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What content makes people want to use sports websites?

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WHAT CONTENT MAKES PEOPLE WANT TO USE SPORTS WEBSITES?

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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by
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Abstract

This study looked at sports websites to see how the variables information, humor, entertainment, community, and credibility affected sports website users' intentions to use and re-use sports websites. Three groups of 25 and one group of 30 participants each completed a website viewing activity and corresponding survey. There were four website viewing activities (one for each group). The activities led participants on tours of ESPN.com, Deadspin.com, Football Outsiders, and Yahoo! Sports. Furthermore, the tours were designed to expose participants to the variables (as defined under disposition theory and uses and gratifications). Likewise, the corresponding survey assessed participants' intentions to use each of the four websites based on the degrees to which they perceived each variable to be present.

In addition to the surveys, the study utilized focus group discussion data as a secondary method. Five focus groups and one interviewee each answered eight open-ended questions. All answers were analyzed according to which of the variables were important to participants on sports websites.

Results of the survey data showed that humor and entertainment content had the most positive effect on sports website users' intents to use, whereas information and credibility content scored highest among the discussion participants. The community variable ranked last via both methods.

The ramifications for this study are that sports websites should develop their humorous and entertaining content regarding athletes and sports figures. Website partnerships with informative and credible sites should be formed to maintain sports information links.

Introduction

Sports websites have seen incredible growth in recent years for both the site creators and their advertisers. One of the few online genres making money, sports sites' revenues are predicted to reach almost \$3 billion dollars by 2012, up from \$1.5 billion in 2007. In that same time period, advertisers are expected to see a 24 percent increase in revenue from \$819 million dollars to \$1.95 billion dollars (Verna, 2008). One recent example of growth is the launch of new, city-specific ESPN websites. In 2009, ESPN (a division of Walt Disney Co.) launched local sports sites for Chicago, Boston, and Dallas. The Chicago site saw 1.15 million unique visitors in October (of 2009). This was 20 percent more than the site had seen the previous month. For all three of these local sites, 2.3 million unique visitors spent 10.4 million total minutes (Klayman, 2009). To continue this exponential growth, sports sites are developing and tracking the popular content. But what are these features that keep sports sites users (and thus advertisers) coming back?

One possible feature is entertainment. Recent studies have shown that online sports fan communities draw users because the users produce content (via message boards, etc.) to entertain each other (Benigni, Porter, & Wood, 2009). Although these fans are producing the content themselves, the examples to follow refer to the entertainment caused by the content, and not by the fan participation. An example worth noting took place on December 3, 2007. The commenter "Belowpar" posted a thread to TigerDroppings.com. He said that ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit had reported a false rumor about LSU's Les Miles because Herbstreit had taken a prank call as his source (Belowpar, 2007).

Belowpar's post began a message board thread that continued for 7 pages over 8 days on TigerDroppings.com. Furthermore, Belowpar's message became the source for other bloggers

and media, such as the December 5, 2007 entry of the blog “Awful Announcing” (Powell, 2007) and a December 1, 2009 posting on the College Football Talk on nbcsports.com (Ramsey, 2009). Comments and blogs blasted Herbstreit and vindicated college football programs (LSU and Michigan). Herbstreit’s mistake became a rallying point for fans – *for* their teams and *against* the media.

In examples such as this, online sports fan communities produce a form of entertainment best explained by disposition theory of sports spectatorship. Online community intensity comes from the intensity of fan cultures in general (and their anticipations of outcomes of games) (Raney, 2006). The intensity stems from the ways in which people are socialized as sports fans (family, school, city, etc.) and the team affiliations that they adopt. Disposition theory of sports spectatorship basically states that we are most entertained when good things happen to those teams and athletes we like. Likewise, we are entertained when the world of sports is unkind to those teams and athletes we dislike (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002). This type of entertainment is often amplified by a group affiliation, such as that of an online fan community. In this example, college football fans were brought together by TigerDroppings, and their entertainment was amplified because they could experience entertaining posts like Belowpar’s as a group (Raney, 2006). The fans read that Kirk Herbstreit made a mistake due to a prank call, and they enjoyed criticism against Herbstreit. The fans were entertained by the negativity directed toward someone they saw as a buffoon, and they enjoyed the absolution of their coach and programs.

Sports websites also entertain by using humor, a principle governed by disposition theory of humor. Disposition theory of humor, like disposition theory of sports spectatorship, manifests itself in the way that we form positive or negative dispositions toward characters such as sports teams and figures. We are still entertained by the defeat of teams and athletes we do not

support. However, under the conditions of disposition theory of humor, there is something about the “defeat” that makes it funny, as in the debasement or humiliation of that negative disposition entity.

In this way, disposition theory can be applied to other humorous entertainment features for sports websites. We are more entertained when good things happen for our positive disposition characters (our favorite team gets a win) and when bad things happen to our negative disposition characters (i.e., Elizabeth Lambert is suspended for behaving violently during a women’s collegiate soccer match, or Tiger Woods is dropped by his sponsors after multiple incidents of cheating on his wife). Using disposition theory of humor, we can investigate whether humorous stories, photos, or videos featuring the debasement or humiliation of a sports character entertain sports website users.

Besides humor, information features are another way sites are attracting users. An example of this is Fantasy Sports Ventures (FSV), which bought 30 sports Web sites along with promotional and revenue-sharing agreements with some 400 affiliates (Van Riper, 2009). The goal was to utilize a handful of small, independent football sites catering to hardcore fans. Such websites allow statistics and other information content to be shared, providing the service of aggregating sports information to help fantasy sports team owners to make decisions from week to week. This use of sports information features attracted users by the millions. FSV is now “the fifth-most popular sports Web business, with more than 10 million unique viewers a month, according to Nielsen Media Research” (Van Riper, 2009). Sports information is, in this case, a classic end goal under the theory of uses and gratifications (McQuail, 1984). The theory of uses and gratifications explains how individuals make media choices based on what they want to get out of the media. Similarly to FSV, Carlson, Rosenberger, and Muthaly (2003) have noted that

information was a key satisfaction for the use of sports websites: “Much of the appeal of sport websites comes from the passions and interests of sports fans who need their daily fix of information...”(Carlson, Rosenberger, & Muthaly 2003, p. 184). Uses and gratifications literature describes this “fix” using the terms “guidance” and “surveillance.” Note that the uses and gratifications implication for the term “surveillance” is that an individual can continually follow a medium to stay fully informed on a topic. Therefore, Carlson et al.’s (2003) sports fans and the users of FSV sites all have one thing in common: the use of sports websites for the uses and gratifications goal of sports surveillance.

Within uses and gratifications, individuals can choose media to fulfill other purposes in addition to surveillance. These purposes can be motivated environmentally or from within, and are subject to limiters like access. “Empathy” and “social exchange” are two of these other satisfactions in uses and gratifications (McQuail, 1984). Online communities, such as those provided by sports websites with interactive fan features, aid the uses and gratifications process for sports fans seeking to satisfy a social need. According to Wise, Hamman, and Thorson (2006):

...many people use the Internet to communicate with individuals through tools such as email and instant messaging; others use it to communicate with larger groups by posting their ideas to blogs, discussion groups, and other public websites. In fact, The Pew Internet and American Life Project recently reported that 44 percent of Internet users have contributed content to a website (Lenhart, Fallows, & Horrigan, 2004). Such websites are now generically referred to as online communities (p. 25).

Therefore, community (for social exchange and surveillance) of sports websites can also be investigated under uses and gratifications.

Lastly, recall the fact that sports website information supplies a means for a fan to be guided in their sports knowledge. However, credibility is often an enhancer of information. While research on the credibility of sports websites is largely undeveloped, Hong (2006) has demonstrated that there is a strong relationship between the perceived credibility of a website and the intention to revisit the site. For these reasons, I will study the variables information, community, and credibility associated with sports websites, and this will be done under the theoretical framework of uses and gratifications.

Within the theoretical frameworks of disposition theory and uses and gratifications, this study will investigate how online features of sports websites such as entertainment, humor, community and information relate to an intention to reuse sports websites. I will again investigate the interaction of credibility with these variables in sports website use. Using a mixed methodological approach of a quantitative survey and qualitative focus groups, I will explore four sports websites.

The implications of this research are that websites that give users what they want are sure to succeed. If website managers can show that a website can create ways to attract unique views as well as sustain current fans, advertisers will be more likely to buy advertising space on that site and partnerships with other successful websites can form. The goal of this research is to make a modest contribution to the current literature on sports websites by identifying and reinforcing the success of features that allow sports sites to continue to build a good audience. Additionally, I will examine the role of the underdeveloped variable of credibility in the intent to use an entertainment website for the collection of factual sports information.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Disposition Theory and Uses and Gratifications

This study will look at entertainment, humor, community, information, and credibility and how they relate to sports website use. These variables can be studied in the context of two main theories: disposition theory and the process of uses and gratifications.

Disposition Theory

Bryant and Zillmann (2002) were among the first to define the theories of disposition. The theories arose from the need to describe how people viewed entertainment material in various forms. They said entertainment includes “any activity designed to delight and, to a smaller degree, enlighten through the exhibition of the fortunes or misfortunes of others, but also through the clear display of special skills by others and/or self...” (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002, p. 530). Entertainment encompasses sports, i.e. any game or play, athletic or performance-related, observed or taken part in, alone or with others. However, Bryant and Zillmann (2002) wanted to understand when entertainment is effective, i.e. “What contributes to the actual *enjoyment* of entertainment? How can the mass media produce *good* entertainment?”

Bryant and Zillmann (2002) contend that the enjoyment of any drama, comedy and sport is influenced by many variables. Some of the most important of these variables are *affective dispositions*. These are an entertainment-seeker’s feelings toward the interacting parties in their entertainment material. Bryant and Zillmann (2002) proposed that the enjoyment of drama, comedy, and sports is strongly influenced by one’s affective dispositions toward the interactive parties, as was previously stated, but especially parties confronted with problems, conflict, and adversity (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002). Thus, enjoyment becomes a function of conflict resolution, and what that resolution means to the parties involved. Seekers of entertainment get the most out of entertainment when those who “come out on top” are liked or loved, and when those who

come out “on the short end” are disliked or hated (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002). So the best entertainment experience is ultimately a function of sentiments toward the parties of involvement, or characters. Good entertainment is also rounded out by the entertainment-spectator’s acceptance or liking of the end resolution. In other words: Enjoyment deriving from witnessing the enhancement, success, or victory of a party, agent, or object increases with the intensity of positive sentiment toward these entities (and vice-versa). Likewise, for “endings:” annoyance deriving from witnessing the debasement, failure, or defeat of a party, agent, or object decreases from negative sentiment and increases with positive sentiment toward these entities (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002; Raney 2003a; Raney, 2003b).

Bryant and Zillmann’s (2002) prediction, then, is that we enjoy what entertainment gives the best to those characters we like. This phenomenon has been observed in terms of drama, comedy, and sports spectatorship. In each case, research has given us a wealth of information regarding the formation of affective dispositions. Thus, we can examine three types of disposition theory in order to explain how each applies to the consumption of sports and sports media. The three types of disposition theory to be applied are: humor, drama, and sports spectatorship.

Disposition Theory of Humor.

How do we form affective dispositions toward the characters in humorous media or jokes? Zillmann and Cantor (1976) have told us that this happens via empathy and *in situ* emotional response.

Empathy plays a role in encoding a humorous situation (Zillmann & Cantor, 1972). The person interpreting the humor first identifies the roles and activities of the characters. Then, the interpreter reacts with empathy toward characters whose roles and activities are associated with positive experiences. Similarly, the interpreter reacts with counterempathy toward characters

whose roles and activities are associated with negative experiences. The interpreter may also have both reactions at one time. Basically, empathy allows us to “take sides” with characters we learn about in humorous media. We align our disposition positively with those characters more experientially close to us, and negatively with those who are more experientially distant (Zillmann & Cantor, 1972).

In sports, empathy allows us to form dispositions in the same manner. Consider Deadspin.com’s panning of Lisi Monroe in the item, *Scantily Clad Women Have No Place on the Ice Unless They’re Figure Skating* by Brian Hickey. In this story, Monroe started an online petition opposing the startup of a cheer squad for her hometown of Edmonton’s NHL franchise, the Oilers. Monroe is reported to have started the petition because she felt that the sight of scantily clad women was not part of Canada’s hockey culture. Deadspin’s commenters responded to Monroe’s actions with humorous insults. “Lisi,” said one commenter, “you’re just pissed that the venereal disease carrier you are currently dating ogled them, aren’t you?” (Slappyfrog, 2010).

“Next thing you know, this broad will want to get rid of the Star Spangled Banner before the game,” said another (Disco Choo, 2010).

A reader of this Deadspin item can use empathy to form positive and negative dispositions toward Lisi Monroe, the Deadspin writers and commenters, and the Edmonton Oilers organization. The reader may see Monroe’s activism as extreme and react with counterempathy toward her. In this case, Monroe becomes a character toward whom the reader has a negative disposition, and the humorous insults amuse him.

Conversely, the readers may see Monroe’s petition as reflective of their own morals and form a positive disposition toward her. Likewise, they may see the Oilers’ management as cheap and shameless, forming a negative disposition. Therefore, upon reading the part of the article that links Monroe’s petition and finding that it gained over 1000 signatures in just a few days, the

reader would most likely be amused. Summarily, we can see how empathy powers disposition formation in humorous sports stories.

Zillmann and Cantor (1976) described *in situ* emotional responses by noting that if the interpreter of a humorous situation comprehends enough information to have an emotional reaction to the characters, then a disposition can be formed. These affective “gut responses” can actually vary greatly over time, making affective dispositions more contingent upon emotional states than personality traits. What this means is that we may not form dispositions in humorous situations the same way every time we are faced with them. For example, a transient emotional state may affect how you see the above example about Lisi Monro. If you are upset at a neighborhood petition against your noisy home construction project, you might form a negative disposition toward Monro because she is also a petitioner. In this case, you would probably laugh at the Deadspin comments even if you would normally admire Monro’s morals.

Lastly, regarding emotional responses, Zillmann and Cantor (1976) noted that they allow us to form dispositions and find humor surrounding characters we know very little about (i.e., “two guys walk into a bar...”). Zillmann and Cantor (1976) argued that we can make such jokes work because we react *in situ* with negative emotions toward the provoking act by the one and with amusement caused by the other’s retaliation. A sports humor example of emotional response to non-descript characters can be seen in a video posted on Deadspin featuring Mites on Ice. Mites on Ice is a program that allows a children’s hockey game to take place on the ice during an NHL game’s intermission. In the 16-second video, a pint sized player scores on the breakaway. Immediately, his teammates celebrate and taunt the opposition by making “snow angels” on the ice surface (Petchesky, 2010). We don’t know the kids in the brief video. Its story could start with the words, “Some kids were playing 5-on-5 ice hockey.” Nonetheless, the

scoring team's unexpected antics make us laugh. Our emotional response to a sports taunt or sports celebration from a team of young children quickly steers our disposition formation.

Disposition Theory of Drama.

Raney (2003a) noted that disposition-based dramatic stories differ from humorous ones in that we do not necessarily get our enjoyment in conjunction with a character's disparagement. Zillmann and Cantor (1976) described this further by saying that our enjoyment of dramatic material depicting a loss or misfortune is not readily excusable; it is only when the misfortune or debasement is perceived as justified that the drama can be enjoyed without guilt. Alternatively, one can enjoy dramatic stories in the absence of any debasement at all (i.e., a hardworking mom wins the lottery). In both cases, disposition formation is similar to disposition formation in humorous situations (Raney, 2003a).

Recall how, in humorous situations, interpreters evaluate the roles and behaviors of the characters. In dramatic situations, viewers have to consider morals in the side-taking process. The more proper we judge a character's actions, the more positive a disposition we will form. Conversely, the more improper we judge a character's actions, the more negative a disposition we will form. Thus, empathy is crucial in disposition formation for dramatic situations, much like in those of humor.

Disposition theory of drama can likewise be applied to the stories of characters in sports. On October 25, 2010, ESPN.com ran a story on Pitt Men's Basketball head coach Jamie Dixon. Dixon had been driving home from a practice and film session when he saw a car hit a wall on the side of I-279. The car rolled following collision. Immediately, Dixon stopped to help. Although he was not the only person to stop, Dixon was the first. He even pulled two trapped victims from the overturned car. Consequently, Dixon was commended by Pennsylvania State Troopers and recognized on ESPN's program *First Take* for his good deeds.

In this example, we form a disposition toward Jamie Dixon by morally evaluating his behavior in the face of a difficult situation. We know that Dixon could have continued home to rest after basketball practice. However, we most likely judge his acts as morally correct, and we apply a positive disposition. We enjoy Dixon's vindication. Just as the literature suggests, one can form an *in situ* disposition toward Dixon based on an emotional response to his actions.

Disposition Theory of Sports Spectatorship.

Disposition formation in sports spectatorship differs from disposition formation in humor and drama. Spectators form positive dispositions toward or allegiances with teams and players, but the way these are formed has not been readily explained (Raney, 2003a). The one premise that is agreed upon regarding disposition formation in sports spectatorship is that sports dispositions are more stable and longstanding than the dispositions in comedy and drama. Sports fans enter games with favorite players and teams. They have affect dispositions toward the parties involved without any need for external development. Thus, dispositional mechanics should predict a person's enjoyment of (or displeasure with) sports spectatorship in addition to humorous and dramatic sports stories. A review of important literature will illustrate this prediction.

Studies on Disposition Theory as Applied to Enjoyment of Sports Spectatorship.

One of the first studies into the sports/entertainment aspect of disposition theory belonged to Zillmann, Bryant, and Sapolsky (1989). These researchers investigated the relationship between disposition and sports enjoyment. This was done using an NFL matchup in which the Minnesota Vikings defeated the St. Louis Cardinals. Zillmann et al. (1989) predicted that those who had the most positive disposition toward the Minnesota Vikings would register more enjoyment than those participants who strongly disliked the Vikings or had much stronger fanships toward the Cardinals. Likewise, the findings supported Zillmann's et al. (1989)

expectations. The people with the most positive dispositions toward the Vikings most enjoyed the game (Zillmann et al., 1989).

Researchers have worked on other specialized forms of disposition, as well. Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson, and Kennedy (1992) found that the enjoyment derived from watching a favored team win can actually raise a viewer's self-esteem and boost their personal confidence (Hirt, et al). Likewise, watching a favored team lose can be associated with the opposite effects. For example, Madrigal (1995) and Owens and Bryant (1998) found team affiliations and game outcomes contributed more to a fan's enjoyment of a sporting event; team affiliations and game outcomes also contributed to a person's overall satisfaction with their life. This carryover of game enjoyment into self esteem effectively signals the power of disposition.

The "personal satisfaction" application of disposition can be taken a step further as demonstrated in a study by Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, and Sloan (1976). This group theorized that the quality of being aligned with a winning team is our ability to "bask in reflected glory," or BIRG of team victories. The ability to BIRG then allows one to improve their public image (Cialdini et al., 1976). A person may be more likely to be perceived as a "winner" if the team of their fanship is winning. So, Cialdini et al. (1976) studied college football fans. They found that a higher percentage of college football fans wore their team's apparel on the Mondays following a football victory than on the Mondays following a football defeat. This shows that the fans were more "public" about the teams to which they devoted their fanship when those teams won. Another observation was the use of "the we," as in the times when a fan utilizes a first person plural pronoun to "group themselves in" with their team. Cialdini et al. (1976) noted that students used "the we" significantly more after a victory than a loss, a phenomenon that became "even more pronounced when the researchers did not acknowledge their affiliation with the university" (p. 405).

Cialdini et al.'s (1976) participants' sports enjoyment, therefore, was less about the game and more about their perceived utility as a fan. If the fans "distanced themselves" from a losing team, it was as if they felt they could minimize any damage to their public image. Snyder, Higgins and Stuckey (1983) called this "cutting off reflected failure" (Snyder et al., 1983). Thus, Cialdini et al.'s (1976) study shows how disposition theory of sports fandom can be applied to image management – a personal desire even beyond enjoyment.

David, Horton, and German (2008) published a multilevel study of enjoyment of the 2006 Super Bowl. The overall purpose of the study was to examine all the positive and negative effects of entertainment, including everything from gender effects to interactive video games and websites. The study also included a disposition hypothesis. It stated: "Fans of the winning team would be more entertained than other viewers" (David et al., 2008, p. 405). They measured the participants' personality characteristics, demographic information, and various fandoms in a questionnaire 24 hours before the game. Participants had also been asked to identify whether they were going to root for Pittsburgh, Seattle, or neither team in that particular Super Bowl. Then, the participants watched the game under natural viewing conditions. In the study's discussion, the researchers did say that the measured fandom emerged as a predictor of game entertainment (David et al., 2008). The researchers did not, however, observe a purely proportional relationship between the winning team's (Pittsburgh's) in-game situation and Steelers fans' level of entertainment. For example, there was an assessment point just before halftime that showed entertainment level going up as situational positive affect goes down. Likewise, there had been a small but significant correlation between situation negative affect and entertainment. These factors indicated that the participants may have enjoyed a closer game. The results may have also come from the fact that none of the participants were strong fans of either team in the Super Bowl (David et al., 2008).

The studies above all show how disposition theory comes into play in sports spectatorship and the enjoyment of sports. Next, I will show how this applies to sports websites.

Disposition Theory of Sports Spectatorship and Sports Websites.

One way that disposition theory of sports spectatorship is most pronounced on the web is through the conflict and drama produced within fan communities and other story sources on the Internet. For example, in 2002 after the University of Florida Gators football hired Ron Zook to replace head coach Steve Spurrier, UF graduate Mike Walsh bought the domain name FireRonZook.com. FireRonZook was one of a myriad of “head coach hazing sites,” allowing fans to vent brutally on forums and message boards. (Benigni et al., 2009). At FireRonZook.com, fans were able to express their activism concerning student athletics, and to entertain each other in the process. One popular section of the site featured a place where fans could suggest a new job for Ron Zook, such as a ticket intern for another university, or to manage a Denny’s restaurant (Benigni et al., 2009). Basically, fans were entertained at the prospect of a negative fate (firing, being blasted with negative comments) of a negative disposition character (Ron Zook). Traffic to FireRonZook.com was high during the site’s tenure, standing proof that the fans were entertained.

One more example of sports conflict and drama on the web happened when a scandal broke on Internet message boards. In 2003, University of Alabama head football coach Mike Price had an affair with a stripper. This story first broke on the message boards of SEC rival Auburn University’s website, but the message spread rapidly on boards across the country. Radio talk show host Paul Finebaum reported that the story generated greater than two million page views to his radio network website in two days (Benigni et al., 2009).

From this example, we can observe two things. The first deals with disposition. Mike Price’s story was first told by Auburn fans. Because Price was the coach of a rival, the Auburn

fans would have had a negative disposition toward Price. Therefore, disposition theory of sports spectatorship plays a key role in explaining why Price's story was entertaining. The second observation we must note is about the traffic recorded on sites featuring Price's story (like Paul Finebaum's). The numbers are a definite testament to the popularity of disposition theory based entertainment on the sports web. The people logged on to get the scoop on Price's scandal.

Thus, I ask the following question:

RQ1: To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website entertainment to be present? Entertainment will be defined as materials that tell the stories of sports characters toward whom we have positive and negative dispositions.

Disposition Theory and Humor on Sports Websites.

Past research on the use of humor in sports articles is scant, but the use of debasement humor by political commentators is a proven draw for those commentators. Young (2008) conducted a study on the effects of the use of such humor in which the program *Real Time* with Bill Maher was utilized as stimulus material. In Young's (2008) study, Maher pokes fun at President Bush's inadequate handling of the War in Iraq by saying: "President Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Allawi were in Washington recently to say things are going very well in Iraq, although Allawi did admit there are pockets of terrorists. Most of whom are in one area, called...Iraq" (Young, 2008, p.142). While Young's (2008) study found overall that the use of humor in political messages reduces the scrutiny people give to those messages, the study does note the popularity of such humorous debasement of political figures: "...self-reported learning from late-night comedy shows among young people has been on the rise over the past several years" (Young, 2008, p.120). That is, increasing numbers of young people were reporting that they gained their political knowledge from humorous media in which political figures like President Bush were made fun of. Therefore, it is not a stretch to assume that people could obtain

sports knowledge by choosing humorous sports media. Humor caused by the debasement of a sports “character” toward whom people have negative affect will likely be a draw for the users and readers of sports websites. Therefore, I ask the following:

RQ2: To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website humor to be present?

Humor will be defined as the debasement of a sports character toward whom people have negative affect.

In addition, I make the following hypotheses regarding disposition theory and sports websites:

H1: Entertainment on sports websites, defined as materials that tell the stories of sports characters toward whom we have positive and negative dispositions, will positively correlate with the participants’ intentions to use the website in the future.

H2: Humor on sports websites, defined as the debasement of a sports character toward whom people have negative affect, will positively correlate with the participants’ intentions to use the website in the future.

In the next section, I will discuss an additional theory I am using to explain my chosen sports website variables. The theory of uses and gratifications will be explained in detail and applied to the concepts of sports website information, community, and credibility.

Uses and Gratifications

The theory, or approach to mass communications research known as *uses and gratifications* (U&G) describes the process by which individuals choose and use various media. U&G incorporates a large body of work. This work was collected and summarized in 1984 by McQuail (1984), who developed two models for the process of U&G. Both of these models can be used to study sports websites. McQuail’s (1984) models are: 1) cultural and 2) cognitive.

The main difference in McQuail's (1984) two models is that the cultural model emphasized motivation of the individual to use certain media due to their individual *taste*. The cognitive model applies when individuals choose certain media in order to fulfill a specific *function*. "For example," states McQuail (1984), "it is quite different to say that someone has a taste for thrillers than to say that someone's 'need for escape' is met by thrillers. In general, the lexicon of terms developed in a cultural model would depend on and say more about the specific content than the people and circumstances" (p.190). That said, McQuail (1984) wrote two, four-phase processes in order to define and illustrate the U&G approach to studying mass media. The first one was cultural.

In McQuail's (1984) cultural model of U&G, the phases were motivation, culture(I), culture(II), and satisfaction. The motivation phase in this model is related to "general expectation of involvement" (McQuail, 1984, p. 189) in a movie, TV show, book etc. That is, the individual chooses some medium that they expect to capture their attention. The culture(I) phase is an extension of motivation, as culture(I) deals with individual taste (i.e., *what* individual tastes does the person possess that made them choose that medium). In the culture(II) phase, the decision propagates through what media or content is accessible to the individual. Lastly, in the satisfaction phase of the cultural model, the individual imagines experiencing some feeling they want, such as excitement, arousal, sadness, empathy, value resonance, or wonder. The individual chooses a medium depending on what experience they want that medium to illicit.

As to the cognitive model, "the key difference from the previous model... is the absence of that *disconnection* between ordinary life and the moment or cultural experience." The motivating factor is one of connection and extension rather than disconnection" (McQuail, 1984, p. 190). In other words, the cognitive model does not separate cultural factors from "ordinary" functions. The U&G cognitive model's four phases are: motivation, interests, information, and

satisfaction. Motivation under the cognitive model consists of general interest and curiosity. Interests are in terms of individual preference. They can lead to the individual's choice from and attention to all available Information (as in phase III of the cognitive model). The Information phase in the cognitive U&G model is similar to the culture(II) phase of the cultural model, because the individual's choice of medium is filtered through what content is accessible (although the cultural model refers more to what is accessible according to social position). Lastly, in the satisfaction phase, the individual imagines the experience of benefit of the use of certain media. Examples of these benefits might be: guidance, surveillance, application, social exchange and orientation (McQuail, 1984).

The uses and gratifications of sports websites can be placed within both U&G models. This is because the use of sports websites is not strictly functional *or* cultural. A good example of this can be seen via Farquar and Meeds (2007). Farquar and Meeds (2007) developed typologies of online fantasy sports users. The "types" were in terms of uses and gratifications. For instance, "entertainment, escape, arousal, social interaction, and surveillance" were listed and operationally defined as possible satisfactions for fantasy sports users (FSUs), similarly to the way the terms "excitement, arousal, surveillance, and social exchange" were used as possible satisfactions in McQuail's (1984) models of U&G. In addition, the researchers operationally defined "regard for fantasy sports" and "involvement" in order to add attitude and activity dimensions to the personality analysis.

The end result was five "factors," or FSU motivations by which the researchers categorized the users. The majority of players actually fell under only two of these factors, however: the skilled players who enjoyed statistics, and the less-involved players who sought the thrill of victory and bragging-rights. By learning what personality types are most common among FSUs, Farquar and Meeds (2007) were able to note what fantasy sports website aspects

were most important to provide a gratification to the users. For instance, “Interactivity was most important to members of F2, the skilled players. This group sought the most control and feedback from fantasy leagues. These FSUs often paid extra money for increased statistical feedback and more control” (Farquar & Meeds, 2007, p.1225). Thus, it is evident that the majority of FSUs log on to their preferred fantasy sports websites when they wish to satisfy a need for sports information.

It is here, then, that I can develop the variables of sports websites, governed by the process of U&G, to be evaluated in this study. These variables are community, information, and credibility. I argue that users will seek websites containing one or more of these variables in order to fulfill a final satisfaction or motivation as in McQuail’s (1984) models of U&G.

Community.

There have been many studies in which an online community or group has been attractive to the users of sports websites. For example, Jae Seo, Green, Jae Ko, Lee, & Schenewark (2007) conducted a survey study on the “cohesion” of NFL team websites. Cohesion was defined in terms of “the attractions among members of a group plus the attraction of group members to the group itself” (Jae Seo et al., 2007, p.235). In other words, once an individual sees a particular online sports community, do they want to be a part of it? Can communities generate cohesion, and is it significant enough to increase sports website use?

Jae Seo et al. (2007) found that the respondents’ perceived cohesion of their favorite NFL teams’ websites “was shown to relate to satisfaction with the group process, communicating for pleasure, and involvement.” Furthermore, “Cohesion, built and maintained via a website, is clearly related to fans’ intentions to use the site” (Jae Seo et al., 2007, p. 244). Therefore, it is likely that other sports websites that feature cohesive interactive fan communities will garner continuing use.

Three other notable studies show promise for the community variable as an attractive item for sports website users. Moonki and Raney (2007) sought the motives of online sports fans and found a significant correlation between sports website user motives and “perceived interactivity-entertainment.” Sports website user motives were also positively and significantly correlated with “perceived interactivity-informativeness,” where *perceived interactivity* was defined as a “perceived degree that a sports news website user in two-way communication surroundings can bring a reciprocal effect to other sports website users through the communication process by turn-taking, feedback, and choice behaviors” (p. 9). In other words, the more sports website users perceived two-way communication and feedback with other sports website users, the more sports website users were motivated to use the site for both community and information (Moonki & Raney, 2007).

Kassing and Sanderson (2009) found that sports websites could garner a great deal of use when fans felt that they could be part of a special community with a famous athlete. Kassing and Sanderson (2009) called this “parasocial interaction” (PSI), and they studied it by monitoring Floyd Landis’s website for “fan reactions to and in support of Floyd Landis over the final and dramatic stages of the 2006 Tour de France” (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009, p. 182). A detailed analysis of 1,086 fan postings showed that PSI on Landis’s website approximated real social interactions between fans and athletes. Thus, Kassing and Sanderson’s (2009) ramification for my own study is the power of the online sports community. Communities designed around famous athletes draw fans who desire social relationships with those athletes (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

Lastly, Wilson (2007) did a similar study of the message boards at BigSoccer.com, where he noted that one of BigSoccer.com’s most successful features was its forum for an “evolving American soccer culture” (Wilson, 2007, p.387). A large portion of the posts in Wilson’s (2007)

study allowed the BigSoccer.com community to commiserate about soccer's media coverage (or lack thereof). One such example read: "It's so frustrating to hear guys like this [media personality], who'd rather watch poker or golf, [and] 'rag' on soccer" (Wilson, 2007, p. 388). Overall, Wilson's (2007) study showed (among other things) that a "niche" community formed around the discussion points of a group with a common bond which may be one feature that drives a successful sports website. In the words of Wilson (2007): "...emerging technologies make it easier for small groups of people with shared interests to form functioning vibrant cyber communities" (p. 396).

The above studies show numerous ways that fans use sports websites to satisfy a need to see or participate in online fan involvement. For this reason, "community" in sports websites will be viewed as any sports website-specific arena for fan involvement and interactivity. Examples of community features are comment boards, online clubs, and chat opportunities.

RQ3: To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website community to be present? Community will be defined as sports website-specific arenas for fan involvement and interactivity.

H3: Community features on sports websites will positively correlate with the participants' intentions to use the website in the future.

Information.

The use of sports websites as a means to obtain sports information has been studied, as well. Moonki and Raney (2007) administered a survey that asked participants four questions to evaluate informativeness. In these questions, participants had to rate their agreement with statements that said a particular website "gives me large volumes of information, is useful to obtain information, is knowledgeable, and is helpful to obtain information" (Moonki & Raney, 2007, p.15). As a result, the researchers identified "informativeness" as an antecedent of attitude

toward sports information websites. If a user evaluated a website as “informative,” that evaluation drove the user’s attitude toward the site and ultimately the satisfaction that user derived from visiting the site (Moonki & Raney, 2007).

Similarly, Randle and Nyland (2008) explored sports fanship as a reason to use mass media for information. Specifically, they studied web-based fantasy sports users to determine if their pastime was associated with an increase in sports media consumption. The researchers found that the more hours per day their web-based fantasy users participated in their leagues, the more days per week those users spent following sports (in person, on the radio, and on TV). In other words, fantasy sports players make media choices to get information. The overall ramification of Randle and Nyland’s (2008) study was that media outlets can increase their consumer base by hosting fantasy sports leagues on their websites, and providing sports information to help people use those leagues (Randle and Nyland, 2008). Sports fanship and fantasy sports stimulate media use for sports information.

Additionally, recall Farquar and Meeds’ (2007) study mentioned alongside the description of U&G. Their results stated outright that “surveillance,” defined as “information gathering, working with statistics, and staying in touch with real-world sports” (Farquar and Meeds, 2007, P.1212), was the leading motivation of online FSUs. That is, the majority of fantasy sports users surveyed in the study went online to play fantasy sports games because they wanted to gather and maintain their sports information.

Therefore, sports information will be investigated as a website characteristic that will correlate with intent-for-use. Examples of “information” in this study will include: scores, schedules, game recaps and statistics, team and player statistics, trades and player or coach transactions, etc.

RQ4: To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website information to be present? Information will be defined as scores, schedules, game recaps and statistics, team and player statistics, trades and player or coach transactions, etc.

H4: Information on sports websites will positively correlate with the participants' intentions to use the website in the future.

Credibility.

The attractiveness of sports website credibility to sports website users has not been thoroughly researched. However, Jo (2005) investigated credibility in regards to the building of relationships between news websites and news users.

In Jo's (2005) study, participants were asked to evaluate positive versus negative news and online sources versus traditional journalistic sources. The findings showed respondents felt that the negative news from a traditional news source was also the most credible (Jo, 2005). Jo (2005) found: "trust and commitment are mediators between attitudes and future intentions of customers" (Jo, 2005, p. 63). Therefore, we can expect that user trust and commitment (of a user to a website or other news source) are proportional to credibility.

For this reason, credibility (to be characterized using perceived believability, accuracy, and trustworthiness of sports website content) will be evaluated in the current study as a possible attraction for sports website users. According to Jo (2005), "The present study demonstrates that the information credibility is important in initiating, nurturing and maintaining relationships with publics" (p. 74). So it is thought that credibility will correlate positively with a sports website user's intent to use a sports website. Note that the "credibility" parameter is an enhancer of information, and not a satisfaction of the U&G unto itself. The more "credibility" is perceived as a characteristic of a website, the more that website's information will satisfy the U&G.

RQ5: To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website credibility to be present? Credibility will be defined as perceived believability, accuracy, and trustworthiness.

H5: Website credibility will correlate positively with the participants' intentions to use the website in the future.

Sports Websites Viewed

Four sports websites were selected for this study. They are: ESPN.com, Deadspin.com, Yahoo! Sports, and Football Outsiders. Each was selected for having a unique format and content-type. These sites were also selected for their range of recognizability (i.e., Deadspin.com and FootballOutsiders.com are not as well known as ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports).

Because all four of the websites have such different formats, sports website users will be unlikely to perceive the same amounts of entertainment, humor, community, information, and credibility on each one. Could it be possible that participants' perceptions will be divided most markedly between the more widely viewed sites and those sites that are not as widely viewed?

Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

RQ6: Will participants associate more credibility with the more widely viewed websites (ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports) than with the lesser-viewed websites (Deadspin.com and FootballOutsiders.com)?

RQ7: Will participants associate more information content with the more widely viewed websites (ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports) than with the lesser-viewed websites (Deadspin.com and FootballOutsiders.com)?

RQ8: Will participants perceive more community to be present on the lesser-viewed websites (Deadspin.com and FootballOutsiders.com) than on the more widely viewed websites (ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports)?

RQ9: Will participants perceive more humor to be present on the lesser-viewed websites (Deadspin.com and FootballOutsiders.com) than on the more widely viewed websites (ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports)?

RQ10: Will participants perceive more entertainment content to be present on the lesser-viewed websites (Deadspin.com and FootballOutsiders.com) than on the more widely viewed websites (ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports)?

Summary

In summary, there are many website variables that are suspected to be attractive to potential users as a result of theory-based research.

1) Humor (in the form of jokes, articles, photos, videos, and other content) about the “characters” of sports is suspected to gain website users under the principles of disposition theory.

2) Entertainment (in the form of articles, messages on message boards, or any materials) about drama and conflict in the lives of the “characters” of sports is suspected to gain website users under the principles of disposition theory.

3) Sports information (in the form of sports facts and knowledge such as scores, schedules, game recaps and statistics, team and player statistics, trades and player or coach transactions, etc.) is expected to draw sports website users within the framework of the uses and gratifications process.

4) Community (defined as any sports website-specific arena for fan involvement and interactivity) will also motivate users under uses and gratifications.

5) Lastly, credibility (as characterized by perceived believability, accuracy, and trustworthiness) will also be a characteristic of sports websites that will secure users.

The next section of this research thesis will detail the process of the data collection and analysis. Data collection occurred by surveying a sample and holding focus group discussions.

Methods

Overview

Survey and Discussion Methods.

This study utilized a website viewing activity followed by a survey (present in Appendices B and A, respectively). The study also used focus groups to supplement the surveys. The goal of the data collection was to correlate five variables of sports websites (humor, entertainment, community, information, and credibility) with a participant's intent to use that website in the future. Most participants took the surveys online on their own schedules, but a portion of the sample took their surveys within the focus group settings. All focus groups were held at various times between October of 2009 and July of 2010. In addition to the focus groups, one interview was held in place of a cancelled focus group meeting. While the interview was not considered a focus group, it provided anecdotal evidence used to study the variables. The interview occurred in March of 2010.

Descriptions of Websites Used in the Viewing Activities

I chose ESPN.com for this study because it is the most popular and farthest-reaching of the selected sites. It currently reaches over 23 million monthly people (Quantcast Corporation, 2009). Furthermore, 2009 was the year that ESPN began the quest for regional sports website supremacy, with the launches of ESPN Chicago.com, ESPN Dallas.com, and ESPN Boston.com, respectively. Currently, ESPN.com covers all major American sports leagues, outdoor sports, and features links to additional and international sports not covered by ESPN (clicking on "Rugby" will take one to headlines from ESPNScrum.com, a wholly owned subsidiary of ESPN, Inc.). Site content is updated as events occur (particularly in games) and includes columns, blogs, webcasts, videos, fan communities, and radio.

Deadspin.com is, according to Quantcast.com, a top 5,000 site that reaches more than 1.5 million people monthly. The majority of these people are in the U.S. (1.3 million, or 89 percent). The site attracts a young adult, educated, mostly male audience. The typical visitor reads Gawker and visits nbsports.com. (Quantcast Corporation, 2009). I chose to study Deadspin.com for its funny, sarcastic approach to sports. The content of Deadspin.com has been described as, “Sports news and commentary with a humorous slant” (Quantcast Corporation, 2009). One key feature of Deadspin.com is its unique fan community. Each article is footed by a board of comments from people vying to be the funniest one of all (Leitch, 2006). Deadspin.com is part of a family of sites that make up the Gawker Media Network, which includes sites like Gizmodo.com and Jezebel.com. Those two sites feature news about gadgets and popular culture, respectively, also from an irreverently humorous slant.

Yahoo! Sports covers all major American sports leagues, outdoor sports, and international sports. According to the description at Quantcast.com, “Sports.yahoo.com is a major destination that reaches over 9.8 million U.S. monthly people. The destination attracts a more educated, mostly male, more affluent audience. The typical user visits fftoday.com and reads the Los Angeles Daily News” (Quantcast Corporation, 2009). I chose Yahoo! Sports because of its extensive fantasy gaming community. The site has message boards for player interaction, but it also has a unique and useful Fantasy News and Analysis menu. This menu provides statistical, injury, position, and other information to help fantasy owners make team decisions in football, baseball, basketball, and hockey. The analysis is written in a way that is easy to read and meant to be used actively. Yahoo!’s fantasy football information even has bullet lists of “stoplight” icons that tell whom to rest and whom to start, sleepers, and key injuries for every NFL game of the season.

Finally, Football Outsiders' is a football statistics site chosen for its unique character. According to Quantcast.com, "This site reaches approximately 25,404 U.S. monthly people. The site appeals to an overwhelmingly male, young adult, more educated following" (Quantcast Corporation, 2009). The unique feature of Football Outsiders is that it has its own brand of in-depth statistics for the purpose of analyzing skill players, offenses, defenses, special teams, and total team efficiency. The numbers are archived starting from the 1994 season, and updated each week of the current one. Football Outsiders examines both college football and professional. The site also boasts interesting articles that are packed with dry wit.

Variables

This study assessed five variables: sports website entertainment, sports website humor, sports website community, sports website information, and sports website credibility. The study also assessed participants' intentions to use each website, with respect to each of the above variables.

Sports website entertainment was defined as entertainment resulting from disposition-theory based principles of characters toward whom we have positive or negative disposition. An example of entertainment material on a sports website would be Deadspin.com's coverage of the Brett Favre/Jenn Sterger scandal. Brett Favre (QB, Minnesota Vikings) is a character toward whom many have a negative affect. This may stem from reasons of both sports fanship and moral judgment. Green Bay Packers fans may dislike their former quarterback for coming out of retirement to play for an NFC North rival. New York Jets fans may dislike Favre because of the circumstances under which he retired from their team and then unretired yet again. In 2008, the Jets were counting on Favre to improve their record. He did (from 4-12 in 2007 to 9-7 in 2008), but the Jets did not make the playoffs during their time with Favre. Favre retired at the end of the

2008 season due to his claimed physical inability to continue performing on the field. A few months later came Favre's second un-retirement, i.e. the one that Jets fans would dislike. The Jets fans (and many other people) probably see Favre as attention-needy and hypocritical. He is thus, a typical "negative disposition" sports character.

The Deadspin.com coverage of the Jenn Sterger scandal consisted of a series of articles that began on October 6, 2010. They told of allegations that Brett Favre attempted to initiate inappropriate relations with Sterger, a Jets sideline reporter. Deadspin.com even provided recordings of the alleged voicemails and uploaded images of the alleged picture mail. Widespread news of the disgraceful suggestion of Favre attempting to cheat on his wife with a Jets employee would certainly be entertainment material under disposition theory. This is because a sports character whom many do not like has been linked to scandal and shame.

Entertainment's presence on a website was assessed via survey data. This includes all data recorded in the form of open-ended and closed-ended answers on the survey. Entertainment's correlation with intent to use will be evaluated using both the numeric survey data and the discussion data. For example, if a participant made statements such as "I look for sports articles that tell an interesting story filled with conflict and drama" or "If I built a website, I'd include paparazzi video of athletes and coaches who are dramatic and interesting," such statements were considered intent-to-use opinions connected with the entertainment variable.

Humor was defined as the debasement of a sports character toward whom we have negative disposition. An example of a humor item would be the Deadspin.com item, "Ryan Mallett's Scooter Gives SEC Fans a Head Start on Next Season's Taunts" (Bennett, 2010). This brief article with corresponding video explains how Arkansas Quarterback Ryan Mallett rode around on a special scooter to keep his healing left foot off of the ground. Mallett is a character

for whom we have negative disposition due to his recent arrest for public intoxication. Therefore, we laugh at the hilarious visual (debasement) of Mallett (negative disposition) riding around campus on a scooter with his left foot in the air. Humor's presence on a website was assessed via survey data, and so was its correlation with intent to use. Concerning the discussion data and open-ended question data, we looked for a several specific types of answers. If a participant gave answers such as "I look for sports articles with a funny take on a story" or "If I built a website, I'd include blooper reels," such statements were considered intent-to-use opinions connected with the humor variable.

Community was defined as any sports website-specific arena for fan involvement and interactivity. Examples of community features are comment boards, online clubs, and chat opportunities. A specific example of sports website community is the SportsNation page on ESPN.com. The SportsNation page has five menus that offer sports fans places to enjoy different types of social interaction. The "Profiles" and "Groups" menus take you to a portion of the website that functions as ESPN's own social networking site. Under "Profiles" and "Groups," individuals can register profiles, create and join groups, view status updates, and create feed posts of their own. ESPN Profiles is very similar to Facebook, a site people use for online socializing. Therefore, it is easy to see how a sports fan motivated by the desire for online social interactivity would choose the SportsNation page on ESPN.com. Community's presence on a website was assessed via survey data, and so was its correlation with intent to use. Concerning the discussion data and open-ended question data, if a participant gave answers such as, "I look for websites with interesting comments" or "If I build a website, I'd host my own forum," such statements were considered intent-to-use opinions connected with the community variable.

Information was defined as sports facts and knowledge, including (but not limited to) scores, schedules, game recaps and statistics, team and player statistics, trades and player or coach transactions, and fantasy player advice. This definition includes player biographical info only as far as their sport is concerned. Player life stories and similar ‘human interest’ material is not included under this definition of information. An example of sports information would be the “Top Stories” tab on the home page of ESPN.com during the March 2010 NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament. During the tournament, the “Top Stories” tab featured live scores for all games in progress. A person motivated by the desire to be up-to-date on the progression of the Tournament would choose the information found on the ESPN.com Top Stories tab. Information’s presence on a website was assessed via survey data, and so was its correlation with intent to use. Concerning the discussion data and open-ended question data, we looked for several specific types of answers. If a participant gave answers such as, “I look for websites that give me sports information” or “If I had my own sports website, it’d be able to tell you about up-to-the-minute action in the world of sports,” such statements were considered intent-to-use opinions connected with the information variable.

Credibility was characterized by perceived believability, accuracy, and trustworthiness. An example of credibility would be all of Joe Lunardi’s team-specific NCAA Tournament Preview videos. In these videos, ESPN college basketball expert Joe Lunardi gave and explained his predictions for a school’s success or failure in the tournament. Lunardi did this for every school selected. A person motivated to fill out their bracket as accurately as possible would view Lunardi’s videos because Lunardi is a trustworthy source on college basketball teams and their NCAA tournament seedings and matchups. In this example, the use of an expert as a source makes for believability, accuracy, and trustworthiness. Credibility’s presence on a website was

assessed via survey data, and so was its correlation with intent to use. Concerning the discussion data and open-ended question data, we looked for a several specific types of answers. If a participant gave answers such as, “I look for websites that are well-established and have truthful columnists” or “If I had my own sports website, I’d never print any crazy allegations – just the facts,” such statements were considered intent-to-use opinions connected with the credibility variable.

Survey Method

Obtaining Participants.

Convenience and “snowball” sampling were used for the surveys. The participants were obtained via the use of e-mail distribution lists, a Facebook fan page, group meetings assembled by invite, and one Louisiana State University undergraduate journalism class meeting. For the e-mail distributions, addresses of potential participants were obtained from friends and family. The website viewing activity instructions and survey links were e-mailed to the distribution list. On Facebook, a fan page was utilized to recruit my own Facebook friends as well as friends of Facebook friends. The “Discussion” tab of the fan page provided all necessary website viewing activities and survey links so that participants could access them online. Five of the survey participants were actually recruited via personal invite. These five gathered at a meeting location with their own laptops and completed one website viewing activity and survey in the same manner as all other online participants had (i.e., the same instructions and survey links were sent to them electronically). The only difference between the five personally invited meeting participants and the strictly online participants was that the five did the website viewing activity and survey at one time in a focus group setting. The Louisiana State University class meeting was similar to the five-person group meeting in that the website viewing activity and survey were completed all at one time. However, the distribution of the website viewing activity

instructions and surveys happened on paper instead of online. The website viewing activity and survey questions were identical to all those distributed online.

Survey Procedure.

The exact procedure varied with the means by which participants were recruited. Participants who received the survey via e-mail received it with one of four different e-mail messages. Each message was specific to each one of the four websites associated with the study. The messages were written as a series of steps that told the participant how to complete the website viewing activity and corresponding survey. The viewing activity for each website created an online viewing path to ensure all participants were exposed to the website material that reflected the variables being tested. Then the e-mail messages included links to the survey. All participants completed the same survey questions regardless of which website viewing activity they did.

An example of the messages is included in Appendix C. These messages were sent via Facebook e-mail as well as regular e-mail, so there is one minor difference between these two types of electronic mail messages. Since each message references a separate document that includes the instructions for viewing the participant's assigned website, regular e-mail participants received the website viewing instructions as an attachment. The Facebook e-mail recipients received their website viewing instructions as a second message. The website viewing activity instructions for all four of the websites studied can be found in Appendix B.

Facebook was also used to recruit people to "like" a fan page that had been created for the study. The fan page was called Sports Research ONLINE. Once participants had "liked" the page, they would be able to view page updates informing them that all of the information they needed to help with my study was available via the "Info" and "Discussion" tabs of the fan page.

The “Info” tab of the Sports Research ONLINE fan page provided a brief description of my study as well as tips on how to use the fan page to help. Basically, the “Info” tab directed fans to the “Discussion” tab. The “Discussion” tab had four sets of thread pairs on it. Each thread pair served the same purpose as the e-mail message/website viewing activity instruction pairs. The discussion threads with the word ‘STEPS’ in the subject provided the same steps and survey links that the e-mail participants received. The discussion threads with the word ‘INSTRUCTIONS’ in the subject provided the same website viewing activities that all of the e-mail participants received. Participants who chose to take part via Sports Research ONLINE were able to choose which website activity they wished to do. The “Info” tab made it clear to participants to be sure to choose the correct ‘STEPS’ thread for their selected ‘INSTRUCTIONS’. This was made easier by including the website names in the discussion thread pairs.

For the five who met as the result of a personal invite, the procedure was similar to that for the e-mail participants, with the exception that all information was received and utilized at the same time. For the 15 who took the survey in an LSU undergraduate journalism class, the procedure is as follows.

Participants gathered in an on-campus computer lab where they normally met for class. Instructions were given for participants to use the computers to carry out the website viewing instructions for Deadspin.com (Appendix B). The participants were handed paper copies of the website viewing instructions and told not to discuss their tasks or the website with the other participants. They were also asked not to look at the other participants’ computer screens.

Participants then completed a written survey that had questions identical to those of the online survey. Participants, during the survey portions of the two group meetings, refrained from discussing the websites and survey questions with their neighbors.

Survey Instrument and Data Analysis.

The survey had 32-items (Appendix A). Six were demographic questions dealing with the sample's background and media use (Princeton, 2008). Twenty-five of the items were 5-point Likert scale questions which asked participants the degree to which they perceived certain characteristics to be present in the site they just viewed (5 for each, i.e., entertainment, humor, information, community, and credibility) (Jee & Lee, 2002). For example, "I found the content of this Web site humorous" was one of the items with which participants had to rate their agreement in order to assess whether or not a site contained humor. If a participant were to mark "Strongly agree" for the above example, then that participant would be registering the highest possible degree of perceived humor in the website (for one survey question). Additionally, each question group about perceived characteristics was paired with an intent-to-use question. For each variable, the survey had four 'perceived variable' items and one corresponding intent-to-use item. An example intent-to-use item is: "Because of the humor associated with this website, I would like to visit it again in the future." In these questions, the respondent rated the likelihood of whether the perceived characteristic from the previous question group would make the respondent want to use the website in the future. The questionnaire also had one open-ended question box. It asked participants to write what they thought of the website, if they would use it again, and what characteristic(s) of the website made them want to. The website activities and corresponding surveys took between 15 and 30 minutes to complete.

Overall, the survey data allowed me to look at perceived characteristics, and plot them against participants' intents-to-use websites with those characteristics. For instance, a "Strongly Agree" answer was given a numeric weight of 5, whereas "Agree" was given a 4, "Neutral"=3, and so on. This allowed me to look at a participant's degree of perceived characteristic "X," because I could sum over that participant's numeric weighted responses for each variable

perception question. That is, for each survey item dealing with the degree to which a respondent registered characteristic “X” (entertainment, humor, community, information, or credibility), I could add up the numeric weights and get that respondent’s own degree of perceived characteristic “X” (i.e., entertainment, humor, community, information, or credibility).

Likewise, the participant’s intent to use was determined in the same manner. For each survey item dealing with a respondent’s intent to use a website with respect to characteristic “X,” I assigned a numeric weight of 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1. At that point, it became possible to plot a participant’s intent to use a website versus the degree of perceived characteristic “X” for that same website. Then, in similar fashion, we could plot the data points for all other participants’ intent-to-use/degree of perceived variable pairs. With all of the data points for one website use/variable set plotted on an X-Y graph, Microsoft Excel was used to draw a best fit trendline through the data points. The higher the slope of the line, the more the intent to use was influenced by increases in the degree of perceived variable. In addition, correlation coefficients could be calculated in order to test the relationships between each of the 20 independent/dependent variable pairs. In this study, the independent variable was a participant’s degree of perceived characteristic (i.e. humor, entertainment, information, etc).

Pilot Testing and Development of Survey Items.

Before developing the procedures used in this study, I conducted a pilot test using a draft version of the survey instrument. In a small sample of five participants, three agreed that the website Deadspin.com had a unique community. All five agreed that the website had humorous content, and three agreed that they would use Deadspin.com to read their sports stories. All five of the participants “liked” the website, and Deadspin.com’s community and humor aspects both got participants (three and four people, respectively) to say they would use the website again.

Open-ended responses gained at least three respondents' consensus that the site's layout was uncomplicated (i.e. "simple," "easy to navigate," and "...bare boned. The design seemed very basic, more like a personal blog.") All five responses to the open ended questions mentioned being entertained by Deadspin.com's content.

The pilot survey was used to hone the study survey instrument. For example, the original survey was purely exploratory, and not written for a specific list of operationally defined variables. In one of the items, participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "The website's stories, photos, etc were funny and entertaining." This item does not account for the fact that a participant may find website content entertaining but not funny. Furthermore, the website items mentioned (i.e. stories, photos, etc) are not descriptive enough to help a participant assess *why* they might find those items funny or entertaining. Stories and photos could correspond to any one of the variables, not just funny or entertaining ones. What the draft survey needed was a means of separating all of the variables and ideas so that each one could be connected (or not connected) to a participant's intent to use.

Jee and Lee (2002) had used survey research to study their participants' perceived interactivity on websites. Jee and Lee's (2002) participants had to rate agreement with items such as, "I could communicate with the company directly for further questions about the company or its products if I wanted to," (Jee & Lee, 2002, p. 45). Basically, Jee and Lee (2002) took parts of their operational definition of interactivity and put them into Likert-type survey items so that they could learn how much their participants perceived interactivity in the websites being studied. Using similar reasoning, I did the same thing in order to study my own participants' perceived variables (humor, entertainment, information, etc). I created survey items featuring the operational definitions of humor, entertainment, information, community, and credibility. Items

such as the one from the draft survey above were replaced with “I found the content of this Web site humorous” and “I could communicate with other sports fans who enhanced the humor of this website by making comments that would be really humiliating to sports characters who deserve getting made fun of.” This made it easy for my participants to rate their own agreement and help me measure their degrees of perceived humor. While the draft survey had shown promise for certain concepts (i.e. humor and entertainment) as variables, it needed to be refined to create a viable study.

Open-ended Survey Question Data.

Basically, analysis of the open-ended survey question was established by grouping similar statements and counting the frequencies of each. The relevance of each statement type was determined with respect to the statement types that were obtained. Likewise, the most common statement types could be used in combination with the Likert-type question data to answer the Research Questions presented in the Literature review. Furthermore, common statements regarding intent-to-use opinions were used in combination with both the aforementioned line slopes *and* the Focus Group data. This was done in order to address the hypotheses.

For example, one open-ended survey answer regarding the site Yahoo! Sports was:

It is generally informative and entertaining. While I did enjoy the interaction of the website users and their insights into sports in general, I did not think there was an enormous amount of expert sports information and opinion to spur me to tap in again, though.

The person who wrote this said first that they found the site “generally informative and entertaining. Because of that portion of their answer, I added tally marks to the open-ended

answer categories I had called “I thought the website was entertaining/enjoyable/had a good time with it” and “Site was informative/had good information/learned something.” Reading further, the author of this quote stated that they did not feel they would “tap in again.” Because this participant did not feel they would “tap in” to Yahoo! Sports again, I added a tally mark to the answer category I had called “Will not revisit.”

The middle and end portion of the above survey quote state, “...I did not think there was an enormous amount of expert sports information and opinion to spur me to tap in again, though.” This comment speaks to a perceived lack of credibility. Therefore, a tally mark was added to the answer category I had called “Don’t trust/lacks credibility.”

The end tallies provided the two types of information mentioned at the beginning of this section: answers to Research Questions and insight for addressing the hypotheses. The more statements saying that survey takers found Yahoo! Sports “informative” there were, the more the “information” variable was perceived as present on Yahoo! Sports. Likewise, the quote about the lack of expert information making the participant not want to revisit Yahoo! Sports provides direct support for hypothesis H5 (“Website credibility will correlate positively with the participants’ intentions to use the website in the future.”)

Focus Groups

The total number of focus group participants was 22. Five focus groups were held. The first one was at CC’s Coffee House on Burbank Drive in Baton Rouge, LA. This focus group took place on October 28, 2009. The second focus group was held in a computer lab classroom in LSU’s journalism building. The date was February 23, 2010. The third group was held at Panera Bread on Route 22 in Monroeville, PA. The Panera group met on April 19, 2010. The last

two groups were held at BREC's Highland Road location in Baton Rouge, LA. These happened on July 14, 2010 and July 27, 2010.

It is important to note that one interview occurred, also. The original plan had been to hold a focus group on March 7, 2010. However, none of the invitees responded to their invites and the meeting was cancelled. On the day of March 7, 2010, one of the focus group invitees called at the time the meeting had been set to start and said that he was available to participate. Likewise, he was asked the same eight questions as all of the focus group participants. While this one interviewee is not included as a focus group participant, his quotes were analyzed and used alongside all of the focus group data. A complete breakdown and analysis of all discussion data is included in Appendix D.

Discussion Procedure and Analysis.

All discussion participants were asked the same eight questions (Appendix A). The focus group questions (Appendix A) were open ended and designed to invoke the participants' own words. Examples were "What do you look for in existing sports websites and why?" and "If you were making your own sports website, what would you put on it?" The discussions took 20-30 minutes apiece, depending on how long the participants kept talking.

All discussions were note-recorded and compared in order to establish commonalities between the participants and groups. Focus groups were analyzed using a points system. Points were given to keep scores for the participants' affinities for the five variables and one additional category, "favorite sports." The "favorite sports" category was created in response to the large number of discussion statements and phrases in which participants simply named coverage of a favorite sport as influential in their choice of sports websites. Conversational tangents, discussion

of website usability factors, and all other discussion unrelated to the variables was left unanalyzed. The complete analysis of all questions for all focus groups can be found in Tables 15 through 22 of Appendix D. Phrases were coded as groups in order to count points for each time a participant expressed the importance of a certain variable. Entertainment phrases were one group, humor phrases were a second, community phrases were a third group, and a fourth phrase group was made for credibility. Information phrases were put into a fifth group and the “favorite sport” phrases were the last group. When an entire focus group spoke different statements that expressed a point for the same variable or sport, the analysis charts in Appendix D make note of it. In this event, the charts read that all participants expressed individual opinions in favor of that variable or sport, and one point per participant was awarded to that variable or sport. However, when one discussion participant made a statement in favor of one variable or sport and the other participants simply concurred without making their own statements, only one point was awarded.

In the next section, I will provide the results. Both methods’ data (survey and focus discussion) will answer the research questions and address the hypotheses.

Results

Overall Sample

The total number of participants across the combined study methods was 116. Out of the 116, 93 participants did only the survey. 12 people participated in both the survey and the discussions. Also, there were 11 participants who took part in only the focus groups.

56 percent of the participants were male, and 44 percent were female. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 65. All participants were high school graduates, and 98.3 percent of participants reported having at least some post-high school education. Only four of the 116 participants reported that they were not sports fans.

Survey Sample

There were a total of 105 survey takers. 53.3 percent were male, and 46.7 percent were female. All survey participants were high school graduates, and 98 percent of survey participants had post-high school education. Survey participants ranged in age from 18 to 65. 87.6 percent of survey takers reported that they used sports websites at least twice per month. This figure includes the 31.4 percent of survey takers who said they used sports websites weekly. Also, 23.8 percent of the study's survey takers reported daily sports website use.

Survey Sample by Website.

For the Deadspin.com viewing activity and corresponding survey, N was equal to 30. 60 percent were female, and 40 percent were male. All Deadspin participants had post-high school education and ranged in age from 18 to 61. 73 percent of Deadspin.com survey participants reported that they used sports websites at least twice per month. This figure includes the 23

percent of Deadspin.com survey takers who said that they used sports websites weekly. Also, 20 percent of the Deadspin.com survey participants reported daily sports website use.

For the Football Outsiders viewing activity and corresponding survey, N was equal to 25. 60 percent were male, and 40 percent were female. All Football Outsiders participants had post-high school education and ranged in age from 22 to 63. 92 percent of Football Outsiders survey participants reported that they used sports websites at least twice per month. This figure includes the 20 percent of Football Outsiders survey takers who said that they used sports websites weekly. Also, 36 percent of the Football Outsiders survey takers reported daily sports website use.

For the ESPN.com viewing activity and corresponding survey, N was equal to 25. 54 percent were male, and 46 percent were female. All ESPN.com participants had post-high school education and ranged in age from 23 to 65. 88.5 percent of ESPN.com survey participants reported that they used sports websites at least twice per month. This figure includes the 34.6 percent of ESPN.com survey takers who said that they used sports websites weekly. Also, 15.4 percent of ESPN.com survey takers reported daily sports website use.

For the Yahoo! Sports viewing activity and corresponding survey, N was equal to 25. 60 percent were male, and 40 percent were female. All Yahoo! Sports participants were high school graduates and 92 percent of them had post-high school education as well. The Yahoo! Sports participants ranged in age from 24 to 57. 96 percent of Yahoo! Sports survey participants reported that they used sports websites at least twice per month. This figure includes the 48 percent of Yahoo! Sports survey takers who said that they used sports websites weekly. Also, 24 percent of Yahoo! Sports survey takers reported daily sports website use.

Discussion Data Sample

There were 22 total focus group participants and one interviewee. 15 were male and eight were female. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 40, and all had completed at least some college education.

Research Questions

All of the research questions dealt with how much participants perceived the presence of the five variables (entertainment, humor, community, information, and credibility) on the four sites used for the website viewing activities. All variable perception levels were direct results of the survey.

Overall Likert-type Survey Data.

The degrees to which participants perceived the presence of each variable were highly intrinsic to the websites they viewed and addressed on their survey. For instance, Deadspin.com has a vastly different format and content type from ESPN.com. Survey takers who viewed Deadspin.com would have been more likely to perceive the presence of humor than those who took the survey after viewing ESPN.com. However, an overall ranking of degrees of perceived variables combined over all four of the websites is as follows. That is, I am providing a ranking of the degrees of each variable perceived in this study without regard to website. The research questions will be formally addressed in the sections after this one.

Recall from the Methods section that I calculated each participant's degree-of-perceived-variable score by summing their numeric-weight responses from the four perception items regarding that variable. Likewise, all degree-of-perceived-variable scores were out of a possible 20. The highest mean for variable perception scores went to information, at 15.55. Next highest

for variables perceived was community (mean=15.15). The remaining variables (in order of the degree to which they were perceived, highest-to-lowest) were credibility (mean=15.08), entertainment (mean=14.98), and humor (mean=13.36).

As was stated above, these variable perception scores are the result of combining survey data from four groups of people, each of which had viewed a different website. So, the numbers encompass the responses of participants who answered the questions after viewing very different materials from each other. However, the overall perceived variable scores still provide insight about the websites viewed and about people in general. Information was perceived to be the most present variable, which is logical because it is the one variable most likely to be shared on all four websites studied. Humor was perceived to be the least present variable. This is also logical because only Deadspin.com and ESPN.com's "Page 2" are formatted as sports humor sites. To add to this, people in general are more likely to digest a piece of information such as a football score or a game recap than they are likely to "get" a joke. While the ranking of overall perceived variable scores does not provide complete answers to the research questions, it does provide a good validity estimate of the Likert data.

Research Question One.

Research question one (RQ1) asked, "To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website entertainment to be present? Entertainment will be defined as materials that tell the stories of sports characters toward whom we have positive and negative dispositions." RQ1 will first be addressed in terms of the Likert-type survey data. All degree-of-perceived-variable scores were out of a possible 20. Recall from the previous section that the overall mean score for perceived entertainment was 14.98. However, individual scores for degree of perceived entertainment were highest for the site Deadspin.com, with a mode score of 16 (mean=14.5). The

remaining sites' degrees of perceived entertainment can be ranked as follows: Football Outsiders (mode=15, mean=15.5), Yahoo! Sports (mode=15, mean=15.2), and ESPN.com (mode=15, mean=14.8). So, Deadspin.com and Football Outsiders had the highest and second highest degrees of perceived entertainment overall.

RQ1 was also examined using data from the open-ended survey question. Table 1 gives us a detailed breakdown of the types of answers given to the open-ended survey question for all websites studied. Example statements and phrases are provided to illustrate each category. Likewise, Tables 2-5 give the numbers of statements or phrases counted for each answer category. Note that the Methods section contains a detailed description of how the open-ended survey answers were analyzed.

For Football Outsiders, seven statements or phrases (out of 50 total for Football Outsiders) were written that said people found the site entertaining. Six similar statements or phrases were written for Deadspin.com (out of 60 total Deadspin statements and phrases). Yahoo! Sports actually tied Deadspin.com's open-ended entertainment statement number at six (out of 45 statements for Yahoo!). So, this tie presents a slight difference from RQ1 in the Likert only data; Yahoo! Sports had been third for perceived entertainment, not tied for second. For ESPN.com there were fewer entertainment statements issued (four), giving ESPN the least amount of perceived entertainment in both the Likert-type and open-ended survey data. ESPN.com's total number of open-ended question statements and phrases was 54.

Research Question Two.

Research question two (RQ2) asked, "To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website humor to be present? Humor will be defined as the debasement of a sports

Table 1 Examples of Open-Ended Survey Answers to Demonstrate each Category	
Category	Example Statement or Phrase
Website is trying to be funny but isn't very	It was kind of like my dad telling me a joke. It's funny, but my friends (i.e., other websites) have better ones.
Don't trust/lacks credibility	...I don't know if I would take the facts seriously.
I thought the website was humorous	I thought it was entertaining because it seemed to find the funny stories.
Will Revisit	Informative, easy to navigate - would use again.
I thought website was entertaining/enjoyable/had a good time with it.	Wacky and entertaining.
There are just so many to choose from - don't know if I'll revisit	I may visit it again, but there are so many websites of its kind available on the Internet.
Will not revisit	Lots of sports topics about which I care very little (MLB, NBA, Fantasy, etc.). Probably won't actively use it again for sports news.
Not into sports OR not into sports websites	I don't go hunting around on the Internet to find out analysis on sports.
Will visit again because I like seeing sports figures mocked..	I would visit it again because I like seeing sports figures mocked.
Gossipy 'relentless snark',	Website seemed a bit gossipy...
On the fence about visiting again	I am a little up in the air about the website...
Site was informative/had good information/learned something	...the thorough and innovative nature of the stats is interesting and refreshing.
Site was only a little bit funny, would only revisit if I were really into sports	It was a little bit funny, but would only be worth going to if I had a lot of extra time and was really into sports.
Uninteresting, poorly written	It is too difficult to navigate through and most of the articles are of no interest to me or are written poorly.
Wish to comment on site/noted comm. features	I would want to revisit to give my own take on current football discussions.
Site was just a portal for ESPN, a place for ESPN to dump stats	It was just a portal for ESPN. There were a lot of sports stats - so it was a place for ESPN to dump some of their article content...
Site was Interesting/unique	This site is unique and different than others.
I watch sports on TV	I like watching sports shows on TV more so.
Prefer one team/team website	I don't go to a lot of sports websites. I watch the games on TV and if I miss the game I will go to the Steelers' website to find out what happened.
Information was too technical/difficult/focused	It may have been a little too in-depth and focused for my taste.
Not interested in any website discussions or message boards	I am not one for message boards and communicating.

Table 1 continued

Table 1 continued

Category	Example Statement or Phrase
Good for fantasy football owners	I do play fantasy football, and the statistical and number part of this website would be useful in picking players. I would visit this website to get the breakdown of players and teams from a fantasy football aspect.
Trustworthy, credible	I trust it and its content.
Liked website's community	I think the ability to have some communication with other users and professional observers is also valuable.
Most accessible/available	It's the most accessible if only for the fact that it is the most available.
Confusing	...there is just so much here that navigating the site is a bit bewildering.
Lacked strong interaction opportunities with other sports fans	I would use this site again despite its lack of strong interaction opportunities with other sports fans.
Site did not have a lot of content	There was not a lot of content on the website. There was a lot of video content.
Other sites more entertaining	I've seen better, more entertaining sites, and find no special value to Yahoo on sports or in general.

Table 2														
Types of Statements made about Deadspin.com in response to the Open-Ended survey question														
Category	Website is trying to be funny but isn't very	Don't trust/lacks credibility	I thought the website was humorous	Will Revisit	I thought website was entertaining	There are just so many to choose from - don't know if I'll revisit	Will not revisit	Not into sports OR not into sports websites	Will visit again because I like seeing sports figures mocked..	Gossipy 'relentless snark',	On the fence about visiting again	Site was informative/had good information	Site was only a little bit funny, would only revisit if I were really into sports	Uninteresting, poorly written
Number of statements counted	2	5	18	7	6	1	7	5	1	2	1	3	1	1

Table 3															
Types of Statements made about Football Outsiders in response to the Open-Ended Survey question															
Category	I thought the website was humorous	Will Revisit	I thought website was entertaining/enjoyable/had a good time with it.	Not into sports OR not into sports websites	On the fence about visiting again	Site was informative/had good information/I earned something	Uninteresting, poorly written	Wish to comment on site/noted comm. features	Site was just a portal for ESPN, a place for ESPN to dump stats	Site was Interesting /unique	I watch sports on TV	Prefer one team/team website	Information was too technical/difficult/focused	Not interested in any website discussions or message boards	Good for fantasy football owners
Number of statements counted	4	5	7	1	1	11	1	2	1	5	2	2	4	3	1

Table 4													
Types of Statements made about ESPN.com in response to the Open-Ended survey question													
Category	Website is trying to be funny but isn't very	I thought the website was humorous	Will Revisit	I thought website was entertaining/enjoyable/had a good time with it	Site was informative/had good information/learned something	Site was only a little bit funny, would only revisit if I were really into sports	Prefer one team/team website	Not interested in any website discussions or message boards	Trustworthy, credible	Liked website's community	Most accessible/available	Confusing	Lacked strong interaction opportunities with other sports fans
Number of statements counted	1	2	9	4	18	1	1	3	7	3	1	3	1

Table 5												
Types of Statements made about Yahoo! Sports in response to the Open-Ended Survey question												
Category	I thought the website was humorous	Will Revisit	I thought website was entertaining/enjoyable/had a good time with it	Not into sports OR not into sports websites	Site was informative/had good information/learned something	I watch sports on TV	Not interested in any website discussions or message boards	Good for fantasy football owners/fantasy players	Don't trust/lacks credibility	Site did not have a lot of content	Other sites more entertaining	Will not revisit
Number of statements counted	2	8	6	1	18	1	2	2	1	1	1	2

character toward whom people have negative affect.” RQ2 will first be addressed in terms of the Likert-type survey data. All degree of perceived humor scores were out of a possible 20. Recall from the Overall-Likert data section that the overall mean score for perceived humor was 13.36.

However, individual scores for degree of perceived humor were highest for the site Deadspin.com, with a mode score of 16 (mean=14.7). The next highest degree of perceived humor scores were found for ESPN.com (mode=15, mean=13.6). Lastly, Yahoo! Sports and Football Outsiders were tied for degrees of perceived humor (mode=12, mean=12.4). Likewise, Deadspin.com and ESPN.com had the highest and second highest degrees of perceived humor overall.

The open-ended survey question data provided additional insight into RQ2. For Deadspin.com, 18 statements or phrases were written to the effect that participants found the site humorous, whereas the number was much lower or nonexistent for all of the other sites. The order of the remaining sites for perceived humor in the open-ended survey question data was Football Outsiders (4 statements), ESPN.com (2 statements), and Yahoo! Sports (2 statements). This is consistent with the Likert-type data for RQ2, except that the order of ESPN and Football Outsiders is reversed.

One further note must be made about the manner in which RQs 1 and 2 were addressed by the open-ended survey answers. Both RQ1 and RQ2 included dispositional elements (i.e., “sports characters toward whom we have positive and negative dispositions”). In order to explain how the open-ended data addresses disposition, recall that the website tours (Appendix B) taken by survey participants were designed to expose participants to the variables humor and entertainment as operationally defined. The humorous website sections operated by disposition theory of humor, the entertainment website sections operated via disposition theory of drama, and all of the website sections had the potential to operate via disposition theory of sports spectatorship. Therefore, when a participant wrote to the effect that they found a website humorous, we can logically conclude that their amusement was due to an appeal to their dispositions.

Research Question Three.

Research question three (RQ3) asked, “To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website community to be present? Community will be defined as sports website-specific arenas for fan involvement and interactivity.” RQ3 will first be addressed in terms of the Likert-type survey data. All degree of perceived community scores were out of a possible 20. Recall

from the overall Likert data section that the overall mean score for perceived community was 15.15. However, individual scores for degree of perceived community were highest for the site Football Outsiders, with a mode score of 17 (mean=16.2). The remaining sites' degrees of perceived community can be ranked as follows: ESPN (mode=15, mean=15.6), Deadspin.com (mode=13, mean=14.4), and Yahoo! Sports (mode=11, mean=14.6). Therefore, Football Outsiders and ESPN.com had the highest and second highest degrees of perceived community overall.

The open-ended survey question data is consistent with the Likert-type question data in response to RQ3. For all sites Deadspin.com through Yahoo! Sports, numbers of perceived community statements are as follows: 0, 2, 3, and 0. At first glance, it appears that the highest degree of perceived community in the open-ended data went to ESPN.com. However, one person commented that ESPN.com "lacked strong interaction opportunities with other sports fans." This statement contradicts the other three that affirmed the community variable on ESPN.com. Therefore, we can say that ESPN.com and Football Outsiders are tied for the highest amounts of perceived community, according to the open-ended survey data.

Research Question Four.

Research question four asked, "To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website information to be present? Information will be defined as scores, schedules, game recaps and statistics, team and player statistics, trades and player or coach transactions, etc." RQ4 will first be addressed in terms of the Likert-type survey data. All degree of perceived information scores were out of a possible 20. Recall from the overall Likert data section that the overall mean score for perceived information was 15.55. However, individual scores for degree of perceived information were highest for the site Yahoo! Sports, with a mode score of 18 (mean=15.9). The

remaining sites' degrees of perceived information can be ranked as follows: ESPN.com (mode=17, mean=16.8), Football Outsiders (mode=15, mean=16.6), and Deadspin.com (mode=15, mean=13.4). Therefore, Yahoo! Sports and ESPN.com had the highest and second highest degrees of perceived information overall.

From the open-ended survey results, 18 statements or phrases were written denoting that participants associated information with ESPN.com. The same number was written for Yahoo! Sports. For Football Outsiders, the number of perceived information statements was 11, and only three were written for Deadspin.com. Thus, the open-ended survey question data was consistent with the Likert only results obtained for RQ 4, except that the rank order between ESPN and Yahoo! was reversed.

Research Question Five.

Research question five asked, "To what degree will sports website users perceive sports website credibility to be present? Credibility will be defined as perceived believability, accuracy, and trustworthiness." RQ5 will first be addressed in terms of the Likert-type survey data. All degree of perceived credibility scores were out of a possible 20. Recall from the overall Likert data section that the overall mean score for perceived credibility was 15.08. However, individual scores for degree of perceived credibility were highest for the site ESPN.com, with a mode score of 17 (mean=16.4). The remaining sites' degrees of perceived credibility can be ranked as follows: Yahoo! Sports (mode=17, mean=15.8), Football Outsiders (mode=15, mean=16.6), and Deadspin.com (mode=11, mean=12.3). So, ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports had the highest and second highest degrees of perceived credibility overall.

Regarding the open-ended question data, Deadspin.com did not have any open-ended answers associated with the perception of credibility, but the site did receive five statements that said Deadspin.com lacked credibility. Football Outsiders did not receive any statements related to the perception of credibility or the lack thereof. ESPN.com received seven statements associated with perceived credibility, and Yahoo! Sports received zero. Yahoo! Sports did, however, have one answer that said the site lacked credibility. These results are slightly different from those obtained from the Likert only result for RQ5. ESPN still ranks first, but the open-ended survey answers reported a perceived lack of credibility for Yahoo! Sports. So the rank order for perceived credibility in the open-ended survey data was ESPN.com, Football Outsiders, Yahoo! Sports, and then Deadspin.com. This is the same order as the one found in the Likert-only data, except that Football Outsiders and Yahoo! Sports are reversed.

Research Question Six.

Research question six (RQ6) asked, “Will participants associate more credibility with the more widely viewed websites (ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports) than with the lesser-viewed websites (Deadspin.com and FootballOutsiders.com)? The answer to RQ6 was yes. ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports had the following perceived credibility scores respectively: mode=17 (mean=16.4) and mode=17 (mean=15.8). Deadspin.com and Football Outsiders only had the following perceived credibility scores, respectively: mode=11 (mean=12.3) and mode=15 (mean=16.6). Therefore, degrees of perceived credibility were, in fact, higher for the more widely viewed sites ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports.

The open-ended question data gave a slightly contrasting answer to RQ6. Only one of the two “more widely viewed” websites was associated with more credibility than both of the two

“lesser-viewed” websites. Recall from the section on RQ5 that Yahoo! Sports was ranked third for perceived credibility.

Research Question Seven.

Research question seven (RQ7) asked for a similar comparison to that of RQ6’s regarding information. Would participants associate more information content with the more widely viewed sites as well? The answer to RQ7 was also yes. Degrees of perceived information were highest for Yahoo! Sports and ESPN.com – the more widely viewed sites in the study. These sites’ numbers were mode=18 (mean=15.9) and mode=17 (mean=16.8), respectively. Deadspin.com and Football Outsiders only had the following perceived information scores, respectively: mode=15 (mean=13.4) and mode=15 (mean=16.6).

The open-ended survey data also provided a “yes” answer for RQ7. This is because the two “more widely-viewed” sites had higher numbers of perceived information statements than the two lesser-viewed sites did (18 and 18 for ESPN and Yahoo!, 11 and 3 for Football Outsiders and Deadspin).

Research Question Eight.

Research question eight (RQ8) asked if participants would perceive more community to be present on the lesser-viewed websites (Deadspin.com and Football Outsiders) than with the more widely viewed sites, ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports. The answer to RQ8 was both yes and no. Perceived community was most associated with one lesser-viewed site and one widely-viewed site. The highest and second highest degrees of perceived community were associated with Football Outsiders and ESPN.com, respectively. Their perceived community scores were mode=17 (mean=16.2) and mode=15 (mean=15.6). The perceived community scores for

Deadspin.com and Yahoo! Sports were mode=13 (mean=14.4) and mode=11 (mean=14.6), respectively. Since ESPN.com is the most widely viewed website in this study, again, the answer to RQ8 was only no for ESPN.com. Football Outsiders was one of the lesser-viewed websites, and participants noted the highest degree of perceived community on it.

Recall from the information regarding RQ3 that the open-ended survey data put ESPN.com and Football Outsiders first for perceived community. This is entirely consistent with the Likert-only survey answer to RQ8: no in the case of ESPN.com, and yes for Football Outsiders.

Research Question Nine.

Similarly to RQ8, research question nine (RQ9) asked if participants would perceive more humor content to be present on the lesser-viewed websites. The highest and second highest degrees of perceived humor were associated with Deadspin.com and ESPN.com, respectively. Since ESPN.com was one of the widely viewed websites in this study, the answer to RQ9 is both yes and no. Perceived humor was most associated with one lesser-viewed site and one widely-viewed site. Perceived humor scores for Deadspin.com and ESPN.com were mode=16 (mean=14.7) and mode=15 (mean=13.6), respectively. Perceived humor scores for the remaining websites Football Outsiders and Yahoo! Sports were tied at mode=12 (mean=12.4). Therefore, we can see that the answer to RQ9 is yes in the case of Deadspin.com and no in the case where ESPN.com superseded Football Outsiders for degree of perceived humor.

In the open-ended question data, Deadspin.com was first for perceived humor. However, the second place site for humor in the open-ended question data was Football Outsiders. This is not consistent with the Likert data result for RQ9; the Likert data had ESPN.com in second place

for humor. Therefore, in the open-ended question data, the answer to RQ9 was solidly yes, and it was not the same as the mixed answer obtained from the Likert-only results.

Research Question Ten.

Lastly, research question ten (RQ10) asked, “Will participants perceive more entertainment content to be present on the lesser-viewed websites (Deadspin.com and FootballOutsiders.com) than with the more widely viewed websites (ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports)? Deadspin.com and Football Outsiders had the highest and second highest degrees of perceived entertainment scores. These sites’ degrees of perceived entertainment scores were mode=16 (mean=14.5) and mode=15 (mean=15.5), respectively. Therefore, the answer to RQ10 is yes. The perceived entertainment scores for the more widely-viewed websites ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports were mode=15 (mean=14.8) and mode=15 (mean=15.2).

Concerning the open-ended survey data, the answer to RQ10 was also yes. Football Outsiders and Deadspin.com registered the highest amounts of perceived entertainment in the open-ended data. These two sites were the lesser-viewed ones, so the open-ended data also gave RQ10 a “yes” answer.

Hypotheses

Introduction.

Support for the hypotheses was found using the Likert-type survey data, open-ended survey data, and discussion data. This introduction will give an overview of how all types of data are used. Each hypothesis will be formally addressed in the sections to follow.

All hypotheses (referred to hereinafter as “H1” through “H5”) were written with respect to each variable. They stated that each of the variables in this study, when present on sports websites, would correlate positively with the study participants’ intentions to use the sports websites in the future. That is, a significant correlation would exist, and the influence of the perceived variable on a participant’s intent to use would be positive.

Likewise, the Likert-type survey data provided correlation coefficients between each variable and each intent-to-use data set on each one of the websites. The study found only two correlation coefficients (out of 20 total) that were contradictory to any of the hypotheses.

Table 6 shows the correlation coefficients for all participants’ perceived variable scores and their corresponding intent-to-use scores. These correlation coefficients are presented for each variable on each website. Table 6 also shows the changes in participants’ intent-to-use scores with respect to each variable for each website. These changes were obtained by simply creating scatter plots of each participant’s intent to use the website versus their degree of perceived variable on that website. After all participants’ data points were plotted, Microsoft Excel was used to draw the best fit straight line through the data points. For all lines drawn, the slopes were positive numbers. Also, the correlation coefficients were significant for all but two of the data sets: community and intent to use Deadspin, information and intent to use ESPN. Thus, the Likert-type survey data was consistent with all hypotheses H1 through H5 except in the cases of the two above-mentioned sets.

Open-ended survey answers varied in the amounts of information given. However, some participants addressed both their perceptions of variables present as well as the influence that variable had on their intent to use. For example, one participant said regarding Deadspin.com, “I would use this site again- I found the articles humorous.” Another participant said, “It was

Variables	Entertainment			Humor			Community			Information			Credibility		
Slopes of Regression lines and their corresponding R ² values	Slope	R ²	Correlation coefficient	Slope	R ²	Correlation coefficient	Slope	R ²	Correlation coefficient	Slope	R ²	Correlation coefficient	Slope	R ²	Correlation coefficient
Deadspin.com	0.20	0.22	0.47***	0.29	0.49	0.70****	0.12	0.09	0.30	0.19	0.27	0.52***	0.23	0.54	0.74****
Football Outsiders	0.37	0.69	0.83****	0.29	0.69	0.83****	0.24	0.20	0.44**	0.42	0.65	0.81****	0.26	0.35	0.59***
ESPN.com	0.22	0.28	0.53***	0.23	0.41	0.73****	0.15	0.14	0.37*	0.16	0.17	0.42**	0.22	0.40	0.63****
Yahoo! Sports	0.31	0.54	0.73****	0.25	0.46	0.68****	0.23	0.39	0.62***	0.07	0.08	0.29	0.20	0.39	0.62***
<p>Note: The highest and second-highest slope values for each website are shown in bold. This makes it easier to see which variables had the most positive influence on participants' intents-to-use the sports websites.</p> <p>All correlations but two were significant. p* < .05. p** < .025. p*** < .005. p**** < .0005</p>															

refreshing because it was funny and still accurate. I would use it again and recommend it to friends.” This quote was also about Deadspin.com. The first quote connects perceived humor with intent to use, whereas the second quote connects both the site’s humor and the site’s information with intent to use.

Similarly, a participant from the Football Outsiders survey said,

I would be apt to return to this site because it offers great in-depth analysis for professional and college football, has interesting and comedic articles that appear on other well known sports websites like ESPN, and a vast array of discussion boards. This makes the experience more enjoyable for the intense football fan!

This answer begins by expressing intent to use and then connecting that intent with perceived information and humor. Community and credibility are included as well. In similar fashion, we can use the following statement from an ESPN.com participant to address the hypotheses regarding entertainment and information: “I would use this website. I found it informative and entertaining.” Additionally, one Yahoo! Sports participant said:

I feel that this website has great information, but the organization is kind of garbled. I would use it again, particularly for the 'Entertainment' sports videos and the funny soccer blog. The people behind that blog are funny writers who use an ideal balance of text, video, and photo content.

These last two quotes serve similar purposes to the first three written in this section; they demonstrate that while positive intent to use and positive degrees of perceived variables were present on all sites, the intent to use was associated with varying numbers of variables per

participant. In the open-ended survey question data, there is no reason that participants would have thought to isolate each variable's effects.

For the focus group data, the hypotheses were addressed by reviewing the points scores described in the Methods section. Scores for each variable (per question and overall) can be seen in Table 7. Note that the scores for each variable per question take into account all of the six discussions in the study.

Table 7						
Frequencies of Variable Preferences Recorded in the Discussion Data						
Points for each variable/category						
Question number and topic	Humor	Entertainment	Community	Information	Credibility	Favorite Sports
1) ...On your own sports website?	1	2	2	8	2	7
2) ...On existing sports website(s)	3	5	1	8	4	7
3) Humor	6	0	0	0	1	0
4) Entertainment	0	5	0	2	0	0
5) Community	1	0	6	0	0	0
6) Information	0	0	0	12	0	2
7) Credibility	1	0	0	0	6	0
8) In general..	3	0	0	3	5	6
TOTALS	15	12	9	33	18	22

Recall that all hypotheses H1 through H5 stated that the variables would correlate positively with intent to use. Table 7 shows us that there were no zero-points scores for any of

the variables. In the analysis of the focus group data, points were awarded to variables when participants verbally connected those variables with their preferences and what they look for in sports websites. (Note that a detailed description of the focus group data analysis can be found in the Methods section.)

Hypothesis One.

H1 stated, “Entertainment on sports websites, defined as materials that tell the stories of sports characters toward whom we have positive and negative dispositions, will positively correlate with the participants’ intentions to use the website in the future.” Table 6 shows that all correlations between entertainment and intent to use were statistically significant ($p < .005$). This means that perceived entertainment and intent to use the websites rise and fall together. Furthermore, line slopes for all plots of participants’ intents to use with respect to their degrees of perceived entertainment are 0.20, 0.37, 0.22, and 0.31. These numbers are all greater than zero. This also demonstrates how intent to use changes with participants’ degrees of perceived entertainment. The Likert-type survey data supports H1.

H1 had general support from the open-ended survey question. For all four websites Deadspin, Football Outsiders, ESPN, and Yahoo, there were positive numbers of perceived entertainment statements: 6, 7, 4, and 6 respectively (these are totals by website). Each of the four websites from Deadspin through Yahoo also had positive numbers of statements of intent to use (7, 5, 9, and 8 respectively). While each intent-for-reuse statement may have been issued for a different reason, we can make a logical assumption that each was due to some mix of all of the variables perceived to be present. Therefore, the open-ended survey data generally supports H1. H1 was also supported by the discussion data. Table 7 shows that 12 points were given to the

entertainment variable. Thus, intent to use sports websites was positively correlated with the entertainment variable during the discussions.

Hypothesis Two.

H2 stated, “Humor on sports websites, defined as the debasement of a sports character toward whom people have negative affect will positively correlate with the participants’ intentions to use the website in the future.” Table 6 shows that all correlations between humor and intent to use were statistically significant ($p < .0005$). This means that perceived humor and intent to use the websites rise and fall together. Furthermore, line slopes for all plots of participants’ intents to use with respect to their degrees of perceived humor are 0.29, 0.29, 0.23, and 0.25. These numbers are all greater than zero. This also demonstrates how intent to use changes with participants’ degrees of perceived humor. The Likert-type survey data supports H2.

The open-ended survey data supported H2 in the same general manner as it did H1. For all four websites Deadspin, Football Outsiders, ESPN, and Yahoo, there were positive numbers of perceived humor statements as well: 18, 5, 2, and 2. Through similar reasoning to that which we used for H1, we can then relate that some portion of the “Will Revisit” statements are due in part to perceived humor. The open-ended survey data supports H2.

Lastly, the discussion data in Table 7 shows us that the humor variable received 15 points. Thus, intent to use sports websites was positively correlated with the humor variable during the discussions. The discussion data supports H2.

Hypothesis Three.

H3 stated, “Community features on sports websites will positively correlate with the participants’ intentions to use the website in the future.” In Table 6, we can see that positive

correlation coefficients were obtained for all of the websites. However, these were only significant ($p < .05$) for three of the websites studied. The correlation coefficient for the community variable and participants' intents to use Deadspin.com was 0.30 and was not significant. The line slopes for all plots of participants' intents to use with respect to their degrees of perceived community are 0.12, 0.24, 0.15, and 0.23. These numbers help to demonstrate how intent to use changes with participants' degrees of perceived community. However, H3 was supported by the Likert-type survey data for all websites except Deadspin.com.

H3 was supported by the open-ended survey data, but not by the same reasoning given for H1 and H2. The community variable actually registered some zero and negative numbers of statements. "Zero" statements refer to variables that participants did not mention outright in their answers. "Negative" numbers were given to any statements such as this one, obtained for ESPN.com: "I would use this again despite its lack of strong interaction opportunities with other sports fans. It is entertaining, though more on a TV network type of basis than on an interactive level." This participant expressed a lack of community, and any answers expressing a perceived lack of some variable are considered negative (note that absolute values only are provided on Tables 2-5). The statement still supports H3, however. The participant said that he would use the site despite its lack of interactivity. Therefore, we know that perceived community would be connected to this participant's intent to use a sports website. It should be noted also that a few open-ended answers were given that support H3 more directly, by the same logic used for H1, H2, and H4. These answers were the perceived community statements referred to in the section about RQ3. Once again, their numbers were 0, 2, 3, and 0 for Deadspin, Football Outsiders, ESPN, and Yahoo! Sports, respectively. Pair these perceived community answers with the sites'

“Will Revisits” (7, 5, 9, and 8, respectively) to register additional open-ended survey data support for H3.

It is important to note here that while Deadspin.com did not register perceived community-related written answers, it did register 7 “Will Not Revisit” quotes. While these “Will Not Revisit” quotes are not connected with community (or any clear reason, necessarily), we can still infer that they are. This is because Yahoo! Sports was the only other site to register a “0” number of perceived community quotes. It was also the only other site in this study to register “Will Not Revisit” (there were 2). Overall, I logically conclude that the open-ended survey data supports H3, but suggest that more research regarding perceived community on sports websites is needed.

Regarding the discussion data, the community variable scored 9 points. The discussion data supports H3.

Hypothesis Four.

H4 stated, “Information on sports websites will positively correlate with the participants’ intentions to use the website in the future.” On Table 6, we can see that positive correlation coefficients were obtained for all of the websites. However, these were only significant ($p < .025$) for three of the websites studied. The correlation coefficient for the community variable and participants’ intents to use ESPN.com was 0.29, and not significant. Correlation coefficients were positive and significant ($p < .025$) for Deadspin.com, Football Outsiders, and Yahoo! Sports. Line slopes for all plots of participants’ intents to use with respect to their degrees of perceived information are 0.19, 0.42, 0.16, and 0.07. These numbers help to demonstrate how intent to use

changes with participants' degrees of perceived information. But overall, the Likert-type survey data supports H4 in all cases but one: the information variable on ESPN.com.

In the open-ended survey question data, H4 garnered general support through the same reasoning as that was used for H1 and H2. All four websites Deadspin, Football Outsiders, ESPN.com, and Yahoo! Sports had positive numbers of statements for perceived information: 3, 11, 18, and 18. Recall that the "Will Revisit" statements for these four websites were 7, 5, 9, and 8, respectively. The open-ended survey data supports H4.

However, an important note must be made about H4. While the open-ended survey data did support the hypothesis, some of the answers obtained noted that the type of information mattered in terms of intent to use. Table 3 shows that there were 4 statements made that were put in the category "Information was too technical/difficult/focused." Here is one example, about Football Outsiders: "The statistical nature of this site makes it difficult for most to follow. I feel that it can only be appreciated by a very select few." Depending on the specific nature of the information offered by a sports website, H4 can actually be contradicted by the open-ended data.

In the discussion data, H4 was strongly supported. Table 7 shows that the information variable scored 33 points, the highest a variable scored in the discussion analysis. Similarly to the open-ended survey question data, however, the type and depth of information had an effect. One focus group held a website-specific discussion about the site Football Outsiders. One of the participants in this discussion said, "The statistics were good, but too in depth for me. The site was good, but not a conversation piece." Therefore, we can conclude that H4 was partly contradicted by the focus group results as well as the open-ended survey data.

Hypothesis Five.

Lastly, H5 stated, “Website credibility will correlate positively with the participants’ intentions to use the website in the future.” Table 6 shows that all correlations between credibility and intent to use were statistically significant ($p < .005$). This means that perceived credibility and intent to use the websites rise and fall together. Furthermore, line slopes for all plots of participants’ intents to use with respect to their degrees of perceived credibility are 0.23, 0.26, 0.22, and 0.20. These numbers are all greater than zero. This also demonstrates how intent to use changes with participants’ degrees of perceived credibility. The Likert-type data supports H5.

In the open-ended survey data, H5 was supported by positive statements about perceived credibility, and also by negative statements about a lack of credibility. Numbers of statements written about perceived credibility on all sites Deadspin through Yahoo were: -5, 0, 7, and -1. The seven mentions of ESPN.com’s credibility were often strongly associated with a participant’s intent to reuse, as in this quote:

It seemed reliable, perhaps because it is, after all, ESPN. Also, I thought their coverage of some items was more detailed and from a different perspective than I’ve heard elsewhere. I would use it again because of these things. It was also, I thought, easy to navigate.

The negative quotes were *complaints* about lack of credibility, such as this one regarding Deadspin: “I would not use it to find actual analysis of any sport. The light-heartedness of the site makes it seem not so credible.” Such statements would not have been written if credibility did not influence the participants’ intents to use. Therefore, for the sites Deadspin, ESPN.com, and Yahoo! Sports, the open-ended survey data supports H5. The only inconsistent result for all

of the open-ended data was obtained for Football Outsiders. No perceived credibility statements were written (positive or negative), and no “Will Not Revisit” statements were written either.

In the discussion data, the credibility variable scored 18 points. This made credibility the second-most influential variable in the discussion portion of the data. The discussion data supports H5.

Summary

The results can best be summarized by Tables 8 and 9. Table 8 contains the means and modes for all of the perceived variable scores in the study. It shows the overall degrees to which participants perceived the presence of each variable on each website, and it allows for fast comparison of the different websites.

Table 8					
Degrees of Perceived Variable by Website					
Variables		Deadspin.com	Football Outsiders	ESPN.com	Yahoo! Sports
Perceived Entertainment	Modes	16	15	15	15
	Means	14.5	15.5	14.8	15.2
Perceived Humor	Modes	16	12	15	12
	Means	14.7	12.4	13.6	12.4
Perceived Information	Modes	15	15	17	18
	Means	13.4	16.6	16.8	15.9
Perceived Community	Modes	13	17	15	11
	Means	14.4	16.2	15.6	14.6
Perceived Credibility	Modes	11	15	17	17
	Means	12.3	16.6	16.4	15.8
Note: The sites that ranked first and second for their respective degrees of perceived variable have means and modes for that variable shown in bold.					

Table 9 provides a Summary of the Hypotheses by stating whether or not they were supported in the data from each method.

Table 9 Summary of the Hypotheses by Method			
Hypothesis	Likert-type survey data	Open-ended survey question data	Discussion data
H1: "Entertainment" will correlate positively...	Supported	Supported	Supported
H2: "Humor" will correlate positively...	Supported	Supported	Supported
H3: "Community" will correlate positively...	Supported for all websites except Deadspin.com	Supported	Supported
H4: "Information" will correlate positively...	Supported for all websites except ESPN.com	Supported in most cases; data indicates that "technical" information does not.	Supported in most cases; data indicates that "technical" information does not.
H5: "Credibility" will correlate positively...	Supported	Supported	Supported

Overall, Tables 8 and 9 are designed to collect Results for the reader and provide an at-a-glance summary of the information used to address all RQ's and H's.

Ranking of the Variables by Influence on Intent to Use.

In all but two of the 20 Likert-type survey data sets, the variables had positive, significant correlations with the participants' intents to use the sports websites in the future. Some website variables had more positive influence than others. This can be concluded from the simple linear analysis we used to calculate the slope values and correlation coefficients in Table 6. Likewise,

we can ask, “What sports website variables had the *most* positive effect on participants’ intents to use the sports websites?” To answer this question, we will rank each variable in order of influence strength from “most” to “least.” A brief explanation of why the variable was ranked where it was will follow each one.

Humor.

The humor variable was ranked highest. Table 6 shows that humor had the highest or second highest slope values for intent to use versus the degree perceived for all but one of the websites (Football Outsiders). The humor variable also had the strongest correlations ($p < .0005$), denoting the most consistent and most significant linear trends.

Entertainment.

The entertainment variable is ranked second. It had one highest slope value and one second-highest slope value over all of the websites. These two slopes were actually the second and third highest in the entire study (the only slope higher was the one for the information variable on the site Football Outsiders). For all four websites, correlations between intent to use and perceived entertainment were significant ($p < .005$). So, a clear linear trend was present. Since the slope values for entertainment were only high for two of the websites instead of three like humor, entertainment was the second most influential variable on intent to use sports websites (see Table 6).

Credibility.

The third most influential variable in the survey data was credibility, which had two second-place slope values (they were for Deadspin.com and ESPN.com). The credibility slope values for Football Outsiders and Yahoo! Sports were fourth and third place for those two

websites, respectively. All correlation coefficients between intent to use and perceived credibility were significant ($p < .005$). So, basically, this means perceived credibility did show some influence on intent to use, although not as much influence as entertainment and/or humor.

Information.

The information and community variables came in fourth and last for slope values, respectively. The information variable's only first-place slope value occurred for the Football Outsiders site. On Football Outsiders, perceived information had a strong positive influence on intent to use. For Deadspin.com and ESPN.com, less of a relationship between information and intent to use was observed ($p < .025$). For Yahoo! Sports, however, no significant correlation was observed. Could this mean that for Deadspin.com, ESPN.com, and Yahoo! Sports, other variables were more influential than information in fluctuating participants' intents to use?

Survey data regarding ESPN.com suggests that other variables besides information correlated with intent to use more directly. This is because participants intended to reuse ESPN.com regardless of the amount of information they perceived on it. Out of all 25 intent-to-use scores based on ESPN.com's information, only two participants gave it less than a "4." (Intent-to-use scores were out of a possible 5.) This means that for all degrees of perceived information for ESPN.com (the range was 13-20 out of a possible 20), the intents to use were consistently high. This observation was corroborated by both the open-ended survey data and the focus group data. Anecdotal evidence will be given in the Discussion.

Community.

The community variable exhibited the least influence on intent to use. Slope values for intent to use versus perceived community were the lowest in the study. Correlation coefficients

between perceived community and intent to use were significant ($p < .05$) for three of the websites. For Deadspin.com, the relationship was not significant.

Note also that the results for community were consistent between both the numeric and qualitative data. The community variable received only 9 points in the discussion analysis (Table 7). Furthermore, in the open-ended survey data, only three participants wrote that they “liked” a particular website community (ESPN.com’s). A significantly larger number of survey participants (eight) actually noted that they were not interested in website discussion forums or message boards. Overall, the community variable was the least important to the sports website users in this study.

Rank Summary.

Overall, the Likert-type survey data yielded the results that the humor and entertainment variables showed the most positive effects on intent to use with respect to changes in the perceived degree of each variable. This does not mean that the remaining three variables are unimportant to sports website users, however. Credibility, information, and community all had lower slope values with intent to use, but in 18 out of the 20 Likert-type data sets, the relationship was significant ($p < 0.05$). In the two non-significant data sets and all others with low slope values, we must consider the following. Slopes give us a rate of change, and it may be possible that there is not always a change in intent to use with respect to changes in the degrees of perceived community, information, and credibility. Participants’ intents to use or not use the websites may be constant regardless of the information, credibility, and community they register.

One last finding that should be noted as a part of this summary is that the ranking of the variables by influence was different between the survey data and the focus group analysis. Recall

that the highest point totals for the discussion groups went to the variables information and credibility, at 33 and 18 respectively. Third highest was humor, at 15 followed by entertainment and then community.

These preferences are not entirely consistent with the findings of the survey data. In the survey data, humor and entertainment were found to be the most influential variables, whereas the discussion data puts information and credibility in front. This could be for reasons of U&G, or even an additional idea called self-report (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). The differences between survey and focus group data will be addressed in detail the Discussion.

Corollary

Although this study was designed to investigate the influence of one variable at a time on intent to use, the data suggests that variable perceptions may be related. For example, when people perceive a high degree of information, they may also perceive a high degree of credibility. The Likert-type survey data can be used to show which variable perceptions are the most likely to rise and fall with another variable's perceptions. Table 10 gives correlation coefficients for each possible pair of website variables.

Note that only two out of the 10 sets have correlations that are not significant. The highest correlation was between perceived information and perceived credibility scores, at 0.73. The lowest correlation coefficient was between perceived humor and perceived credibility, at -0.04. Could this mean that an inverse relationship exists? Future studies should be designed around the potential of the variables to interact and interfere with each other. Lastly, the qualitative data obtained in the open-ended survey answers and discussion data also suggests

sports website variable interactions. Interaction possibilities in the qualitative data will be more fully attended to in the Discussion.

Table 10 Correlations between All Pairs of Perceived Variable Scores in the Likert-type Survey Data	
Variable Pair	Correlation between Perceived Variable Scores
Humor and Entertainment	0.38**
Humor and Information	0.15
Humor and Community	0.24*
Humor and Credibility	-0.04
Entertainment and Information	0.48**
Entertainment and Community	0.34**
Entertainment and Credibility	0.39**
Information and Community	0.64**
Information and Credibility	0.73**
Community and Credibility	0.51**
Notes: p* < .01, p** < .0005	

In the next section, I will discuss the qualitative findings from the focus groups in greater depth. This discussion will also investigate the reasons that the results in this section were obtained and the relationship of the findings to our theoretical frameworks. Finally, I will discuss future ramifications of this study as well as give practical suggestions for sports website operators.

Discussion

Humorous and Entertaining Sports Content

The most striking finding of this study was the fact that humorous sports website content had the most influence on sports website users, followed closely by entertainment content. Upon examination of the discussion data and open-ended survey answers, we can see that the use of the Internet for humorous and entertaining sports stories coincides strongly with the U&G theory. In fact, LaRose and Eastin (2004) did an Internet-related expansion to the theory that works particularly well with the results of this study. LaRose and Eastin (2004) defined categories of Internet use incentives, one of which was “activity incentives.” Two of the activity incentives were to “cheer myself up” or to “feel entertained” (LaRose & Eastin, 2004, p.370). LaRose and Eastin (2004) also defined “self-reactive” Internet incentives, such as to “relieve boredom,” “find a way to pass the time,” or “forget my problems” (LaRose & Eastin, 2004, p.370). Likewise, the researchers found that activity and self-reactive outcomes were significantly related to Internet usage. The present study illustrates the same for humor and entertainment on sports websites.

Humor and Entertainment as Uses and Gratifications Incentives.

“I always like the funny stuff... Or bloopers, like ESPN’s *Not Top Plays*,” said Greg, a 30-year old aquaculturist, referring to his tendency to seek out humorous content on sports websites. “I definitely want jokes and cartoons,” said Günter, 40, an environmental engineer. “I definitely want to be entertained,” he added. When asked what he looked for on an existing sports website and why, Greg mentioned that one of the sites he enjoyed was Deadspin.com, a

site whose humor content we have already demonstrated. Likewise, Sheila, an 18-year old college student, mentioned that she would return to the Deadspin site “if I wanted to laugh.”

In the open-ended portion of the survey, participants made the desire for sports-website humor equally well-known. “The humorous columns are my biggest draw,” wrote one participant about ESPN.com. “The personal perspective is what I want to read – the funnier, the better,” he added. Recall also one open-ended survey answer used as a demonstration in the Results section:

I would use [Yahoo! Sports] again, particularly for the ‘Entertainment’ sports videos and the funny soccer blog. The people behind that blog are funny writers who use an ideal balance of text, video, and photo content.

This survey participant was clearly motivated by the humor she found on Yahoo! Sports. Regarding the site Football Outsiders, one survey answer read, “Loved the humor...made me feel like I was with my buddies.” Similarly, another Football Outsiders survey participant had said, “I like the funny nature of the content. Stats are all fine and good, but get a little dry sometimes. With this website, the info is presented in a way that is easier to swallow.” Lastly, one answer referred to Football Outsiders’ “interesting and comedic articles.” He added, “This makes the experience more enjoyable for the intense football fan!”

Deadspin.com also had multiple open-ended survey answers from people who said they enjoyed sports websites for humor. Recall two of these from the Results section:

“I would use the site again. I found the articles humorous.”

“It was refreshing because it was funny and still accurate. I would use it again and recommend it to friends.”

Many other open-ended Deadspin survey answers agreed. One participant noted that Deadspin would provide a humorous way to get sports news. “It was pretty funny,” she said. “The comments were pretty funny as well, which means I might visit again if there was actual sports news happening,” she added. The sentiment was echoed by the following quotes:

“I like the site for its humorous take on sporting events.”

“I thought [Deadspin.com] was humorous. I will probably visit again.”

“It was a pretty humorous website; I would probably visit it again because it is funny.”

Most of these quotes have been about humor as a uses and gratifications incentive to reuse a sports website, but the entertainment variable was spoken and written about in the same manner. Take this open-ended survey example, regarding Football Outsiders, “This site is one I didn't know about. But it's very, very detailed information and outside angles on how information is presented are both entertaining and very educational for me.” This participant was also entertained, but for different reasons than the ones in the previous quotes about Football Outsiders. The “detailed information” and “outside angles on how information is presented” most likely entertained the participant from a uses and gratifications perspective. In addition to written sports stories and columns, Football Outsiders supplies its very own statistics and metrics to measure players and teams realistically. A participant entertained by such metrics would choose Football Outsiders to elicit mental arousal, as in McQuail's (1984) cultural model of the uses and gratifications theory. Such entertainment would also correspond to the “self-reactive” outcome expectations of LaRose and Eastin's (2004) theory expansion.

Dispositional Explanation for Humor and Entertainment Enjoyment.

The above quotes and comments link directly into LaRose and Eastin's (2004) U&G expansion. Sheila had stated outright that she would return to Deadspin.com with the expected outcome of laughter. However, disposition theory must be utilized to explain *why* the participants laughed and were entertained by the content they sought from sports websites. It was Raney (2003b) who noted that the growing cult of personality in sports has made sports news more like dramatic fiction than straight coverage of athletics. Likewise, my participants' sports website viewing behaviors were ones to which the disposition theories of humor, drama and sports spectatorship were all important. The number of disposition theories operating at any one time seemed to vary with the media consumer and the way(s) in which their affective dispositions were formed. But in all cases, disposition theory offered a way to explain why humor and entertainment on sports websites were so popular.

Firstly, consider Greg's quote about ESPN's *Not Top Plays*. In ESPN's *Not Top Plays*, one sees the top ten funniest blooper videos from the entire world of sports, as ordered by ESPN. These are air on TV as a part of the SportsCenter program, but a viewer might miss these on TV. Therefore, we catch them on the Internet. More importantly, blooper reels are a prime example of content that can be explained by disposition theory of humor. For example, number nine on the September 11, 2010 list of SportsCenter's *Not Top Plays* shows Jody Gerut, (OF, Milwaukee) diving to make a catch during a late-regular season game with the Cardinals. Gerut dives and slides, but the pop fly is caught easily by the Brewers' right fielder as Gerut slides past empty-gloved. The action in the video debases Gerut, and anyone who had seen his show-off move misfire would encode him as a negative disposition character and laugh at him. This *in situ* disposition formation can be applied to many Internet sports bloopers, allowing fans of all teams

and sports knowledge levels to enjoy them. Disposition theory of sports spectatorship should not be ignored here, however. The Gerut clip would most likely hold special amusement for any Cardinals fan (or Brewers hater).

Steve, a 19-year old college student, talked about a similar example of disposition formation in humor. “They had that one [video] that was recent with the squash competition and the guy talking trash to the other guy. I’d seen it a couple times but it was still funny to watch.” What this participant was referring to was the Deadspin.com story, *Squash Players are Just the Worst*, originally posted on February 22, 2010. In this story, Trinity college senior Baset Chaudry defeated Yale freshman Kenneth Chan in straight sets to help Trinity to its 12th straight title. Chaudry then delivered a vicious string of trash talk to Chan’s face, as can be seen in the corresponding video. The visual is hilarious, and so is Deadspin.com’s commentary because it mocks Chaudry for his strange and immature behavior. Chaudry’s behavior makes it easy to form a negative disposition toward him. Chaudry’s role and actions would cause most people to categorize him as a “sore winner.”

Materials pertaining to the disposition theory of drama had comparable popularity to those operating via disposition theory of humor. For Yahoo! Sports, one survey participant wrote, “It was user friendly and I enjoyed the video I watched.” This simple statement refers to a video that the participants had been instructed to watch on their website viewing activity instructions (Appendix B). The video that participants were required to watch was their choice from Yahoo! Sports’ “Entertainment” category of videos. Note that the videos in Yahoo! Sports’ Entertainment category were created exclusively for the Yahoo! Sports site; they were not taken from any network TV programming. These videos feature “story” content about the life events of athletes, such as an introspective with Darrelle Revis (CB, New York Jets) about being a Jet or

Ron Artest (F, Los Angeles) performing a rap single at a celebration of the Lakers' 2010 NBA championship. The participant in this example expressed that they enjoyed these types of videos – material that was designed to entertain with regard to athletes and sports characters. The content allows the viewer to form dispositions based upon an *in situ* moral judgment of the characters' roles and actions. The enjoyment comes from the conclusion of each video. Do we like what has happened to the athletes we've learned about?

Disposition theory of sports spectatorship is of particular concern here as well. Fans of the Jets or the Lakers would be particularly entertained by these videos – the aforementioned athletes would be characters toward whom fans had a positive disposition. Additionally, the videos feature good things happening to one Jet and one Laker. Thus, the “Entertainment” videos on Yahoo! Sports tell us a lot about why people love to be entertained by sports website content. They can form dispositions at the site, or utilize the ones they have as fans.

Participants cited additional dramatic examples when they were asked what entertained them on sports websites. “I watched Elizabeth Lambert,” said Jake, a 28-year old sales representative. On November 6, 2009, ESPN.com posted a complete reel of University of New Mexico junior defender Elizabeth Lambert clips. In these clips, Lambert punched, shoved, elbowed, tackled, and kicked the ball in the face of various members of Brigham Young University's women's soccer team during the Mountain West Semifinals. In one scene, Lambert pulled Kassidy Shumway (F, BYU) to the ground using Shumway's own ponytail. The clip reel ends with a report of Lambert's suspension and written statements of her regrets.

This quote and material correspond exactly to the predictions made using disposition theory of drama. Through her violent behavior, Elizabeth Lambert became a character toward whom we have negative disposition. We are entertained by her bizarre behavior and her

suspension. In similar fashion, other focus group members noted that they went online to find videos of LeGarrette Blount (RB, Tampa Bay Buccaneers) and Brittney Griner (C, Baylor Lady Bears basketball). Blount, then a running back for the University of Oregon Ducks, punched Boise State defensive end Byron Hout following the 2009 season's first game. Blount was issued a suspension for the remainder of the season. Likewise, Griner punched Texas Tech forward Jordan Barncastle after Barncastle fouled Griner during a Big 12 matchup. The punch broke Barncastle's nose, and Griner was suspended two games. This caused Griner to miss Baylor's Big 12 Championship tournament opener.

Therefore, as demonstrated above, participants sought entertainment on sports websites under the tenets of disposition theory. They may not have heard of Lambert, Griner, or Blount before their names were in the news. However, once the reports of these athletes' infractions were out, the people in my study enjoyed the online videos. The action on the field and court allowed the participants' to form dispositions, and the end punishments allowed them to enjoy the stories.

One large category of humor and entertainment responses still remains: the one that deals strictly with the more permanent, longstanding dispositions governed preeminently by disposition theory of sports spectatorship. Recall that the ways in which we become fans (or haters) of teams and athletes have not been readily defined. However, a particular trend was noticeable in this study: dispositions were formed by the celebrity-level coverage of athletes and other people in sports. The media has provided so much information about the characters of sports that it is easy to form longstanding dispositions.

The most common of these dispositions found in this study was borne specifically of the sports personality-celebrity concept. People were often found to have negative dispositions

toward athletes and other personalities in sports when those personalities had been built up as celebrities. On the open-ended portion of the Deadspin survey, one participant said:

The site is irreverent in nature, certainly not like that of network television. Its humor and 'common' approach to sports is more in keeping with the way I view, especially, professional sports. That is, the pretense and self bloated majesty that surrounds pro sports is totally out of keeping with the stink of the sweat which makes athletic competitions into 'sport.'

This participant felt that network television coverage of sports is not reflective of the “common spectator’s” mentality. Did this commenter represent the “common spectator?” According to his survey, he is a 61-year old male. Another survey taker, a 19-year old male, offered a similar Deadspin quote. The 19-year old male wrote he’d revisit the site because it “speaks to me as a sports fan.” Recall also how the first fan explained that he did not prefer anything that allows “self-bloated majesty” to surround sports. So, another possible explanation for the influence of dispositional humor on intent to use is that people who feel they are “common” fans agree that network television coverage allows too much celebrity for the world of sports. In the words of Dustin, 36, a kinesiology grad student: “I do like to see people make fun of sports figures because they take themselves too seriously a lot of times. They place such great importance on themselves to society and it’s not necessarily true.” Dustin later added, “I hate the concept of free agency because there’s no loyalty. So I like to see when an athlete goes to a new team... are they about the team or the individual? It’s a little bit if drama!” By taking themselves too seriously and acting like celebrities, athletes become characters toward whom we have negative disposition. We are not fans of diva-like athletes, and it is enjoyable to see them debased.

One open answer regarding the site Football Outsiders stated:

These people really know what they're doing. I will definitely use this site again for my own entertainment and amusement. Their no-bull approach to the subject matter, the tentative or fishing questioner, and the myriad of detailed collections originally packaged make them very very unique to me.

This participant was influenced to revisit because he was entertained by Football Outsiders. The participant then pinpoints the site's "no-bull" approach to sports coverage as a reason for his entertainment. This is in keeping with the idea that spectators do not prefer media to sugar-coat the stories of athletes and coaches. A blunt, hard-hitting approach to sports coverage would be more likely to unearth the on and off-field stories of sports characters and entertain such website users. Football Outsiders' written content is often reminiscent of a non-vulgar Deadspin. For example, Football Outsiders ran a story on September 24, 2010 entitled, *Varsity Numbers: What Do We Know?* The piece details the Fall 2010 college football season one month after the season's start. Part of the article states quite bluntly which coaches and programs must improve. Here is a quote:

We know that coaches like Minnesota's Tim Brewster, New Mexico's Mike Locksley and possibly even Mississippi's Houston Nutt need to turn things around very quickly. We also know that nobody particularly likes Lane Kiffin (Connelly, 2010).

Lane Kiffin (head football coach, University of Southern California) left his head coaching position at the University of Tennessee after only one season. During his time at Tennessee, he embarrassed the program by guaranteeing a win over Florida and ending the season with a 7-6 record. Kiffin's behavior and performance make him a negative disposition

character to fans of Tennessee, Southern California, and many other programs. Therefore, the participant who described Football Outsiders “no bull” approach as entertaining can most likely be explained by the types of dispositions formed under the theory of sports spectatorship. Kiffin’s behavior over time was self-important, and his on-field performance at Tennessee was ineffectual. The blunt treatment of sports characters toward whom we have well-established negative dispositions is thus entertaining.

One Yahoo! Sports survey taker stated, “I hate the idea of ‘celebrity’ anything.” Other survey takers also wrote about the over-celebritization of athletes *and* the sports media:

I liked [Deadspin] because it has a format I am familiar with (I read Gawker, Jezebel, io9, Lifehacker), and it has a similar tone. This is great because a lot of sports websites kind of take themselves too seriously. I love the snark!

Continuing along the ‘criticism of sports media’ line, a survey taker wrote the following about Deadspin: “I might visit it again because I like seeing sports figures mocked – especially when they *and* ESPN take themselves so seriously.” For similar reasons, Dave, a 22-year old mathematics major reported being an avid viewer of Kenny Mayne’s *Mayne Street*. This is a program in which ESPN SportsCenter feature reporter Kenny Mayne posts humorous webisodes each week of the show’s season. In these webisodes, Mayne pokes humor at the idea of applying celebrity to sports commentators. We see Mayne use his cowboy-hat wearing camera man as an attorney in the case of Mayne’s parking ticket. Better yet, we see Mayne catatonically talking about the Beatles on SportsCenter after being fed too much cold medicine by an intern. In *Mayne Street*, Mayne reminds us of our own negative dispositions toward self-important sports anchors. Then, he humorously debases them.

Raney (2003a) took this type of disposition formation a step further, stating that “the publicity of celebrity scandals may impact consumers’ attitudes toward certain stars...” (p.81). Basically, this means that we may become anti-fans of athletes who are surrounded by a celebrity scandal. When asked what she’d put on her own sports website, Felicia, a 32-year old medical employee replied, “Anything but Ben Roethlisberger!” Roethlisberger (QB, Pittsburgh Steelers) has been in the news for repeated reports of sexual assault. The first came in the summer of 2009, when Roethlisberger allegedly assaulted Andrea McNulty at a hotel in Lake Tahoe the previous year. Also, in March of 2010, Roethlisberger was accused of sexually assaulting a college student in the restroom of a bar in Milledgeville, GA. Although Roethlisberger was never actually convicted of any crime, his bad decisions around women have caused many to develop a longstanding negative disposition toward him. This example is another testament to why we love websites that make fun of celebrity athletes. We feel they have brought it on themselves.

Lastly, examples of sports website enjoyment that followed more traditional sports spectatorship theory arose in the discussions. Recall how, quite simply, we enjoy the sports stories and games that show positive endings for our favorite players and teams. For this reason, Dave disliked what he felt was the popular opinion of LeBron James (PG, Miami Heat) during the 2010 coverage of *The Decision*. *The Decision* was the name of the televised program in which James made his choice of NBA team contracts at the start of his free agency. The announcement had been long awaited, as the young star had been courted by many franchises, including the Chicago Bulls, New York Knicks, New Jersey Nets, and his own Cleveland Cavaliers. However, after weeks of media attention and his one-hour television special, James announced he’d be going to the Miami Heat. By joining the Heat alongside power forward Chris

Bosh and shooting guard Dwayne Wade, James felt he was on his way to an NBA Championship.

Immediately, critics emerged. Many felt that James had been disloyal and misleading to the Cavaliers, his franchise since joining the league in 2003. However, Dave was an established LeBron James fan. He had not enjoyed the criticism of one of his favorite basketball players. “Every single person said what LeBron did wrong with his decision, but no one said how much money he raised for the Boys and Girls Club. He left \$16-17 million on the table in Cleveland. Nobody even addressed that,” Dave had said. Being a fan, Dave was pointing out that James had used *The Decision* to raise almost \$6 million in advertiser donations for the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Furthermore, James had actually taken less money in the move to Miami than he would have made if he stayed with the Cavaliers. Overall, Dave felt James was selfless as well as a basketball star. Dave would have preferred coverage with more praise for James, in order to match a fan’s disposition.

One further story of fanship in disposition came from Billie, a 22-year old college student from Louisiana. An LSU football fan, Billie commented that she’d used the Internet to find the video of Chad Jones’ 2010 accident. She was referring to the tragic car accident in which New York Giants rookie and former LSU safety Chad Jones suffered extensive, almost crippling injury. The video shows the obliterated car, and Jones being removed on a stretcher. This was a dramatic video of a horrible off-field event for Chad Jones. While Jones is not regarded as a sports character toward whom we (or Billie) have negative disposition, the accident video still qualifies as entertainment material under disposition theory and the operational definition of the entertainment variable. The video is entertainment material with an ending we do not like (i.e., a sports character toward whom we have positive disposition is carted away on a stretcher).

In summary, humor and entertainment were the variables with the strongest direct influence on intent to use a sports website. The theory of uses and gratifications explains humor and entertainment as motives to log on, but disposition theory tells us why people enjoy what they do. In the next section, I will discuss the study's next major finding: community and its weaknesses on sports websites.

Community and Weak Influence on Intent to Use

The second-most remarkable theme in this study was the weak influence of community on sports website users. The community variable ranked last across all the methods of this study. Football Outsiders had experienced the highest degree of perceived community, and similar to the other websites I studied, there appears to be only minimal relationship between its community and intent to use. One reason for this might be the fact that the other variables (namely, information and entertainment) are what influenced the Football Outsiders survey sample's intent to use. Participants in this study most likely had other motivations and interests besides community that governed their U&G processes. For example, LaRose and Eastin (2004) had described "novel outcomes" of Internet use. These were things like getting immediate knowledge of news and events, obtaining a wealth of information, and obtaining information that is difficult to find elsewhere. Novel outcomes, as opposed to social outcomes (LaRose & Eastin, 2004) were a major motivation for the U&G processes in this study. This can be seen from many of the quotes from focus group data and open-ended survey questions. In the words of one Football Outsiders survey-taker, "I rarely view discussions, knowing the lack of factual information and [I] don't need to know someone's opinion. I would use [the site] for statistics, though." This participant felt that the community features of the site (discussion boards) were likely to be full of non-factual opinions – not the content that this participant would prefer.

However, he did remark that he would use Football Outsiders for statistics (a novel outcome of Internet U&G).

Similarly, one Deadspin survey taker wrote, “I would not use this site again because I like my sports news to be official such as ESPN. Not news or YouTube videos that anyone can post.” This quote also demonstrates that sports website users who prefer novel outcomes such as information and credibility may not also prefer community features such as discussion boards or Deadspin.com’s “Share” field. The “Share” field is where users can post their own videos as links from YouTube, Twitter, or the like.

On the other hand, some users really enjoyed the communities. “The community seems respectful,” said Barney, 29, a mass spectrometer mechanic, about the site Football Outsiders. “I like the types that the site allowed in their community,” he added. A Football Outsiders survey taker agreed: “It seems very well thought out and gives great detail on its discussions and analysis. I would want to revisit to give my own take on current football discussions.” These users differed from those above in that LaRose and Eastin’s (2004) social outcomes motivated their uses and gratifications. LaRose and Eastin (2004) had included specifically the items “find something to talk about” (p. 370) and “find others who respect my views.” (p. 370) under the category of social outcomes. Therefore, social outcomes were a priority to some of the participants, like Barney and the survey taker in this example. But, the majority of comments put other U&G expected outcomes ahead of social ones.

This finding is surprising because community features have been found to be highly significant in other studies. Jae Seo et al. (2007) had found that NFL website communities created cohesion for sports website users, and that the cohesion was related to fans intentions to use the site. The Moonki and Raney study (2007) had also stated that two-way communication

and feedback among sports website users was highly connected with sports website users' motivations to keep using sites. So, why might the community variable have been less important in this study?

The overriding theme of the community-related quotes was the expected outcomes of the people who participated in the study. Most of my study participants did not make their sports website choices with social exchange as their end satisfaction. Many of the open-ended survey answers were written to that effect:

I like the website. I am definitely a sports fan and usually rely on ESPN, but I like the variation in articles (facts, stats AND humorous takes on sports happenings). I am not a big sports chat person though, so I probably wouldn't utilize the message board feature much (regarding Yahoo! Sports).

I would use the site again. It was informative and the commentary was entertaining. I'm not usually someone who posts to message boards... so I probably would not use the sports fan interaction very much (regarding Yahoo! Sports).

Lastly, one participant wrote regarding ESPN.com: "I would use this website. I found it informative and entertaining. The communication aspect is not what is most important to me." We can see that many were not interested in the community features of the sports websites in this study, simply because they were not interested in community features at all.

This can be taken further, because many participants were not just uninterested in sports website social outcomes. They actually felt that community features took away from other expected outcomes. One survey participant noted that they found community postings to be negative: "I enjoyed Rick Reilly and Page 2, and it was easy to see scores and interviews. I didn't

like the message boards, as they just seemed like a lot of name calling” (regarding ESPN.com). “Name-calling” is in direct opposition to what LaRose and Eastin (2004) described about “respect” as a social outcome. This participant is saying that he avoids community features because he feels that they actually do the opposite of what they have intended – to provide respectful interaction. Also, LaRose and Eastin (2004) listed “feeling relaxed” and “forgetting problems” as self-reactive outcomes of Internet use. A message board of immature name-calling would probably detract from such expected outcomes. The survey-taker in this example may have been guided by the need to relax while sports web-surfing. Therefore, he would dislike “noisy” communities.

Other users added on to the idea of community features as detractors. Sports website users who were motivated by novel outcomes such as knowledge noted that community features might be a source of bias from random and inaccurate postings. Read the words of one survey-taker, about ESPN.com:

I'd use it again because of its good coverage of my favorite teams, and a few individual columnists I like to read. I tend to avoid "community" features of a site, especially anonymous message boards. If those became too prominent I'd stop visiting.

Schmidt, 24, an engineer, named one item that might alleviate the problems with anonymous message boards: credibility. When he spoke about what he looked for on sports websites, he combined his use of community features with the credibility variable. “Intelligent response,” he said. “I’m looking for analyst’s opinions and times when there’s public commentary from people who actually know the sport and can respond to the stories intelligently.” Schmidt felt that if the credibility of interactions was proven, then the social and novel outcomes could be expected. Schmidt’s idea is a community concept that is consistent with

Kassing and Sanderson's (2009) study of parasocial interaction. The posters on Floyd Landis's website wanted to be seen by and interact with a real cyclist. Furthermore, Kassing and Sanderson (2009) had referenced former Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling's Internet chat with fans on a Web-based fan site of the Boston Red Sox. In this chat, fans could interact with Schilling regarding the trade negotiations going on at the time. Schilling, a veteran MLB pitcher, could definitely be classified as a person who knows his sport and could respond to fans intelligently. We can thus conclude that although community had the least draw for repeat sports website users, community features may garner more use in the presence of convincing sports credibility.

There is one further possibility for the departure from expectations of the community findings. It is Facebook. Most of the participants in this study were Facebook users, and many of them had even been recruited to help in the study via Facebook. Prior to 2007 when data from the Jae Seo (2007) and Moonki and Raney (2007) studies was being taken, there were not as many Facebook users as there are today. Now, many people turn to Facebook as their site of choice to satisfy the expected outcome of social exchange. Thus, when they utilize sports websites, it is not with the intention of seeking community. Facebook even has many fan pages and groups for various pockets of sports fans; so much of the sports fan community described in the earlier studies has been taken over on Facebook. More research would be required to make a definitive conclusion regarding changes in online sports fan communities with increased use of Facebook, however.

Credibility as Most Popular Additive

Credibility was the one variable that people found necessary but not the only thing they looked for in a sports website. For instance, when people perceived low credibility on Deadspin.com, they also had a low intent to use. However, participants certainly perceived

credibility on Football Outsiders and this did not necessarily relate to an intent to use. One Football Outsiders survey answer read:

I found this website to be extremely boring. Yes, it had the latest NFL news and such, but it seemed, to me, that the articles were followed by over analysis and a whole bunch of statistical numbers, which makes it boring. I visit sports websites for enjoyment, not to be bogged down with numbers. That said, for this purpose, I would not visit this website again.

This woman found Football Outsiders to be a viable and credible source of official NFL news, although she also wished to be entertained. Perhaps she preferred for her sports website materials to allow her to engage in disposition formation more than she wanted to fulfill an expected outcome of U&G. That is, she might have wanted Football Outsiders to include more articles like Bill Connelly's and fewer statistics. Such theoretical differences allow us to propose a pattern. A *lack* of credibility will hinder intent to use, but a perceived presence of credibility alone may not be enough to fuel website traffic. Let us examine additional arguments in support of our credibility pattern.

"You have some people who will write who are pulling for one team," said Sheila. "And you just want to get the facts right. You don't want to be pulled one way," she added. Sheila disliked fan bias in sports writing, as she felt that it would discredit the information in an article. Therefore, she liked credibility on sports websites in order to trust the information she was getting. Sheila equated bias with a lack of correct facts. So, it could be inferred that credibility was an influential variable simply because other variables like information were too. Recall how past research has noted that website user intentions are highly affected by the trustworthiness and believability of news sites (Jo, 2005). The credibility parameter was thought to be an enhancer of website content and not necessarily a satisfaction of U&G unto itself. The data in this study

suggests that the previous statement is also true for sports websites. Perceived lack of credibility, often found in the form of bias toward a certain team or a comment post from an unfamiliar source, will drive users away from a sports website. In the words of Greg, “What I won’t go back to are the people who chug USC’s [expletive], or Kobe Bryant’s.” Overall, the results provided that a lack of credibility would drive users away from a sports website, but credibility holds little interest by itself.

This was not to say that the credibility variable was never pinpointed as a draw unto itself. “I’d have critics’ blogs, analysts’ blogs, players’ blogs...” said Schmidt when asked what he’d put on his own sports website. He cited sports critics, analysts, and players because he would find *their* content credible.

But, the most common variable mentioned in conjunction with credibility was actually humor. This is of particular interest because it happened in two different ways: 1) humor as a detractor from credibility and 2) credibility as an enhancer to humor.

In one example of humor as a detractor to credibility, a survey-taker wrote, “...The light-heartedness made it seem not so credible.” Could this mean there exists some inverse relationship between humor and credibility?

According to other open-ended survey quotes regarding the site Deadspin.com, there might be. Here are a couple of examples:

“I like the site for its humorous take on sporting events, but wouldn’t rely on it for strictly factual news.”

“I liked it because it was funny and used that humorous spin in the sports news, but because of the humorous nature I don’t know if I would take the facts seriously. It was pretty much author’s opinion, then humor, with facts mixed in.”

It was more common in this study, however, for credibility to be seen as humor’s most preferred additive. Tim, a 40-year old architect, said, “I like witty writing style with credibility.” This participant combined the humor variable with credibility.

Dustin said he liked Deadspin.com specifically *for* its credibility. His explanation: “They were using actual situations. Even though they might have been mocking them or making fun of them, it seemed like at least some of it was legitimate situations that they took and put a humorous spin on.” Basically, Dustin enjoyed his humor when he knew it was legitimate. It was as if he felt that real sports news made the jokes something he could really laugh at. This idea goes directly back to disposition formation and previous literature. Young (2008) had stated that humor was popular alongside political discourse, citing *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno, *The Late Show* with David Letterman, *Late Night* with Conan O’Brien, and *Real Time* with Bill Maher. So, what did the credibility of real sports and politics do for the humor on Deadspin and the talk shows? Recall the encoding of characters from disposition theory of humor. Credible information would aid and justify the formation of a negative disposition toward a character. This gives us a basic tenet regarding credibility and humor: the more credible the setup, the funnier the humor. If we can believe the joke-teller, it’s easier to laugh.

Summarily, this research yielded two more categories of questions about the interaction of humor with credibility: 1) What does it mean when they appear to interfere with each other and 2) Could humor sometimes be the enhancer to a source’s credibility?

To better explain the first question, recall from the previous section that the credibility variable was rarely mentioned alone in any of the qualitative data. We can say that the credibility data is consistent with the findings of past credibility studies (Jo, 2005). However, the question remains about how much credibility enhances the other variables in this study. Are sports website users who make media choices via a U&G process more influenced by credibility than sports website users whose reactions are primarily governed by disposition theory? Remember, those who log on with an expected outcome from LaRose and Eastin's (2004) list have increased probability of wanting something other than enjoyment – uses and gratifications can be fulfilled without it. Perhaps a study assessing specifically credibility and types of sports website users should be conducted.

To better explain the second question, consider the people you tend to believe. That is, does the ability to make fun of someone or something make a person appear more knowledgeable about that subject? Or, could humor be the proverbial “spoonful of sugar” that makes people enjoy learning facts? Further research is warranted.

Lastly, a clarifying point must be made regarding the references to Young's (2008) study. Recall from the literature review the overall findings of Young's (2008) study. Basically, the use of humor in political messages was found to reduce the scrutiny that people gave to those messages. To establish this finding, Young (2008) had focused on the *processing* of political messages by participants. For this reason, the present study of sports websites does not necessarily suggest the same findings as Young (2008). Scrutiny is the critical analysis that media consumers perform in their evaluation of a particular medium. In the case of a sports website, the messages are very different from those in political discourses. Sports website messages may be as basic as a game recap or as complicated as playoff predictions. What kind of

scrutiny do people give to such messages under *any* conditions, humorous or non-humorous? Their scrutiny could evaluate based upon fanship and disposition theory, information content, uses and gratifications, or any number of other criteria. In order to investigate such a topic, a study must be designed to learn what manner of scrutiny people give to the messages on sports websites. The purpose in using Young's (2008) study as a reference was merely to note the popularity of humor alongside "serious" material, and the potential of such a concept to be popular on sports websites.

In this section, we have discussed how participants cited credibility as their preferred additive to the other variables. In the next section, we will talk about the evidence of other variable interactions and what it could mean for future work.

Remaining Variable Interactions

This study had only been designed to investigate the relationships of the individual variables with intent to use. However, much of the data suggests that the variables in this study may interact in ways that influence sports website use. A future investigation of variable interactions and combinations would provide additional insight. Here are some combinations with potential for interaction effects.

Humor and Entertainment.

The humor and entertainment variables in this study were operationally defined unto themselves, but disposition theory tells us that humor could also be defined as a subset of entertainment. This is because humor enjoyment, like the enjoyment of entertainment, is governed by a continuum of affective dispositions (Raney, 2003a). Also, according to McGhee (1979), comedy can actually be construed as a form of drama; the difference is in the cues that

tell us not to take things too seriously. Two particular Deadspin quotes from the open-ended portion of the survey best corroborate these literature references:

“I thought [the website] was entertaining because it seemed to find the funny stories.”

This website, to me, is based on entertainment – not the statistics of sports or their standings. I would definitely use it again because the first time reading it I already laughed out loud. The sarcasm of the website made me want to revisit it.

These people said that they were entertained by Deadspin.com because it made them laugh. Such statements lead to the conclusion that both humor and entertainment must be studied in conjunction with intent to use. It may amount to a question of “What type of disposition formation do people most prefer to apply?”

Entertainment and Information.

Uses and gratifications theory tells us that website users who make choices on the basis of activity and self-reactive outcomes may choose different websites than those who sign on expecting novel outcomes. Accordingly, this study suggested that the entertainment variable is influential to some users and the information variable is influential to others. For instance, one Deadspin survey taker wrote:

The website was interesting because it had kind of a sarcastic way of telling sports news. I will most likely not visit the site again simply because it is just not a topic of interest to me. [The site is] up front and honest, which I like. It’s refreshing.

This woman found Deadspin.com entertaining, but it was not something that interested her. A Yahoo! participant provided similar insight: “I’ve never been into the entertainment

portion of sports.” This helps to show that even though participants may have perceived plenty of entertainment to be present on the websites, such a variable will never influence their own personal intent to use. The cognitive model of the uses and gratifications theory lists guidance, surveillance, and social exchange as benefits of certain media choices. Perhaps the above two participants made media choices under the cognitive U&G process. Furthermore, McQuail’s (1984) cultural model of uses and gratifications starts with the question, “What individual *taste* does the person possess?” If a person is “not into the entertainment portion of sports,” they could also be making their sports website decisions via McQuail’s (1984) cultural model. Some focus group members even shared the cultural U&G process. In response to Focus Group Question 4 (“What, if anything makes a sports website entertaining? Do you use sports websites to be entertained?”) Remlee, a 36-year old LSU registrar employee replied, “Nothing particularly. Usually someone either sends me something or refers me to something. But I don’t know that there’s anything I’d look at consistently.”

Taking the opposite tack, I also had participants who used websites with the expected outcome of feeling entertained. Recall from the Credibility section the woman who felt that Football Outsiders was, “boring.” She said: “...I visit sports websites for enjoyment, not to be bogged down with numbers...” In a case where a participant’s chosen function to fulfill was enjoyment, could the information variable interfere with entertainment?

This leads to the question of entertainment’s interaction with variables that pertain more to novel outcomes, surveillance, and social exchange. Do sports website users without a “taste” for entertainment feel that it interferes with the other variables? The data in this study does not suggest so; it only suggests that there are U&G differences among participants. Consider also that entertainment stories of athletes are often their real-life events. The stories are informative

whether or not a user sees them as entertaining. It could be possible that one user's information is another's entertainment. Therefore, it is not expected that the entertainment variable would be a detractor to the other variables' influences. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to study the content-type perceptions of different users. How do entertainment and information affect each other in the minds of sports website users? Future investigations should be launched.

Perception Interactions.

The above variable pairs were named specifically for their suggested effects upon each other. Recall from the Results, however, that participants perceived the presence of almost all of the variables alongside at least one other variable. That is, when participants perceived the presence of one variable, they were likely to perceive the presence of one of the others also. In one case (humor and credibility), results actually suggest that when people perceived the presence of one variable, they did not perceive the presence of the other. Do the variables affect each other from a "participant perception" standpoint, then? If so, how will this impact their intent to use?

Information as a Non-linear Influence

The last finding concerns information. In this study, participants registered high intentions to use based on sports website information even when they had perceived a low presence of information. Here are some quotes from the focus groups and open-ended survey answers to demonstrate.

The website is comprehensive. It has everything from major pro sports to high school. I have used this website in the past but was not aware of some of the available content I have seen

today. I will use it again. There is nowhere else a sports fan can get such a variety of sports information in one place.

This quote is from a participant who most likely perceived a high degree of information on ESPN.com, and who reports a definite intent to use. Note also the way that this example supports what has been said about U&G and users who desire information as an end satisfaction. But what of other participants who did not perceive the highest information but still reported a definite intent to use?

Dave had remarked that he actually liked to read ESPN when the writers made mistakes. He said, “I like bloggers who flip-flop on topics like the Saints until [the bloggers] screw up! I mainly read ESPN.”

Lastly, recall that there were open-ended answers written on the ESPN survey that said ESPN.com was confusing. But, despite some confused, uninformed visits to ESPN.com, this participant still “craves” the site:

ESPN is like the McDonald's of the sports news world. It's the most accessible if only for the fact that it is the most available. I often get cravings for it and will indulge only to find myself confused, irritated, and with an upset stomach.

Basically, it appears there is a relationship between perceived information and intent to use a sports website, but the relationship is not linear. That is, a person's intent to use does not increase with their perceived information. Instead, it appears to be constant for most degrees of perceived information. Then, intent to use trails off when perceived information gets very high.

This was clear when members of the focus groups agreed that they did not like to use sports websites if the information was of a very technical nature. “The stats were over the top but

I could see it for a fantasy league,” said Evan, a 29-year old TV sports anchor, about Football Outsiders. During another focus group, Tim responded similarly. He had been asked what he looked for on sports websites and he replied, “Analysis that doesn’t get too deep.” Open-ended survey answers regarding Football Outsiders were in agreement:

The statistical nature of this site makes it difficult for most to follow. I feel that it can only be appreciated by a very select few.

Do we really need to know the in-depth stats provided on this site? I don’t feel that the stats would give me any advantage or more knowledge than someone else, simply because the stats are so in-depth.

It might have been a little too in-depth and focused for my taste...

So while the exact relationship between information and intent to use is indeterminate, the type or degree of information appears to have an effect. Note that the last quote refers to “taste.” Could it be that there are fewer sports website users looking to satisfy a taste for technical information? Perhaps user tendencies with respect to information could be clarified via a “uses and grats” classification of sports website users. If we can map the strata of peoples’ standards for sports website information, we should be able to understand how it impacts their intentions to reuse a website.

There was one additional factor in this study that made information’s effect on intent to use hard to identify. It was the study’s mixed methodology. Participants in the focus groups had higher intentions to reuse sports websites based on information than survey takers did. This was most likely due to a combination of two reasons 1) uses and gratifications and 2) self report.

The U&G motivations of the discussion participants appeared to be different than those of the survey takers. Many of these participants, when asked the second question (“What do you look for in existing sports websites and why?”) started their answers by stating their tendencies to look for information items on sports websites. “Stats!” said Felicia. “Scores, on sites that are quick,” said Barney. “Game times,” said Barney’s wife Annie. Annie was a 29-year old schoolteacher. These quick, off-the-top-of-the-head answers corresponded to all or part of the information variable. The second part of the question, however, was “why?” What about the participants made information the most influential variable in the focus group data?

“It’s my schedule or circumstances,” Barney explained. “I travel a lot and can’t find my games out of town,” he added.

“If I don’t have the schedule up on the wall,” said Annie, who reported that she looked to sports websites for game times. Recall that Barney was a mass spectrometer mechanic and traveled a lot for his job. This made him use sports websites to get coverage of his favorite teams while away from their markets. Annie’s job as a teacher required her to be in many different classrooms during the course of a day, meaning that she would not necessarily have access to a wall-mounted team schedule or calendar. So jobs may be one reason that the focus group participants put information first. The cultural model of the uses and gratifications theory even addresses the fact that media choices are filtered through what content is accessible according to social position (i.e., Internet coverage of a certain team will be more accessible than TV coverage to an out-of-market fan). Similarly, Beth, a 19-year old college student, cited similar reasoning for why she looked for information on a sports website. “My hometown,” she said. “I try to follow the sports from my hometown.” As a student, Beth may have been too far away

from her hometown to follow its sports on TV. So the vocation of being a student caused Beth to seek out information, the same way the jobs of Barney and Annie did.

The focus group data easily corroborated what has been found in the past regarding the seeking of information under the theory of uses and gratifications. Recall Randle and Nyland's (2008) study. The fantasy sports league owners in the study made their media choices to get sports information. The same can be said for many of the participants in this study. They sought information as their end satisfaction in the uses and gratifications process that governed their sports website choice. For example, Dave had said quite simply, "I go to Yahoo! Sports and ESPN to get information." In other words, he *chose* Yahoo! Sports and ESPN.com to satisfy his goal for sports information. Farquar and Meeds (2007) study had said that the majority of their fantasy sports users went online to play their games in order to gather and maintain sports information. Similar findings were a big part of this study as well, particularly among the focus group participants. The focus groups really seemed to support the use of sports websites for information from a uses and gratifications perspective.

As an additional note, however, we should not rule out the concept of self report in the differences between the survey and focus groups. The idea behind self-report bias is that research participants want to respond in ways that make them look as good as possible (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). Differences in the focus group results and the survey results might stem from social insecurities and desires to appear sophisticated or well-informed. That is, participants may have been more likely to express preferences for humor and entertainment on an anonymous survey than in a group discussion.

To summarize, the relationship between participants' intents to reuse and the information variable is not comprehensively clear from the results of this study. Perhaps past experience with

such a reputable and ever-present entity has influenced perceptions of ESPN.com. Also, types of information and users could have telling effects. More research is required to understand the relationship between the information variable and intent to use ESPN.com (and, to a lesser degree, all of the other websites studied).

Summary of the Findings

Overall, the study yielded that the humor and entertainment variables showed the most positive effects on intent to use with respect to changes in the perceived degrees of the two variables. These findings were explained by the open-ended and focus group data, which told us two things: 1) Activity and self-reactive outcomes dominated the participants' uses and gratifications processes and 2) Humorous sports website content often gives users something they don't get from sports coverage on network TV: the mocking of athletes and figures in sports. In fact, humorous and entertaining sports website content influenced users because it gave users an outlet for their affective dispositions. The best testaments to the influence of entertainment on intent-to use were given by users who noted exclusive video content that told interesting stories about athletes on and off-the-field.

Sports website communities exhibited the weakest influence on users. Participants tended not use sports websites with social outcomes in mind. Additionally, many felt that communities on sports websites could introduce bias and "name-calling."

Credibility was found to be the most popular additive to all of the other variables. This is entirely in accordance with the results of past research, which stated that credibility was an enhancer of website content more than a draw unto itself. In this study, the variable most commonly intertwined with credibility was humor.

Other variables appeared to interact, as well. The variable pairs with the most potential for interaction effects were: humor and entertainment and information and entertainment. Also, the majority of variables were often perceived to be present along with another variable. For this reason, perception interactions have potential for future study as well.

Lastly, the information variable was of importance to sports website users, but information's influence was not linear or direct. Participants intended to use the websites (particularly ESPN) regardless of how much information they perceived to be present. High-level information actually appeared to cause website usage to decrease. Future study of the uses and gratifications typologies of sports website users is required to better understand how information relates to sports website reuse.

Overall Conclusions

Limitations and Future Studies.

There were numerous limitations of this study. The foremost was the difficulty experienced in gaining participants. This led to only 25 sets of survey data per website studied (30 for Deadspin.com). Such small numbers might have been responsible for the lack of conclusiveness of two portions of the numeric data (i.e., the relationship between information and intent to use Yahoo! Sports and the relationship between community and intent to use Deadspin.com). Moreover, the small sample was the underlying cause of most of this study's other limitations.

The initial plan for the study involved getting all of the participants to meet in small groups to take written surveys and have website-specific focus group discussions. However, despite advance-planning meeting dates, notifying potential participants, and getting free coffee

donated as an incentive, only five participants attended one of the pre-planned meetings (out of >200 potential participants invited). To gain participation, adaptations to the original plan were imperative.

For the survey, all operations were moved online. That way, participants who did not wish to commit to a meeting could do their part online on their own time. The online format introduced its own limitations, however. To put the surveys online, I used the site Surveymonkey.com. Surveymonkey.com allows surveys to be placed online free of charge, but only up to ten questions per survey. My survey was 32 questions long. Likewise, four links were necessary per website survey. In order to ensure each 4-link survey was completed by just one participant, I had to examine each set of answers to verify that each IP address of a “starting” link could be propagated through the other three. In many cases, errant data was deleted. The data used to calculate the results, however, is from participants who began and ended the surveys successfully. If funding for a paid Surveymonkey membership could be secured, all of the questions for one survey could be distributed using one link. This would eliminate some of the time that it took to validate the survey data.

Another limitation of the online survey format was that all answers are subject to individual question interpretations and abilities to operate the software. The data in this study does not suggest that operator difficulty was a problem. All survey-takers (with the exception of 15 people from an LSU undergraduate course) were recruited via Facebook or e-mail and were most likely competent Internet and PC users.

Online surveys give way to the question, “If survey-takers would only participate online, how did we get focus group participants?” Initially, the plan had been to conduct the focus groups immediately following the survey sessions. However, recall that only five participants in

this study attended one of these meetings as planned, and one interview occurred as a last-minute substitute for a cancelled focus group. The research had to be brought to groups that already existed (such as an LSU class and Baton Rouge rugby practices). Holding focus groups at other, already-existing specialized groups presented another subset of limitations: records and interpretation.

The initial plan for recording the focus groups had been to create audio or video recordings of the discussions. However, such equipment could not be secured. Therefore, all discussions were recorded via my own note-taking on a laptop. This slowed the discussions slightly and may have disrupted some natural conversational flow. In addition, I was the only researcher conducting this study so I was the only one coding and interpreting the discussions. A future study with focus group participants who are willing to commit to a meeting date would allow the researcher to secure audio or visual recording equipment so that multiple analyses of the discussion are possible. Alternatively, if more than one researcher were involved, multiple interpretations could be possible.

The final design limitation in this study was the lack of data collection regarding race, ethnicity, or other personal background. The demographic questions included in the survey were chosen for relevancy and brevity. However, future studies should allow the option of examining variables and intents to use alongside additional demographic factors.

Practical Ramifications and Suggestions.

The main findings in the study were that the survey takers' intents to use sports websites were most consistently and positively influenced by changes in their degrees of perceived humor and entertainment on those websites. The data from the discussion groups and the open-ended

survey data show information and credibility to be the second most important variable pair. The community variable has come in last on all fronts. These findings give us the following suggestions for sports websites:

1. The humorous content on all of the website viewing activities designed for this site was representative of the disposition theory of humor. That is, the humor sections viewed featured content and contributors known for humorously debasing athletes and other figures in sports. In my study, this type of humor was shown to have significant positive effect on sports website users to use sites containing the humor as described. Therefore, sports websites should develop their disposition theory-based humor content. They should also develop their marketing in order to gain a reputation for such humor content. Similar development and marketing should be done for sports websites disposition theory-based entertainment content.
2. Information and credibility did have positive effects on sports website users' intents-to-use, so current updates and headlines should still be kept in a prominent place. However, instead of spending money developing the information and credibility features, partnerships should be developed with the sports information sites ESPN.com and Yahoo! Sports – sites that users already associate with information and credibility. Newer sports websites should retain links to credible updates and headlines. All links should open to their own windows.
3. The advent of widespread Facebook use means that sports websites should play down their social networking communities. If sports website users are uninterested in communities on sports websites, it is not helpful to spend money maintaining communities. Furthermore, advertisers do not wish to buy space on lesser-used

websites and pages. Thus, it is advisable for sports websites to keep only those community features which relate to fantasy games and other sports-related functions not covered by Facebook and other social networking sites.

In conclusion, the next steps that should be taken are to try the above suggestions on an actual sports website. Further research is necessary to truly tailor sports website content for increased traffic and profitability. Communication theories tell us that people enjoy media as governed by disposition theory and that they choose media according to uses and gratifications processes. If we can use such theories to give sports website users what they want, we will get website re-use.

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Appendix A

Survey, Focus Group, and Interview Questions

Table 11 Constructs and Measurement Items	
Construct	Item
Perceived Entertainment	1. I was entertained by the content of this Web site.
	2. I could communicate with other sports fans who enhanced my entertainment while using this website.
	3. Viewing this site is like having a conversation with a commentator who gives me all of the best conflict and drama going on in the world of sports.
	4. I felt that this Web site would be updated frequently with fresh, entertaining content. (This item and the previous 4 are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.)
	5. Because of the entertainment value of this website, I would like to visit it again in the future. (A 5-point Likert-type scale from Definitely Disagree to Definitely Agree is used for rating this item.)
Perceived Humor	1. I found the content of this Web site humorous.
	2. I could communicate with other sports fans who enhanced the humor of this website by making comments that would be really humiliating to sports characters who deserve getting made fun of.
	3. Viewing this site is like having a conversation with a commentator who gives me the funniest take on the world of sports.
	4. I felt that this Web site would be updated frequently with fresh, really funny content. (This item and the previous 4 are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.)
	5. Because of the humor associated with this website, I would like to visit it again in the future. (A 5-point Likert-type scale from Definitely Disagree to Definitely Agree is used for rating this item.)
Perceived Community	1. I noticed that the content of this Web site was really geared toward its distinct community of users.
	2. I could communicate in real time with the site's community while using this website.
	3. Viewing this site is like experiencing a great discussion with a distinct group of other sports fans.
	4. I felt that this Web site's message boards would be used frequently. (This item and the previous 4 are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.)
	5. Because of the community of this website, I would like to visit it again in the future. (A 5-point Likert-type scale from Definitely Disagree to Definitely Agree is used for rating this item.)
Perceived Information	1. I observed a lot of sports information while navigating through this Web site.
	2. I could communicate with other sports fans who enhanced my sports knowledge while using this website.
	3. Viewing this site is like having a conversation with a sports analyst who gives me all of the best information from the world of sports.
	4. I felt that this Web site would be updated frequently with breaking sports news and current stats and analysis. (This item and the previous 4 are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.)
	5. Because of the information on this website, I would like to visit it again in the future. (A 5-point Likert-type scale from Definitely Disagree to Definitely Agree is used for rating this item.)
Perceived Credibility	1. I believed what I saw/read on this Web site.
	2. I would have opportunities to communicate with sports subject matter experts while using this website, so that I could interactively gain sports knowledge I can trust.
	3. Viewing this site is like having a conversation with a real sports expert who has a lot of experience.
	4. I felt that this Web site would be updated frequently with factual, reliable content. (This item and the previous 4 are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.)
	5. Because of the credibility of this website, I would like to visit it again in the future. (A 5-point Likert-type scale from Definitely Disagree to Definitely Agree is used for rating this item.)

Table 12
Open Ended
Item 1
Explain in your own words how you feel about this website. Would you use it again? If so, why? If not, why not? What characteristic(s) make you want to revisit this website?

Table 13 Demographic and Sports Media Use Questions	
Item	
I use sports websites	Daily Weekly Maybe 2 or 3 times per month Never
Rank the following media according to which you use the most to enjoy sports coverage.	TV Most Second most Middle Second least Least Internet Most Second most Middle Second least Least Newspaper Most Second most Middle Second least Least Magazine Most Second most Middle Second least Least Radio Most Second most Middle Second least Least
What is your age?	_____ years (Write EXACT age if you are 18-96). 97 = 97 or older 98= Don't know 99=Refused
Record your sex.	1 Male 2 Female
What is the last grade or class you completed in school? Circle one number.	1 None, or grades 1-8 2 High school incomplete (grades 9-11) 3 High school graduate (grade 12 or GED certificate) 4 Technical, trade or vocational school AFTER high school 5 Some college, no 4-year degree (includes associate degree) 6 College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree) 7 Post-graduate training/professional school after college (toward a Masters/Ph.D., Law or Medical school)
Rate how often you use the internet or email from...	a. home? – several times a day, about once a day, 3-5 days a week, 1-2 days a week, every few weeks, or less often b. work? – several times a day, about once a day, 3-5 days a week, 1-2 days a week, every few weeks, or less often c. someplace other than home or work? – several times a day, about once a day, 3-5 days a week, 1-2 days a week, every few weeks, or less often

Table 14
Focus Group Questions
Items
If you were making your own sports website, what would you put on it?
What do you look for on an existing sports website and why?
What, if anything, makes a sports website funny? Is humor important to you in determining whether or not you'd visit the website more?
What, if anything, makes a sports website entertaining? Do you use sports websites to be entertained?
What, if anything, do you like about sports website communities? Is 'community' of sports websites important to you?
What about information? Do you use sports websites to get sports information?
What about credibility? How important is credibility on a sports website?
Overall, what makes you want to use a sports website again and again? What characteristic makes you want to revisit the website?

Appendix B:

Distributed Instructions for Website Tours

Appendix B

Deadspin.com Instruction Sheet

1. Go to <http://www.deadspin.com>
2. Scroll through the home page and click on 2 stories that look of interest to you. Quickly read each one. In one of the stories, scroll down to its comment board. Read 5 brief comments.
3. Click the “DEADSPIN” at top left. This will take you back to the home page.
4. Click on the white field to the left of a button labeled ‘Share.’ This field is located in the center of the screen. Note that it allows users to paste a YouTube link and then label it with a hashtag such as “#nhl” in order to make a contribution to a particular category of material.
5. Click on the hashtag “#duan” (to the right of the Share field). This stands for Deadspin up all Night. Scroll down and click on 1 story that looks of interest to you.
6. Go back to the home page. In the Search field (upper right), enter a sport, team, sport event, or prominent name in sports (examples: college basketball, Duke, NFL draft, LSU baseball). From the search results screen, click on a story that looks of interest to you.
7. Click on the first two phrases of linked text you see in that story (sometimes there aren’t more than one, in that case just click on it). Hyperlinked text is in bluish-grey and is underlined when you move the mouse over it.
8. Write down the nature (i.e. does the website belong to a reporter, online newspaper or magazine, TV channel, etc.) of the website you landed on after clicking on the hyperlinked text.

First website _____

Second website (if there's

one)_____

Instruction Sheet for ESPN.com

1. Go to <http://espn.go.com/>
2. Scan the 'Headlines,' just to the right of the large video player of 'Top Stories' at front and center. Click on a 'Headline' or 'Top Story' video that is of interest to you, and review the video or article. (NOTE: If you wish to pause any video that plays automatically, move the mouse over the playing video and single-click the pause icon that appears in the center of the video player.)
3. Click the small, black 'ESPN' icon at the top left corner of the screen. This control will take you back to <http://espn.go.com/> from any screen. Scroll down the page until you can see two rectangles with white backgrounds and links to columns by Bill Simmons and Rick Reilly. In Rick Reilly's block, click the word 'Column' and review Rick Reilly's column.
4. Return to the home page. Look above the 'Top Story' player at the text that reads 'All Scores NFL...College Football/Basketball...etc. Click on a sport and scan the resulting page.
5. Return to the home page. Look at the row of CAPITALIZED headings ABOVE the row that says 'All Scores NFL...College Football/Basketball...etc.' Click on the tab that says ALL SPORTS and look at the list of sports covered by ESPN.com. When you finish viewing the ALL SPORTS tab, return to the home page.

6. Within the same row of capitalized headings, click FANTASY and pick a corresponding fantasy game to click on from the tab that comes up. On the page for the Fantasy sports tab you chose, find and click the heading for Message Boards. Scan the boards, and click on any threads that look interesting to you. Return to the home page.
7. Click on the SPORTSNATION heading, and then click on ‘Conversations’ on the tab that comes up. Look at the conversations going on right now on ESPN, and click on any threads that are of interest to you. Read comments.
8. Click the little ESPN.com at the top left corner to return to the home page. Find the heading that says ESPN3 located almost directly above the tab that reads SPORTSNATION. Click on ESPN3.
9. On the ESPN3 page scroll down to the tabs that have the program schedules. You can view events that are live or upcoming, or click REPLAY to watch a game or event that has already taken place. After completing your exploration of ESPN3, return to the home page.
10. The last area to look at is PAGE 2. (Click PAGE 2.) Scroll down the page to view all stories and columns. Click on at least two PAGE 2 items that are of interest to you and review each one.

Instructions for FootballOutsiders.com

1. Go to <http://footballoutsiders.com/>. The site is also called FO for short.
2. Look at the headings to the right of the large “FOOTBALL OUTSIDERS” graphic at the top left. Move the mouse over the heading that reads “More...” A menu will appear when you do this. Click the menu item that reads “First Time Here.”

3. Read the answer to the first **Q: What are we talking about here?**
4. Scan quickly the entire Q&A list. Then, scroll all the way back up to the top and click the “Football Outsiders” graphic at the top left. This control will allow you to return to the home page.
5. In the full-color block at left, click on the main or one of the recent feature stories of interest to you. Read the story, or read enough to get the idea if the story is long.
6. Return to home. Scroll down and scan the front page. Get an idea of the types of stories that get posted on this site.
7. Go back to the top and look at the right side of the page, where there is a white box with three tabs labeled across the top of the box: “Extra Points,” “FO on ESPN,” and “FO in the Papers.” Click on the ESPN and ‘Papers’ tabs and look over the headlines. Note to yourself that these are links to content produced *by* Football Outsiders but used by ESPN, the New York Times, and numerous other outlets. Click on any of these stories that look of interest to you.
8. Go to the heading ‘Discussion,’ and click on it. From the menu that comes up below it, click Extra Points. Quickly read over a discussion on that page to learn about FO discussions. Find one other comment board on Football Outsiders (like one following an article, for example). Read 4 comments on that board.
9. Last, click on the heading, “Statistics” and look at the menu that appears. Pick one or two items from the menu and look at the comparisons between the teams, position players, or units. Feel free to click on the links of any statistical parameters FO uses that you may want to understand better.

Instructions for Yahoo! Sports

1. Go to <http://sports.yahoo.com/>
2. Look over the Home page that comes up when you click on the link. Scan from left to right and scroll down to the bottom of the page. Click on any of the Headlines or Articles that look interesting to you. Note that the columns are located at the far left under the top window in a block labeled “Yahoo! Sports Experts.”
3. Return to the Home page by clicking on the Yahoo! Sports logo at the screen’s upper left. Scroll down to the “mid” section of the Home page. The center block (just to the right of the Yahoo! Sports Experts”) is labeled “Video Spotlight.” Click where it says “More Videos.” The resulting screen will play one ad before you can pause the video by clicking on the “Pause” symbol that becomes visible when you move your mouse over the bottom left of the video player. Once you have successfully paused the video player, scroll down.
4. Scroll over the entire screen of available videos. Scan also the listing at the far left of all the video categories available. Most categories are simply the names of sports and games, but click on the “Entertainment” category and look at the videos that come up. Click on and watch any videos that may be of interest to you, in “Entertainment” or any category. Whenever you are ready, return to the home page.
5. Return to the home page. At the far right of the screen, single-click the drop-down menu labeled “Fantasy.” From the subject headings across the top of the screen just below the banner, click “News and Analysis.” On the screen that comes up, scroll down and find the link that says More News and Analysis>> in small print at the bottom of the left column. Click on that link.

6. Review the list of available information for Fantasy team owners. Click on any information that looks on interest to you, and note that the entries labeled “Big Board” are comprehensive statistical rankings of the top 50 Fantasy players in each of four sports. If you click on a link that says it is a “Big Board” for a particular sport, you will also find accesses to the Big Boards for other sports. On the row of subject headings, click Fantasy Home.

7. From the same row of subject headings, click Message Boards. Pick “Baseball.” Scan the “General” board, reading whatever threads may look interesting to you. Then, go back to the headings along the top of the screen below the “BASEBALL” banner and click the heading that says “Message Boards.” Select and scan one more message board, reading whatever threads may look interesting to you.

8. Return to the Yahoo! Sports home page. Move the mouse over the drop-down menu “NCAAF” and on the resulting menu click “Rivals.com home.” Scan the page and get an idea what’s on it while scrolling down. At the bottom left-land corner of the page, click the link “About.” Read the brief article on the page that comes up.

9. On the far left of the grey-black row of menus at the top of the screen just below the banner, click “Home.” This will return you to the Yahoo! Sports home page. Single-click the drop-down menu labeled “More” at the right of the screen. The next screen is an informative but graphic-free listing of items you can find via Yahoo! Sports. From the listing of “BLOGS” *briefly* scan/explore the blog “Dirty Tackle.”

Read any text, check out any photos, or watch any videos that may look of interest to you.

Select and review any other blogs that catch your interest, also.

Appendix C:

Example of E-mail or Facebook Message

Including Instructional Steps for the Online Surveys

Appendix C

Example of E-mail or Facebook Message Including Instructional Steps for the Online Surveys

Hi! Here is the information you need to help me with my study. Please follow these Steps in order, and try not to interact with other people during the process. I'm trying to get your own thoughts, as free of influence as possible :)

STEP 1) Open the SECOND MESSAGE I am sending you. The subject is 'Instructions for Yahoo'

STEP 2) Follow the directions on that message to complete the sports website viewing activity.

STEP 3) Do the survey, present as the four links below (because I would have had to pay \$\$ to get more than 10 questions per link). I know this seems like a lot but each part is 10 questions or fewer. NOTE – IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU DO THE SURVEY IN ORDER, PARTS 1 THROUGH 4. Please do the survey in order of the part numbers. THANKS!

Also, as you finish each survey page, be sure to click the buttons that say NEXT OR DONE at the bottoms of the survey pages. Each page is short but be careful not to skip pages of survey parts.

Part 1 <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YR2WRKD>

Part 2 <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YRWVJYY>

Part 3 <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YRTXGY6>

Part 4 <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YRBNTC9>

STEP 4) You're done! If it wasn't too much trouble can you forward this and ask other people to help? They'll get different materials than the ones you had, but the overall level of involvement on their part will be the same.

That's all for now. PLEASE just do this for me in the next week or two and it'll be a big help.

THANKS again,

c

Appendix D:

Analysis of Focus Group Responses

Appendix D: Analysis of Focus Group Responses

Table 15				
Analysis of Question 1 Responses				
Group Date	Number of Discussion Participants	Sports Website Material Discussed	Main Ideas of all Content/Variable-related Answers given to Question 1: If you were making your own sports website, what would you put on it?	Variable or category noted as important to the speaker (number of times)
10.28.2009	3	General sports website discussion	P1: Weird or odd stories, not so much the factual news	Entertainment (1)
2.23.10	6	Deadspin.com	P1: Latest and most interesting moments from whatever sports are in season P2: Stats, records, and information	Information (2)
3.7.10	1(interview)	Deadspin.com	P1: You'd have to have the latest headlines. But if I were making my own website, I'd definitely go for the more abstract, special interest stories. Examples are the curling that happens year-round instead of just what we see every four years or even the Paralympics you never hear about. These things aren't mainstream but they are of interest to larger audiences.	Information (1) Entertainment (1)
4.19.10	5	Football Outsiders	P4: Hockey. Anything but Ben Roethlisberger. P2: Interviews with Polamalu, Tennis stats P5: FIFA World Cup coverage. P3: Any college sports.	Favorite sports (3) Information (1)
7.14.10	5	General sports website discussion	P1: Rugby, with schedules, stats and miscellaneous. P3: When I read sports websites, a lot of times everyone has the exact same opinion. So give the other side of it. P4: I like a lot of videos. I like to read it and then see what happened. P3: It's helpful when you can give your own comments. P2: Critics' blogs, analyst blogs, players' blogs, commentary from the public, stats, videos, and user responses.	Favorite sports (1) Credibility (2) Information (3) Community (2)
7.27.10	3	General sports website discussion	P1: Schedules, and the history of the team and the sport. P2: I always like funny stuff. But definitely clips of top plays. Or blooper reels like ESPN's 'Not Top Ten.' Videos and funny pictures. ALL: Rugby coverage	Information (1) Humor (1) Favorite sports (3)

Table 16 Analysis of Question 2 Responses				
Group Date	Number of Discussion Participants	Sports Website Material Discussed	Main Ideas of all Content/Variable-related Answers given to Question 2: What do you look for on an existing sports website and why?	Variable or category noted as important to the speaker (number of times)
10.28.09	3	General sports website discussion	P2: I have an app on my iPhone that gives me the ESPN Sportscenter information. P1: I usually check out UPI, Reuters, Digg. For odd news, health, and science. The only sports thing I go to regularly is BBC because they talk about rugby.	Information (1) Entertainment (1) Favorite sports (1)
2.23.10	6	Deadspin.com	P3: Specific teams. P1: Unbiased analysis. The facts without any "pull" for one team. P4: If I grew up playing a certain sport, I'll look for that sport.	Favorite sports (2) Credibility (1)
3.7.10	1(interview)	Deadspin.com	P1: Personnel, standings, trades. I like to see who's changing, who is impacting their new teams. I hate the concept of free agency, because there's no loyalty. So I like to see when an athlete goes to a new team. Do they make it better or worse? Are they about the team or the individual? It's a little bit of drama!	Information (1) Entertainment (1)
4.19.10	5	Football Outsiders	P4: Stats. P1: Scores. Quickly. Schedule or circumstances. I travel and can't find my game while I'm out of town. P2: Game times, interesting articles. I do like funny stuff, too. P3: I will read a good writeup. I usually go by writers. P4: I will read an article that catches my eye. P5(also): Pictures.	Information (3) Entertainment (1) Humor (1) Credibility (1)
7.14.10	5	General sports website discussion	P2: Intelligent response. I'm looking for analyst's opinions and times when there's public commentary from people who actually know the sport and can respond to the stories intelligently. P3: I like bloggers who flip-flop on topics (like the Saints) until they screw up!	Credibility (1) Community (1) Humor (1)
7.27.10	3	General sports website discussion	P3: The latest scores of whatever I'm interested in. P1: Upcoming schedules, football for fall, and rugby tournament schedules. P3: Analysis that doesn't get <i>too</i> deep. P2: Tiger Droppings and Deadspin. I don't like going to websites where it's just some talking head. I'd rather keep up with what's going on rather than just baseball scores. P1: Just crazy, 'off-the-wall' stuff. ALL: International and unique sports content.	Information (2) Favorite sports (4) Credibility (1) Entertainment (2) Humor (1)

Table 17 Analysis of Question 3 Responses				
Group Date	Number of Discussion Participants	Sports Website Material Discussed	Main Ideas of all Content/Variable-related Answers given to Question 3: What, if anything, makes a sports website funny? Is humor important to you in determining whether or not you'd visit the website more?	Variable or category noted as important to the speaker (number of times)
10.28.09	3	General sports website discussion	P2: If it's a public interest story about an athlete doing something off the field, it's not as important to me to see it unless he's doing something ridiculously embarrassing.	Humor (1)
2.23.10	6	Deadspin.com	P1: There was an article about families in the Olympics, and they talked about a brother-sister ice skater pair, which is kind of creepy. The comments were really funny. But I would only go back to this website if I wanted to laugh. P2 (citing a February 2010 video in which a college squash player screams a string of 'trash talk' at an opponent): I'd seen it a bunch of times before and it's <i>still</i> funny.	Humor (2)
3.7.10	1(interview)	Deadspin.com	P1: There was a story about a hockey player whose last name would be humorous to a 14-year old boy... there was a story about a Jamaican dog-sledder. Both of those stories were funny, although I couldn't really tell if the Jamaican dog-sledder was real or not.	Humor (1) Credibility (1)
4.19.10	5	Football Outsiders	P5 and P2: Comment boards and message boards were funny.	
7.14.10	5	General sports website discussion	P3 (referring to a series of ESPN webisodes in which the host uses a lot of self deprecating humor as well as jokes about others): Kenny Mayne is funny.	Humor (1)
7.27.10	3	General sports website discussion	P1: I definitely want jokes, cartoons.	Humor (1)

Table 18 Analysis of Question 4 Responses				
Group Date	Number of Discussion Participants	Sports Website Material Discussed	Main Ideas of all Content/Variable-related Answers given to Question 4: What, if anything, makes a sports website entertaining? Do you use sports websites to be entertained?	Variable or category noted as important to the speaker (number of times)
10.28.09	3	General sports website discussion	P1: Of all the websites that I view while I'm bored at work, it's whichever ones have the best updates for the most current things.	Information (1)
2.23.10	6	Deadspin.com	P1: Just the peoples' comments were entertaining.	
3.7.10	1(interview)	Deadspin.com	P1 (reiterated answer for what was funny).	
4.19.10	5	Football Outsiders	P1: I like the statistics. P3: The stats were too in-depth for me. They were good, but not a conversation piece.	Information (1)
7.14.10	5	General sports website discussion	P4 (referred to a dramatic event in the sports world): I found the video of Chad Jones [accident]. P1 (referred to violent behavior in the sports world): I watched Elizabeth Lambert. P2 (referred to another incident of violent in-game behavior): I looked up Brittany Greiner. P3: Yeah, and LeGarret Blount.	Entertainment (4)
7.27.10	3	General sports website discussion	P1: I definitely want to be entertained!	Entertainment (1)

Table 19 Analysis of Question 5 Responses				
Group Date	Number of Discussion Participants	Sports Website Material Discussed	Main Ideas of all Content/Variable-related Answers given to Question 5: What, if anything, do you like about sports website communities? Is 'community' of sports websites important to you?	Variable or category noted as important to the speaker (number of times)
10.28.09	3	General sports website discussion	P2: I don't really look at the comment boards, I'm just looking at primary articles. P3: Me too.	
2.23.10	6	Deadspin.com	P5: I liked that the site lets people add to the website as soon as things happen, like from camera videos.	Community (1)
3.7.10	1(interview)	Deadspin.com	P1: Aside from just reading the comments, I didn't really look into them much. Didn't look to see if there was a place where I could comment, because I don't normally do that anyway.	
4.19.10	5	Football Outsiders	P4: I liked that the community seems active. P3: Humor and sarcasm! P2: Reading down, you could see the conversation as you go. P1: The community seems respectful. I liked the personality types of the people in the community.	Community (2) Humor (1)
7.14.10	5	General sports website discussion	<i>Skipped question, as community features had been largely addressed in Q1. The participants expressed that they preferred sports websites to have specific community features, such as comment boards.</i>	
7.27.10	3	General sports website discussion	P2 (talking about his rugby team): About Yahoo! Sports, we set up a community in order to avoid back and forth e-mailing. ALL were interested in good community features, even if the community was not surrounding some story.	Community (3)

Table 20 Analysis of Question 6 Responses				
Group Date	Number of Discussion Participants	Sports Website Material Discussed	Main Ideas of all Content/Variable-related Answers given to Question 6: What about information? Do you use sports websites to get sports information?	Variable or category noted as important to the speaker (number of times)
10.28.09	3	General sports website discussion	ALL: Yes. P2: When it comes to something like sports, things develop all the time and you want to know what's going on.	Information (3)
2.23.10	6	Deadspin.com	ALL: Yes.	Information (6)
3.7.10	1(interview)	Deadspin.com	P1: I didn't really think the site was applicable in that way, it was more a commentary.	
4.19.10	5	Football Outsiders	P3: Site's information was good. Stats were over the top, but I could see it for a fantasy league. P1: They have a lot of information, but figuring out how to access it in a coherent manner.. P5: I access a lot of sports websites on my phone just for the simplicity.	Information (1)
7.14.10	5	General sports website discussion	P2: I go to Yahoo! Sports and ESPN to get information. P3: NFL.com and NCAA.com. P1: Team websites. LSU website and Saints website.	Information (1) Favorite sports (2)
7.27.10	3	General sports website discussion	P1: Yes, regarding the history. Trivia related to the sport.	Information (1)

Table 21				
Analysis of Question 7 Responses				
Group Date	Number of Discussion Participants	Sports Website Material Discussed	Main Ideas of all Content/Variable-related Answers given to Question 7: What about credibility?How important is credibility on a sports website?	Variable or category noted as important to the speaker (number of times)
10.28.09	3	General sports website discussion	P1: I like brief synopses of articles in order to tell if you want to click on it or not.	Credibility (1)
2.23.10	6	Deadspin.com	P6: I liked the links to sources and original articles posted by reporters. P2: There were a lot of articles and it seemed pretty credible.	Credibility (1)
3.7.10	1(interview)	Deadspin.com	P1: They were using actual situations. They might have been mocking or making fun of them, but it was legitimate.	
4.19.10	5	Football Outsiders	P4: Names of the writers and players I recognized made this site credible. P5: The fact that they write for ESPN and New York Times, also.	Credibility (1)
7.14.10	5	General sports website discussion	P1: It's important! ESPN is what's credible. P2: Yahoo! Sports is credible.	Credibility (2)
7.27.10	3	General sports website discussion	P3: I can't stand reading comments from just the general public. I like witty writing style with credibility. P2: With Tiger Droppings, the only comments that are credible stay on top. P1: What gets to me is the bloggers..	Humor (1) Credibility (1)

Table 22 Analysis of Question 8 responses				
Group Date	Number of Discussion Participants	Sports Website Material Discussed	Main Ideas of all Content/Variable-related Answers given to Question 8: Overall, what makes you want to use a sports website again and again? What characteristic makes you want to revisit the website?	Variable or category noted as important to the speaker (number of times)
10.28.09	3	General sports website discussion	P2(mentioned a website with a story on Larry Johnson): It was definitely a funny take on recent days. P1: I've got a very short attention span so 2-line summaries of articles are good.	Humor (1)
2.23.10	6	Deadspin.com	<i>No additional opinions offered.</i>	
3.7.10	1(interview)	Deadspin.com	P1: I do like to see people make fun of sports figures because they take themselves seriously a lot of times.. Seeing the athletes mocked and made fun of - the humorous aspect.	Humor (1)
4.19.10	5	Football Outsiders	P4: I'd visit again but my interest in football is shallower. I'd recommend. P5: Maybe during football season - during playoffs to pick teams. P1: I could see checking it out but more during football season. P2: More during the season - for fantasy purposes. Can't see it a lot during the off-season.	Information (2)
7.14.10	5	General sports website discussion	P2: I like them credible, easily accessible. I want to use one again if it's complete -- all the sports are there whether you want them or not (like lacrosse and NASCAR). ALL made comments about their particular favorite sports being important to them on websites. P1: Not NASCAR. Credibility.	Credibility (2) Information (1) Favorite sports (5)
7.27.10	3	General sports website discussion	P2: Sports that I care about - rugby and international sports websites. And, the latest news! P1: Obscure sports quarterly... interactive games and trivia but not the same stuff for-[expletive]-ever P3: I'd like funny stuff that's well written. P2(referring to bias): What I won't go back to are the people who chug USC's [expletive] or Kobe Bryant's...	Favorite sports (1) Information (2) Humor (1) Credibility (1)

Vita

Cara De Carlo obtained her Bachelor's of Science in Chemistry from Allegheny College in May of 2000. She worked as an analytical chemist for Sigma Corporation until November of 2002. At that time, Ms. De Carlo became a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Chemistry at Louisiana State University (LSU). As a Ph.D. candidate, Ms. De Carlo researched free radical formation at the surfaces of particulate air pollution (PM_{2.5}). She left LSU in May of 2004 to become an environmental scientist at the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality. In January of 2008, Ms. De Carlo enrolled in the Master's program at LSU'sanship School of Mass Communication. Her Master's research investigated sports website content in order to learn what keeps sports website users. Ms. De Carlo's Master's degree will be awarded in December of 2010. Her goal since beginning the program is employment as a sports/entertainment writer or web content producer.