

LURKERS AND POSTERS ON COLLEGIATE SPORTS MESSAGE BOARDS:
A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS STUDY

by

BRAD EPPERLEY

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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Jami Fullerton

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Stan Ketterer

Dr. John McGuire

Dr. Sheryl A. Tucker

Dean of the Graduate College

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Sports Message Boards as Social Media	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Sports Message Board Issues.....	3
Message Board Populations.....	5
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Methodology	7
Research Questions	8
Limitations	8
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	9
Uses and Gratifications Studies	9
Uses and Gratifications and New Media	14
The Internet and Uses and Gratifications.....	15
Message Boards as Social Media.....	20
III. METHODOLOGY	25
Research Objectives.....	25
Research Questions.....	26
Definition of Terms.....	26
Research Design.....	28
Sample.....	29
Survey Instrument.....	29
Data Analysis	32
IV. FINDINGS.....	33
Respondent Profile.....	34
Factor Analysis	34
Uses and Gratifications	35
Lurkers vs. Posters	40
Sports Media Usage	41
V. CONCLUSION.....	43

Summary	43
Discussion	44
Implications.....	48
Limitations	50
Population	50
Respondents	50
Missing Item	50
Big 12 CSMBs	51
Future Research	51
Lurkers and Posters.....	51
Women’s Studies	52
Sports Journalists	53
Conclusion	53
REFERENCES	56
APPENDICES	61

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Collegiate sports message boards (CSMBs) may be dismissed by the general public as the province of crazed sports fans and loners with nothing better to do than ramble on about their favorite team. However, CSMBs are a vibrant and highly trafficked piece of today's social media landscape. With the Rivals.com network logging more than 74 million page views in a single 24-hour period (Skretta, 2007), it is difficult for anyone to argue that message boards are not a vital aspect of sports media.

Since very little research has focused on CSMBs, this study is exploratory and descriptive. It seeks to discern the importance of CSMBs as a medium for sports news and information, examine the characteristics of CSMB users, and determine the uses and gratifications sought from CSMBs. With constantly changing technologies in media, it is important to study the role CSMBs play.

Sports Message Boards as Social Media

Message boards, in general, are an important source of user-generated information for millions of people worldwide. There are message boards for a wide variety of interest areas. The message board is a place where people with mutual interests in a particular subject can gather online to discuss issues around the topic of focus. James and Wotring (1995) said, "With public message posting [online], millions with like interests can post, read, and provide immediate feedback" (p. 30). News message board Reddit.com recently

claimed to have 28 million unique visitors and 1.8 billion page views in a single month (Arya, 2011).

Message board topics are as diverse as the world they reflect. There are entire boards dedicated to the television show *Seinfeld*. Other boards focus on specific software such as Microsoft's Windows operating systems. Still others focus on movies, video games, or simply things labeled as "bizarre" (Lewin & Donner, 2002). Doctors can discuss new drugs or procedures, and cancer patients can discuss the latest treatments (Chung, 2008). Whether they are life-saving or merely for entertainment, what all message boards have in common is that the majority of their content is user-generated from registered members within the community.

Regular sports fans are no longer relegated to being just consumers of sports media. With websites like CSMBs, they can also be the producer (Real, 2006). CSMBs can give today's sports fan quicker reporting on stories with more discussion of surrounding issues. Traditional media are limited by format, deadlines, program length or page space. Those limitations do not apply to CSMBs. They are accessible at any time from any Internet-ready place on the planet (Mahan & McDaniel, 2006).

This study focused on two separate types of message board users: *registered members* and *lurkers*. Registered members are users who contribute content to the message board through posting visual and textual content. Lurkers are users who only read the content others post, but do not contribute anything themselves (Nonnecke & Preece, 2000). Because of the differing behavior with regard to the way these two groups use message boards, differences are expected in their demographic make-up, patterns of use and reasons for using.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the uses and gratifications sought by all CSMB users. It attempts to discern what, if any, demographic differences exist between members and lurkers of CSMBs. It also seeks to compare these groups with regard to their media usage. Finally, the study measures the amount of time spent with all types of sports media including CSMBs, newspapers, local television, local news Websites, sports radio, national sports television and national sports websites. This was done to help judge the importance of CSMBs versus other sports media.

This study partially replicates the method and instrument used in Clavio's (2009) online survey of message board users. For this study, a survey was posted on six Big 12 message boards from January 2-16, 2012, corresponding with the last days of the 2011 regular NCAA football season and the beginning of conference basketball play. The survey explored basic demographic information, questions regarding uses and gratifications and measured sports media usage.

There has been very little study on message board users, so few hypotheses can be postulated beyond the likelihood that most users are white, male, and college educated (Clavio, 2009). All significant findings about message board motivations were reported, as well as any differences between registered members and lurkers.

Sports Message Board Issues

One problem faced by collegiate sports message boards is their regional limitations – a likely reason they do not attract many major advertisers. Since they are generally attached to a single team and, therefore, a single campus, they will never have the national or international footprint that Facebook has achieved, for example (Nash,

2009). Another problem people may have with message boards is the stereotype that has been attached to users. When many people hear the term “message board,” they instantly think of an Internet nerd. The Internet nerd, preaching from a soapbox to no one in particular, has become a recognized stereotype in America (Schott & Selwyn, 2000). Although that characterization may have held true in the early days of the Internet and message boards, today’s sports message boards users are as numerous as sports fans in general and they are becoming an increasingly important part of the life of the American sports fan.

Big business would seem to agree. Rupert Murdoch’s Newscorp purchased the Scout.com network in 2005 for an undisclosed amount rumored to be near \$60 million. Scout is the second largest national sports message board website today (Cook, 2005). Yahoo! acquired the largest message board service in the country in 2007 when it purchased the Rivals.com network for \$100 million. While some may question if a member-driven Website is worth such a lofty sum, others will point to their visitor numbers as all the proof that is needed. On the day that Kentucky University was prepared to hire new head basketball coach Billy Gillespie in 2007, more than 16,000 fans were logged on at Catspause.com, the Kentucky branch of the Rivals.com network. On National College Football Signing Day 2007, Rivals.com had more than 74 million page views (Skretta, 2007).

Although they have not received as much attention as the multimillion dollar deals surrounding national websites like the Rivals.com network, independent collegiate sports message boards are no less important to their millions of users. Independent CSMBs are member-initiated virtual communities maintained by fans that may have little

official affiliation with the school of focus or its athletic programs (Porter, 2004). That means they can be as strict or lax in censoring members as they would like. In some cases this leads to unbelievably vulgar topics and posts. Message board Reddit.com, for example, was forced to close down part of its services when it learned its laid-back policies had allowed a user to transmit illegal materials over their website (Caulfield, 2011). On other message boards, it can lead to excessive censorship that drives away some users. Many schools have multiple CSMBs dedicated to their athletic programs with some being family-oriented and others allowing more offensive material to be posted.

Message Board Populations

Some lurkers are unable to post content or participate in topic discussion on CSMBs because they have not registered with the software. Therefore, they can only consume the content. Others may have registered but choose not to post content. For this study, lurkers are defined as users who make zero posts. Despite that lack of direct input, they can comprise a majority of the users of any message board. Depending on the message board, lurkers can comprise as much as 90% of the total user population (Katz, 1998). One study found that users of a health-related message board were made up of 45% lurkers and 55% registered members. Another message board based on software support had lurkers comprising 82% of its total user population (Nonnecke & Preece, 2000). Lurkers make up a huge portion of the overall population of message board users, even if they do not provide any content to the Websites. This survey discerned any statistically significant differences between registered members and lurkers in terms of gratifications sought, media usage and sports media preferences.

Statement of the Problem

With this survey, some detailed and useful information about the users of collegiate sports message boards was obtained. There have been very few studies performed on the uses and gratifications of message board users. None have focused on the difference between registered members that post on message boards and those referred to as lurkers. As no studies have focused specifically on these two groups and collegiate sports message boards, there is little in the way of existing data. Therefore, this study was among the first to explore the backgrounds and motivations of collegiate sports message board users.

It was expected that the demographics for collegiate sports message boards would closely mirror those of other sports message boards and message boards in general. White males with college degrees tend to make up the majority of collegiate sports message board users. Two main gratifications are usually sought with regard to sports message boards - information and community (Clavio, 2009). This study attempts to confirm early findings in terms of demographics and gratifications sought.

Finally, this survey measures the amount of time respondents spend with various types of sports media. Registered members take the time to participate in the community. They have more time and energy invested than most lurkers. It was suspected that lurkers will value the message board highly as a source of information, but that they still will rely on more traditional media formats (television, radio, national sports news Websites) as their primary source of sports media information.

Methodology

This study partially replicates the method and instrument used in Clavio (2009). It used an online survey of 574 collegiate sports message board users. A link to the survey was posted on six Big 12 sports message boards. Responses were collected over a 15-day period from January 2-16, 2012.

This study used Clavio's (2009) survey instrument and 31 uses and gratifications items about message board use. Nine general demographic questions were taken from Clavio based on Hansen et al. (1998). Three questions about the Internet and sports message boards were taken from Clavio. Nine questions about media usage were adapted from Clavio's survey in order to apply them to various sports media formats. Those eight questions also contained the addendum "about your favorite team" in order to specify media use around the subject of the respondent's favorite team. This is to discern media usage with regard to a specific topic.

A factor analysis was performed on the 31 Likert-type items. Five factors were identified including *Interactivity*, *Diversion*, *Information Gathering*, *Argumentation* and *Pass Time*. Chi-square tests were performed to see if there were differences between lurkers and posters with regard to demographics. Finally, the two groups were compared with regard to media usage and uses and gratifications of CSMBs. Independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the means of usage variables in order to look for statistically significant differences between members and lurkers. T-tests were used to compare the groups with regard to their media consumption.

Research Questions

Although no studies have been done comparing registered members and lurkers of CSMBs, it was expected that registered members and lurkers may have some differences in their reasons for uses and gratifications sought. Since lurkers do not actually take part in content generation for CSMBs, it was doubtful that they would value “community” as highly as registered members. Conversely, as lurkers are only on the message board to read and not participate, it was expected that they would value “information” more highly than registered members. It was also suspected that registered members would spend more time on the CSMB for information about their favorite team than lurkers. However, as few previous studies focused on registered members and lurkers, no hypothesis can be formed. Therefore, the following research questions will be explored:

RQ1: What are the uses and gratifications derived from CSMBs?

RQ2: Are there differences between posters and lurkers on collegiate sports message boards with regard to demographics, purpose for use and gratifications sought?

RQ3: How much time do users spend with CSMBs relative to other forms of sports media?

Limitations

This study was limited to a purposive sample of users of six Big 12 CSMBs. The findings cannot be generalized to other websites or message boards based around other topics. Since lurkers do not actively participate on CSMBs, but merely spectate, it was possible that getting them to respond to the survey in statistically significant numbers could become an issue.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examined the uses and gratifications of collegiate sports message boards. It sought to build on previous studies that have looked at uses and gratifications for message boards, including sports message boards, as well as uses and gratifications for the Internet. This chapter will begin by reviewing the development of the uses and gratifications approach to communications research. Next, it will examine past research into the uses and gratifications for the Internet, paying special attention to studies of message boards. Finally, it will discuss several studies that have analyzed the content and goals of Internet websites and message boards.

Uses and Gratifications Studies

The study of media effects goes back to the 1930s and 1940s (Lowery & DeFleur, 1983). Those early studies were the precursors of today's uses and gratifications research. Herzog asked why people listen to daytime radio serials (1954), shifting the focus of the study from media providers to media consumers. She found that there were three gratifications that explained why listeners tuned to the radio shows. Although the programs were generally considered to be shallow entertainment, which was reflected by the gratification of *wishful thinking*, they also fulfilled the very real needs of *emotional release* and *valuable advice*.

Berelson (1954) focused on the reasons that people read newspapers instead of their editorial choices. Since that time, the media consumer has become a much more integral part of the study of media effects. The shift in focus of media studies from producers to consumers had begun. While technologies have changed vastly in the following decades, the basic need to study why people use media has not.

In 1959, Katz solidified this shift in the focus of media effects study when he proposed a change in the primary subject. Severin and Tankard (2001) credit the article by Katz as the beginning of uses and gratifications research, but Katz would argue that for years researchers had asked what the media does to people that use it. The old paradigm viewed the audience as a passive receptor for whatever the media chose to show them. Katz (1959) proposed that the focus should instead be on what people do with the media. He saw the audience as an active participant in their media consumption and felt that participation required further study.

Four functions of the media were defined by Wright (1960). Although they have been expanded upon, those four functions still hold true for modern media such as the Internet. The first function is *surveillance*. People have a strong desire to know what is going on in the world outside of their immediate sphere of experience and there are few ways to accomplish that goal apart from mass communications. The second function is *correlation* or *editorial*. This function is about teaching media consumers what behavior a particular group expects. They teach people how to react in certain situations. The third function is the *transmission of culture*. It is the way in which a culture communicates its values and social norms to unfamiliar parties. The fourth function is *entertainment*. That is media that is intended to amuse or entertain.

Those functions were still focused on the media itself, however, leaving many questions about the audience untouched. In 1973, Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas shifted attention toward audience needs. They created five categories of needs based on the social and psychological functions of the mass media. Possibly the most vital need in a functioning society is cognitive, referring to the acquisition of knowledge. People need information about the world around them in order to make informed decisions in their own lives. Audience members also have affective needs. Those refer to the emotional desires we have. Beyond simple informative functions, Katz et al. realized that audience members actively seek pleasure in their media choices. They also recognized personal integrative needs which relate to their own credibility and status. A person who has little knowledge of the world around them is unlikely to have a highly valued opinion among their peers. A parallel to that are social integrative needs or the ability to relate to friends and family. While many learn social cues from their parents, the impact of media on proper social integration cannot be discounted. And finally, people have tension release needs. That category refers to escape or diversion. Lots of media are designed to take people away from the everyday humdrum of their regular lives.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) found that various media are able to gratify human needs in three specific ways. The first is a passive, or per se exposure. This refers to the simple act of engaging media. For example, a person may use television viewing as a way to relieve stress and let go of the anxiety from a long day's work. The actual content does not really matter in this case. It is the act of viewing that provides the gratification rather than the program itself. The specific content can also help meet needs by informing the viewer about the world around them, social norms, or simply providing

entertainment. Finally, the social context in which the media are consumed can fulfill various needs. For example, watching a football game with friends provides gratification of some basic social needs.

Up until this point, many mass communications scholars felt that media effects took a straight line, or hypodermic path. However, others started to see the audience as having more and more influence over the media. The idea of active audience (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 2003) was a major shift in thinking for media scholars. They stated that the audience needs were just as vital to media effects studies as the intent of media communicators. Since need gratification is almost entirely user-instigated, it seems obvious in hindsight that media consumers would have their own specific reasons for choosing particular media. There is, of course, competition with other sources of needs gratification. For example, one can get pleasure from watching a particularly entertaining movie, but one can also derive pleasure from a favorite dinner or an amusement park ride.

Mass communication scholars have created many different categories over the years to define the needs that are satiated by media usage. Some are as simple as Weiss' (1971) two basic categories of fantasy-escapist and informational-educational motivations. Others can be as complicated as McGuire's (1974) system of 16 motivations that he drew from various existing psychological theories. This model created a four-dimensional construct taken from 16 needs including consistency, attribution, categorization, objectification, autonomy, stimulation, teleological, utilitarian, tension-reduction, expressive, ego-defensive, reinforcement, assertion, affiliation, identification, and modeling.

There is also competition between and within types of media. The cognitive need for information in the form of current events can be met by local newspapers, national newspapers, Internet sites, local television, radio, or national 24-hour news channels. Media consumers are intelligent enough to recognize their own uses of the media and the gratifications they derive from that use and they can be trusted to report those motives accurately when asked (Katz et al. 1974). The question then becomes, which media will the consumer choose to fulfill his or her cognitive needs? Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (2003) noted that non-media sources were often valued more highly than the media with regard to needs gratification. That can mean that a great marketing campaign is likely to be trumped by the word of a close friend or acquaintance. Marketers will have a tough time competing with word-of-mouth.

Message boards fulfill the cognitive need for information. In some cases, they can do a better job than standard media due to the immediacy with which information can be posted to the site. Even 24-hour news organizations are constrained by the editorial process and requirements for source verification. Message boards are not held to such standards. However, that very advantage also highlights one of their shortcomings as an information source. Without any editorial oversight or verification of a story, there is little to stop false information from making its way to the information-seekers. Some people have even used this type of false information to manipulate the stock market (Leinweber & Madhavan, 2001).

Message boards are possibly the most effective mass medium when considering Katz et al.'s (2003) statements on the value of non-media sources. While message boards make up a part of the mass media landscape, most of their content is user-generated. Due

to Katz's findings, message board users are likely to value the information they glean from the Website more highly than that of local or national media outlets.

Uses & Gratifications and New Media

There has been some criticism of uses and gratifications due to its lack of a coherent theory. It is really more of a field of study. Severin and Tankard (2001) noted that uses and gratifications has been called a "data-collecting strategy" (p. 297) rather than an actual theoretical framework. Although studying why people use media and what they glean from it may not provide a concrete theoretical framework, it still is vital in order to discover consumer motivations. Despite the larger field's lack of a single defining theory, many subsequent theories have been spawned due to uses and gratifications research (Blumler, 1979). Palmgreen and Rayburn (1982) combined uses and gratifications practices with expectancy value theory. They used the value expectancy model to examine the effects a respondent's beliefs about a media object's attributes will have on the gratifications they seek.

Despite its drawbacks, uses and gratifications' lack of a unifying theory allows it to be flexible enough for application on many different types of media, including developing technologies. Williams, Phillips, and Lum (1985) pointed out how well the field could work with regard to developing media such as cable television and VHS tapes. They felt that the concept of audience would need some alterations due to the expanded choices and interactivity that these new media formats offered. Cable television offered a plethora of new choices to the mass media audience. Video cassettes freed the audience from the constraints of network schedules. However, that choice expansion and greater interactivity was just a harbinger of things to come. Laney (1998) believed that

the active role an audience must take in using the Internet makes uses and gratifications the perfect field of study to employ in its examination.

As media expanded, so did the field of uses and gratifications. Rubin and Rubin (1985) sought to define the field by generating five assumptions. First, they stated that media use is goal directed, meaning that the idea of the passive audience is nearly non-existent. People carefully choose media with a specific goal in mind. Second, the media are used to satisfy personal needs. Those needs will vary from case to case. Third, media users are adept at identifying their own needs. They are also capable of making coherent decisions based upon those needs. It seems strange today to contemplate the idea of a passive audience with all of our media options, but it was a widely-held belief in the early stages of media effects studies. Fourth, Rubin and Rubin stated that people were capable of accurately reporting their own motivations for use of specific mass communications. And fifth, the audience can be impacted by both internal and external factors with regard to their individual media decisions.

As the 20th century came to a close, 10 motive dimensions for media use were identified (Lin, 1999). These were entertainment, surveillance, information, diversion, escape, social interaction, parasocial interaction, identity, companionship, and simply to pass the time. Lin also identified cognitive and affective dimensions to motivation. Those focused on the thought processes and the emotional influences that shaped a person's media usage decisions.

Uses and Gratifications and the Internet

One study that predates the World Wide Web focuses on the predecessor to today's message boards; bulletin boards. Bulletin board systems, or BBSs, were basically

message boards hosted by a single person on a home computer instead of a large paid server like today's CSMBs. They handled much smaller levels of traffic, but many of the activities, including textual posting on various topics, are the same. Garramone, Harris, and Anderson (1986) performed a telephone survey to determine the need fulfillment sought by users of a political bulletin board. They found that users were motivated by nine categories including surveillance, learning others' opinions, interaction with users, expressing opinions, access to the bulletin board host (a specific legislator who owned the BBS), curiosity, individual utility, entertainment, and use of technology. Using a factor analysis, the survey defined three major dimensions of gratifications. The personal identity dimension accounted for 31.7% of the total variance and included items such as comparing one's ideas and learning what others think about you. The surveillance dimension accounted for 22% of the variance included issues like staying informed on current events and learning about government matters. The final dimension, diversion, explained 12.6% of the total variance. It included items like passing time and entertainment.

Even before the advent of the Internet, electronic bulletin boards were called "a new kind of mass medium" (Rafaeli, 1986). Electronic bulletin board systems, or BBSs, were a precursor to today's CSMBs. Rafaeli employed uses and gratifications theory in an early study of BBS users because he felt it was appropriate, due to the interactive nature of the medium. One of the most important elements of BBSs and CSMBs is the active role taken by their members. This high level of interactivity is diametrically opposed to the passive audience that many previous media theories espoused.

In a discussion of whether the Internet should be considered as a valid field of study for communications scholars, Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) stated that it not only belonged, but that uses and gratifications was probably the best theoretical field to use to study the new medium. The authors also believed that the Internet, with its myriad uses and applications, would revive the struggling field of uses and gratifications research.

The tool that people use to access CSMBs, the personal computer, has been the subject of many previous uses and gratifications studies. Lin (1996) discovered that many common needs sought in previous gratification studies carried over to his research into personal computers. “Social identity, interpersonal communication, parasocial interaction, companionship, escape, entertainment, and surveillance,” were all gratifications that respondents sought in personal computers. Even though the smartphone is fast becoming a preferred method of Internet and message board access, only 25% of Americans say they preferred it to computers (Smith, 2011).

Ruggerio (2000) also agreed that uses and gratifications provided a logical method to study the new and expanding medium. He suggested that the Internet brought three new attributes that were mostly lacking in traditional media. First is interactivity, which refers to the heightened level of communication that members of the audience can exhibit within the Internet. Second was demassification, or the amount of individual control that a single person can have over the medium. Finally, asynchronicity refers to the two-way nature of the Internet. Not only are traditional media posting their messages, but responses are often possible. No place is this more true than on message boards. However, Ruggerio also felt that these changes in media attributes would inevitably lead to a re-examination of the traditional definitions of the concept of an active audience.

A similar study was performed by James and Wotring (1995) to ascertain demographic data about bulletin board users as well as the reasons they choose to participate. They administered a survey to users of Prodigy and Compuserve, two Internet subscription services. The study discovered that 67% of the respondents had attained a college degree with 25% receiving graduate degrees. 73% of respondents made at least \$40,000/year and 87% were employed in professional or managerial positions. 74% of users were male. With regard to uses and gratifications, James and Wotring grouped the responses into five major categories. 38.2% of the respondents listed information as their primary reason for using the bulletin boards. Socialization was the next most popular response with 23.9%. Appeal of the medium (17.4%), business-related motivations (11.7%), and entertainment (8.8%) comprised the other three categories that were identified.

One of the primary questions facing gratifications scholars was understanding why users choose one website over another. Stafford and Stafford (2001) identified five factors of Internet use motivation. These are search, cognitive, new and unique, social, and entertainment. Search refers to the use of search engines and research sites to glean needed information. The cognitive factor states that users are seeking to be mentally stimulated by learning and self-education. The new and unique factor discusses the novelty of the medium and the seemingly constant creation of new websites. The social factor refers to interaction with friends in chat rooms, by email, and on message boards. Finally, the entertainment factor identifies users that are motivated by games, videos, and other types of diversion.

Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) also defined some primary motives behind Internet usage. The first was identified as interpersonal utility, which focused on community interaction including meeting new people and participation in discussions. This was the most prominent motivation that the authors identified in their research. With this definition, one can clearly see why message boards are an ideal format to use in the study of Internet uses and gratifications. The other motives Papacharissi and Rubin identified were passing time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment.

In an attempt to discover why users choose to participate in message boards, Ridings and Gefen (2004) performed a study of users of many different types of message boards. Although there were many responses, the three most repeated answers were information exchange, social support, and friendship seeking. They found that the particular ranking of these three motives varied across message board type, but they were consistently the three most common responses no matter what the message board's focus happened to be. However, no studies of this kind have focused specifically on members and lurkers of CSMBs.

The social elements of the medium that are valued by Internet users were the focus of Best and Krueger (2006). Their study assumed that social interaction takes place between individuals on the Internet. They hoped to discern any differences between users of message boards and those who used the Internet for email and instant messaging. Best and Krueger found that 56% of message board users stated that at least half of their online interactions on the boards were with people that they had met online, meaning they had no prior real-world interaction with those individuals. Contrast that against their findings that 50% of email users and 75% of instant message users never used those

forms of communication to interact with people they met online. Email and instant messaging was mostly reserved to augment existing relationships rather than create and foster new ones.

When contrasting the Internet and television, Ferguson and Perse (2000) found many similarities. The two media formats share many of the same factors when compared, including entertainment, passing time, and social information. Where they differed was in the “relaxation” factor. Television users rated relaxation as one of the most important motivating factors for their use, whereas Internet users felt it was not important at all.

Message Boards as Social Media

Message boards that are created specifically as fan communities for sports fanatics have some unique characteristics. End (2001) found that message board users were much more likely to post on boards related to successful teams. It also identified three main message types. The first was information sharing, and it made up nearly 60% of the responses. Next was blasting (also known as “flaming”), which is the use of a message board post to attack another poster or the fans of opposing teams. This motivation was reported 30% of the time. Finally, BiRGing (Basking in Reflective Glory) made up 10% of the responses.

Seo and Green (2008) took it a step further and created a motivational scale for online sports consumption. Their final scale consisted of 10 dimensions of motivation: fanship, interpersonal communication, technical knowledge, fan expression, entertainment, economic, pass time, information, escape, and support. While this may seem like quite a large set of motivations for a single genre of message board, it mirrors

the communications that many fans have in face-to-face interaction with regard to their team of focus.

According to Porter (2004), virtual communities are defined as “an aggregation of individuals or business partners who interact around a shared interest, where the interaction is at least partially supported and/or mediated by technology and guided by some protocols or norms” (p.1). Based on this definition, CSMBs might be classified as virtual communities. However, there are distinctions within that classification. Porter (2004) breaks these communities down into two types. The first is member-initiated communities. These communities were initially founded by some of their members. They also are maintained and updated by members. The second type is organization-sponsored communities. These are sponsored by commercial or non-commercial (e.g. government, non-profit) entities.

Many collegiate sports message boards fall squarely into the category of member-initiated communities. They were started by fans of a particular team or program, for the use and enjoyment of other fans of that same team or program. Others, however, operate under the corporate model. The Rivals.com network is owned by Yahoo! and qualifies as an organization-sponsored community. It charges a fee for access to its message board network and operate as a for-profit enterprise. Finally, there is a third type of message board that started out as a member-initiated community, but was later purchased by Rivals.com or another corporate entity and now operates as part of its network. The Indiana University message board Peegs.com fits this third model. Due to this situation and others like it, message boards can be difficult to categorize. Therefore, it would be difficult to place collegiate sports message boards, as a whole, into a single sub-category

of virtual communities. Each one must be examined and categorized based on its history and current organizational status.

The importance of all online communities to their users is more than just a passing interest. These communities play such a large part of their users' lives that nearly half of Americans – 43% – who use them say that their online acquaintances are as important to them as their real-life friends and colleagues (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010).

Even though categorization of message boards may be difficult, the question of why people use them has been studied. Ridings and Geffen (2004) performed an exploratory study to discern why users join message boards in the first place. They performed a survey asking members of 27 different message boards across 5 broad topics “Why did you join?” The top answer was information exchange. The second most frequent answer varied by message board type. Those who visited the message boards for health/wellness or occupational reasons rated social support as the second most common reason. Message boards that specialized in hobbies, personal interests, or recreation had their members rate friendship as the second most common reason for their visits. In fact, friendship and social support accounted for more than a third of the total responses.

Not everyone is excited about the expansive uses that are being discovered for Internet message boards. Traditional media members may feel threatened by the existence of sports message boards. Poor (2006) examined reaction to Curt Shilling's use of a sports message board to communicate with his fans. The fan reaction was generally positive. They felt as if they had intimate access to the all-star pitcher that could not be offered by traditional media formats. However, old media sports reporters felt that this type of direct interaction was a threat to their role within the sports media arena. If fans

can interact directly with their favorite sports figures, then why do they need a reporter with a press pass to relay information they view as fundamental to their favorite team?

Although CSMBs have not been studied widely, sports media scholarship is on the rise. During the 1970s and 1980s, there were relatively few studies of sports and media. Although sports were very popular, they were seen as a risky field of study for scholars due to the perceived lack of seriousness of the subject. However, in the 1990s the field began to gain some traction. In the 2000s, the subject of sports media scholarship has exploded with the publishing of several new journals on the subject like *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* and *Journal of Sport Management* (Wenner, 2006).

While there have been few studies of message boards and even fewer focused specifically on collegiate sports message boards, Clavio (2009) performed an exploratory study that discovered some valuable data about their users. He learned that collegiate sports message board users were the most highly concentrated in the 30-39 year age group at 29.3% of the total. Even more overwhelming were findings that the majority of board users were male (87.8%) and white (90.8%). They are fairly well-to-do with 31.2% of users making between \$100,000 and \$199,000 per year. Collegiate sports message board users are also highly educated with 76% of users reporting they held at least an undergraduate degree.

This study will extend the work of Clavio (2009) by separating the users of message boards into two distinct categories: registered members and lurkers. Registered members are users that have taken the time to register with the message board software so they have the ability to post messages. Lurkers are users who do not post any content to the message board and just use it as a source of information, somewhat like a

newspaper reader. It will seek to discern any statistically significant differences between these two groups. Their behavior is different in that one group participates in the message board while the other merely spectates. This study will discover any variances in motivation between the two groups.

A secondary goal of this study, and an expansion on Clavio's (2009) exploratory study, is to find out how often CSMB users visit the Websites for information about their favorite team and how they compare in time spent to other forms of sports media. Some users spend vastly larger amounts of time on CSMBs than others. Registered members take the time to add to the content while lurkers merely read what others have posted. It would follow that some groups spend more time on message boards for information about their team of focus than others. This study hopes to identify which group spends more time on CSMBs for information about their favorite team and which group spends more time using other types of sports media. It will rank CSMBs in terms of the amount of time spent when compared to other sports media formats.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research objectives of this project, the research questions, and the design for the study. It discusses the sampling methods and the expected survey instrument. Finally, it covers the data processing and analysis techniques as well as the statistical analysis.

Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to glean some basic information about the users of CSMBs, why users visit the Websites, and how they use CSMBs relative to all forms of sports media. As a relatively new form of social media, collegiate sports message boards have received little attention as a field of research in academic circles. The study seeks to define the position of importance that collegiate sports message boards hold in the setting of current sports media by comparing usage across all sports media formats. Finally, it attempts to discern any differences between the two primary groups defined as registered members and lurkers.

Lurkers are usually not registered to use CSMB software. That means they are unable to post content and participate in discussions. Depending on the message board and its topic, lurkers can comprise more than 90% of online groups (Katz, 1998). Other studies involving lurkers found that they made up 45.5% of the users of message boards based around health issues and 82% of boards focused on software support (Nonnecke &

Preece, 2000). It seems that lurkers comprise a large portion of the population of message board users, even if they do not provide any content to the Websites. The survey attempts to uncover any statistically significant differences between these two groups that could explain their gratifications sought, media usage patterns, and sports media preferences.

Research Questions

Due to the lack of previous studies comparing registered members and lurkers of CSMBs, it is unknown if registered members and lurkers are going to display differences in their motivation for uses and gratifications sought. However, because lurkers do not participate in creating content on the CSMB, it is likely that they will not value “community” as highly as registered members. Further, the gratification of “information” is expected to be much higher for lurkers than registered members because they do not take an active part in the community, but only visit the Websites to read what others have posted. However, as few previous studies focused on registered members and lurkers, no hypotheses can be formed. The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: What are the uses and gratifications derived from CSMBs?

RQ2: Are there differences between posters and lurkers on collegiate sports message boards with regard to demographics, purpose for use and gratifications sought?

RQ3: How much time do users spend with CSMBs relative to other forms of sports media?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used for discussion of the results in this study (Clavio, 2009):

- **Administrator**-An individual who acts as a manager of message board content, which includes the policing of messages and execution of technical changes to the message boards and forums.
- **Collegiate Sports Message Board**-A message board dedicated to the discussion of a particular NCAA schools athletic program(s).
- **Flame**-An inflammatory message, often written in a pejorative style. The act of writing such a message is known as flaming.
- **Forum**-An independent part of a message board, often used to coordinate or foster discussion on a particular topic. A message board may have multiple forums.
- **Lurker**-A user of message boards who does not engage in the posting of messages, preferring instead to read what others have written.
- **Member**-A person who has registered with the message board and has the ability to create and share content.
- **Message Board**-A web page dedicated to asynchronous communication between users through the use of software protocols.
- **Moderator**-An individual who acts as a referee of message board content, which includes the policing of messages and responding to user complaints. A message board may have multiple moderators.
- **Post**-A single message written on a message board forum.
- **Poster**-A user who actively engages in the posting of messages.
- **Team of Focus**-A sports fan's favorite team.

- **Thread**-A grouping of messages on a message board. A thread may contain as little as one message, or as many as the software protocols on the board allow.
- **User**-An individual who uses sports message boards. Users can include both posters and lurkers.

Research Design

This study employed an Internet-based survey. The use of the Internet, by its very nature, makes it an active form of media. Users must decide what Websites they want to visit and then commit the action of typing in a web address or clicking a link. Active audience is an assumption of the uses and gratifications field of study (Katz et al., 2003). Uses and gratifications is a valid theoretical framework for study of the Internet. The vastness and seemingly never-ending number of Websites available to an Internet user necessitates an active audience. Unlike television, one cannot simply sit down at the Internet and absorb whatever the current channel is displaying. Beyond the homepage, users must make decisions about what sites they visit and how long they stay. This requisite behavior defines the audience as active (Severin & Tankard, 2001).

Survey method is a standard format employed to look at uses and gratifications in the mass media (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). Not only that, but it has been used many times to examine the gratifications sought with regard to Internet use (Charney & Greenburg, 2002). Shoemaker and McCombs (2003) believe that Internet surveys have several benefits. They cost less than other forms of survey and the results are returned instantly. They also allow respondents to answer more completely than they might in a monitored survey format.

There are some drawbacks to Internet surveys. They cannot provide a random sample and they are easily ignored. However, the sheer number of people exposed to the survey in this study should bring the respondent pool up to an adequate level for statistical analysis. Therefore, an Internet survey method was used for this project.

Sample

The study used a purposive sample group made up of voluntary respondents taken from users of six Big 12 CSMBs. A link to the survey was posted on six popular CSMBs called Orangepower.com, Tigerboard.com, Baylorfans.com, Shaggybevo.com, OStatesports.com and KUSports.com. Board users were asked to click on the link and respond to a survey about their use of CSMBs. There was a request next to the link focused specifically toward lurkers. It implored them to take part in the survey even if they do not participate in posting content on the message board. This population-specific request was hoped to raise the number of lurker responses.

A non-probability sample was necessary considering the medium being examined. Although message boards are widely used, there are large segments of the general population that do not visit the Websites. Due to that fact, a sample taken from the general population would fail to adequately focus on the intended target population for this study, which is the users of CSMBs. Due to the relative lack of previous study in the field of sports message board gratifications, a non-probability sample was also used because of the exploratory nature of the study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

Survey Instrument

SurveyMonkey.com was used to create and host the Internet-based survey for this study. Survey items were borrowed or adapted from a previous study (Clavio, 2009). In

order to improve response rate, a \$100 gift certificate to Amazon.com was raffled off between the respondents.

The survey began with a series of 31 questions involving CSMB uses and gratifications including, “Because I find out things about my favorite team that my friends don’t know,” “To pass time when I’m bored,” “To ‘smack talk’ or ‘flame’ fans of other schools” and “To share information I have learned with the community” (For a full list of questions, see Appendix D). These questions were taken from Clavio’s 2009 dissertation on sports message boards from the University of Indiana. These questions asked respondents to rate their use of CSMBs for certain motivations on a 5-point Likert-type scale. They sought to discern why people visit CSMBs. These questions were used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2.

In addition to these questions about gratifications, four more questions about the Internet and message boards were taken from Clavio (2009). These questions were used to divide the respondents into two groups – registered members and lurkers. They also provided part of the data needed to answer Research Question 3.

A series of ten new questions was adapted from Clavio (2009) to discern respondents’ favorite team and what level CSMBs have in terms of use in sports media with regard to information about that team. For the first question, an item about general sports fanship was adapted to specify fanship of a specific team. For the next eight questions, an element about time spent with the Internet from Clavio (2009) was adapted to various forms of sports media and given the specificity of the respondent’s favorite team. Finally, a last question asked respondents was what is their preferred type of sports media for information about their favorite team. There are many places that today’s

sports fan can go for information about their favorite team. This survey sought to discern the importance of those various media formats when compared to CSMBs. It is difficult to compare usage across media formats, so the questionnaire focused on the amount of time spent per week using each format. These ten questions were used to answer Research Question 3.

The questionnaire finished with a series of standard demographic questions. Respondents' information including age, race, income, gender, and other factors were gathered. These types of questions are standard in most surveys (Hansen et al., 1998) and will be used to make comparisons of responses across various demographic groups. These nine questions were used to answer Research Question 2.

Finally, all of the responses to these three groups of questions were split by the respondent's identification as a poster or lurker using their answers to the question about average posts per week. Because users can register without contributing content, zero (0) posts per week was what defined respondents as lurkers. It was hoped that the difference in media behavior between the two groups would translate to other areas such as gratifications sought and media usage.

Moderators and owners of the six target message boards were contacted in order to receive permission to post the survey on their websites. The links were specific to each CSMB so users may be tracked according to the board where they learned about the survey.

The survey was posted on SurveyMonkey.com. The survey was open from January 2-16, 2012. These dates coincided with the last two weeks of the 2011 NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (Formerly known as Division 1) season. They also marked the

beginning of NCAA basketball conference play. These dates were expected to have some of the heaviest website traffic of the year, thereby maximizing potential response rate.

Data Analysis

After the survey was been closed and all data have been collected and screened, several statistical methods were used to analyze the information. Utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 18 (SPSS), descriptive statistics were used to examine the frequencies and distributions of demographic data. Means, standard deviations, and histograms were generated for all variables. Those statistical methods were applied to the entire data set. Factor analysis was performed in order to identify any underlying dimensions of the uses and gratifications. The factor analysis also reduced the data into fewer variables, making it easier to analyze and identify any theoretical constructs. The data were then analyzed based on status as registered members and lurkers. Crosstabulations were performed on demographic variables. Chi square analyses were performed in order to discern if the statistical distributions occurred by chance.

Additionally, independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the means of usage variables in order to look for statistically significant differences between members and lurkers. T-tests were used to compare demographic groups with regard to their media consumption. Usage for all media formats were ranked based on the amount of time respondents spend on each format weekly looking for information about their favorite team. T-tests were also performed to test for statistically significant differences between members and lurkers with regard to their motivations for CSMB use.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The following chapter details the findings of the survey to measure uses and gratifications of collegiate sports message board users. The survey measured respondents' attitudes about the reasons they use CSMBs and the gratifications that were sought from the Websites. It also attempted to determine sports media usage among CSMB users by asking the amount of time spent in a typical week for eight different types of sports media. Finally, some general demographic information about CSMB users was collected.

Clavio's (2009) *uses and gratifications of collegiate sports message board users* scale was used to identify the underlying factors motivating people to use CSMBs. Respondents were presented with 31 items about reasons for CSMB use. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale with a score of 5 indicating the most positive response "strongly agree" and 1 indicating the most negative response "strongly disagree." A question about time spent with the Internet was adapted to all forms of sports media to discern how much time was spent by CSMB users across sports media formats. Respondents were asked how many hours they spend in an average week with each kind of sports media. The survey was posted to six Big 12 affiliated collegiate sports message boards from January 2-16, 2012.

Respondent Profile

A total of 574 CSMB users completed the online survey. Most (90%) of the respondents were male. Race/ethnicity distribution was 93.2% Caucasian/White Non-Hispanic, 2.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.5% Asian, 1.5% two or more races, and 0.2% Black or African American. Almost two-thirds (64.9%) were married or living with a domestic partner.

Age was fairly evenly distributed with 26.3% of respondents being from 23-29, 25.3% from 30-39, 21.2% from 40-49, 13.8% from 50-59, 8.5% were 60 or over, and only 4.9% from 18-22. Respondents were highly educated with only 13.9% holding less than an undergraduate degree. 41.2% held an undergraduate degree, 20.2% had a master's degree, 12.7% held a doctorate, 12% had done some graduate work, 11.8% had done some undergraduate work, 1.5% received a high school diploma, and 0.6% had completed some high school. Respondents were also identified as 21% lurkers (those who only view the message board content but do not contribute) (n=120), and 79% posters (those who participate in the message board community by posting content) (n=454).

Factor Analysis

To gain a better understanding of the underlying dimensions that constitute uses and gratifications of CSMBs and to confirm Clavio's (2009) findings, the CSMB item scale was subjected to a principal components factor analysis (with Varimax rotation). Factor analysis was deemed appropriate because the respondent (n=577) to item ratio exceeded 10:1 (Stacks, 2002). Four criteria for factor extraction were followed: (a) three or more questionnaire items had to load on a factor; (b) items had to have loadings of at

least .60 on a factor, but not have loadings greater than .40 on any other factor; (c) factors had to have eigenvalues of greater than 1.00; and (d) on the *scree* plot, factors had to fall to the left of the point where eigenvalues appear to level off (Cattell, 1966).

Uses and Gratifications

Research Question 1 asked what are the uses and gratification derived from CSMBs. Thirty-one of Clavio's (2009) thirty-eight CSMB items were used to measure uses and gratifications derived from collegiate sports message board. A factor analysis was conducted with the 31 items from this study to determine the underlying dimensions of uses and gratifications of CSMBs. Five factors were extracted with an overall alpha of .894 and explained 52.99% of the variance. It should be noted that Clavio (2009) found only four factors in his original study. The fifth factor, *Pass Time*, was precluded in Clavio's (2009) study because it only loaded on two items, but because it contained three items in this study, it was retained herein. The other four factors loaded similarly to Clavio's (2009) study, and were therefore titled as Clavio named them – *Interactivity*, *Diversion*, *Information Gathering*, and *Argumentation*. One item, *Argumentation*, only had two items loading but was retained because the third item that loaded in Clavio's study was inadvertently left out of this study. It is believed that this factor would have included more items had all of Clavio's items appeared in the survey. See Table 1 below for factor loadings.

Table 1

	<i>Factors</i>					
<i>Retained factors and items</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>Means</i>
Factor One: Interactivity						3.5083
To express myself freely	.648	.243	.050	.346	-.037	
To discuss games in progress	.558	.058	.072	.204	.038	
To give my input and opinions	.830	.090	.036	.212	.001	
To communicate with fellow fans of my school and/or team	.861	.105	.086	.087	.040	
Because I feel like I'm a part of the message board community	.618	.246	.059	.026	.043	
To participate in discussions about my favorite team	.826	.041	.181	.127	.035	
To share information I have learned with the community	.586	.109	.095	.287	.102	
Because I enjoy interacting with other users	.830	.193	-.008	.120	.076	
To belong to a community of like-minded fans	.704	.050	.070	-.043	.059	
Factor Two: Diversion						2.4109
To talk about things other than sports, such as politics or religion	.215	.718	.039	.256	.195	
To keep up with non-athletic news about my alma mater	.095	.753	.117	.041	.050	
To stay in touch with old friends and classmates	.269	.581	-.168	-.085	-.032	
Because I like to use the non-sports forums to discuss all issues of life	.212	.687	.109	.185	.267	
Factor Three: Information Gathering						4.2638
To find out news faster than I would using other types of sports media	-.003	.095	.737	.069	-.022	

Because I find out things about my favorite team that my friends don't know	-.035	.169	.547	.240	-.054	
Because it offers more in-depth coverage of my favorite team that traditional sports media	.189	-.049	.737	-.076	.150	
To get information about my favorite team that I can't get elsewhere	.130	-.051	.747	-.140	.090	
Factor Four: Argumentation						2.1537
To "smack talk" or "flame" fans of other schools	.180	.070	-.034	.704	.087	
To argue with other users online	.369	.126	-.035	.618	.150	
Factor Five: Pass Time						3.5433
To pass time when I'm bored	.092	.202	.076	.058	.679	
Because it gives me something to do at work	.082	.148	.023	.125	.747	
To find out the latest gossip about players	-.010	-.115	.104	.248	.635	
<i>Items Not Retained</i>						
To feel like I'm part of the community even though I live far away	.221	.141	.078	.150	-.256	
To meet new and interesting people	.552	.471	-.101	.024	.113	
To talk about my team's recruiting efforts	.369	-.107	.213	.266	.042	
To read what others have to say, even though I don't participate in discussion myself	-.381	-.160	.090	.082	.123	
To complain about things going wrong with my favorite team	.532	..069	.052	.518	.140	
To hear about other users' personal encounters with coaches and players	.137	.032	.163	.116	.087	
Because I enjoy reading what other users write	.289	-.034	.383	-.143	.291	
To be able to share my views anonymously	.454	.070	.027	.523	.214	

Factor One, *Interactivity*, dealt primarily with participation and interaction with the message board community. The nine items that loaded onto this factor were “To express myself freely,” “To discuss games in progress,” “To give my input and opinions,” “To communicate with fellow fans of my school and/or team,” “Because I feel like I’m a part of the message board community,” “To participate in discussions about my favorite team,” “To share information I have learned with the community,” “Because I enjoy interacting with other users,” and “To belong to a community of like-minded fans.” Factor One explained 27.42% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue of 8.50. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .905, which indicated good internal consistency for the *Interactivity* factor. The items measuring *Interactivity* were subsequently collapsed into a single variable (M=3.51, SD=.91), which indicated a positive interest of CSMB users in *Interactivity*.

Factor Two, *Diversion*, described aspects related to discussing non-sports information about the school of focus. The four items that loaded onto this factor were “To talk about things other than sports such as religion or politics,” “To keep up with non-athletic news about my alma mater,” “To stay in touch with old friends and classmates,” and “Because I like to use the non-sports forums to discuss all issues of life.” This factor had an eigenvalue of 2.78 and explained 8.98% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .749, indicating good internal consistency. The collapsed variable (M=2.41, SD=.98) measuring use of the message boards for non-sports information showed that respondents disagreed with use of CSMBs for *Diversion*.

Factor Three, *Information Gathering*, dealt with news and information about the user’s team. The four items that loaded on this factor were “To find out news faster than I

would using other types of sports media,” “Because I find out things about my favorite team that my friends don’t know,” “Because it offers more in-depth coverage of my favorite team than traditional sports media,” and “To get information about my favorite team that I can’t get elsewhere.” The eigenvalue for *Information Gathering* was 2.08 and accounted for 6.70% of the total variance. The alpha coefficient for this factor was slightly weaker at .688. However, the collapsed variable value (M=4.26, SD=.61) indicates that respondents felt strong agreement with use of CSMBs for *Information Gathering*.

Factor Four, *Argumentation*, represented combative online interaction with other users. Only two items loaded on this factor – “To ‘smack talk’ or ‘flame’ fans of other schools”, and “To argue with other users online”. However the factor was retained because they were conceptually linked, and it registered three items in Clavio’s (2009) study. One of those items, “Because I enjoy putting other users in their place,” was arbitrarily left out of this study. Had it been included, the researcher believes it would have loaded on this factor. Factor Four produced an eigenvalue of 1.78 and accounted for 5.73% of the variance. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this factor was also slightly weaker at .669. The collapsed variable value (M=2.15, SD=1.07) indicates that users strongly disagree with using CSMBs for combative online interaction.

The fifth factor, *Pass Time*, measures the use of CSMBs to fill users’ free time. Three items loaded onto this factor including “To pass time when I’m bored,” “To find out the latest gossip about players,” and “Because it gives me something to do at work,” Factor Five produced an eigenvalue of 1.29 and accounted for 4.16% of the variance, with an acceptable alpha reliability coefficient of .597. The collapsed variable value

($M=3.54$, $SD=.86$) showed that CSMB users' generally agreed that they use CSMBs to fill their free time. This factor was identified in Clavio's (2009) study, but was not retained there because only two items loading on the factor.

Lurkers vs. Posters

Research Question 2 asked if there are significant differences between lurkers and posters on collegiate sports message boards with regard to demographics or uses and gratifications. Chi-Square tests were used to explore the relationship between lurker/poster status and demographics. Lurkers were statistically more likely to be female and posters to be male ($X^2 = 5.48$, $p=0.019$). When comparing age, lurkers tended to be older ($X^2 = 20.27$, $p=.001$) than posters. Posters made up a higher percentage of the two youngest age groups while lurkers held advantages in two of the three oldest. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups with regard to other demographic variables, such as household income, level of education, marital status, race/ethnicity, or country of residence.

Lurkers and posters also showed differences in the reasons they use CSMBs and the gratifications they seek. Lurkers ($M=2.53$) were extremely less likely to value *Interactivity* ($t(d.f.=560)=-16.14$, $p=.0005$) with the message board community than posters ($M=3.77$). Posters ($M=2.52$) valued the *Diversion* aspects of CSMBs in Factor Two ($t(d.f.=565)=-5.6$, $p=.0005$) more than lurkers ($M=1.97$). Factor Three, *Information Gathering*, had posters ($M=4.3$) scoring slightly higher than lurkers ($M=4.14$) when using CSMBs for information ($t(d.f.=572)=-2.60$, $p=.009$). Factor Four, *Argumentation*, had posters ($M=2.28$) again scoring significantly higher than lurkers ($M=1.67$) in using CSMBs to be combative with other users ($t(d.f.=570)=-5.73$, $p=.0005$). The only factor

that did not represent a significant difference between lurker and poster gratifications was *Pass Time* ($t(d.f.=569)=-1.96, p=.051$).

Sports Media Usage

Research Question 3 asked how much time users spend with CSMBs relative to other forms of sports media. When asked what type of sports media respondents prefer for information about their favorite team, 328 respondents (70.1%) chose "Collegiate sports message boards," 31 (6.6%) chose "National sports media Websites (e.g. ESPN.com, Yahoo! Sports)," 31 (6.6%) chose "Local news sports media Websites," 30 (6.4%) chose "Sports section of a local paper," 30 (6.4%) chose "Sports talk radio," 12 (2.6%) chose "National sports television networks (e.g. ESPN, Fox Sports)," 5 (1.1%) chose "Local television news sports broadcasts," and 1 (0.2%) chose "Sports magazines (e.g. ESPN the Magazine)."

Sports media usage was measured using Clavio's (2009) seven-point time scale. Respondents were asked how many hours they spend with each medium in a typical week. Options were (a) 0 hours, (b) 1-5 hours, (c) 6-10 hours, (d) 11-15 hours, (e) 16-20 hours, (f) 21-25 hours, (g) 26 or more hours. In order to facilitate analysis, midpoints were assigned to the values to give means that equate closely to actual hours. In terms of time spent, CSMBs garnered much more time ($M=8.16$ hours) than all other sports media options. National sports television networks were second ($M=7.24$ hours) followed by sports talk radio ($M=4.58$ hours), national sports media Websites ($M=4.08$ hours), local television sports broadcasts ($M=2.83$ hours), sports section of the newspaper ($M=2.35$ hours), and sports magazines ($M=0.97$ hours).

Very few differences were found when comparing sports media usage between lurkers and posters. When asked how many hours per week they spend on the Internet, lurkers ($M=16.678$) spent slightly less time ($t(d.f.=572)=-3.0, p=.013$) than posters ($M=18.8026$). On CSMBs, lurkers ($M=5.4286$) spent significantly less time ($t(d.f.=574)=-5.44, p=.0005$) visiting the Websites than posters ($M=8.884$). Sports magazines represented the only other statistically significant difference with lurkers ($M=.6555$) reading the publications ($t(d.f.=571)=-1.829, p=.005$) less than posters ($M=1.0463$). There were no significant differences in usage of the sports section of newspapers ($p=.395$), local television sports coverage ($p=.970$), national sports television networks ($p=.479$), sports talk radio ($p=.165$), national sports media websites ($p=.674$), or local sports websites ($p=.072$).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Although they are among the most popular types of sports media on the web, relatively little study has focused specifically toward collegiate sports message boards. CSMBs log millions of page views in a day (Skretta, 2007), yet few have taken the time to study their users. Members and lurkers of CSMBs present different behaviors with regard to how and why they use CSMBs. Those differences translate to different uses and gratifications sought.

While users of CSMBs are similar to users of other message boards (James et al., 1995), and of Internet users in general (Ebersole, 2000; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), they log on to the CSMB Websites for specific reasons. This study sought to identify those reasons. Just as the Internet has produced massive changes in the publishing industry (Matthews, Hendrickson & Soh, 2007), these Websites present a powerful new presence in the landscape of sports media.

Summary

This study examined the uses and gratifications of CSMB users. Five factors for use were identified. *Information Gathering* was the most important reason for use of CSMBs. *Argumentation* was the least likely reason that sports fans went to their message

boards. Users felt they did not visit the Websites for *Diversion*. However, they were positive about use of CSMBs for *Pass Time* and *Interactivity*.

There were some demographic differences between lurkers and posters. Lurkers tended to be older than their posting counterparts. They also were statistically more likely to be female than were posters. There were no significant differences between the two groups with regard to household income, level of education, marital status, race/ethnicity, or country of residence.

Posters and lurkers showed differences in their uses and gratifications. *Pass Time* was the only factor that did not show statistically significant differences between lurkers and posters. Posters agreed more strongly than lurkers about the uses of CSMBs for *Interactivity*, *Diversion*, *Argumentation*, and *Information Gathering* and all four factors bore out significant differences between the groups.

Very few differences were found when comparing the two groups' sports media usage. It was most notable that posters spend more time on the Internet than lurkers overall, not just on CSMBs. Although posters spent more time with all forms of sports media, Collegiate sports message boards, sports magazines and the Internet were the only types of media where the two groups showed statistically significant differences in their time spent. When examining the sports section of newspapers, local television sports coverage, national sports television networks, sports talk radio, national sports media Websites or local sports Websites, the two groups spent similar amounts of time.

Discussion

This study used Clavio's (2009) scale to measure gratifications sought and reasons for use of collegiate sports message boards. A factor analysis revealed five

underlying factors make up the gratifications of CSMB users: *Interactivity*, *Diversion*, *Information Gathering*, *Argumentation*, and *Pass Time*. The first four of these confirmed factors found in Clavio's (2009) study. The fifth, *Pass Time*, was discarded from Clavio's study because it only registered two items. In this study, *Pass Time* registered on three items. Item loadings in this study were similar to Clavio (2009) and similar reliability coefficients were found indicating that the survey instruments are a good measure of the gratification of collegiate sports message board users construct.

In this study of CSMB users, the findings were generally consistent with other uses and gratifications studies of Internet users in general. Previous studies identified dimensions of gratification for non-sports Internet use that closely mirrored this study. The first factor found in this study of *Interactivity* included items like "To express myself freely" and "Because I feel like I'm part of a message board community." This is similar to the results in Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), which found five factors that made up motives for Internet use. The first factor accounted was *Interpersonal Utility* and it contained 12 items that were categorized into inclusion, affection, social interaction, expressive need and surveillance.

This study's fifth factor, *Pass Time*, directly correlates to Papacharissi and Rubin's (2000) second factor, also titled *Pass Time*. The third factor in this study, *Information Gathering*, is nearly identical to their third factor called *Information Seeking*. Their fifth dimension of Internet usage was *Entertainment*, which had items that closely paralleled the second factor in this study, *Diversion*. The only factor that did not directly translate from Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) to this study was Factor Four, *Convenience*. Either CSMBs users are not seeking convenience when they log on to their favorite

team's message board or, more likely, the study did not include items that would have indicated convenience as a reason for use.

Ebersole (2000) identified eight factors that explained 58% of the total variance of why students choose to use the World Wide Web. Factor One was *Research and Learning*, which closely correlates to *Information Gathering* in this study. Ebersole's (2000) Factor Five, *Access to Material Otherwise Unavailable* also contained items that were similar to those in *Information Gathering* from this study. Some of the items from this study that registered on *Information Gathering* were "Because I find out things about my favorite team that my friends don't know" and "To get information about my favorite team that I can't get elsewhere."

Factor Two, *Diversion*, is similar to Ebersole's (2000) second factor, *Easy Access to Entertainment. Interactivity*, Factor One from this study, contained items like, "To communicate with fellow fans of my school and/or team," and, "Because I enjoy interacting with other users," which are similar to Ebersole's third factor, *Communication and Social Interaction*, which contained items including "To meet new people" and "To talk with people from around the world." Finally, the fifth factor from this study, *Pass Time*, is related to Ebersole's Factor Five, *Something to do when I'm bored*, is directly related to the fifth factor from this study, *Pass Time*.

Factors were also closely related to a gratifications study of Facebook users by Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2007). Factors *Interactivity*, *Diversion*, and *Information Gathering* found in this study closely mirror *Socializing*, *Entertainment*, and *Information*, which were three of the four factors identified by Park et al. As both CSMBs and Facebook are forms of social media, this connection was to be expected.

This study had a respondent pool made up of 90% male respondents. 86.1% of those polled had achieved at least a bachelor's degree. The demographic findings were similar to previous studies of Internet users. James and Wotring's (1995) survey of members of online communities CompuServe and Prodigy found that 74% of respondents were male and 89% had earned a college degree.

CSMB gratification dimensions closely paralleled four of the 10 suggested motive areas for Internet usage put forth by Lin (1999). *Diversion* and *Information Gathering* factors found in this study are nearly identical to *Diversion* and *Information* factors found in Lin's study. *Interactivity* in the current study is very closely related to Lin's *Social Interaction*, as well. The *Entertainment* factor from Lin's (1999) study could be tied to both *Diversion* and *Pass Time* from the current study.

This study is similar to Clavio's (2009) demographic findings in several areas. 93.2% of respondents in this study were found to be white/non-hispanic where Clavio found that the majority of CSMB users (88.7%) responded the same. This study found that 68.3% of respondents made \$60,000 or more per year and Clavio found that a 74.2% of respondents made over \$60,000/year. The marital status responses from both surveys were extremely close with this study showing 64.9% were "Married or living with domestic partner," and Clavio noting 63% of respondents were married. This survey even had a similar number of lurkers (21%) to those that were found in Clavio (28%). The sample populations in both surveys, although taken from different message board communities based in different parts of the country, appear to be very similar in many ways.

Implications

The results of this research, although not generalizable to all Internet users or even all CSMB users, suggests that CSMBs are among the most important sports media to active users of the Websites. Although not as vital to non-participating users, or lurkers, they nevertheless garner a place of great importance among all who log on to CSMBs. The findings may be important to sports journalists who should take into account the relevance to sports fans of this alternative media source to gain information about their favorite team. Sports media are no longer one-way communications with professional journalists sending information and the public receiving. The casual sports fan, thanks to Websites including CSMBs, can now be the producer of information as well as the consumer (Real, 2006). CSMBs offer sports fans faster reporting with greater depth and discussion than traditional sports media formats, albeit with a lower level of reliability due to lack of editorial oversight and story verification requirements. The limits of traditional media like sports talk radio (program length and format) and newspaper (deadlines and page space) do not apply to CSMBs. They are able to be accessed at any time from any location, making them a truly worldwide participatory online location (Mahan & McDaniel, 2006).

The results offer an additional level of opportunities and challenges to sports personalities. With the ever-growing prominence of CSMBs - where fans control the content - players and coaches must be aware that their activities are under the microscope of not only traditional sports journalists, but also every member of the CSMB community. CSMBs offer an unprecedented level of opportunity for direct communication between fans and players, which can help build personal fan relationships

beyond anything possible with traditional media. However, with CSMBs, every user becomes a potential reporter who can "scoop" stories about what they have seen or heard (Real, 2006). Sports personalities need to be more careful than ever about what they do and say away from the field because everyone around them has the ability to report to the world on any inappropriate activities.

This study contains some major implications for traditional sports media practitioners. Sports reporters have already showed that they feel threatened by the direct connection that sports message boards can offer between players and fans (Real, 2006). The Internet has had a substantial impact on the publishing industry (Mathews et al., 2007), and while very few are arguing that publishing is dead, no one can deny that the industry is in a state of flux. Is it possible that a similar impact will be felt on sports journalism?

This study found lower numbers of lurkers than other types of message boards. However, the respondents on Clavio's (2009) study of collegiate sports message boards showed a similar number of lurkers (28%). It is possible that sports message boards generally have lower numbers of lurkers than other boards. There may even be some variation among sports or within levels of the same sport (High school, college, or professional). Future study is necessary to determine any differences between lurker populations with regard to message board type.

Although some may think of message board users as hotheads, this study indicated that arguing was the least preferred use of the medium. Users who read without posting make up about 20% of the users of collegiate sports message boards and tend to be female. Women seem reluctant to put their opinions forward in this public media

space. This finding may have implications for traditional media who seek to target women with sports news and for gender studies researchers who are considering the questions surrounding women's voices in the public sphere.

Limitations

Population

The non-probability sampling method used for this research experiment cannot be generalized to the greater population of CSMB users or Internet users. The findings of the present study are limited to users of the six message boards polled and do not represent the overall population of CSMB users.

Respondents

The research respondents were users of CSMBs. Although they are not generalizable to greater Internet populations, they were not intended to be. CSMB users were the focus of the study, so polling Internet users that do not take part in CSMBs would not further understanding of the population, but rather would dilute the findings. However, the respondents were limited to users of CSMBs that focus on Big 12 schools, so generalizing the results to other CSMB populations, either college or professional, is not possible.

Missing Item

One item was arbitrarily left out of the Likert-type section of the survey. "Because I enjoy putting users in their place" was used in Clavio (2009) and registered on Factor Four, *Argumentation*. Had it been included, the researcher believes it would have loaded on Factor Four in this study, as well.

Big 12 CSMBs

Only six Big 12 collegiate sports message boards were used for this study. Two others (Soonersfans.com and Texags.com) were contacted, but no reply was received. If more CSMBs had been used, the respondent pool would likely have been larger.

Future Research

Lurkers and Posters

Further study should be focused on lurkers as a large yet non-participatory segment of message board populations. This study showed that lurkers on CSMBs are less likely than posters to consume all forms of sports media. It would be interesting to understand if this trend carries over to lurkers on message boards with a focus other than sports. With lurkers making up as much as 90% of some message board populations (Katz, 1998), they can be a silent majority in many instances. It is possible that they use all media less than their posting counterparts, not just sports media. Further study into this particular type of Internet user is needed.

One potential area of future study would be to discover if there is a correlation between fanship and lurker/poster status. Using a fanship scale, it could be determined if lurkers scored lower or higher than posters with regard to their overall sport fanship. Posters spend more time and post more content on CSMBs than lurkers, so it is possible that they would score more highly on sport fanship scales, as well. It is feasible that posters could be bigger sports fans in general, but more study is needed to determine if any connection exists between lurker/poster status and general fanship scores.

Another potential area of future study is to compare the level of fandom with the amount of value placed on CSMBs. Posters scored higher than lurkers in four of the five

factors in this study. They felt more strongly about the use of CSMBs for *Interactivity*, *Diversion*, *Information Gathering*, and *Argumentation*. The only Factor where there was not a statistically significant difference between lurkers and posters was *Pass Time*. Not only is it possible that fanship equates to lurker/poster status, but it might also correlate to the level of importance placed on CSMBs. The casual sports fan may feel less strongly about CSMBs, which could correlate to lurker status, but more study is needed in order to discern any connections between the two.

Women's Studies

Women were more likely to be lurkers in this study. There are some potential areas of connection between this and other gender studies. Women speak up less than men in a classroom setting (Banks, 1989). It is possible that there is some link between this social behavior and their lower levels of participation in CSMBs. Women are less likely to participate in other areas in society. Could this tendency also be affecting their participation in CSMBs? More study could discern any connections between female response rates in other settings and those on CSMBs.

Another potential area of gender comparison is with CSMBs and televised sports. Studies have shown that women are less interested in televised sports than men and they devote less time to watching televised sports broadcasts, as well (Ganz & Wenner, 1991). It is possible that there is a connection between women's lack of interest in televised sports and their lack of participation in online sports media.

Women use the Internet less frequently than men (Wasserman & Richmond-Abbott, 2005). It is possible that both the lower level of interest and participation in

televised sports and the lower level of overall Internet participation effect women's activities on CSMBs. Future study comparing these two behaviors in relation to CSMB participation could discern any correlations between the two as well as the degree of effect that Internet participation and sports participation have on CSMB activity.

Sports Journalists

It looks like CSMBs are here to stay. While some traditional sports journalists may feel threatened (Poor, 2006), it is the savvy journalist that will use CSMBs to their advantage. The Websites can gauge what stories are most important to fans. They can provide potential stories in the form of rumors to be investigated and verified. CSMBs can be a powerful tool. While they have many advantages over traditional sports reporting, they will likely never have the saturation or access provided by traditional sports media. Instead of being worried by the potential changes, journalists should include CSMBs as part of their regular research. With this in mind, future research should focus on the way in which traditional media practitioners use CSMBs in their work. It would also be interesting to use a content analysis to see if there is a connection between stories on CSMBs and those that appear in legitimate sources like newspapers.

Conclusion

CSMB's have emerged as an important medium in the sports information arena. The importance with which users of CSMBs hold the Websites, as discovered in this study, is valuable. Sports fans' preference for CSMBs (70.1%) over all other media forms should give pause to sports journalists everywhere. While sports journalists' positions may not be directly jeopardized by the emerging technology, the large number of respondents who prefer CSMBs to traditional sports reporting is significant.

CSMBs users are mostly seeking information, looking to interact with friends and wanting to pass some free time. They felt strongly that CSMBs were not used for argumentation or for non-sports information. All of these gratifications put CSMBs in a unique position among emerging Internet-based social networks and sports media. For anyone looking to disseminate information about a specific sports team, CSMBs present a new channel with ample potential.

There are several possible explanations for the findings of this study. Overall fanship could have an effect on CSMB usage. Said plainly, posters on CSMBs may be bigger sports fans than lurkers. If that's the case, then a correlation could be drawn across all sports participation including ticket purchases, broadcast viewing, memorabilia ownership, CSMB use and event attendance.

The fact that respondents had a negative reaction to the use of message boards for "flaming" or "smack talk" could be a sign of cognitive dissonance. While it is clear users self-report that they don't use CSMBs for Factor Four, *Argumentation*, negative posts make up a considerable portion of the total posts made and many CSMBs have entire forums dedicated to the practice. It is possible that many users enjoy arguing but they don't want to appear aggressive or argumentative. Future study could focus on this apparent dissonance between behavior and stated belief.

This study identified CSMBs as the type of sports media with the highest usage among respondents. However, that result was somewhat expected considering the sample was made up entirely of CSMB users. It would be interesting to see where CSMBs rank among sports media with regard to time spent among general sports fans. Although it may be difficult to get a large enough sample size to achieve statistically significant

results, it would be a valuable piece of data for sports journalists, fans and academics. CSMBs make up a significant portion of sports media, but it will not be known how significant that portion is until a comparison can be made among the larger population of all sports fans. CSMBs offer sports fans the ability to be producers and not just consumers of sports media (Real, 2006). They represent an entirely new type, but little is known about their impact in the context of all sports media. Learning how much time all sports fans spend on CSMBs could give a clearer picture of today's sports media landscape to everyone involved, including professionals and casual fans.

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Appendix A - Request to post survey

Appendix A: Request to post survey

Dear _____,

I am a current graduate student at Oklahoma State University. I'm conducting a survey on Big 12 collegiate sports message boards for my master's thesis. I'm writing to request permission to post a link to my survey on your message board. The survey will include some general demographic questions, questions about the amount of time users spend with various sports media (television, radio, newspapers, message boards, etc.), and questions about the reasons that people use collegiate sports message boards. I can provide you with a copy of the survey if you would like.

I will be holding a raffle between participants for a \$100 gift card to Amazon.com. Participation in the raffle will be voluntary since an email address will be required for entry into the raffle. I will be more than happy to share the results with you and your members upon completion of the study.

Will you help out a Big 12 grad student?

Thank you for your consideration,

Brad Epperley

Appendix B - Message board recruitment post

Appendix B: Recruitment message board post

Title:

Short survey: Chance to win \$100 AND help out a Big 12 grad student. (Lurkers, please respond!)

Message:

Would you like the chance to win a \$100 gift card to Amazon.com?

Would you like to help out a Big 12 graduate student?

Please click the link below and take a short survey on collegiate sports message boards and you can do both at the same time!

Under 18? Sorry, but you can't participate due to University guidelines.

Even if you just read the boards and don't post, I'm interested in your opinion. Please take a few minutes to help a struggling grad student get his degree.

<survey link>

Appendix C - Sample Survey

STUDY OF COLLEGIATE SPORTS MESSAGE BOARD WEBSITES

Primary Researcher: Brad Epperley, Oklahoma State University

Advisor: Dr. Jami Fullerton, Oklahoma State University

Thank you for participating in this research study. This survey is designed to gain a better understanding of how and why people use collegiate sports message boards.

Here are a few things you should know:

- 1) Your participation is voluntary. You can quit the survey at any time
- 2) This survey will take less than 20 minutes to complete
- 3) You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey
- 4) This survey can only be taken once on any computer
- 5) Your answers to this survey will be anonymous and the records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records.
- 6) There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.
- 7) This survey is part of a master's degree program at Oklahoma State University. If you have any questions you may contact Brad Epperley at bepperl@okstate.edu.
- 8) If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377, or irb@okstate.edu.
- 9) By completing this survey, you are giving your consent to participate.

1. For each of the statements listed below, please respond based on the following scale:

I use collegiate sports message boards:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
To find out news faster than I would using other types of sports media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Because I find out things about my favorite team that my friends don't know	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To feel like I'm part of the community even though I live far away	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To express myself freely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To talk about things other than sports, such as politics or religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To keep up with non-athletic news about my alma mater	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To stay in touch with old friends and classmates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To pass time when I'm bored	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To meet new and interesting people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To discuss games in progress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. I use collegiate sports message boards :

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
To talk about my team's recruiting efforts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To read what others have to say, even though I don't participate in discussion myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To give my input and opinions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To complain about things going wrong with my favorite team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To communicate with fellow fans of my school and/or team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Because I like to use the non-sports forums to discuss all issues of life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To see video clips of top players and/or recruits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To "smack talk" or "flame" fans of other schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To hear about other users' personal encounters with coaches and players	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Because I feel like I'm a part of the message board community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. I use collegiate sports message boards:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
To argue with other users online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Because it offers more in-depth coverage of my favorite team than traditional sports media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Because I enjoy reading what other users write	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To get information about my favorite team that I can't get elsewhere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To participate in discussions about my favorite team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Because it gives me something to do at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To find out the latest gossip about players	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To be able to share my views anonymously	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To share information I have learned with the community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Because I enjoy interacting with other users	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To belong to a community of like-minded fans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Are you a registered member of one or more collegiate sports message boards?

- Yes
- No

5. If so, how many total posts would you estimate you make per week on collegiate sports message boards? If not, choose 0.

- 0
- 1-20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- More than 60

6. What collegiate sports team are you the biggest fan of, or follow most closely?

Other (please specify)

7. In a typical week, how many hours would you estimate you spend on the Internet?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

8. In a typical week, how many hours would you estimate you spend on collegiate sports message boards?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

9. In a typical week, how many hours would you estimate you spend reading the sports section of newspapers?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

10. In a typical week, how much time do you spend reading sports magazines?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

11. In a typical week, how much time would you estimate you spend watching local television sports news coverage?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

12. In a typical week, how much time would you estimate you spend watching national sports television networks?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

13. In a typical week, how much time would you estimate you spend listening to sports talk radio?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

14. In a typical week, how much time would you estimate you spend on national sports media websites (e.g. ESPN.com, FoxSports.com)?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

15. In a typical week, how much time would you estimate you spend on local news sports media websites?

- 0 hours
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-25 hours
- 26 or more hours

**16. Which type of sports media do you prefer for information about your favorite team?
(Choose one).**

- Collegiate sports message boards
- Sports section of a local paper
- Sports magazines (e.g. ESPN the Magazine)
- Local television news sports broadcasts
- National sports television networks (e.g. ESPN, Fox Sports)
- Sports talk radio
- National sports media websites (e.g. ESPN.com, Yahoo! Sports)
- Local news sports media websites

Other (please specify)

17. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-22
- 23-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or over

18. Are you:

- Male
- Female

19. What is your approximate household income?

- \$19,999 or less
- \$20,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$59,999
- \$60,000-\$79,999
- \$80,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$199,999
- \$200,000+

20. What best describes your level of education?

- Some high school
- High school diploma
- Some undergraduate
- Undergraduate degree
- Some graduate
- Master's degree
- Doctorate

Other (please specify)

21. If you attended college, please list the institutions you attended, starting with the first.

	College or University
Institution 1	<input type="text"/>
Institution 2	<input type="text"/>
Institution 3	<input type="text"/>

Other (please specify)

22. What is your marital status?

- Married or living with domestic partner
- Single

23. Which of the following best describes your race/ethnicity?

- Caucasian/White, Non-Hispanic
- Hispanic
- Black or African American
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Two or More Races

Other (please specify)

24. In what country is your primary residence?

25. If you answered "United States" to the previous question, in which state is your primary residence located?

Appendix D - IRB Review Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, November 29, 2011
IRB Application No: AS11131
Proposal Title: Lurkers and Posters on Collegiate Sports Message Boards: A Uses and Gratifications Study

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 11/28/2012

Principal Investigator(s):

Bradley Scott Epperley 1737 S. Peoria Ave. #26 Tulsa, OK 74120	Jami Armstrong Fullerton OSU-Tulsa 700 N. Greenwo Tulsa, OK 74106
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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

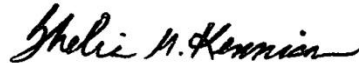
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Bradley Scott Epperley

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Thesis: LURKERS AND POSTERS ON COLLEGIATE SPORTS MESSAGE
BOARDS: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS STUDY

Major Field: Mass Communication/Media Management

Biographical:

Education:

Oklahoma State University
Bachelor of Arts – English
December 2006

Oklahoma State University
Masters of Science – Mass Communication/Media Management
Expected completion – May 2012

Experience:

PennWell Publishing
Developmental Editor (2007-present)

Name: Bradley Scott Epperley

Date of Degree: May 7, 2012

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Tulsa, Oklahoma

Title of Study: LURKERS AND POSTERS ON COLLEGIATE SPORTS MESSAGE
BOARDS: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS STUDY

Pages in Study: 73

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Mass Communication/Media Management

Scope and Method of Study:

Collegiate sports message boards are a highly trafficked, popular type of interactive sports media. However, relatively little study has been done to discern why users visit the Websites and what gratifications they seek from them. No study has yet compared the two groups of CSMB users known as *lurkers* and *posters*. The purpose of this study is to determine the uses and gratifications sought by all CSMB users. It attempts to discern what, if any, demographic differences exist between posters and lurkers of CSMBs. It also seeks to compare these groups with regard to their media usage. Finally, the study measures the amount of time spent with all types of sports media including CSMBs, newspapers, local television, local news Websites, sports radio, national sports television and national sports Websites. The methodology for this study was an online survey with a link to the survey posted on six Big 12 conference CSMBs.

Findings and Conclusions:

There were a total of 574 online surveys completed. The results indicate that CSMB users are mostly male, Caucasian/white non-hispanic, married or living with a partner and college educated. Five factors were identified using factor analysis including *Interaction*, *Diversion*, *Information Gathering*, *Argumentation* and *Pass Time*. Users overwhelmingly preferred CSMBs (70.1%) to all other sports media formats for information about their favorite team. Users also spent more time with CSMBs than any other sports media. Females were more likely to be lurkers. Lurkers were older than posters. Posters valued 4 of the 5 factors more highly than lurkers and the fifth factor, *Pass Time*, approached significance. Posters spent more time with the Internet, CSMBs and sports magazines. This study confirms many previous studies with regard to uses and gratifications of the Internet and of sports media.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Jami Fullerton, PhD
