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# The Effects of a Web Presence on Sportscasting Audiences

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# THE EFFECTS OF A WEB PRESENCE ON SPORTSCASTING AUDIENCES

A thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Journalism

by  
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Approved by

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Marshall University  
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Adam Cavalier

2011

## **Dedication**

To my father for teaching me to love sports.

To my mother for teaching me that there is more in life than sports.

To my girlfriend for putting up with me as I worked long nights crafting the words herein as well as for loving sports with me.

To my thesis committee members, Chris, Chuck and Rob for their advice and guidance.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to determine how much and what type of Web presence/content effectively draws listeners and viewers to the major sportscasts a station presents. Ad revenue, viewership/listenership and audience fragmentation all are conundrums in today's fluctuating media landscape. Combine those issues with the present economic crisis and the vast majority of media companies must rethink the way they do business. This research seeks to lay groundwork as to what new strategies effectively draw listeners/viewers back to the traditional media of radio and television while expanding upon the relatively new online media offerings. Furthermore, this research is meant to serve as a guideline for efforts to integrate radio and television web-based components where they relate to sports.

Focus groups were used to elicit responses from 14 individuals regarding what they preferred in online and over-the-air sports content, and how they utilized both venues in conjunction with one another. The results from this purposive sample of Marshall fans show that online offerings do affect viewing habits at a national stage; however, this habit is far less evident for the subjects' favorite teams, to which they are so in tune that they so fervently seek out information that it matters not from where that information comes, be it a newspaper, radio, television or Facebook status.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In today's fast-paced journalistic world defined by the 24-hour news cycle, consumers of media are accustomed to getting information in an instant through a variety of online channels, be it via the website of a news entity, the Twitter or Facebook accounts of a beat writer or even an e-mail sent from a friend. Going to the Web is even more prevalent for sports audiences, which may choose to view highlights immediately following a game through any number of channels. Even with the demand for this type of information, some stations have de-emphasized local sports, in part because of the recession, but also because these television and radio stations are unable to bring viewers or listeners to their primary revenue source because of increased market fragmentation.

Instead, these users receive their information from team websites, ESPN or other Internet sources. These multimedia users may view highlights and photos or read game summaries and statistics of their local team or otherwise gain information on the occurrences surrounding their favorite team at their own pace (Pergament, 2009). In response, many over-the-air entities have produced exclusive Web content to bolster their over-the-air sportscasts; for instance, Huntington, W.Va.'s NBC affiliate, WSAZ-TV, allows web-savvy users access to raw unedited interviews from Marshall football's signing day in addition to the packaged content delivered over-the-air (WSAZ Sports Staff, 2010). As radio revenue falls (Clifford, 2008) and mass media audiences – read television audiences -- become more fragmented (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001), it will be

increasingly important for media entities to use their Web presences to push more listeners/viewers to the over-the-air components of their sportscasts by promoting those components on the website at an earlier time. These promotions can be for the 5 p.m. newscast, or the play-by-play account of a university sporting event.

As more and more stations reduce the number of staffers dedicated solely to producing sports content – a pair of Buffalo television stations now have news reporters, as opposed to sports reporters covering weekend sports (Pergament, 2009) – it will be imperative for those sports reporters who remain to be capable of multitasking. These hybrid sports reporters must be concerned with more than just broadcasting; each sportscaster will need the ability to act as his/her own promoter (Fuller, 2008). In a convergent world, journalists must be able to multitask over multiple platforms. Gone are the days where broadcasters could just be broadcasters (Fuller, 2008). Today, sports journalists must be capable of promoting themselves, reading copy effectively and pleasing management and advertisers (Fuller, 2008). Tewksbury (2005) recognizes the potential websites have for niche audiences in research on news specialization:

Because there are no geographic boundaries to the reach of the Web, news sites can be accessed by a much larger potential audience than is the case with their offline outlets. That should not imply a mass-market orientation to sites, however. Online news

sites can develop unique identities that have less to do with geography than with content expertise. For example, online news readers looking for information about the Indianapolis 500 automobile race can read a national news site, but they may be better served by the online version of an Indianapolis television broadcaster. (p. 335)

While Tewksbury (2005) validates the global nature of the Web, he also suggests that a local sportscaster may create a local following for his or her over-the-air broadcasts by frequently posting creative content online. Current trends indicate that as the market stabilizes and radio and television revenues rebound, marketers will begin to make their way to Web and mobile sources such as Twitter to “gain more eyeballs” (Garofoli, 2009, para. 2). As the Web becomes a more attractive forum for advertisers, sports broadcasters will need to use the online arena to help point more online users to the streams of over-the-air content that continue to account for the bulk of revenue (Garofoli, 2009). As broadcasters open lines of communication online, they will make themselves available to a community where participants may also serve as contributors.

Media elites and professionals once dominated the agenda setting power of discussion; however, the Internet has outmoded that tradition (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). The ability of users to place their voices alongside the voices of the professional sportscaster in an open forum such as Twitter might endear many broadcasters to these fans as interaction increases (Chaffee & Metzger,

2001; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Although the professionals' messages may lose some power or prestige because of a fragmented market (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001), they will gain new attention if the information contained in their messages is buzz-worthy. In other words, the professionals' messages need to create discussion and increase interaction. This discussion and interaction should give listeners and viewers a higher level of trust and reliance in the person producing the content as those users/listeners/viewers continually return to that source for trustworthy and reliable information (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The question then becomes at what level this online discussion enables a broadcast entity to draw listeners to its primary revenue stream.

Little research has been conducted in regard to the effectiveness of a Web presence on over-the-air sportscasting audiences; however, it is this lack of scholarly research that makes finding out the influences of the different media platforms on one another so important. People still enjoy listening to the radio (Clifford, 2010), people still enjoy watching television (Garofoli, 2009) and yet people are flocking to the Internet for information more and more frequently (Garofoli, 2009). Thus, the question becomes how do broadcast media entities specializing in sports utilize the unique functions of the respective online media platforms to draw users to the primary revenue producing channel. This research will examine how previous studies involving radio and television may be transcended to apply to the online community.

The purpose of this research is to discover how much and what type of Web presence/content effectively draws listeners and viewers to the major sportscasts a station presents. Ad revenue, viewership/listenership and audience fragmentation all are conundrums in today's fluctuating media landscape. Combine those issues with the present economic crisis and the vast majority of media companies must rethink the way they do business. This research will explore potential connections media companies can make between radio/television and the online realm with the hope of providing suggestions for future operations in both fields. Furthermore, this research is meant to explore what diehard – a term frequently used by participants in the study to describe themselves - fans consume as they use both radio and television with web-based components when it relates to sports. The hope with this qualitative research is that it is used as a starting point for research into news as well as other media markets and fans use of web-based content in the effort to ascertain how media entities draw users to their primary revenue channels.

The thesis hypothesizes that the more nuanced Web presences – those that satisfy multiple needs of users -- will be more likely to draw listeners and viewers to the entities' main sportscasting events because of the increased sense of interactivity and trust well done multimedia reporting creates. The most successful Web presences will be the ones that creatively give people a reason to tune in to broadcasts while, at the same time, sparking discussion. Through this hypothesis, the hope is to answer the questions: what type of

content is best for drawing people to an over-the-air sports broadcast and at what level does that user become reliant on that Web content as a consistent source of information regarding his/her favorite teams? This study will be rooted in Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumer & Katz, 1975) and Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

Both Uses and Gratifications Theory as well as Dependency Theory presuppose heavily active and involved audiences (Blumler & Katz, 1975; Ball-Rokeach & Defleur, 1976). Having a Web presence allows for audience interaction to both a station and individual reporters (Secko, 2009), which creates a more active audience that is more likely to depend on a reliable Web source (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). This aspect is especially true with sports audiences, which are typically active audiences, continually craving and searching for more information about their favorite teams (Ganz & Wenner, 1991). Therefore, because of the active nature of sports fans as a particular audience – one that relies on a media outlet that provides a consistent level of information -- a Web presence is exceedingly important in drawing listeners to over-the-air and Web streamed sportscasts. Although there is little scholarship on the effects of websites and their corollaries on audiences, other theories on interactivity and active audience – both of which apply to Web users – exist. The foundations for this approach come from Blumler and Katz with Uses and Gratifications (1975), Ball-Rokeach and Defleur with Media Dependency Theory

(1976). The two theories posit a heavily active and engaged audience that aggressively seeks out information on topics about which it wants to know.

As such, in what manner do media entities use these tools to effectively draw users to their primary revenue streams? No expectation exists for this research to provide a magical elixir that solves all audience issues as these issues relate to sports content on the Internet as well as on radio and television. However, there is hope to provide suggestions for consideration by advertisers, sportscasters, managers as well as other scholars regarding effectively using new media platforms to draw or push consumers back to traditional media platforms and vice versa. As ad revenues continue to decline and audiences become more fragmented, it will become incessantly necessary to utilize new media platforms as additional promotional tools. New business models may result from this research; however, the expectation is to ascertain how media entities can keep audiences around longer across media platforms. This concept is an important idea because sporting events remain one of the few regular appointment listening or viewing experiences left in media today.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

A media entity can have a Web presence in many ways. From websites representing media organizations themselves to individual sportscasters/reporters interacting on a person to person basis with fans, anything that happens on the Internet qualifies as a Web presence. Having a Web presence allows for audience interaction (Secko, 2009), which creates a more active audience that is more likely to depend on a reliable Web source (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). This aspect is especially true with sports audiences, which are considered to be typically active audiences, continually craving and searching for more information about their favorite team(s) (Blumler & Katz 1975; Ganz & Wenner, 1991). Ganz and Wenner (1991) found that more than 75 respondents to a phone survey were either “somewhat interested or very interested” in keeping up-to-date with current sports news.

This sense of seeking information is what helps apply Uses and Gratifications to the study. Blumler and Katz (1975) indicate that there could be just as many reasons for a user to go to a media source as there were users of a given media. As such, it is necessary to go to the derivatives of Uses and Gratifications Theory to find better operational definitions as it pertains to consumption of both over-the-air and web-based content. McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) classified four media gratifications as they related to television viewing: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance. Of these

categories, diversion and surveillance are the two that apply the most to sports fans. Diversion applies for the sense of emotional release sports fans get in following a given team (Ganz & Wenner, 1991). Surveillance involves users utilizing the different media for information; in the case of sports fans, this can apply to the hours and minutes spent by a fan chasing down factoids and statistics on their favorite team(s) (Ganz & Wenner, 1991). Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) broke down 35 needs taken from social and psychological functions of mass media and grouped them into five categories. Sports fans have needs branching from four of the categories as they pertain to satiating their sports information desires: cognitive needs, affective needs, social integrative needs and tension release needs (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). The cognitive needs involve acquiring information, going back to a sports fan seeking factual information on their team; whereas the affective needs deal with emotions, or the sense of, “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat” that comes with following a sport (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). Social integrative needs include interacting with one’s peers, or sharing the sports experience with other like-minded fans; tension release needs pertain to escape and diversion, which were alluded to earlier (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). In other words, the three common needs that sports fans are trying to fulfill as they are using sports-related media involve information,

entertainment and social interaction with other fellow sports fans, or interactivity, both real and perceived.

Interactivity can be applied as an uncertainty reducer not only to web-based channels today, but also to traditional lines of communication, such as the listener call-in radio show and fan mail (Andreasen, 1985; Reader, 2007; Simmons 2009). Andreasen studied listener recall of call-in versus structured interview radio formats (1985). For the procedure, Andreasen placed two separate groups of college students in similar rooms “dressed” as lounges wired with speakers (Andreasen, 1985). The students were then told to fill out basic demographic information while a radio program played over speakers.

The students were not briefed that they would be quizzed on anything that played over the speakers (Andreasen, 1985). In one room, a 16-question Interview on the subject of vasectomies between a University of Wisconsin Medical School Urologist and a Wisconsin Public Radio host was played (Andreasen, 1985). In the other room, a call-in format was played in which the same answers were given by the urologist, but 12 of the interviewer’s 16 questions were deleted and replaced with telephone voices of 12 other people asking the same questions directed at the urologist by the interviewer in the interview format (Andreasen, 1985). The participants were quizzed after the program ended; those listening to the call-in format answered, on average, approximately two more questions correctly on the 15-question quiz (Andreasen, 1985). This two-question difference was found to be statistically significant.

Even though the participants in the study did not have a chance to call in to the program, they retained more information because they believed there was a sense of interactivity (Andreasen, 1985). This same sense of perceived interactivity – one does not have to call in to participate -- is what may connect a fan and reduce uncertainty with regard to a journalist via message boards and social media. However, interactivity and uncertainty reduction with radio extend beyond call-in formats and person-to-person, web-based interaction.

Interactivity can also take the form of listener mail (Reader, 2007; Simmons, 2009). An examination of 1920s listener mail to an individual announcer, a station, a program and a network found that people mailed their thoughts because they sought a level of interactivity with that entity that could have been real or perceived (Simmons, 2009). Many letters acknowledged there was little chance for an actual response from the organization; however, the writers still hoped their words would influence the on-air actions of the entity they were mailing (Simmons, 2009). In other words, a perceived level of interactivity exists that reduces uncertainty for an interactive and thus an active audience. Furthermore, an inspection of NPR “Letters from Listeners” found that people believed they were a part of a community because they were able to interact with the network through both traditional letters or mail and e-mail (Reader, 2007). As a fan’s uncertainty is reduced online toward a person such as a journalist or a media outlet because of a perceived relationship, that fan will

begin to rely more and more on that journalist/outlet as a primary source of information about his/her favorite team (Ganz & Wenner, 1991).

Sports fans want information on their teams, and they will go to lengths to seek it. A study of 300 Los Angeles based sports fans found that 75 percent of people who claimed that they enjoyed sports would search for more information about their team after a game was over (Ganz & Wenner, 1991).

In 1991, this additional information took the form of watching highlights from the game on the local newscast or reading articles about the game the next day in the local paper (Ganz & Wenner, 1991). Today, this additional information may take the form of listening to highlights on a radio station's website, reading a beat writer's blog or listening to a sports talk show host's thoughts about the game via a podcast. By using numerous channels to search for different perspectives on what happened with a fan's favorite team(s) most recent game(s), that sports fan is actively seeking that information; the media does not act on the user, the user acts on the media (Blumler & Katz, 1975). Because sports fans are an especially motivated part of a particular active audience, they will actively seek out those sources of information that best suits their needs – in this case, news and notes on their favorite teams (Blumler & Katz, 1975). Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications Theory holds that, not only are audience members active, they are also goal oriented and will search for those sources which best meet their needs. As displayed by Ganz and Wenner's (1991) study of sports fans, these particular

audiences will earnestly seek additional information about their teams. Similarly, a study predicting audience exposure to television in an increasingly cluttered and fractured media environment indicated Internet use by participants was a good indicator as to how much television an individual would watch (Cooper & Tang, 2009). However, this study did not explore reasons behind the connection, just that it existed (Cooper & Tang, 2009).

If a Web entity is able to continually push users back to its website and while there direct them to the on-air source, then fans/users will become dependent upon that source (Ball-Rokeach & LeFleur, 1976). With Media Dependency Theory, users will grow increasingly reliant on media outlets that meet their needs and that in turn help the users achieve their goals (Ball-Rokeach & LeFleur, 1976). So, as an outlet produces more and more content that the active fan finds useful, the more a fan returns to that site to keep up-to-date with the frequent postings about his/her favorite teams. Also, if that same outlet can go beyond just the knowledge needs of the sports fan and meet an entertainment need, for instance that fan is also more likely to return to this outlet's site for information (Ball-Rokeach & LeFleur, 1976). Media Dependency does not mean that the sports fan will cease to exist if the site goes away; what the theory suggests is that fans who have multiple needs/goals met by an entity will return to that entity for more and more information; they begin to rely on it. The same categories of needs that apply to sports fans and Uses and Gratifications also apply to Media Dependency Theory, but with one twist. If a

media entity can provide content that meets a sports fan's need for information, entertainment and social interaction, the more likely a user will be to return to that outlet. This thought process follows Ball-Rokeach & LeFleur's model for Dependency Theory (1976). Step one involves selective exposure to an entity with the hope of fulfilling a need (Ball-Rokeach & LeFleur, 1976), practically, checking out a website for updated scores on a team. Step two deals with the "intensity of the relevant dependencies" and the degree of cognitive and affective arousal, or attention and the like or dislike of the material in question, respectively (Ball-Rokeach & LeFleur, 1976). This step would result in the material in question having some consistent relevance to a user's favorite sports team(s). Then, there is step three, in which a user's arousal is a good indicator in the amount of involvement in "information processing" (Ball-Rokeach & LeFleur, 1976). A sports fan's interest truly needs to be piqued by the information; it needs to be different and unique. Finally, Ball-Rokeach and LeFleur finish the model with "the greater the involvement, the greater the probability of cognitive, affective and behavioral effects from the media" (1976, par. 7). In other words, the sports content needs to affect multiple needs of the user to get that user to return to the source time and time again.

When people watch television, they do so to satiate a certain motivation (Hawkins et al., 2001). Similarly, sports fans will seek out media that can fulfill multiple needs. Hawkins et al. indicate that a predisposition to watching a certain

genre on television is correlated to whether a viewer believes him or herself to be an expert in that genre – drama, for instance (2001). Furthermore, in the survey of how much attention college students paid to specific genres, results showed that viewers' preference of content would correlate positively with how much attention the viewers paid to that given show (Hawkins et al., 2001). Given that sports fans are rapt in the factors determining the outcome of a game (Ganz & Wenner, 1991), fans will attempt to make contact, interact and associate with those who share their love for a particular team.

Social media have also increased the level of online participation as it relates to politics (Donnelly-Smith, 2008). A respondent at a New York University said in an interview, "You can find out who is interested in the same things as you are, and what political organizations they're involved with that you might also want to be a part of... and YouTube is great for catching up on whatever you miss with candidates and debates" (Donnelly-Smith, 2008, para. 5). Another respondent from the nation's capitol indicated the ease of access to the social media websites kept her coming back, "It's much easier to learn about politics through sites we're already using (for different purposes). People who wouldn't normally educate themselves during an election year now do – it's easier, and more available in formats we are used to" (Donnelly-Smith, 2008, para. 15). If an audience member wants a specific parcel of content, he/she can be pushed again and again to a community source (Fanselow, 2008). Fanselow (2008) found that blogs by and about certain western communities

increased civic engagement within those communities. Furthermore, Fortune 500 companies were able to engage a higher level of trust in stakeholders by opening more frequent and fervent, unfiltered lines of communication through Twitter (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). The study suggests, "Twitter should not be treated as just another means through which to disseminate the same advertisements and publicity pieces that stakeholders are already receiving through other traditional media channels" (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, pg. 340). Couple those dependency realizations with indications that social media users in general approach the websites with an attitude that can be defined as information seeking (Kwon & Yixing, 2010). Furthermore, in analyzing message board offerings of the BBC, Klein (2009) concluded that the organization needed to decide whether the interactions it was encourage were user-user based, or user-media organization based.

The BBC message boards exist at a junction between old interactive media habits (whereby the interaction is between audience member and media producer) and new interactive media activities (whereby interaction is largely between audience members). BBC Radio listeners who use the message boards thus regard the BBC message boards as offering the opportunity to communicate with other listeners as well as with BBC staff.

(Klein, 2009)

By offering unique content through an alternative online channel, entities can create a sense reliability in its audience members.

As fans begin to rely more and more on selected entities for information, they are apt to become a part of that community. This trend was especially true when NPR tried to predict listener support (Bailey, 2004). On average, Bailey (2004) found that givers to NPR stations were far more loyal -- how frequently they listened to public radio versus commercial radio -- than non-givers. Not only were the givers more loyal, but they also turned out to listen longer - by about three hours a day -- than non-givers. Those who tuned in the longest also contributed money at a higher level (Bailey, 2004). The majority of those who gave financial contributions considered public radio to be of great personal importance and felt that they were a part of a broader community (Bailey, 2004). As discussed with Dependency Theory and Uses and Gratifications, fans are more likely to click on multiple links found on a website in addition to listening to over-the-air broadcasts, especially if they consider themselves a part of a larger community revolving around a team or the coverage of that team.

In this way, people are more likely to follow through on an action if it is endorsed by someone they trust (Sedo, 2008). Viewers and listeners of a pair of book recommendation programs -- a Canadian radio show and a United Kingdom television program -- indicated they were more likely to make an active decision on whether or not to read a book based on whether or not that recommendation came from someone they trusted (Sedo, 2008). In this case, friends -- someone to be trusted implicitly -- were the most frequent source of book recommendation; however, viewers/listeners were more likely to follow through on a book

recommendation if they believed the programs – and their respective hosts – to be trustworthy (Sedo, 2008). Those programs have particularly active audience members who have developed a trust in the presenters of the content (Sedo, 2008).

The formation of an active audience community may be aided through the generation of user content on a website. Secko (2009) makes a conjecture to science journalism and journalists. Because of users' ability to comment and rate stories, Secko (2009) believes the narrative resulting from a story continues well beyond the moment the story leaves the journalist's hands and is published. The particularly active nature of the audience in science journalism may be applied to sportscasting in such a way that the narrative of a game or sporting event is not finished immediately following its publication. Instead fans have the ability to continue the narrative thanks to technological products such as message boards, Facebook and websites' own comment spaces. Furthermore, the active nature of radio audiences creates a need to provide those audiences with some level of perceived interaction in their consumption of the material.

More and more people are being drawn to online "radio" stations such as Pandora, Last.fm and Yahoo's LAUNCHcast (Freire, 2007). This developing trend is happening mainly because people get to select the type of music they want to hear (Freire, 2007). However, when people want to discover new music, they prefer to be told something about the song or guided by a disc jockey (Freire, 2007). Music services such as Pandora, Last.fm and LAUNCHcast do

not provide disc jockeys, merely the music without much supplemental information. This phenomenon indicates new music discoverers are left feeling empty without some level of interaction as they either discover or are given new music (Freire, 2007). Nevertheless, some people want to listen strictly to a specific artist such as Huey Lewis and the News; they will be gratified by what Pandora, Last.fm and LAUNCHcast have to offer. Applying this perceived interaction component to the websites for all media platforms will fulfill the craving people have to experience some level of interaction with the source of information. This interaction can be accomplished in the form of comments, live chats with personalities or in the interaction provided by talk shows and call-in shows. People care about and are drawn into stories through interactivity, either real or perceived.

Because of the active nature of Internet audiences (Bailey, 2004; Cooper & Tang, 2009; Freire, 2007; Ganz & Wenner, 1991; Reader, 2007; Simmons, 2009), one can conclude an interactive Web presence in relation to sportscasting will enable a media entity to increase its listenership. Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media Dependency Theory reveal that all of these motivated audiences are indeed active, seeking information they want about their favorite teams (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Blumler and Katz, 1975). Furthermore, the intimate nature of the Web allows users to follow along closely with the producers of the content (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Thus, reducing this level of uncertainty can create a user that relies more and more on that

information they find useful (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Because interactivity results in users more attentively using a service, they will more often than not be drawn to the over-the-air functions of sportscasts. Additionally, the rabid nature of sports fans makes them a more active part of an audience that, as a whole, will repeatedly seek out information on their team regardless of how their team is faring (Ganz & Wenner, 1991).

These factors make it imperative for a media entity to provide a Web presence to complement its over-the-air and Web streamed broadcasts. That being said, the research conducted results in a hypothesis that a person's search for information about his or her favorite team, as well as his or her use of social networking sites such as Facebook and team message boards, will positively correlate to his/her use of over-the-air sportscasts pertaining to his/her team. This hypothesis leads to the question, what sources do sports fans prefer – social media, websites, message boards, or others - when communicating with sportscasters with regards to their favorite teams? Furthermore, how often do these fans listen/view over-the-air content based on the usage of the interpersonal web-based content? Consequently, the following research questions have been formulated:

R1: What type of Web content is most frequently cited in drawing Web users to over-the-air broadcasts?

Do person-to-person Web communities on social media websites and message boards provide a more effective way to draw people to the media entity, or are

things such as online content and teasers a more effective way of drawing people?

R2: What source do people seek first -- the over-the-air, main components of an entity's sportscast or the complementary supplemental material found exclusively on the Web?

It stands to reason that an over-the-air component could direct or push viewers or listeners to an outlet's website, but does the website return the favor by directing viewers or listeners back to the over-the-air side of the media outlet.

R3: At what level of Web use does a user become reliant on the services that a media entity provides?

In other words, is there a certain level of Web usage at which a user of the Web content is more likely to be tuned in when the entity goes live with a play-by-play broadcast or a daily sportscast?

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

With regard to sportscasting audiences, this research posits a positive correlation between listenership and viewership of over the air sportscasts and the same individuals' use of station sponsored Web materials, including, but not limited to the station's actual website and social media postings. Because of the multitude of confounding variables this study contains – pay scales, access, presence of local versus national Web offerings – it was concluded that a qualitative study using focus groups is appropriate. This study is not meant to generalize or predict, but to provide a snapshot of an audience in Huntington, W.Va., and what it finds appealing in Internet offerings as those offerings relate to the broadcast medium. The overarching goal of using this method is to dig deep into the mindset of the user/viewer/listener with thick description and a code of the responses of focus group participants.

A qualitative method was used as opposed to a quantitative method for a couple reasons. One, the length and nature of a self-disclosure survey proved to be too unreliable and difficult to complete to effectively factor out the numerous confounding variables coupled with this study. Two, a study of non-human subjects research utilizing Arbitron data and IP address tracking software would adversely influence user Internet habits and would unnecessarily invade respondent privacy. Furthermore, using a qualitative method enabled the disclosure of highly unique experiences of users.

The focus groups used in this study were comprised of 14 individuals. These hour long sessions were conducted in the last week of February 2011. Twelve respondents were invited to each session with four attending the first session, three the second and seven the final day. Adam Cavalier moderated each session. The two precursors for admission into the focus groups were that the individual be a sports fan and be an active consumer of sports information. Those who did not consider themselves to be a sports fan or who did not actively pursue information on their favorite team(s) was automatically disqualified. The groups were skewed highly in favor of men, 12 individuals who participated were men and just two were females. The respondents were also skewed heavily toward younger individuals – potentially a bit of self de-selection by older individuals who thought they were unfit for the study – 57.1 percent of the participants were 25 or younger with just two participants over the age of 35.

Members of Marshall University's fan base make up a convenience/ purposive sample for this research project. It would be too time consuming and cost ineffective to sample each university and pro sports team out there – thus, fans of Marshall University made up the sample. Message board postings and e-mails were used to elicit respondents. As such, the respondents can be clustered into three groups: members of the Big Green Club, donors to Marshall's athletic department's fundraising arm; the Marshall Maniacs, Marshall's student-

based athletic fan club; and Herd Nation, an online message board forum for Herd fans.

Responses were transcribed then coded post hoc by three people to ensure data reliability. Member checks were also conducted two weeks after the focus groups concluded to further strengthen validity. All told, there were 214 responses by the 14 participants that qualified for inclusion. These 214 responses were divided into 22 categories by the coders. Intercoder reliability was ensured using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation with an enter method. This model was shown to be statistically significant as  $F(2, 19) = 1083.233, p < .01$ . The model accounted for 99 percent of variances with a Pearson's R of .996, well above the recommended .7 for a social science study.

This study used Pearson's R to assert statistical significance for the coders' categories because of the numerous categories and because there were multiple coders. Had there only been two coders, with fewer categories, the study would have utilized Cohen's Kappa. This study was intended to be conducted with more focus group members. Thirty-six individuals were invited with the expectation that half would attend the sessions for a grand total of 18. While the 14 that participated fell short of that number, these individuals gave a far greater depth to their responses than would have been possible had more people attended. In essence, the 241 responses that were gathered had a

breadth and depth that the project would not have had had all 36 people participated. Instead of giving brief, reactionary answers to questions, the 14 respondents who participated gave thoughtful, intuitive answers that were clarified and rehashed because they had the time to think. Instead of sentences, the respondents provided paragraphs of verbal responses. Had the focus groups had more participants, there simply would not have been enough time to elicit the same quality of responses from a greater number of participants. The number of respondents likely could have been increased had the focus groups been held at the downtown Huntington landmark the Marshall Hall of Fame Café with its ample parking nearby; however, it was far more cost effective to have the focus groups in a classroom at the campus radio station, WMUL-FM. In retrospect, the in-depth nature of the 241 responses is far more valuable for the insight they provided than if the same number of responses had come from 36 individuals albeit with less depth. The presence of only two females is also regrettable; however, an even number of males and females was invited. The lack of women can be owed to selection bias. The same can be said for the age of participants. Those who participated were highly skewed to those individuals in their 20s and early 30s. However, this may also be a product of youthful individuals primarily utilizing the Web as it relates to sports coverage.

## Chapter 4: Results

After coding the transcripts from the three focus groups, the coders produced 22 categories into which the respondent's answers could be grouped.

They are presented in the order in which they occurred in the focus groups.

The first three categories deal with the respondents' motivations for following sports and help to assert that all the participants are classified as "diehard" fans coupled with a dichotomous question about their level of fandom and their time spent watching sports; the remaining 19 categories involve media consumption and help answer the three research questions with a few incidences of overlap:

1. In it for the Competition – These respondents indicate they like watching/listening to/following sporting events because of the sense of competition distilled by the action of the event.
2. Loves to Win – The individuals grouped into this category say they follow sports because of the thrill of victory.
3. Been in the Game since They Were Kids – The vast majority of the participants have been playing/watching sports since their formative years and continue to do so in adulthood.
4. Gotta Love Those Factoids – Respondents whose answers fall in this category enjoy information for the weird statistics often contained therein. These responses help to answer R1. In these answers, factoids are those bits of interesting information. It could pertain to a baseball player batting .422 when switch hitting in the month

of October, or a personal interest story about how an athlete saved a two-month old from a burning building.

5. Accessibility – A reason for using a media entity is because of the ease of access it gives the user to a particular fountain of information.

This category assists in answering R2 and R3. It deals with a person's ability to use technology to get information on sports anywhere (e.g., as one participant stated, checking a score at a wedding).

6. Are Dying to Know What Other People Think – These users participate in social media as well as message boards because they are intrigued what others – both the famous opinion writers and the common person – think regarding a sports subject. This terminal pertains to R2 and R3.

7. The Internet Takes me to Teams Where I am Not – These sports fans access websites that allow them to follow an out of town team with more depth. This category involves R3 and the ability of a user to follow a school outside of their local area through the connectivity of the Internet.

8. Give me the Time and Score – Whether the fan is dealing with an over-the-air broadcast or a Web entity, this individual wants to know the outcome immediately. R1 is being answered partially here through respondents expressing their desire to know who is winning.

9. Connect with Those in Power – Users who enjoy access provided by the Web, as well as call in shows, to discuss topics with prominent media members. Again, R3 is at work with this question that indicates participants' interest in getting in contact with those at the top of the sports food chain.
10. A True Fan ALWAYS Tunes In – This category deals with fans who indicate that they will always find a way to listen/watch/know the time and score when their favorite team(s) is in action. This set of responses deals with R3 and R2. If a game is on and involves the favorite team of the diehard, one better believe the diehard will find a way to watch.
11. Adores a Good Butt Whoopin' – Fans who will seek out action concerning hated rivals who are getting their keisters kicked. Again, R2 is at work for those searching for a certain type of lopsided score.
12. He's on the Mic, I'm Listening – Users who will tune in just to hear a specific announcer. In providing some data points for R1, respondents indicated that if the Sunday Night Baseball crew of Joe Morgan and Jon Miller was on-air, they would make the appointment to watch the telecast of the contest.

13. Please, Be Unbiased Mr. Announcer – In R1, respondents discussed the type of delivery desired in the content, indicating it should be reported right down the middle.
14. Information Overload – Use of both over-the-air and Web sources is a wondrous thing because of the limitless possibilities of having multiple resources at one's fingertips. Again, deals with R1 in the voluminous nature of content required to satiate some diehard's desire for sports knowledge.
15. Big Time Breaking News – These respondents enjoy the instant nature of the Internet for the sense of immediacy provided by social media sites. In assisting the answer for R1, this group of responses show a want to find out about something such as the Carmelo Anthony trade to the New York Knicks.
16. I Can Find it All By Myself – A select few respondents showed disdain for the likes of Facebook and Twitter in partly answering R2, These participants argue their time was better spent perusing national websites for the stories they wanted to see..
17. Entertain Me – This selection of users indicated a desire to also have an entertainment need met by sports information, both online and over-the-air. This response set moves back to R1 and results in a user fulfilling a need other than excitement.

18. Give Me Something I Can't Find Anywhere Else – The user demands information that takes an uncommon depth of research to uncover or well-established ties to a program; This R1 based category also applies to content delivered both on the Web and over the airwaves.
19. Creates a Better Fan – Involves individuals who believe the glut of information available to them makes them better sports fans. This category goes back to R3 and the sense that diehard fans truly want to earn the title with which they self-identified.
20. Fact Checker – Web users who prefer listening to sports on radio or watching sports on television while keeping an eye/ear on the announcers' accuracy with Web resources. The users that fall in this R1 category have are looking for stats and facts to cross check with what announcers provide in a broadcast.
21. Need Reminders – Fans who get reminders of when to watch/listen to sportscasts through a variety of Web sources. These responses are dropped into R2.
22. Community Creators – Users who find a bit of happiness in sharing their sports experience with other users online. This answer deals with R2 and R3 and can occur before or after the viewing/listening of a live sporting event broadcast.

The vast majority of these categories pertain to both online and over-the-air usage, so much so that many responses blended the two content channels into

the same answers. As such, the coders elected to keep those answers grouped together. Furthermore, all respondents clearly identified Marshall as their favorite team, as would be expected out of 14 individuals from the Huntington area.

The most frequent responses across the focus groups dealt with individuals who sought information they could not find anywhere else. Eleven percent of the 241 answers were on this topic. For some users, this meant tuning in to sportscasts because of a sense of immediacy and color that was not present online. For other respondents, this situation called for information and interviews on blogs/social media/websites that could only come from someone who had access to a particular sports team. For one fan, this came from interviews accessed online and on air.

I try to listen to (local WRVC-AM sports talk host Woody Woodrum's) show every day, whether I can get to a radio, or I can listen to the podcast off the internet... I really like when they get interviews, like if (Marshall Athletic Director Mike Hamrick) comes and talks for 15 minutes. I really like during two-a-days each year in August, (Woody's) able to get some interviews with players and talk about what their doing and things of that nature, same with basketball in September and October. I really enjoy that because you're not getting a bunch of stats and information.

Similarly, for another respondent, it boils down to feeling as if that user is getting inside information. "I'm a Kentucky basketball fan," the respondent began.

"So I get these updates about the game and the recruiting stuff though Facebook... I like it because it keeps me in the loop about who their looking at recruiting wise and stuff." The desire for insider info extended from college athletics to the pros for another male respondent. "I'm an ESPN Insider," the respondent reported. "(It gets me access to) stuff like trade rumors... that's the biggest thing for me, trade rumors or recruiting rumors or anything like that."

Sometimes whom the individuals go to comes from a far away source and only a short period of time. "I picked up on a couple bloggers from south Florida who were big into recruiting," said one respondent during a focus group that occurred shortly after NCAA Football's recruitment period. "I unfollowed them just as quickly as signing day had come and gone. Whenever it involves Marshall, I enjoy having that right there instant gratification." The responses that fell into the Give Me Something I Can't Find Anywhere Else category were typically applicable to the respondent's favorite team. The same can be said for those answers that were placed in the Information Overload category, which accounted for 10.3 percent of responses.

Information Overload crosses boundaries from Web content to over-the-air sportscasts; some fans cannot get enough information to satiate their sports

appetites. For some fans, this desire even extended outside the realm of the study to things such as text messages.

I get text messages from everything. Breaking news, talk, sports, you can (opt) in if you want certain stories. If I can get a schedule of broadcasts... it's like if you're looking for something, and it's there, there it is.

Even going back further, if you want to hear (a radio announcer) say the score, that's crucial I think for your average sports fan any type of information they can take in, I don't really think there is a bad way.

For one respondent, an access to a mass quantity of information was the exact appeal of Twitter. "At first I was like Twitter, that's kind of strange," the Huntington native began. "Do I really want to know about someone washing their laundry? But it's so much more than that. You can follow different writers; you can follow ESPN; you can follow individual writers in little Podunk towns and maybe this random sport (jai'lai)." However, for some respondents, the glut of information coupled with a multitude of sources recreating the same content ended up as a turnoff. One such respondent conceded to staying away from Facebook for sports-related content. "I know that everything is at the touch of your finger tips," the respondent said. "But I already (get links for articles) at another website. Whether it's (Marshall message board) Herd Nation or whatever message board, so it's like I don't really use it. I may see a brief headline about it, but I won't click on the story and dive into it." Primarily

information overload sticks to one team. “If it’s a team that I’m interested in and I want to quote stalk them then I would sign up for every update that I can,” said a respondent who used Google Alerts heavily to monitor his teams. “To me it’s nice to know I can get access to it. Knowing that there is something there is great because in the future I can get access to it but if I don’t want access to it at all, I can shrug it off.” Although Information Overload and Give Me Something I Can’t Find Anywhere Else apply primarily to content delivered at a local level, Give Me the Time and Score, which ranked third among responses at 7.9 percent, and Need Reminder, which was ninth with 5.0 percent of answers, are mainly on a national scale.

For national sportscasts in which the viewer/listener rarely has a rooting interest, all most respondents wanted to know was who was winning and how much time was left in the game. With regard to a primetime Big East game happening after one of the focus groups, one respondent replied, “I’ll probably check the score after it’s over, or if I see someone blowing up about the game in a Facebook status. I’m not going to shut off the rest of what I’m doing just to watch Pitt and Connecticut.” Social media often can be a time and score instigator to get people to watch. “With the Daytona 500 just being run,” said a respondent. “I sat there and watched the last 20 laps because I saw someone post on Twitter that that rookie who won had a shot (to win).” For some, social media is the best way to get scores, “I literally just got on Facebook earlier and

this guy (posted as his status), 'I'm getting rid of my Facebook,'" one respondent replied. "And someone answered 'how will I know the score updates now?'"

The same national trend can be applied to the Need Reminder category, so much so that an anti-local mindset exists, which ties into the A True Fan ALWAYS Tunes In category. With regard to those who wanted some indication was happening on a national level, it almost always involved a big game that would be water cooler talk the next day. "You watch games, listen to games; they're always plugging something else," said one respondent with regards to ESPN. "Tune in tomorrow at 7 for yada, yada, yada. Even if you forget, the website is always close by so you always have something to remind you." For others, finding out about the big games is a weekly ritual. "On a Monday or Tuesday I'll go to ESPN.com," indicated one user. "(I'll look through their top 25) and the days of the week (to) see if there's anything there. Then I'll go to the conference games and see who's playing who and what I want to watch."

However, the exact opposite is true when favorite teams are involved – The True Fan ALWAYS Tunes In. One Marshall fan carries his devotion to the extreme. "I've missed weddings because of Marshall events. I missed my 5-year (high school) reunion and 10-year reunion because Marshall was playing Kansas State and WVU. My good friend that was in my wedding is going to get married on September 10<sup>th</sup>, and I think we (Marshall) play Southern Miss that day, so I'm already getting stressed (about how I'll keep up with the game)." Yet another

response went to a favorite college football conference, “I look forward to SEC football,” replied a Florida native. “I grew up a Gators fan, but if on Saturday night LSU and Auburn are playing primetime eight o’clock I’m watching it, from kickoff to final whistle.” This divide between how fans treat national versus local coverage of teams is what sways this thesis’ hypotheses.

## Tables

Table 4.1 Coder Categories

<b>Category</b>	<b>Coder 1</b>	<b>Coder 2</b>	<b>Coder 3</b>
In it for the Competition	2	2	2
Loves to Win	2	2	2
Been in the Game since They Were Kids	10	11	10
Gotta Love those Factoids	9	8	9
Accessibility	18	18	14
Are Dying to Know What Other People Think	5	5	5
The Internet Takes me to Teams Where I'm Not	5	5	4
Give Me the Time and Score	19	18	18
Connect with Those in Power	14	15	14
A True Fan ALWAYS Tunes In	18	19	17
Adores a Good Butt Whoopin'	2	2	2
He's on the Mic, I'm Listening	13	13	13
Please, Be Unbiased Mr. Announcer	13	12	12
Information Overload	25	25	27
Big Time on Breaking News	11	12	15
I Can Find it All By Myself	5	5	5
Entertain Me	10	9	10
Give Me Something I Can't Find Anywhere Else	28	28	28
Creates a Better Fan	3	3	3
Fact Checker	8	8	9
Need Reminders	12	11	12
Community Creators	9	10	10

Table 4.2 Research Question Categories

<b>Reasons for Following Sports</b>	<b>R1 Based Responses</b>	<b>R2 Based Responses</b>	<b>R3 Based Responses</b>
In it for the Competition	Gotta Love those Factoids	Accessibility	Accessibility
Loves to Win	Give Me the Time and Score	A True Fan ALWAYS Tunes In	Are Dying to Know What Other People Think
Been in the Game since They Were Kids	He's on the Mic, I'm Listening	Adores a Good Butt Whoopin'	Connect with Those in Power
	Please, Be Unbiased Mr. Announcer	I Can Find it All By Myself	The Internet Takes me to Teams Where I'm Not
	Information Overload	Need Reminders	A True Fan ALWAYS Tunes In
	Big Time on Breaking News	Community Creators	Creates a Better Fan
	Entertain Me		Community Creators
	Give Me Something I Can't Find Anywhere Else		
	Fact Checker		

## Chapter 5: Conclusions/Discussion

The focus groups for this thesis provide insight with a spotlight-like quality on sports fans in the Huntington, W.Va., area. These qualitative results are by no means generalizable; however, they do provide some structure and strategy to how sports fans operate. For R1– “What type of Web content is most frequently cited in drawing Web users to over-the-air broadcasts?” -- the best type of content for bringing in a user seemed to be information that users interpreted as exclusive, insider information they would not be able to find out through their own research; this thought was on par with one of the hypotheses. This type of information involves material that could be copyrightable. In other words, a user would like to hear an interview with an assistant coach on a certain defensive scheme his basketball team plans on running in a game over the weekend – an original piece of work that they would be unable to collect. A user is less likely to want to receive strictly factual information – for instance, a statistic that a first basemen is batting 25 percentage points better against left-handed hitters – unless that information is presented in a way that makes it unique and different. However, the curious thing about this content is from where it comes.

The argument for Media Dependency Theory explaining the behavior of users as it relates to their media consumption does not apply in the way that was initially hypothesized. Instead of getting pushed to over-the-air sportscasts by in-house content, users frequently find their way to a sportscast thanks to a blog or a Facebook status that has no direct relation to the producer of the over-the-air

content, but does have a direct relation to the team at hand. This thought process is more true on a national level than on a local level, a theme that will be prevalent throughout this discussion of results. Although some push does come from an entity's own website, it seems it is typically in the form of a broadcast schedule. The buzz that is generated around events seems to come from sources outside the media outlet. On a local level, most fans already have easy access to when to tune in and how they are going to watch/listen to their favorite team – in the case of this study, the Herd. A fan of the Herd may have the schedule memorized – as many respondents claimed to have done for the 2011 Marshall football season. However, in the event that he or she was to forget when a game broadcast was to start, the local newspaper, pocket schedules in the area, radio stations, university-sponsored website or fellow fan of the Herd could provide them that information in a heartbeat. These fans of the local team live in an environment where they can gain access to that information through a multitude of sources that provide continual reminders.

As such, Dependency Theory applies to the study in a way that is different than initially hypothesized. The initial thought was that it would be the producers of the content that created a dependency in users. However, this is not the case; instead, the dependency happens in absence of a particular venue – the reliance on information is with regard

to a particular team instead of a particular writer or station. Users are dependent on the team as a source of information/ entertainment.

The broadcasters who deliver content about the team are merely the means by which users gain access to the information/ entertainment they desire. In essence, the venue for the information does not matter, only that the information provided deals with the team about which the user wants to know. Their primary goal is to get supplementary information they would not normally know, in other words, going beyond the time and score. Although it did not matter to fans from where this content came, it stands to reason that a station/sportscaster could develop a Web channel to suit the fans specific needs to keep their sports desires in house.

R2 - "What source do people seek first - the over-the-air, main components of an entity's sportscast, or the complementary supplemental material found exclusively on the Web?" - also seems to follow a national/local divide in how users interact with content. At a national – ESPN – level, the push comes from the Web; yet, at a local level, the push starts with the over-the-air presence to Web content. Oddly enough, both local and national pushes tend to start or end with social media. First - the national push – a user sees a Facebook status with a close game; they head over to ESPN to watch the final laps of an upset in a NASCAR race, or turn on the tube to witness some extra innings of a midsummer baseball game between the Red Sox and the Yankees.

In this case, a sense of community starts the push to the national scale.

This push also ties back into Uses and Gratifications and the need to have excitement. By utilizing Facebook, Twitter or ESPN.com's Top 25 scoreboard, fans are essentially tracking those games they will find exciting regardless of the opponents. In other words, a fan may only check out UCONN v. Pitt in basketball if he/she discovers that the game has hit overtime period number two. The game has reached a level of excitement that fulfills that need. However, a fan is not going to "waste" two hours watching a game between two teams in which he/she has no vested rooting interest. This phenomenon may explain why the NFL Network's Redzone package has attracted fans' attention. On this channel, the viewer is cycled between games in which a team advances inside the opposition's 20-yard line. In this way, the audience is assured of catching the most exciting moments. In utilizing social media to find close games, the user is ensuring that he/she witnesses the most dramatic parts of contests.

The reverse is true for the local level. Tuning in to a Marshall game is automatic for the fans interviewed for this report – the notion that a true fan always tunes in. As such, after the fact, fans want to discover what their like-minded compatriots are expressing. One respondent said he logged on to Facebook immediately when a Herd game concluded. "When we got slammed at home against UAB," the respondent began, "the first thing I did when I got home was see what people were doing, whether they were like jumping off the cliff or

calm down.” The opposite effect is true, the fan experiences the sense of excitement associated with rooting on his/her favorite team by following the broadcast of the content, then seeks to fulfill a need for a sense of community by sharing in a discourse involving the sense of excitement post hoc. Because fans are going online, but away from the stations’ website to entities such as social media or message boards, the challenge for station managers is to determine if creating online gathering places is a financially viable option to attract advertising dollars. It seems with many play-by-play accounts, announcers/managers expect the fans to be done with the game as soon as the postgame show sign-off closes the broadcast. However, the participants in this study indicated they were still hungry for more information and interaction even after the broadcast close played. Managers should explore the option of either partnering with existing message boards or creating their own venue for discussion on their station’s website to keep the topic of conversation flowing well after the game concludes. The challenge is determining how much capital is necessary to make this extra level of content a financially viable option. A station most certainly can push local users to the Web after a game concludes, but can they do so in numbers that makes that push worth supporting financially. Right now, users are going away from stations after games. However, if a local affiliate were to create a message board for its own website, it may be possible to funnel fans in that direction and keep those ad dollars in house. While the national/local split defined R2 and R3,

R3– “at what level of Web use does a user become reliant on the services that a media entity provides” – sees the national/local split merge.

The sports fans interviewed for this study all defined themselves as “diehard” fans, especially for their favorite teams. The data the participants provided in a brief preliminary survey prior to the focus groups backed up their assertions made while actively participating in the groups. For instance, respondents were diagnosed as “diehard” Marshall fans first by their answer to a dichotomous question on the topic, then their self-report on the number of hours of sports coverage they consumed in a week followed by interpretations of their focus group responses. Participants self-reported following sports both online and over-the-air an average of 21.3 hours a week with a median of 16.8. The standard deviation was 13.5 with a variance of 181.7. As such there was no level that the users became reliant on an entity. All 14 participants responded in ways that indicated the level they were reliant on an entity for information was whether or not that station/website provided frequent and interesting content for their favorite team. In a sense, the independent variable is not what type of coverage fans want to hear/see/read about, but whether the content of that coverage pertains to their favorite team and is regularly updated. Holding true with Uses and Gratifications, if content is there about the Herd, in the instance of this study, then users will go to that channel. If not, they will look elsewhere. A particularly discouraging response

from one of the study participants as it relates to stations maintaining viewers/listeners occurred when a respondent said there was nothing an announcer/station could do to keep him around if a game involving his favorite team ended up being a blowout by the end of the first quarter.

The implications of this research suggest that stations/networks/broadcast entities are not doing enough in terms of frequently generating “insider” content. Delivering exclusive content that fans cannot find anywhere else seems to be the best way to keep fans around, pushing them between over-the-air sportscasts and the Web. Replicating content from one place to another is fine, given the on demand nature of sports broadcasts (recall the respondent who listens to podcasts of talk shows when he misses them on-air); however, simply providing replication from a broadcast channel to a Web channel is not enough; additional content must be supplied frequently to keep users interested and coming back for more – to perpetuate the push.

This study creates many questions that would lead to additional research. The national/local split that occurred in many of the categories needs to be explored. This research also did not explore users’ motivations for pursuing social media interaction around sporting events. Furthermore, this qualitative study spotlights an incredibly unique fan base. First, in the Huntington market, the Herd is the only show in town; certainly area fans may cheer for the Bengals, the Steelers, the Browns or other sports teams, but the vast majority of fans follow the Herd first and foremost. Second, Huntington is a rural market; how do

fans behave in a more metropolitan area where there are far more distractions creating more fragmentation (a radio broadcast of a season of a high school's sports teams can survive in Huntington; the same cannot be said in New York City)? The costs of conducting such a project would be enormous; however, it would be possible to ascertain how different fan bases reacted and interacted to content with regards to their favorite college and professional teams. For instance, the commutes in and around Los Angeles take hours instead of minutes. If a fan can gain a sense of community after watching the Lakers by listening to a postgame call-in show, do they still find the need to go online after the fact to further discuss the game?

## Appendix A: Letter Indicating IRB Approval for Human Subjects Study



Office of Research Integrity  
Institutional Review Board  
401 11th St., Suite 1300  
Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205

IRB2 #00003206

January 28, 2011

Christopher Swindell, Ph.D.  
School of Journalism and Mass Communication

RE: IRBNet ID# 153445-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Swindell:

<b>Protocol Title:</b>	[153445-1] Effects of web presence on sportscasting audiences
<b>Expiration Date:</b>	January 28, 2012
<b>Site Location:</b>	MU
<b>Type of Change:</b>	New Project                      APPROVED
<b>Review Type:</b>	Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consent were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire January 28, 2012. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Adam Cavalier.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, CIP at (304) 696-4303 or [day50@marshall.edu](mailto:day50@marshall.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol**

### Introduction:

As channels of information grow, people receive information about their favorite sports teams from numerous sources. As a part of original research at Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va., this project is trying to establish what channels sports fans use to follow their favorite team. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you find any questions you are uncomfortable answering, then you do not have to answer these questions. This session is being recorded so that what you said can be studied word for word, but it goes no farther than this group. Anything you say here will be held in strict confidence; it will not be known who said what outside this room. We do have a limited amount of time so I may have to interrupt to keep things moving.

### Opening Question:

Could each of you tell me your name and why you consider yourself to be a sports fan?

### Introductory Question:

What is your motivation or motivations to follow sports?

### Key Questions:

1. What do you enjoy about being able to follow sports online?
2. What do you like about being able to listen/watch or hear about sports on radio or television?

3. Why do you tune in to sports broadcasts?
4. What's your opinion of sportscasters with Facebook/Twitter accounts?
5. What do you think you get out of interacting in an online world?
6. What information are you seeking or hope to discover from those sources?
7. What information are you seeking or hope to discover from over-the-air broadcasts?
8. How do you know when to watch/listen?
9. How has the Web impacted when you watch/listen to over-the-air sportscasts?
10. How do over-the-air sportscasts impact your Web usage?
11. What do you believe you get out of interacting in an online world?
12. Describe your Web usage as it pertains to sports information.
13. How much of a game do you typically watch/listen?
14. Why do you go to the sources you do?
15. How has the Web enhanced how you follow your team?
16. How has a television or radio sportscast influenced how you follow your team(s)?

Follow-up questions will be asked when appropriate.

#### Debriefing:

I would like to thank you for your participation. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion

that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research. I will be in touch with you in the coming weeks to make certain that we have interpreted what you said here today accurately. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this research. Do you have any questions for me?

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