	46	Photos of fan tailgates near stadium and at visiting stadiums.
	Rival	9	Clemson. Palmetto State Showdown. Photos of Clemson pre-game. Fans together tailgating. Four-ever to thee.
	Opponent	1	Shows information about opponents. Fans interacting with opponent fans at tailgates.
	Television	11	Information about game telecast.
	Radio	4	Information about game broadcast.
	Tickets	1	Information about tickets for games.
	Children/ Family	63	Photos of children in Gamecocks attire.
	Crowd	30	Photos of crowd at game, wearing garnet.
Game	29	In-game updates with scores, and info about play.	

NOTES: Total posts coded=326. Opener=66. Homecoming=110. Rivalry=59. Senior=91. Frequencies reported in columns reflects the rate of occurrence of code among the n of posts for that week. Total reflects total reported frequency of a given code throughout the analysis period. Several posts were coded for more than one theme.

South Carolina posted its third consecutive 11-win season in 2012, as part of the most successful stretch in school history. As such, fans had plenty to cheer about on USC's Facebook page. "Carolina fans certainly are proud of their team's

recent success, especially against old rivals who once always got the better of them,” the researcher said in field notes. “Fans relish in victories over Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, and the biggest rival, Clemson, with Likes and Comments on posts about scores and upcoming games.” Thus, fans desire to use this forum for discussion, and to cheer on the successful Gamecocks.

USC’s strategy can best be described as information-person driven. The university wants fans to know about its athletes and its games, and to see themselves, their friends, and their families enjoying the communal experience of a Carolina football game. Fans have responded by taking Liking posts, and sharing them, especially memes about Carolina’s success. USC students follow the page, as are their young peers in Columbia; therefore, the university’s decision to students and fans of all ages in its posts responds directly to this audience. Further, by showing some families playing with children at games, young alumni can engage the page, and students can see their futures bringing their families to take part in Carolina football. The *Gamecock Nation* embraces its team and fellow fans in their efforts to cheer and live the life of a Gamecock. Fans on Facebook thrive by seeing their team’s successes boasted on the page, and use the page as a venue to know all about the Gamecocks. The voice of the university dominates the Facebook page, giving fans direction for cheering the team, raising children as Carolina fans, and informing its followers about all USC athletic programs.

Ultimately, the analysis of South Carolina’s Facebook page brings this research to conclude that the university used Facebook to engage fans in cheers and inform them of the university’s success in athletics. USC takes the lead on communications, and fans follow with Likes, Comments, and Shares to extend

the reach of the university's message. As the team succeeded, Carolina's Facebook page turned to a forum of university celebration, with USC contributing memes and fans cheering in comments and sharing the media. This pattern leads the researcher to conclude that the university's message is meeting the right audience, and fans are happily engaged with USC's Facebook content. In sum, South Carolina's page shows how to create and curate content that engages fans of a popular brand. When South Carolina succeeds, fans consume. Additionally, USC shows that fans will embrace a content that focuses as much on sharing photographs as it does sharing information. Fans desire the association with the popular brand, and they want to see and be seen with Carolina content.

5.4 ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study posited two research questions: 1. How do varying competitive levels of college football use Facebook, currently the most popular SNS, to build, enhance, and maintain brand communities, and 2. How do teams use Facebook to engage fans throughout a football season. This section specifically answers those two research questions, and explains the answers in terms of the present study.

Regarding Research Question 1, this study found that teams at the three analyzed levels of competitive play use Facebook to share their cultures, and to gear fans toward a specific cultural expression. However, a comparison of level of competitive play did not reveal a discernible strategic difference; strategies embraced by new programs also were effectively used by major programs. Analysis, however, did find commonality among the major types of posts found

on each Facebook pages, as well as similarities regarding fan response. It is through these similarities that the present study answers the first research question. Fans and the university have build a brand community on team Facebook pages through discussions of the team, its players, and its games, spirit emblems of the university, and by showing the experiences of fans of the university as they take part in each university's football experience.

The comparison of axial codes for the six schools revealed that posts tend to focus on connecting fans and showing fans of universities, and to express and show the spirit emblems of the the universities. While Facebook pages worked as a forum for fans to discuss this brand content, mostly, pages served as a direct mouthpiece for university information. Using a combination of photographs, videos, and text posts, university football Facebook pages offer a glimpse at how the university and its fans define their culture.

Four axial codes stood as the most dominant for the six case universities: Spirit Emblems, Connection, Fan Voice, and Gameday. Table 5.13 shows the universities, their 2012 record, top axial code, and other axial codes. GSU and Mimi shared Spirit Emblems as its most common axial code, while UTSA and Iowa shared Connection; Marshall had Fan Voice and USC had Gameday as the most common type of post on its page. In all, the most popular axial codes for all schools were Spirit Emblems, Connection, Information, Gameday, and People.

For a university, the expression of Spirit Emblems on Facebook is tantamount to preserving the unique aspects of each school's culture. This expression lets fans show they are a part of something greater than themselves, namely, a fan community. All people can wear a university branded or colored T-shirt, can chant and cheer, and can be a part of the crowd. Use of these types of

Table 5.13: Axial code comparison for six schools

	Record	Top Axial	Other Axial	Notes
GSU	1-11	Spirit Emblems	Information, Call To Action	All axial codes occur at similar frequencies. Fan Voice left out.
UTSA	8-4	Connection	Information, Spirit Emblems, Media, People	Contribute left out. Information close to Connection, bigger gap to other axial codes.
Marshall	5-7	Fan Voice	Information, Spirit Emblems, People	All other axial codes are at similar frequency
Miami	4-8	Spirit Emblems	Gameday, Fan Voice	Very close in frequency
Iowa	4-8	Connection	People, Spirit Emblems, Gameday	Large drop between each axial code
USC	11-2	Gameday	Spirit Emblems, People, Connection	Connection substantially lower than other codes

NOTES: Records are Win-Loss.

messages on Facebook makes an emotional appeal to fans; by showing the unity and spirit fans share, one can see their culture, and can want to be a part of it. These expressions of culture, to fans, likely are second nature; just as the researcher in the present study does not wake up every morning and think, “I am an American and a native West Virginian, and I am proud of those things and live my life in a certain way because of these facts” fans of Iowa do not wake and think, “I am an Hawkeye, I am proud to be a Hawkeye, and I live my life expressing my Hawkeye pride.” (Of course, surely some do feel this way.) Thus, while a fan of a school generally expressed his or her fandom on game day, it likely is not a conscious effort. Now, because this activity is not done by a single fan, but all Iowa fans, it can be considered a cultural norm. For all schools in this study, the expression of Spirit Emblems on the universities’ Facebook pages

served as a key indicator of the typical displays of identity with the university's brand.

Posts focused on Connection, which also include Marshall's prominent Fan Voice code, provide a link between fans and the university using their own voices. Fan Voice marks a fan speaking directly to the university, while Connection is fans talking to other fans and the university; thus, the further consolidation of these axial codes is feasible. Fan Connection marks the act of engagement and discourse among fans, either with one another or directly with the university. This allows for "good" ideas to be promoted and "bad" ideas to be dismissed, much as they would as a nation uses the media to discuss its identity and policy. By encouraging this type of engagement, the university acts as a conversation facilitator, either by promoting hashtags or asking for fans to comment or send in media to share. The social aspect of social media sites also comes into play here: as fans discuss the university brand, friends of fans will see their posts, and thus be exposed to university content. By promoting this culture of connectivity, the university encourages fans to see and be seen with university content, making for conspicuous consumption of the team.

Posts of Information work to inform fans about the team, the players, the game, and the university. Fans tune in to get this information, and the university acts as its own news outlet. Because the news from the university comes with an obvious university bias, fans consuming this content see the university and its teams and players as positive, the "good guys" and "our team." Informational messages let universities show themselves in a favorable light and give fans an official voice to hear. Fans responded directly to informational content, especially that about score updates during games. Fans used these informational posts to

cheer the team and comment on the team's performance. As such a venue for discussion, the information from these posts serves to set the agenda for fan discussion, much in the way the media help to shape public discourse (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Universities, then, wield a great deal of power in shaping the fan discourse, and thus, fan culture. By telling fans about different aspects of its football program, universities can indoctrinate fans into agents of brand culture, cheering, dressing, and sharing as the university guides.

South Carolina greatly embraced Gameday posts, and other schools did so with less fervor, as a way to show followers on Facebook the meaning of the game experience at the university. These posts serve to show fans experiencing the game and its festivities firsthand, and not via television. By showing children and families tailgating before a game, and cheering together during it, followers can see a reflection of themselves in the Facebook page. Culturally, this type of posting serves to connect fans through a shared experience, specifically, cheering for the team; even fans who only watch games from home can follow on Facebook and gain an understanding of that happens at the game in terms of pageantry and tradition. The university, here, has a strong role in directing the kinds of messages it wants to express about its culture to its fans, as it typically provides the photos that show the gameday experience. Universities can craft their image here to appeal to certain audience, whether students, donors, alumni, or other fans. Thus, by showing students cheering, families playing together at tailgates, crowds wearing school colors, athletes succeeding, and the band and cheerleaders performing, fans following on Facebook can build their own identity regarding their relationships with the team, and can see how others similar to them engage the team culture.

Similar to Gameday, posts that focus on People look at specific individuals that make up the football brand community. By identifying and showing these people, including coaches, players, fans, students, and university officials, the university is helping to build a human connection among these individuals. Just a gameday posts help fans following online to visualize themselves as part of the game experience, people posts help online fans to connect personally with others in the fan nation, especially the key individuals on the team. These posts function as a means of creating legendary figures for the school's culture, especially for coaches and players. One such post of Hayden Fry, the longtime coach at Iowa, drew hundreds of Likes and Comments as fans recognized his important contributions to the program. By showing today's stars along with the legends of the past, the university can show that those taking part in the team right now could one day be as important as these transformative figures. Thus, fans following online can see the movers and shakers of the football program up close through these kinds of postings.

Ultimately, this analysis reveals that the six schools' pages feature messages addressing Spirit Emblems, Connection, Fan Voices, Information, Gameday, and People to build, enhance, and maintain brand communities. Universities have an important role in starting and facilitating the discussions of the culture of the brand, and have the most power in building fan culture. By embracing messages geared toward these themes, the universities shaped the ways fans engage university media, and show their support for the team. Further, the types of messages on the teams' Facebook pages address different aspects of fandom, including fans and alumni, history, pageantry, the game itself, and the teams' successes.

The universities have cultivated cultures that embrace their individual traditions. Georgia State talks about its connection to Atlanta, UTSA about its place in San Antonio, Marshall about its 1970s plane crash and *We Are Marshall*, Miami about the Cradle of Coaches, and Iowa and USC about historical successes. However, though their individual cultures are different, the means of expression are quite similar, as they all address spirit emblems, connections, information, in ways that energize their fan bases. The fan embrace of cultural traditions on social media also helps to drive the university to create more, similar, content.

For Research Question 2, this research found that fans tend to engage messages that focus on spirit emblems, gameday, and information. For all six schools, posts that were most successful focused on fans and players. However, the engagement of fans on posts coincided with the win-loss records of the teams as well as their frequency of posting.

Figure 5.7 shows the observed engagement of fans on the teams' Facebook pages. All six schools started the season with high engagement, and high postings. Four of the six schools had their highest posting frequency of the season recorded during the season opener. South Carolina and Iowa did not, however; both schools were playing away games to start the season, however, UTSA, Marshall, and Miami also started their seasons with road trips. Regardless, at the beginning of the season, schools tended to make posts that engaged fans to Like, Comment, and Share by encouraging fans to wear school colors, asking questions about plans to watch the upcoming game, and highlighting players and coaches.

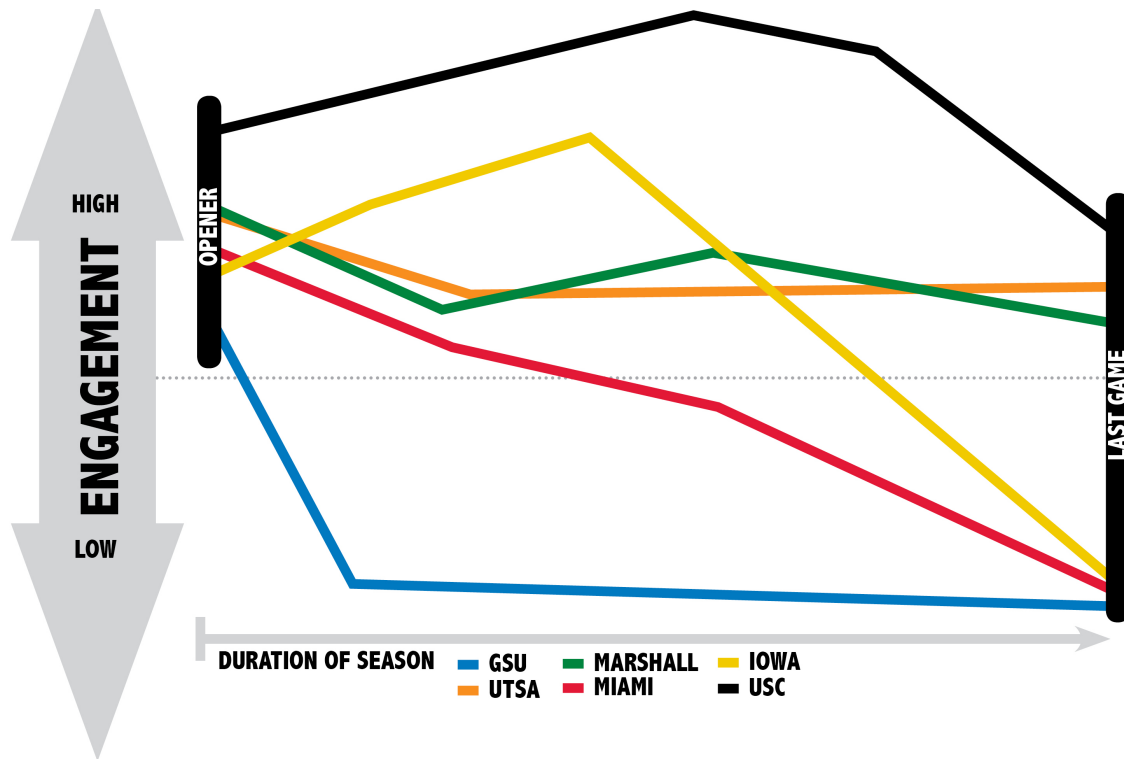


Figure 5.7 Timeline of fan engagement on university Facebook pages

However, after the opener, engagement started to shift. Georgia State’s was the most dramatic move, as the team could not gain momentum on the field, and the university decreased posting, all resulting in fans disengaging GSU messages. Similarly, Miami took a dive after struggling in its first few games. Even leading up to the game with longstanding rival Cincinnati, Miami and its fans did not use the Facebook page to celebrate the team. As these schools struggled early in the season, they lost momentum on their Facebook pages that could not be recovered.

Iowa’s posting took a similar dive to end its season, as the team lost its six final games. Iowa’s page was robust until the team’s failure became evident, and the university shifted its posting focus away from football. Fans still engaged the

scant football posts, but typically used them to complain about the team. Iowa started the year strong, athletically and with postings, showing insider views and players for the first three games. Fans still wanted to engage university content, even if only to complain, in the late season games, but the university voice was absent in the late season, and thus, fans disengaged.

UTSA and South Carolina, on the other hand, started the season strong and kept fans engaged all year, as both schools succeeded on the field. USC posted with much greater frequency, but both universities embraced showing the insider view of their football programs, as well as detailed posts about game activity. South Carolina made a point to show fans, shooting photos of tailgates before the game and posting them to the Facebook page. Additionally, both schools encouraged the use of hashtags, and asked fans to share their photos with the universities. Thus, their strategies, coupled with their decisions to continue posting all season, drove fans to tune in to the teams' Facebook pages all season.

Marshall stood alone in that its fans provided much of the content on its Facebook page. On the field, the Herd struggled, but remained in contention for a bowl game all season. Unlike the other unsuccessful teams in this research, Marshall was not eliminated from the postseason until the final game of the season, thus, fans still had reason to tune in until the very end. Marshall used connections of fans, as well as information about games and players, to keep fans tuned in to the page. Marshall's page offers a lesson in keeping fans devoted to following a struggling team, which is to keep posting, and keep working with connections. As Marshall continued to post about athletes and games, Marshall



Figure 5.8 Timeline of prime fan engagement topics

fans continued to use the Facebook page to cheer and connect with other fans.

Ultimately, the analysis here indicates that fans engage messages that focus on spirit emblems, gameday, and information, as well as connections with other fans. The university typically started the engagement through a post, and fans reacted. Thus, the posting cycle for a typical game event shows a pattern of content that drove engagement. Figure 5.8 shows a timeline of prime fan engagement topics for the three-day period around a game: before, gameday, and after. This model shows that the four primary themes fans engaged in this study, spirit emblems, games, connection, and people, were used at different points in the game event, and fans tended to embrace content of this kind posted on these days.

Before the game, fans embraced messages about spirit emblems, including school colors, mascots, and branding. Universities here might remind fans to wear certain colors to the game, such as GSU's AllBlue campaign or UTSA's

Orange Out. They might also, like Marshall, change their cover photo to one of the team in uniform entering the stadium, or of the mascot emblazoned with the school's branding. Fans made the university's cover photo their own, vowed to wear colors, and share posts marking the game time with university branding. On the day before the game, fans had excitement about tomorrow's activities, and wanted to express that excitement, and see the university expressing it, too. The posting and sharing of spirit emblem posts before games amounted to a fever pitch among fans in terms of engagement, as if fans wanted to tell their friends, "I'm going to (or excited for) the game, and I'm proud to be a part of (Mascot) Nation!" This axiom proved true for all six schools researched before the season opener; however, as teams struggled, universities decreased posting, and fans disengaged, this kind of fervent nationalism faded, or all out disappeared. Thus, a hopeful team draws better engagement from its fans with spirit emblems before a game.

On gameday, fans primarily engaged posts about the game itself and posts that sought to build a connection among fans. Universities used hashtags, and encouraged fans to use them, to post and tweet about the game and game activities. Fans responded by tagging their own posts, which, sometimes, the universities captured into a photo album. Universities posted about the games themselves, offering score-by-score updates for each game, often with photographs of the action. This allowed fans to follow the game on Facebook, regardless of their access to its telecast or radio broadcast, and provided a forum for all fans, both those watching and those following online, to discuss the game itself, and to cheer the team. Further, the university posted images of fans tailgating, cheering, interacting with the mascot, the band, and other gameday-

specific activities on the day of the game. This posting strategy kept the focus on the event of the football game, and not the peripheral culture of the team; rather, on gameday, the team, stadium, fans, and pageantry were on display. Every school in the present study exhibited these kinds of gameday postings; again, however, when teams stopped posting gameday messages, fans did not engage the page. Thus, this research concludes that the university is responsible for driving fans' gameday engagement on its Facebook page.

Finally, on the day after a game, fans best engaged to posts that focused on the people of the game, specifically players who performed well on gameday. Posts that showed the coach's commentary, video of players talking, or photos of a memorable play captured in meme form all generated engagement from fans. Fans used these posts to comment messages that congratulated the team or encouraged them "get 'em next week" after a loss. Fans also engaged photo albums posted of the previous day's game, especially galleries that showed fans cheering and enjoying the game. All the universities in this study had some form of follow-up post after the game, even the schools that greatly reduced posting late in the season. The next-day status served as a way to remind fans of the day before, close the chapter of that week's game, and set the stage to begin again for the next week. Thus, these kinds of post provided closure to fans, completed their game experiences, and let them look ahead to the next opponent.

The model presented in Figure 5.8 represents a culmination of the postings from all six schools. Each school made deviations to the pattern, and fans reacted differently for each school, and each game. Further, the model did not necessarily apply to every school, every week, as some schools disengaged

their Facebook pages after their teams faltered. However, the data in the present study dictate this model for ideal posting and engagement.

5.5 FINDINGS SUMMARY

At three levels of competitive play, university football Facebook pages embrace similar means of content and engagement. All programs posted about their teams' traditions, and highlighted fans, athletes, and coaches in photos. These kinds of messages tell fans how to interact with the brand community and helps them to feel like a part of the larger group identity. Fans tended to engage posts in a pattern. Before games, teams appealed to fans with spirit emblems to build excitement for the game. On gameday, pages featured posts about the game and fans attending it. The day after, fans engaged posts that showed photos of the game, especially fans and players. Ultimately, engagement boiled down to the typical response of a pattern of messages made by the universities; when the universities stopped posting, fans stopped engaging. The next section discusses these findings further, and addresses the context of posts for different stages of the community-building process.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION

BUILDING *IMAGINED COMMUNITIES* IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The present study explored the ways in which people and universities use college football Facebook pages to create and maintain a fan community. This research sought understanding of the kind of community-building messages used online. In particular it sought to address the ways fans and universities use Facebook as part of their fan community. This study raised two research questions, How do varying competitive levels of college football use Facebook to build, enhance, and maintain brand communities, and how do teams use Facebook to engage fans throughout a football season? These questions were raised after reviewing literature that addressed college football, social media, and netnography. Ultimately, these questions led to the conclusion that college football Facebook pages directly deliver community content that engages fans in different ways at different times.

The overall indication of findings in this study suggests that Facebook posts drive engagement differently in the life cycle of an event-focused campaign, a college football game. First, fans engage posts that excited them for the game. On gameday, they embrace posts about the game and use social media to connect with the university and with other fans. After the game, fans engage posts that discuss the people of the game, especially players and fans. The

present study's findings also suggested that university-made posts dominate the brand conversation, and that fans tend to react to real-world actions as well as online campaigns on university posts. The success of a team also played a role in the success of the engagement on the page, as universities with unsuccessful teams reduced their posting over time, and thus fans engaged less often. The intent of this chapter is to discuss the meanings of the findings themselves and explore the implications of these findings for researchers and practitioners.

6.1 SUMMARY OF STUDY

Research about social media focused on its use as a dialogic communication tool (Men & Tsai, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012). Scholars (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxon, 2012; Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012; Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012; Lovejoy & Saxon, 2012) identified the ways social media can be used, and concluded that brands, nonprofits, and universities. However, Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme (2012) found that UGC drives brand conversations and consumer insights. Thus, consumer engagement is good for brands. Scholars have found that college football positively promotes student admissions, state appropriations, and donations, (Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008; Gau, Wann, & James, 2010; Depken, Williams, & Wilson, 2011; Humphreys, 2006; Smith, 2009). Die-Hard Active and Young Belonger fans engage sports content online (DeSarbo & Madrigal, 2012). Lastly, research about *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 2006), indicates that nations are created by policy, history, and culture (Hall, 1996a, 1996b). Nations use visuals to record their story and share their cultures (Green, Harvey, & Knox, 2005). In total, research is needed to explain how culture is exchanged online, and

culturally-associated brands, such as college football, need to understand how to use social media to build their brand community and culture. This understanding will allow social media managers to better reach their audience with appropriate messages.

The participant observation research method guided this study (Kozinets, 2010). Much like ethnography, a netnography (Kozinets, 2006) has a researcher acting as a participant-observer in the field of research; however, while in ethnography the field is a specific place, netnography occurs in a digital place. Netnography calls for researchers to study the netnographic hypermedia (Pink, 2006; Kenney, 2009), which includes photographs, videos, text, links, and other visual material posted to the Internet. Because of the volume of information collected from the netnography, I used coding to reduce the data into categories. A grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allows researchers to sort information into groupings based on similarities, called codes. Then, codes are grouped again by similarities, and those second-level codes are the basis for theory development. The researcher selected six schools, representing three competitive levels of play, for analysis. Using this methodology 595 posts were coded into 29 open codes. Those were each grouped into axial codes based on the intent of the message. Individual open and axial codes were discussed and analyzed for each case, and then compared at each level.

Major findings from the analysis found that all schools used emotion-driven posts, ones that cheered on the team, before the game. During the game, posts kept fans updated about the score and showed players and fans participating. After the game, fans engaged photos of the game and

conversations with athletes posted by the university to discuss the game. This model was derived from the postings of the six universities.

This chapter seeks to enumerate these findings further. It also discusses implications for researchers and social media brand managers.

6.2 KEY FINDINGS

In the present study, the researcher culled 10 key findings regarding the usage of Facebook by college football teams. These conclusions have implications for both researchers and social media branding practitioners, which all are discussed later in this chapter. Primarily, the findings indicate that success on the field helps to drive Facebook engagement, and that teams use Facebook to suit their communication needs of the moment.

First, this study found that the frequency of university postings on Facebook depends on the success of the team. All schools start the season with a 0-0 record, and filled with hopes and dreams; thus, at the beginning of the year, universities post frequently about their football teams and fans tune in, excited for a chance to cheer on their team. However, after a few weeks, the course is generally set for the season, and the university reacts accordingly. However, fans do not necessarily disengage posts, as they still Like, Comment, and Share late-season posts made by failing teams. The decision to disengage on social media is one made by the universities, and not by the fans. Fans still want the content, and enjoy using the Facebook page as a venue to discuss the team and its activity, and by reducing posting, fans lose this venue to engage.

Second, teams use spirit and tradition to attract fans, and fans use these as identifiers. GSU and UTSA are building traditions, but take pride in their colors

and mascots. Miami has the Cradle of Coaches, and Marshall has the 1970 plane crash and *We Are Marshall*. USC and Iowa both have Heisman winners. All of the schools have major sources of pride and identity in these things, and they are on display on their Facebook pages. Miami showed the Cradle of Coaches monument, and discussed a coach's induction into its Hall of Fame. Meanwhile fans on Marshall's page cheer "We Are...Marshall" and got to tune in to an interview with 1971 Young Thundering Herd Coach Jack Lengyel by following the page. South Carolina posted memes about successful players and the team's ongoing success. Observers here can see these traditions and get a taste of the fan culture of these two schools just by observing their Facebook activity. This expression of culture on Facebook reminds fans of the university's points of pride and history, information they might later use in the offline world. Further, they help to build a link between the history of the program and its present fans on a platform the routinely engage.

Third, teams also use spirit and tradition, but embrace broad messages about identity. All schools featured photos of fans on their Facebook pages. Using Facebook this way, the universities can treat the page like a mirror, reflecting the important faces of the program and allowing fans to see themselves among their peer fans. In that way, the Facebook pages served as a venue to showcase their fans, their devotion, and their ways of connecting to the team. A university share of, for example, a USC fan dressing his or her child in Gamecock gear, denotes an endorsement of this fan behavior. By posting and sharing photos of fans, the university has the opportunity to shape the discourse of its fan identity and to encourage specific expressions of fans' relationships with the university.

Fourth, every team starts the season with energy on Facebook, but only the successful teams keep it. By the last week of the season, Georgia State, Iowa, and Miami had been eliminated from postseason contention, and each school made only a few, or a single, Facebook post about the seniors' finale. Marshall was in contention for a bowl game in the finale, but lost; UTSA could not go to a bowl because it was transitioning to the FBS. South Carolina, with nine wins headed into the season-ending rivalry game against Clemson, went on to win, and win a bowl game. For these three teams, the last week of postings on the Facebook page had much more effort, passion, and energy. Thus, as the teams struggled, fans disengaged the Facebook page. But, a moderately successful team (Marshall) still managed to have modest traffic at the end of the year, and much more when compared to schools with losing seasons.

Fifth, informational posting strategies garner less activity when a team is unsuccessful. Miami and Georgia State both embraced a heavily informational posting strategy for their Facebook pages. As both schools struggled, the activity on their Facebook pages took a dramatic slide. Meanwhile, an equally unsuccessful Iowa team managed to have some Facebook traffic through an unsuccessful campaign with emotion posts. However, by the end of the season, Iowa had gone entirely informational, and engagement had fallen dramatically.

Sixth, emotion driven posts are popular regardless of success. While South Carolina and UTSA teams embraced emotional messages and had successful years on the field, Marshall's page was also predominantly emotional, even though on-the-field success was limited. Still, when Marshall posted emotion-based messages, even as the team's struggles went on, fans reacted by Liking and Commenting. Ultimately, we see that emotional messages work on Facebook to

engage fans in this case. In light of the fifth and sixth findings, if teams want traffic on their pages, they should post emotional-based messages more often.

Seventh, fan posts tend to be more emotional than informational. As stated in the previous finding, fans tend to embrace emotional messages posted to a team's Facebook page. Similarly, fans themselves tend to post emotional messages, rather than informational ones, to a Facebook page. Marshall's page offered the only instance of fans posting information content, in response to a fan who asked where a game was being telecast. Otherwise, on Marshall's page and elsewhere, fans shared photos of children dressed in team apparel, chants, cheers, and statements of pride about the team, all of which worked as emotional posts. The impact of fan voices consistently delivering emotional messages on Facebook shows page followers that these fans have invested time and identity into the team. As with the finding about the Facebook page serving as a mirror on the fan base, the mirror here shows fans who value the team enough to speak on its page with cheers, chants, and other emotional activities.

Eighth, fans do turn to Facebook for information, but react better to emotion. As was discussed in the previous paragraph, fans do tune in to Facebook as an information channel. Often, fans would Like or Comment on posts about the game time, game score updates, and information about television and radio broadcasts. South Carolina's strategy here, posting score updates with the name of the player who scored and a brief summary of the action, paired with a cheer or chant, worked most effectively, as it combined information with an emotional appeal.

Ninth, this study found that universities use Facebook to inform or persuade people to be on the team's side. Primarily, these posts showed the

university's voice telling fans information about the team or game, or to encourage them to consume team products. One such post from Iowa encouraged fans to add the Big Ten Network to their cable packages so they could watch all the Hawkeye football games. Iowa draws revenue from the BTN, and thus wants fans to buy in to the network. Thus, informative and persuasive posts of serve to direct fans to think the way the university wants them to think, and act the way the university wants them to act.

Finally, the university's posts have power to instill team pride in fans. Posts like those coded as Spirit Emblems showed fans in university-branded gear and colors, as well as chants and cheers. Other posts regarding games referenced rivals and the implied "otherness" of fans of other universities. These types of posts helped followers differentiate between "us" and "them" on Facebook posts. One such post from Iowa showed a Hawkeyes fan in yellow and a fan of Northern Illinois, the opener opponent, dressed in red, and asked who would be happy when the game ended. Posts such as this helped to show who "Iowa" is and to separate it from who "Iowa" is not. This kind of Facebook nationalism creates a physical manifestation of the imagined community, as fans can see their compatriots as well as their enemy in visual form on the page.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that college football teams use Facebook to shape their fan culture, and their posting strategy helps to advance their institutional needs. However, sometimes the needs of teams run counter to the established gratifications for Facebook use. Thus, practitioners must consider the desires of fans when using various social media platforms.

6.3 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study broadly have use to researchers and practitioners who use social media. Cultural researchers can expand on the use of social media to exchange cultural information. Social media researchers should note the model of online dialogic communication. College football researchers should note the Facebook use patterns for new college football teams, mid-major teams, and major teams. Lastly, college football communications practitioners should use the data about the kinds of content that drives engagement.

6.3.1 *Cultural research*

Cultural research throughout academia should understand the expanding use of social media to exchange cultural information. Much like in McLuhan's Global Village (1964), the Internet, and by extension social media, allow people who share interests to connect across space and time. Thus, as the present study found, cultural messages are shared on Facebook, and presumably other social media, as well. This finding fundamentally changes the way we do cultural research, because if we ignore this important channel, we are analyzing an incomplete cultural text.

As Postill and Pink (2012) argued, scholars must address social media in ethnography. The present study found that universities use Facebook to show fans and potential fans what their team and fan culture means. By posting photographs of fans tailgating before games, children playing with parents, everyone dressed in the university's colors, and cheering on the team, a follower

on Facebook can see what happens at a game, and in part of what it means to be a fan. For example, a fan following on Marshall University's page would see that fans love the American bison mascot, and the impact of an airplane crash more than 40 years ago still lingers in the university's community. Meanwhile UTSA fans see that their school is just like anyone else's taking chartered planes to games, playing in a big stadium, tailgating before games, and all wearing orange and cheering on their team. This finding is noteworthy for a team that has only been in existence for a couple years, and fans in football-happy Texas might not be willing to accept a team viewed as "lesser;" though teams might strive to have the universal popularity in the state as the University of Texas Longhorns or the Texas A&M University Aggies, having the appearance of at least being competitive in scope and style with the Texas Tech Red Raiders, Baylor Bears, Texas Christian Horned Frogs, Houston Cougars, Rice Owls, Southern Methodist Mustangs, and University of Texas-El Paso Miners is expected. UTSA's Facebook page makes that comparison possible.

Thus, the exchange of culture online, though somewhat a new field, provides a vibrant forum for researchers to address. The richness of the data available in a netnography lets researchers gain an appreciation and perspective of a culture that includes people that cannot necessarily be assembled in one place, and captures a cultural record that changes and evolves over time as different voices join the conversation. Traditional ethnography does have its advantages, particularly the ease of access to key actors based on physical presence. However, netnography addresses the dominant media of the moment, digital, and lets researchers access cultural artifacts posted by multiple actors.

6.3.2 *Social media research*

The ever-changing field of social media research should find use of this study's timeline of fan engagement. As the model shows, different types posts have the ability to engage fans at periods of a campaign. The present study's finding that, during an events-based campaign, fans best engage posts that build excitement, inform, and then follow up can be applied to social media campaigns throughout public relations and advertising. As brands use social media to shape their audiences actions, the understanding the present study provides regarding the life cycle of a brand campaign, or micro-campaign, can help researchers to understand the goals of messages on pages, and the reasons for fans reactions to them.

Further, the present study provides insight into the ways that universities and other brands can shape culture using social media. Universities did most of the talking on the pages analyzed, and fans tuned in to respond to the university voices. Only on Marshall's page did fans take a primary role in posting content directly to the university's page. Thus, the university voice is one of privilege on its own Facebook page. Fans follow the university because they want to see what the university has to say, and then they elect to respond to it. But if the university is not talking, then fans are not wont to strike up a conversation. This finding means that brands wanting to engage fans on Facebook have to have a plan to engage them, and brands must understand their audience to create content that will impact that audience. Researchers, then, must understand that brands' use of social media provides an insight into they ways that the brand wants fans to engage.

6.3.3 *College football research*

College football researchers have done little work examining social media's impact on fan culture. Moreover, no work has addressed the needs of new programs. Researchers of college football should note the Facebook use patterns for new college football teams, mid-major teams, and major teams. New teams use Facebook to position the team as part of the already known and existing community, while mid-majors and major programs use Facebook to highlight their traditions. This difference is crucial; new programs do not have a football tradition to tout, and established programs are already part of a community's cultural fabric. In all instances, the team is showing its importance and relevance to the community, but new and established teams have different ways of doing so.

Researchers also should use this study as a means of understanding the cultural importance of the game to its fans. As South Carolina showed, college football is a family affair, complete with inflatable bounce houses and Carolina onesies for infants. For Marshall, fans loved the team so much they shaped their hedges into Thundering Herd topiaries. Previous studies (eg. Borucki, 2003) have found that fans associate football with regional and/or state pride. Scholars must consider that this pride is expressed via social media, and this is a ground fertile for future research.

6.3.4 *College football communicators*

As college football becomes increasingly revenue driven, college football communicators must understand how to keep fans tuned in to media, and the

team itself. Practitioners should use this study's data about the kinds of content that drive engagement to plan the media posting strategy for their teams. As was shown by Iowa, Georgia State, and Miami, schools that use an information based posting strategy tend to stop posting when the team is unsuccessful. This plan runs counter to the financial goals of the program, which call for full game attendance, merchandise sales, and television watching. Although it is difficult to support a bad team, die hard fans follow their schools win or lose, and want to have that interaction. One thing GSU and Iowa did well was shift the focus to the players when the team struggled. By cheering on an individual successful player, the team's Facebook page still has life and positive news; this could translate to following specific players on Twitter, Liking fan pages of players, and, offline, buying jerseys and other gear specific to a player.

Second, college football communicators should understand the purpose of different social media platforms. Scholars have addressed the uses of Twitter as a means of conveying instant information. However, Facebook is meant to reach people on a familial level; photographs of friends and family, special events, and memories work on Facebook in a more impactful way than on Twitter (Bertino, 2014). Thus, communicators should use Facebook for emotional messages, and Twitter for informational messages. This posting strategy will maximize the effectiveness of a social media campaign by playing to the desired gratifications for each platform.

Last, college football communicators should use this study to create content that encourages fan interaction with the team, and its individual players. As South Carolina did, posting information about the activities of specific players in the game allows fans to use Facebook as a platform to connect with the athlete

and the team. Some players will go on to play professionally, and some might have played in high school for a local team. Thus, fans might already have interest in a player, and might develop an interest in players as they move on to the next stage.

6.3.5 *Recommendations for schools*

Each of the schools have positives and negatives about their Facebook pages. In this section, the researcher makes recommendations for each team to grow their audiences and engagement.

Georgia State is working toward a fan culture, and is trying to build engagement on its social media channels. Outside the analysis period, the researcher observed GSU posting questions, quizzes, challenges, and other materials to get fans to tune in to its Facebook page; these strategies seem to work, and the researcher recommends they continue. During football season, GSU needs to bill itself as a family-friendly and affordable way to spend a Saturday. As previous research shows, some fans view games as weekend entertainment; building a festive atmosphere at games, with food, bounce house inflatables, and other activities for children will help to build this. This atmosphere should be heavily promoted on social media. Further, the researcher recommends having a costumed mascot interact with fans, and pose with them in photos that are shared on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram with a GSU-specific hashtag. Ultimately, these offline activities can be captured and shared to build the Facebook presence that will help GSU build engagement on its pages.

UTSA did many things right on its Facebook page, from promoting hashtags to giving an insider view of the program, the Roadrunner page

delivered as an engagement tool. However, one thing truly lacking from UTSA's page is that mirror of the fans. Very rarely are UTSA fans shown tailgating, cheering, wearing team colors, and enjoying their game day experience. Fans shown on UTSA's page are only seen from a distance. By posting photo albums of fans from games, people will tune in to the Facebook page for a chance to see themselves in the crowd or outside the game. UTSA's page does a good job at showing official voices, and making emotional appeals with color, cheers, and branding, but should move toward reflecting its culture, and its fans.

Marshall's page brings a curious situation. The Herd has a stronger fan presence on its official page than any other team; however, without the fans, Marshall's page would largely be informational. Marshall should capture this fan energy and provide some guidance; it is clear Marshall fans want to post on the page, so the university should create directed topics, photo challenges, and hashtags for fans to use, follow, and contribute to on the page. By asking Herd fans to, for example, post photos of their children in Marshall apparel, fans should respond, and the university benefits from branded content being shown on happy young faces. One thing Marshall did very well was create visual content for its page. The Facebook cover photos used on the page, and available for fan use, capture a spirit of Marshall, with glowing green, American bison, players, fans, and the university flag all being prominently featured on cover photos. This lets fans use those photos on their own page, identifying them as Marshall fans, and provides exposure for the team. This is a practice that should be kept.

Miami University's page suffered from poor execution, on top of a difficult season. The RedHawks page was built on an information strategy, and

as the team struggled, fans stopped tuning in. The few emotional posts in the season focused on Miami's proud history, or on the homecoming court. When a statue was unveiled at the Cradle of Coaches marker at homecoming, only a text post announced it; no photos showed the statue, or the monument, or the unveiling ceremony. This was a huge opportunity to showcase Miami heritage on the Facebook page, and it was wasted. Like at GSU, the researcher recommends Miami engage fans to use its page as a venue to express Miami pride, and to show photos of fans in Miami apparel, tailgating at games, and posing with a costumed mascot. Ultimately, these changes will help Miami fans tune in, regardless of the team's struggles.

Iowa, too, suffered from an information strategy that failed when the team struggled. Three of Iowa's four analysis periods were early in the season, when the team still had hope of a postseason. However, by the senior day game, the team was out of contention and had been largely noncompetitive. During the opener, rivalry, and homecoming dates, Iowa was able to effectively reach its fans and get them to respond, using both emotional and informational appeals. The researcher's recommendation is not to let a difficult season end engagement on Facebook. Fans still came to games, and surely still cared about Hawkeyes content. Iowa should embrace its fans, even in times of difficulty, and not avoid them entirely.

Generally, South Carolina worked its emotional appeal throughout its Facebook posts, even those meant to inform. Thus, when South Carolina posted, fans reacted. One particular feature on USC's page, the Photo of the Week, drew fan submissions and was popular with likes and comments. The researcher recommends South Carolina keep up with its strategy, as this clearly works to

engage its fan base. However, one place where the researcher thinks South Carolina could improve is the use of hashtags. These categorizers help fans to channel content into a single place, and lets fans online consume all the content about, for example, #gamecocks, all in one place. The use of hashtags on Facebook will allow USC fans a better opportunity to engage each other as well as the Carolina brand.

6.4 DISCUSSION SUMMARY

In total, this section summarized the present study, including Anderson (2006) and other relevant research, as well as the netnographic research method (Kozinets, 2006). In answering the two research questions, it found that teams at different levels of competitive play use Facebook similarly to share their culture, and to gear fans toward a specific cultural expression, and that Facebook posts help to reinforce wearing of university colors, saying university cheers, and maintaining rivalries. Primarily, implications from this study suggest a need for more research to examine these models, the way culture is exchanged on social media, and better practices in using social media for their intended purpose. The next chapter will further elaborate on avenues for future research, discuss limitations, and make concluding thoughts.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

ADVANCING ONLINE COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Online communities have become a key part of social networks and social media, and brands have embraced them as a strategy to develop greater loyalty. College football teams have followed suit, and the Facebook presence of a team in part represents part of the online activity of an offline community. The present study has explored the Facebook postings on the pages of six college football teams, representing three levels of competitive play.

Using netnography, the research found that college football teams use their Facebook pages to rally their fans. Further, it posited a timeline model for Facebook campaigns, with different types of posts drawing engagement on different days in the game cycle. It found that fan voices tend to be more emotional, and that informational messages drop in frequency if a team is unsuccessful. Further, teams have an important role in shaping fan discussion and engagement in their Facebook pages. This section offers suggestions for future scholars to advance the research begun in this paper. Then, it discusses the limitations of the present study. Finally, it offers some concluding thoughts about this research.

7.1 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research breaks new ground with its model of dialogic online communication, and advance the application of Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006) to online communities. The findings of this study help advance understanding about the way people use Facebook as a tool for identity, and group communications. I have several suggestions for future avenues of research, as well as for replications of this study and its methods.

When completing a netnography of social media, one must have a clear plan for data collection. This study used screen captures of the activity on the page. However, better tools now exist for capturing data. The use of screen captures did allow for a visual record of data, including photographs, which is why it was used. Ideally, a software application would exist to capture photographs, video, and other activity, including posts. The use of screen captures did not allow for the searching of post texts. Further, it did not allow the playing of video.

Future scholars should further develop this study's model of dialogic communication on social media. Using statistical methods, testing and further development of this model would aid in understanding the varying tactics used on social media and their outcomes. The model put forth in this study is built on the findings of this research, but could change with different cases, and in a different research setting. Statistical testing and further refinement will allow this model to be applicable for multiple platforms, and for different type of online, brand-oriented communities.

This study does answer the call of Postill and Pink (2012) for online ethnography of visuals; however, it is only one of the beginning studies needed in this area. This research affirms their assertion that ethnography online helps further the understanding of digital cultural exchange; indeed, this study shows that online culture can easily be dominated by institutional voices. However, more research is needed in this area, as online and social networking communications are increasingly advancing as the dominant media of the time. Thus, ethnography is needed to expand the understanding of the patterns of communication in this area.

The link between emotional appeals and fan posting also must be further explored. The findings of this study indicate fans typically post emotion-driven posts. However, Muniz and Schau (2007) documented a great deal of informational fan postings in a study of Apple Newton users' online community. Apple's official voice was not present in the Newton online community, whereas in the present study, the online community was managed by the universities. It is possible that when an official voice is present to give information, fan voices will gravitate toward emotional messages. Future research should compare these two situations.

Studies into online communities also should explore the way fan interest changes over time. This study found that a primarily informational posting strategy paired with an unsuccessful team caused limited traffic over time. This situation is football, or athletics, specific, but still could be useful in future sports research.

7.2 LIMITATIONS

This study embraced the netnographic research method to answer its research questions. Inherent in any ethnographic pursuit, digital or analog, are certain limitations; moreover, digital ethnography presents its own unique limits. Other limitations specific to this study concern its selection of cases, sampling, and scope. This section discusses each of these limitations.

The nature of ethnography requires researchers to focus deeply on one culture. Researchers in ethnography can embrace the emic and etic perspectives of the culture they are observing. The emic perspective refers to the thoughts of the actors in a culture about how the culture functions. Conversely, the etic perspective is the thoughts of the cultural outsider, comparing the practices across cultures. Emic studies allow the researcher to greater explain the culture in question, because he or she might have a deeper understanding of the material, however, the researcher might not be aware that certain cultural practices are unique. The strength of etic research is the comparison, but the researcher might not fully grasp the historical importance of some cultural practices. In this research, I acted as an emic researcher for Marshall and South Carolina, as I have attended both schools and been a fan of both football programs, and as an etic researcher for GSU, UTSA, Miami, and Iowa. I thought this mix of perspectives helped me control for the lack of understanding in some traditions. However, the limitation of not viewing all cases as entirely emic or etic is noteworthy. I made every effort to understand all six cultures, and followed all six teams fervently for the 2011, 2013, and 2014 football seasons, but, I cannot change my life experience.

Netnography itself comes with its own complications. It is difficult to access all the actors in the scene, because thousands communicate on the pages, and more than that follow the pages. Other netnographies (Muniz & Schau, 2007) have conducted interviews with key actors outside of the netnographic field. However, the nature of the present study has the principle actors, the universities, as nameless, faceless beings who have no specific identity. I contacted administrators at the University of South Carolina to discuss who managed the university's social media, and was told that varying undergraduate and graduate students operate the accounts. Thus, the universities were each considered as individual actors, and further information about their posting decisions could not be attained.

The selection of cases provides an intriguing limitation for which no control can be made. Of the six teams selected for analysis, only one, South Carolina, played in a postseason bowl. UTSA finished with a winning record, but did not defeat enough Division I FBS teams to be bowl eligible, and was held out of postseason play because of its transition to FBS waiting period. Marshall was in contention for the postseason until the final game, which could help to explain the activity on its page at the end of the season. Iowa, Miami, and GSU, all of which were not competitive at the end of the season, had very little activity on their Facebook pages as the year closed. Thus, knowledge about these teams end-of-year posting is limited. Ideally, the study would select teams that are successful and can be followed throughout the season, and would still use Facebook at the season's end to promote football. However, no one can predict the year's successful teams, and further to predict what representative new and

mid-major teams would be successful. Therefore, the nature of college football itself causes data in the study to be limited.

The need to sample in this study also limits the findings. Sampling was necessary after the initial draw of data produced upward of 2,500 posts to be coded. Thus, limiting the analysis to the four weekends provides a look at the culture while making a more efficient use of time in analysis. The sample itself, the opener, homecoming, rivalry, and senior day, also posed some challenges. For GSU and UTSA, the rivalry and senior day games were a single event. In addition, with Marshall, Miami, Iowa, and South Carolina all playing away games for the opener, some of the festivities captured on social media, such as tailgates, might have been lost.

Focusing the study on Facebook, and not including Twitter, also limits the data. Facebook is the largest social media site in the world, and Twitter is the second largest. However, the kinds of information shared on the two sites varies greatly. Generally, people use Twitter to engage entertainment media and to gain information, and use Facebook to share with family and friends, and to post photographs (Bertino, 2014). Thus, the finding that many of the schools here use Facebook primarily for information goes against this understanding. Similarly, knowing that Facebook is used for connecting with friends and family and sharing photographs, the finding that universities and fans use it for emotional type messages is logically manifest. Therefore, the limitation here is that Facebook is the place to find emotional posts, so their finding is not unexpected; conversely, the finding of informational posts, which should have been limited to the Twitter platform, is noteworthy.

The scope of this study also is limited. As a qualitative study, its findings are not meant to be projected to all college football teams. The selected cases are drawn from three kinds of college football teams, but in no means can these cases stand for every college football team from those categories.

7.3 CONCLUSION

As Facebook, Twitter, and other social media grow in importance as part of the media landscape, scholars must continue the quest to explore, explain, and understand the role these powerful communication tools play. The hallmark of the age of Web 2.0 is the social exchange. Fundamental to the pursuit of any communication venture is the innate understanding of the means of communication, its audience, and its impact. Berlo's (1960) SMCR model of communication, Source-Message-Channel-Receiver, in many ways has become outdated, as the receiving audience has the ability to send messages back to the original sender; however, the simplicity of this model remains: those who send messages must be conscious of the message itself, the means used to send it, and the audience who receives it. As this study showed, some universities are not effectively using Facebook given its audiences' desires. Deep understanding of the usefulness and gratifications sought for each of these networks must be attained and reevaluated as the networks change in ability and mission for effective communication practices. On a cultural level, this research is among the first to address the act of cultural exchange via Facebook and other social media. As Postill and Pink (2012) said, the field of online cultural research is in its infancy, and more work is needed. Cultural researchers should note that,

although this study addressed culture in terms of college football, the fact that so many cultural messages were shared on the platform indicates the importance of social media in shaping, maintaining, and creating culture and identity.

For college football, Facebook and other social media activity should follow the lead of advertising, marketing, and public relations for other brands. The cultural aspect of college football's brand is an asset, and universities should use the social networking platform as a forum for fan engagement about the team, fan culture, and the university. An engaged fan base translates to a dedicated fan base, and one that will spend, directly and indirectly, to support their programs.

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Appendix A: 2012 NCAA Division I FBS Teams and Conference Affiliation



Atlantic Coast Conference

Boston College	North Carolina
Clemson	North Carolina State
Duke	Virginia
Florida State	Virginia Tech
Georgia Tech	Wake Forest
Maryland	
Miami	



Big East Conference

Cincinnati	Rutgers
Connecticut	South Florida
Louisville	Syracuse
Pittsburgh	Temple



Big Ten Conference

Illinois	Northwestern
Indiana	Ohio State
Iowa	Pennsylvania State
Michigan	Purdue
Michigan State	Wisconsin
Minnesota	
Nebraska	



Big Twelve Conference

Baylor	Oklahoma State
Iowa State	Texas
Kansas	Texas Christian
Kansas State	Texas Tech
Oklahoma	West Virginia



Conference USA

UAB	Southern
Central Florida	Methodist
East Carolina	Southern
Houston	Mississippi
Marshall	Texas-El Paso
Memphis	Tulane
Rice	Tulsa



Mid-American Conference

Akron	Massachusetts
Ball State	Miami (Ohio)
Bowling Green	Northern Illinois
Buffalo	Ohio
Central Michigan	Toledo
Eastern Michigan	Western Michigan
Kent State	



Mountain West Conference

Air Force	Nevada-Las Vegas
Boise State	New Mexico
Colorado State	San Diego State
Fresno State	Wyoming
Hawaii	
Nevada	



Pac-12

Arizona	USC
Arizona State	Stanford
California	Utah
UCLA	Washington
Colorado	Washington State
Oregon	
Oregon State	



Southeastern Conference

Alabama	Mississippi
Arkansas	Mississippi State
Auburn	Missouri
Florida	South Carolina
Georgia	Tennessee
Kentucky	Texas A&M
Louisiana State	Vanderbilt



Sun Belt Conference

Arkansas State	Middle Tennessee
Florida Atlantic	North Texas
Florida International	South Alabama
Louisiana-Lafayette	Troy
Louisiana-Monroe	Western Kentucky



Western Athletic Conference

Idaho	Texas State
Louisiana Tech	Utah State
New Mexico State	Texas-San Antonio
San Jose State	

Independent

Army	Navy
Brigham Young	Notre Dame

Appendix B: 2012 NCAA Division I FCS Teams and Conference Affiliation



Big Sky Conference

California-Davis	Northern
California	Arizona
Polytechnic	Northern
Eastern	Colorado
Washington	Portland State
Idaho State	Sacramento
Montana	State
Montana State	Southern Utah
North Dakota	Weber State



Big South Conference

Charleston	Presbyterian
Southern	Stony Brook
Coastal Carolina	Virginia
Gardner-Webb	Military
Liberty	Institute



Colonial Athletic Association

Delaware	Rhode Island
Georgia State	Richmond
James Madison	Towson
Maine	Villanova
New Hampshire	William &
Old Dominion	Mary



Ivy League

Brown	Harvard
Columbia	Pennsylvania
Cornell	Princeton
Dartmouth	Yale



Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference

Bethune-	Norfolk State
Cookman	N. Carolina A&T
Delaware State	N. Carolina
Florida A&M	Central
Hampton	Savannah State
Howard	S. Carolina State
Morgan State	



Missouri Valley Conference

Illinois State	South Dakota
Indiana State	State
Missouri State	Southern Illinois
North Dakota	Western Illinois
State	Youngstown
Northern Iowa	State
South Dakota	



Northeast Conference

Albany	Monmouth
Bryant	Robert Morris
Central	Sacred Heart
Connecticut	St. Francis (Pa.)
State	Wagner
Duquesne	



Ohio Valley Conference

Austin Peay	Southeast
Eastern Illinois	Mo. State
Eastern Kentucky	Tennessee-
Jacksonville	Martin
State	Tennessee State
Murray State	Tennessee Tech



Patriot League

Bucknell	Holy Cross
Colgate	Lafayette
Fordham	Lehigh
Georgetown	



Pioneer Football League

Butler	Jacksonville
Campbell	Marist
Davidson	Morehead State
Dayton	San Diego
Drake	Valparaiso



Southern Conference

Appalachian	Furman
State	Georgia So.
Chattanooga	Samford
Citadel	W. Carolina
Elon	Wofford



Southland Conference



Central Arkansas	Northwestern St.
Lamar	Sam Houston St.
McNeese State	S.W. Louisiana
Nicholls State	Stephen F. Austin






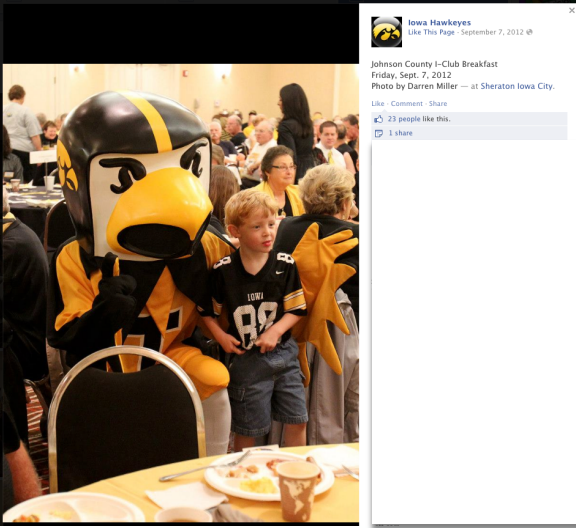
South Western Athletic Conference

Alabama A&M	Jackson State
Alabama State	Mississippi Valley
Alcorn State	State
Arkansas-Pine	Prairie View A&M
Bluff	Southern
Grambling State	Texas Southern

Appendix C: Coding Exemplar

Code	Evidence	Example
Alumni	Posts show photos of and/or specifically address an alumni club, class year, or organization.	
Boosters	Posts show photos of and/or specifically address a booster club.	

<p>Branding</p>	<p>Photo post shows the university logo.</p>	 <p>Marshall University Athletics changed their cover photo. September 2, 2012</p> <p>Like · Comment · Share</p> <p>86 people like this.</p>
<p>Chant</p>	<p>Official chant made by fans at the stadium during games. The chants were verified by university and in YouTube.</p>	 <p>UTSA Football near Richmond, TX</p> <p>U-T-</p> <p>Like · Comment</p> <p>1 people like this.</p>

<p>Cheer</p>	<p>Other cheers posted to the page that are not the official crowd cheer.</p>	 <p>A screenshot of a Facebook post from the South Carolina Gamecocks page, dated November 10, 2012. The post text reads: "GAMECOCKS WIN!!! Final Score: Carolina 38, Arkansas 20. Gamecocks improve to 8-2 overall, 6-2 SEC. Full recap, videos, and photos available on GamecocksOnline.com: http://www.gamecocksonline.com/sports/m-footbl/recaps/111012aaa.html C-A-R-O-L-I-N-A GOOD COCKS!!!". Below the text is a photograph of a crowd of fans at a game, with a prominent red banner that says "IT'S GREAT TO BE A GAMECOCK" and "GAMECOCK CLUB". The banner also features the Gamecock logo. At the bottom of the post, it shows "Like · Comment · Share" and engagement statistics: 5,434 likes, 101 comments, and 572 shares.</p>
<p>Children/Family</p>	<p>Posts show photos of children or a family together at a game or before a game. Or shows them wearing team apparel it celebrating the team in some way. Or family and children are specifically mentioned in a post.</p>	 <p>A screenshot of a Facebook post from the Iowa Hawkeyes page, dated September 7, 2012. The post text reads: "Johnson County I-Club Breakfast Friday, Sept. 7, 2012 Photo by Darren Miller — at Sheraton Iowa City." Below the text is a photograph of a young boy sitting at a table with a mascot wearing a large yellow and black penguin costume. The mascot is sitting on a chair, and the boy is sitting next to it. The table has plates of food and a drink. At the bottom of the post, it shows "Like · Comment · Share" and engagement statistics: 23 people like this and 1 share.</p>

Coach	Post shows photo of or specifically address a head coach or an assistant coach.	 <p>Georgia State University Athletics August 29, 2012 · @</p> <p>1 Day Till Kickoff - Coach Bill Curry</p> <p>Who were your favorite players growing up? I was a young baseball pitcher and when we got our first TV set I watched in awe of N.Y. Yankees catcher Yogi Berra and dreamed of pitching to him or the next great Yankees catcher at Yankee Stadium</p> <p>Who were your favorite coaches growing up? Casey Stengel of the N.Y. Yankees because they always seemed to win World Series. Locally, Bobby Dodd impressed me, even though we were Georgia Bulldogs ... See More</p> <p>1 DAY TILL KICKOFF MEET THE PANTHERS</p> <p>COACH BILL CURRY HEAD COACH</p> <p>Like Comment Share 49 16</p>
Color	Image prominently (>50%) shows university colors. Color can be in crowd shots, facilities, branding, apparel, or as part of a graphic. Or text specifically addresses the name of the university color.	 <p>UTSA vs. TEXAS STATE SATURDAY, NOV. 24 1 P.M. ALAMODOME ORANGE OUT</p> <p>Like Comment</p> <p>UTSA Football One day ... #BeatTXST Like · Comment · Share · November 22, 2012</p> <p>Album: Timeline Photos Shared with: Public</p> <p>Open Photo Viewer Download Report</p> <p>168 people like this. 48 shares</p>
Complain	Fans launch a complaint about something on the Facebook page.	 <p>Marshall University Athletics</p> <p>I really can't believe this new points program the big green is launching. I've been a loyal fan purchasing my football tickets for 20 yrs in good and bad times. Now, I'm going to have to donate 25,000 (5,000 for 5 yrs) so I can get the privilege of buying. If I don't, some other loyal (rich) fan gets to take my seats. I've put up with assessments, mandatory donations , etc. but this is too much. I will not do it. I'm afraid the big green is making a huge mistake. They will lose my family plus many that sit around me. I'm very disappointed that the big green is trying to strong arm the 12th man:(— with [redacted] it Pt. Pleasant, WV.</p> <p>Like - Comment 61 39</p>

<p>Conference</p>	<p>Post specifically addresses the conference to which the team belongs. Or, photo shows the conference branding.</p>	 <p>UTSA Football shared UTSA Athletics's photo. October 19, 2012</p> <p>Join us at the Alamodome tomorrow for the game against San Jose State. #SJSUvsUTSA #getrowdy #UTSA</p> <p>Have you bought tickets yet for Saturday's UTSA Football game yet? If not call 210-458-UTSA and get yours now! Operators are standing by. #getrowdy #SJSUvsUTSA</p> <p>DON'T MISS UTSA FOOTBALL HOME WAC GAME FIRST HOME GAME AGAINST AN FBS OPPONENT</p> <p>UTSA vs. SAN JOSE STATE SATURDAY, OCT. 20, 2012 1 PM ALAMODOME</p> <p>Like · Comment · Share 48</p>
<p>Contribute</p>	<p>Fans are encouraged to give money to the university and its programs. Or to purchase apparel from the university.</p>	 <p>Georgia State University Athletics shared a link. August 29, 2012</p> <p>All of the auctions in our auction blitz end today at 5! Bid now before it's too late!</p> <p>Store Front - GeorgiaStateSports.com - Official Team Auction www.nmnathletics.com</p> <p>The Official Website for Georgia State Athletics, News, scores, schedules, stats, live video, live audio, on-demand video</p> <p>Like · Comment · Share 14 4</p>

<p>Crowd</p>	<p>Photos show crowd of fans watching game, in excess of 100s of people, so small faces cannot be identified.</p>	
<p>FanChat</p>	<p>Posts by fans made directly to the Facebook football page. Indicated by the name of poster on the post.</p>	
<p>Game</p>	<p>Text post directly addresses the time, date, and location of a game; gives the score of a game; explains action in game.</p>	

Hashtag

Posts include a hashtag or directs fans to use a specific hashtag when posting.



UTSA Football shared UTSA Athletics's photo.
August 31, 2012

One day. #getrowdy

Only one day to kickoff. Are you ready? #getrowdy



Like · Comment · Share 27

<p>Insider</p>	<p>Photos that show the aspect of the football program that a typical fan would not see. Posts show a Benin the scenes view of the team, it's travel, facilities, and similar.</p>	<p>UTSA Football shared UTSA Athletics's photo. August 31, 2012</p> <p>The Roadrunners have landed in Mobile, Ala. #getrowdy #UTSA #birdsup</p> <p>UTSA Athletic Director Lynn Hickey tweeted this photo. The Roadrunners have landed in Mobile, Ala. You can follow Lynn and her tweets from Mobile: http://twitter.com/LynnHickeyUTSA</p>  <p>Like · Comment · Share 43</p> <p>43 people like this.</p>
<p>KeyOthers</p>	<p>Posts show photos of or specifically address the athletic director, former players, former coaches, university officials, and others important to the program.</p>	 <p>UTSA Football Like This Page · August 31, 2012</p> <p>UTSA Football Director of Operations Shane Elder (middle) has the tough task of arranging all travel for the program.</p> <p>Like · Comment · Share</p>

<p>Mascot</p>	<p>Post shows photo of costumed character university mascot. Or, post addresses the nickname of the university's athletic teams.</p>	 <p>A Facebook post from the Iowa Hawkeyes page, dated September 7, 2012. The post features a photograph of a person in a large, yellow and black mascot costume sitting at a table during a breakfast event. The text of the post reads: "Johnson County I-Club Breakfast Friday, Sept. 7, 2012 Photo by Darren Miller — at Sheraton Iowa City." Below the photo are options to like, comment, and share.</p>
<p>Opponent</p>	<p>Any information about an opponent that is shared on the page. Do not count test posts that only say "against X University."</p>	 <p>A Facebook post from the South Carolina Gamecocks page, dated August 31, 2012. The post features a photograph of an empty football field with stadium buildings in the background. The text of the post reads: "Empty field hours before kickoff." Below the photo are options to like, comment, and share.</p>
<p>Player</p>	<p>Post mentions a player specifically or shows a photo of and identifies a specific player.</p>	 <p>A Facebook post from the South Carolina Gamecocks page, dated August 30, 2012. The post features a score update: "Score Update: Vanderbilt takes a 13-10 lead with a 44-yard field goal. Connor Shaw with his helmet back on after warming up his shoulder and will return at QB for the Gamecocks with 6:02 to remain in the 3rd quarter starting at own 25 yard line. LET'S GO GAMECOCKS!!!" Below the text are options to like, comment, and share, along with engagement statistics: 399 likes, 78 comments, and 1 share.</p>

Pride	An emblem of pride from the specific university is shown or discussed. Or fans or others express "pride" or "proud" in a post.	 <p>Marshall University Athletics Marshall University Athletics, WV via mobile</p> <p>Proud of the Thundering Herd!!! Way to go guys, no shame in the numbers you put on the score board, your a class act!!</p> <p>Like · Comment</p>
Radio	Information about the games broadcast on radio.	 <p>UTSA Football shared a link via UTSA Athletics. September 1, 2012</p> <p>Listen to today's @UTSA Football game on the Ticket 760 AM on your radio. However, if you are using the iHeart Radio app, you can still tune in on 92.5 FM The Patriot.</p> <p> UTSA/South Alabama radio broadcast moved to Ticket 760 - goUTSA.com: Official website of The University of Texas at San Antonio www.goutsa.com</p> <p>Technical difficulties move 1 p.m.</p> <p>Like · Comment · Share 1</p>

Rival


Any information about a rival that is shared on the page. Do not count test posts that only say "against X University." Or photos of a rivalry trophy or other emblem.


Heading to I-35 Rivalry game at Alamodome to work as Vendor, Media and Volunteer. I think I may have enough to do at the game for Texas State Bobcats football vs UTSA Football. So who wins the game and by how many points?



Like · Share 3 3

3 people like this.

Share	Followers are encouraged to share a post or share photos with the Facebook page.	
Stadium	Post names school's stadium specifically. Or post shows stadium in a photo.	

<p>Student</p>	<p>Post specifically addresses students or shows photos of students.</p>	
<p>Tailgate</p>	<p>Post of photo of fans tailgating. Or post mentions tailgating specifically.</p>	

<p>Television</p>	<p>Information about the games broadcast on television.</p>	
<p>Tickets</p>	<p>Post mentions tickets for an upcoming game or encourages their purchase, also season tickets. Or photo of someone's tickets before a game.</p>	