

2011

Fandom, media consumption, and college sports knowledge: a survey of college undergraduates

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FANDOM, MEDIA CONSUMPTION, AND COLLEGE SPORTS KNOWLEDGE:
A SURVEY OF COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Mass Communication

In

Theanship School of Mass Communication

By
Theodore Charles Greener
B.A. West Virginia University, 2008
May, 2010

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my grandfather, Lt. Colonel (retired), former Deputy Press Secretary to the President, and former Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), William I. Greener, Jr. Without your service to this country and the foundation you laid for your children and grandchildren, none of this would be possible. Thank you for all the inspiration, motivation, and encouragement you provided throughout the years. We are all blessed to have you in our lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Lance Porter. Your assistance, guidance, and most importantly, patience, throughout this process helped shape this thesis. Without your help, this thesis would not be possible. The academic world is immensely fortunate to have such an accomplished, well-rounded scholar and proficient communicator.

Next, I would also like to thank Prof. Craig Freeman and Dr. Kirby Goidel for their sound advice and steadfast council. Both of you made this process enjoyable. I am lucky to have worked with you both and value the relationship we forged and strengthened throughout.

I would also like to thank all of the devoted educators who have challenged me and helped me grow as an individual and a thinker. My professors at West Virginia University, most notably Dr. Theodore Avtgis, Dr. Sean Horan, and Ms. Andrea Weber, I sincerely thank you for providing a foundation and encouraging me to continue my education. All of the teachers at the Manship School of Mass Communication, especially Dr. Regina Lawrence and Dr. Johanna Dunaway, thank you for forcing me to think about matters differently. My supervisor, Dr. Nicole Dahmen, thank you for the guidance and assistance the last two years. Last, Dr. Margaret DeFleur, thank you for seeing something in me and supporting my admission to the program.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their steadfast support. Mom and Dad, you have always been there, through thick and thin and I thank you for that. Rebecca, Billy, and Jesse, my awesome siblings, you are the best family anyone could ask for. KC Gavin, thank you for being you, for always encouraging me, and of course, for calming me down. Thank you. And last, Britt Christensen, a classmate, a friend, and someone I will forever keep in touch with. Thanks for taking the ride alongside me and always lending a helping hand – It has been great.

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ABSTRACT

Sports fandom research often states sports fans know and understand facts surrounding various sports, teams, leagues, and players. College sports literature argues that media involvement increases popularity and revenues, and as a result, competition, controversy, and complexity. The Elaboration Likelihood Model posits that when involvement in a subject is high, so too is motivation and ability to comprehend, and as a result, cognition increases. Given this, results show that sports fandom acts similarly to issue involvement, leading to increased sports-media consumption. Together, both fandom and consumption lead to increased knowledge of facts surrounding college sports. Results imply that general interest in sports leads to knowledge acquisition of facts related to college sports, independent of a preference for college sports. Due to the pervasiveness of college sports in sports-media, those who value sports and attend to sports-media as a result, come to learn about college sports through mere exposure. Results speak to the popularity of college sports and indicate that sports fans remain aware of characteristics unique to college sports and accompanying discussion that takes place within sports-media. Results, however, also indicate that college sports-media consumption is niche-specific, as individuals who placed the most value in college sports scored the highest, signifying that selective exposure to college sports leads to heightened knowledge. Thus, results imply that media do provide incisive information about the complex nature of college sports and fandom does influence behaviors and reinforces preferences. Individuals ultimately control the information they receive, selectively attending to content that coincides with their preferences while avoiding exposure to that which does not. Sports remain another way for individuals to reinforce niche preferences and ultimately learn.

INTRODUCTION

Sports remain a central component of mainstream, American culture, intricately entwined within everyday life (e.g., media, education, language) (Mean & Halone, 2010). Sports' worth steadily grows and today represents a \$213 billion yearly industry (Hughes & Shank, 2005). In fact, sports remain the second most prominent institution behind religion (Frey & Eitzen, 1991).

Sports, aided by technological advancement and mass media, evolved over time from a recreational activity to a commercial-entertainment entity in which sports actors and media work symbiotically to produce a highly profitable, regular commodity. Sports represent a microcosm of society, but unique in that they “command the mystique, the nostalgia, the romantic ideational cultural fixation” of the masses (Frey & Eitzen, 1991, p. 504). Perhaps no other institution combines serious and entertaining components so efficiently (Washington & Karen, 2001).

As a result, extant research notes the frequent presence of sports programming, both professional and college (i.e., games, news) in media (Bellamy, 2006). Pro sports appear straightforward – players are paid and playoff systems decide championships. College sports appear more complex, as an organization known as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) governs 23 sports using a 250-page handbook outlining what not to do off the field, and in, football, a system known as the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) decides championships.

Given college sports' controversial and complex characteristics that differentiate them from professional sports, the purpose of this study is to determine if sports fandom (i.e., how much an individual values sports) and sports-media consumption (i.e., watching games, reading commentary) lead to knowledge of college sports (similar to political knowledge - Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Next, I further explain the motivation for this study as well as the theoretical background and the ultimate purpose, contribution, and relevance.

Consider that the most popular American sport remains professional football, specifically the National Football League (NFL) (Gallup, 2008). In the NFL, the league generates revenue through ticket sales, broadcasting rights, and merchandise sales. The NFL, in accordance with owners, creates rules for the league and pays players for fulfilling the obligations of their contract (i.e., playing football). The league determines the champion through a seeded playoff.

Then consider another American favorite – NCAA sports (primarily football and men’s basketball – “revenue sports”). Players receive an academic scholarship rather than financial compensation, the NCAA determines rules, and football chooses to decide its champion through a complex system of computer and human polls. By the definition of the NCAA’s newly elected president, Mark Emmert, college sports are “a uniquely American phenomenon. No other nation on earth, combines sports and athletics the way we do in the United States” (NOLA.com, 2011).

Yet, uniqueness and complexity causes confusion and often leads critics to paint the NCAA and college sports as hypocritical, institutionally flawed, and incapable of ensuring the idealistic rules and regulations in place (Sack, 2009). “I think 98 percent of the public doesn't know what the NCAA is or what it does,” said Sports Illustrated’s lead college football writer Stewart Mandel in a personal interview. Therefore, while NCAA-sponsored college sports remain widely popular, the NCAA and college sports remain controversial and complex. In fact, “no other American institution has experienced greater crises and scandals than big-time college sports, and yet it has not only survived all of them but thrived” (Splitt, 2010).

Given this and media coverage of college sports and the NCAA (games and news), I ask, does interest in (fandom) and attention to (consumption) sports-media lead to greater awareness of college sports? Do sports fans gain knowledge of facts relevant to college sports despite complexity? The following section helps answer these questions through theory.

Presentation of Relevant Theories

Given the popularity¹, commodification², and media's regular and partially predictable coverage of college sports³, consumers of sports-media might be aware, despite inherent complexity and unique characteristics, of facts surrounding college sports, the NCAA, and controversial characteristics (e.g., amateurism, the BCS). One theory – fandom - and one model for cognition - the Elaboration Likelihood Model, or ELM - (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) help explain how consumers of sports-media may gain knowledge of facts relevant to a specific entity in college sports. This section will define fandom, a theory central to sports research (Benigni, Porter, & Wood, 2009; Wann & Branscombe, 1991; Partridge, Wann, & Elison, 2010), and highlight links between sports fandom, sports-media consumption, and knowledge acquisition.

In addition, I will make a connection between fandom and ELM, a cognition model that has been applied to media disciplines such as advertising (Chang-Hoan, 1999; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; San Jose-Cabesudo, Gutierrez-Arranz, & Gutierrez-Cillan, 2009), public opinion (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Glynn, Herbst, O'Keefe, & Shapiro, 1999), and foreign affairs (Clark & Christie, 2005). Most importantly, I will make a connection between fandom and issue involvement - a key ELM postulate - showing a link between the two based on personal motivation and ability. I will first discuss fandom, emphasizing sports fandom research. An explanation of ELM and its relation to fandom and knowledge acquisition will follow.

¹ Yahoo! Sports reported the day of the 2011 BCS National Championship Game that ticket prices were at an all-time high. The average ticket cost more than \$3,500 (Yahoo, 2010).

² Regularly scheduled, live broadcasts of games are now available through an abundance of TV channels on cable and dish platforms. ESPN recently began streaming games online via ESPN's new platform, ESPN3, and streams all regular programming online now via espnetworks.com.

³ Research suggests sports-media devotes significant attention to controversial issues, best characterized as scandals (Hughes & Shank, 2008). From 1998-2007, networks such as ESPN covered steroids in baseball frequently. In 2010, media covered amateurism issues, as well as the infiltration of agents in college football, with similar regularity. I believe college sports lend themselves to a sensational media more so than other sports because of unique characteristics.

Fandom

Interest in sports and subsequent exposure, consumption, and retaining of college-specific information (knowledge) may be mediated by sports fandom (Wann, 1995). While research fails to unanimously define this concept, it is broadly defined as the state or attitude of being a fan of something (including areas outside of sports such as music, drama, or pop-culture) (Arpan & Raney, 2003). The term, however, is derived from the word fanatic, which stresses more than a small interest. A fan is dedicated, emotionally invested, and obsessed (Crawford, 2004).

As Reysen and Branscombe (2010) note, “any individual who is enthusiastic, ardent, and loyal admirer of something can be reasonably considered a fan” (p. 177). In a way, fandom resembles an occupation individuals choose to engage in based on one’s personality, interests, internal motivations, external environment, and ability (Humphries & Smith, 2006). Following this logic, individuals possess an innate orientation or inclination to “obsess” over an activity or entity. Some are simply prone to this oft-negatively depicted concept of fandom.

For instance, individuals immersed in cultures that place significant value on a particular interest (e.g., college football in the South) are more likely to develop a high level of fandom for that entity than others. As such, fandom research now extends past its roots within sports research, and is slowly becoming an interdisciplinary concept. This makes sense, because as society becomes increasingly fragmented, individuals become more niche-oriented, and being “obsessed with a niche” (e.g., a music or movie genre) aside from sports is hardly far-fetched.

Yet, fandom research typically revolves around sports, albeit sometimes inaccurately. Researchers often confuse fanship (or team identification) with fandom (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). One must recognize, however, the careful distinction between fandom, a connection to the idea of sports as a whole, and fanship, the devotion to one team in particular.

Reysen and Branscombe (2010) argue fandom is a group trait concerned with sports generally and part of one's *social* identity. Conversely, fanship is part one's *personal* identity, concerned with interest in a specific team, defined as "the extent that a fan feels psychologically connected to a team" (Wann, 1997, p. 331). Individuals may be high in fandom, but lack strong fanship, or vice versa. I am concerned with fandom, as I look to discover how one's general, social value of sports impacts interest in and knowledge of a specific sport genre (college sports).

In terms of fandom and its relation to sports-media consumption, Wann (2006) identifies three categories of sports consumption (game, team merchandise, and sponsorship consumption). Game consumption includes direct (in-person, live) and indirect (mediated) consumption. Wann (2006) argues fans consume both types of game consumption most often.

More so, Gantz and Wenner (1995) argue sports fans attend to both games and "non-game content." Non-game content includes watching highlight shows (e.g., *SportsCenter*), reading about sports in newspapers or magazines (e.g., *Sports Illustrated*), listening to sports radio, and now, going online to the thousands of options available for sports fans (i.e., sports websites such as Yahoo.com or ESPN.com, or sports fan sites such as Rivals.com or Scout.com). Important for this study, fans possess an emotional attachment to sports, and place significant value in *consuming* sports-media (Hunt, Bristol, & Barshaw, 1999). Consequently, fandom is associated with consumption levels of sports-media, both games *and* non-game content.

As a result, sports fans remain aware of basic facts and more niche-specific information (Gantz and Wenner, 1995). They "know about the techniques, guidelines, and rules associated with the sport they follow; many are walking compendiums of the current status of particular players and teams" (Gantz & Wenner, 1995, p. 59). Thus, research shows that sports fandom increases sports-media consumption and creates opportunities for knowledge acquisition.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), a fairly general framework for “organizing, categorizing, and understanding the basic process underlying [cognition by separating cognitive effort into high and low]” (pg. 125), helps explain possible knowledge acquisition (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). More specifically, key postulates in ELM, most especially issue involvement (i.e., interest in a subject), help explain why individuals may or may not be aware of certain facts pertaining to college sports. The following section explains what ELM is and how it works.

ELM distinguishes elaboration (thought, cognition, etc.) in two distinct routes, central and peripheral, which work on a continuum from low to high. High cognition, or elaborated thought, characterizes central processing in that individuals consciously and thoughtfully consider the message at hand. According to Griffin (2006), it is “the extent to which a person carefully thinks about issue-relevant arguments contained in [a message]” (Griffin, 2006, p. 217). Research states that attitudes, the primary application concern of ELM and different than knowledge, formed via the central route are long lasting, predictive of behavior, and generally more credible due to heightened message scrutiny (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Thus, sports fans should theoretically attend to sports-media (games or non-game content) via the central route.

Meanwhile, comparatively low levels of cognition characterize the peripheral route. Individuals process peripherally because a simple cue in the message (e.g., credibility of the speaker) suffices for the receiver (Griffin, 2006). The peripheral route offers a shorthand method to accept or reject a message without any depth of thought pertaining to the attributes of the message. Thoughtfulness about the message itself is virtually non-existent, as the process relies on external forces. Accordingly, low or non-sports fans may process sports-media peripherally.

Central route processing occurs due to consideration of the true merits of the message, motivation, and ability (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Perhaps most importantly, motivation is largely mediated by issue involvement. Issue involvement, one's level of attachment and interest in a subject, is similar to fandom because both are based largely on internal motivation and interest (Griffin, 2006; Wann, 2002). Though not the same concept, the two are clearly related.

Factors for involvement include motivation and ability to process content. One must possess the cognitive abilities (i.e., literacy, access) to process a message, as well as internal motivation to do so. If both are high, then so too will be issue involvement, the extent to which an issue or object is personally relevant to the message receiver (Antcil, 1984). Research suggests that high involvement elicits greater personal connections, and as a result, greater attention to semantics through central processing (Engel & Blackwell, 1982).

By equating fandom to issue involvement, fans may not only consume sports media, but also do so more thoughtfully because of a connection to the subject. Just as issue involvement induces greater thought and central route processing when exposed to persuasive communication (San Jose-Cabesudo, Gutierrez-Arranz, & Gutierrez-Cillan, 2009), sports fans may acquire knowledge because of similarly increased attention and central processing. This connection between fandom and issue involvement is key for this study. If issue involvement leads to more central processing of information, then so too should fandom. This is based on motivation, ability, and its role in mediating both issue involvement and fandom.

Thus, fandom and ELM help explain why individuals may attend to sports-media and acquire knowledge. The rest of this introduction section will explain the contribution and relevance of this study. It will also provide an outline for the remainder of this paper.

Contribution and Relevance

Despite the incredible commodification, commercialization, and societal impact of sports, scholars conclude sports-related, academic research falls short in its potential. It “remains somewhat of an orphan specialty...an after-thought, pursued as an academic interest only after ‘serious’ work is done” (Frey & Eitzen, 1991, p. 518). Academics often nudge sports studies to specialty journals and disciplines (Washington & Karen, 2001). Sport is especially “sidelined” among communication researchers (Mean & Halone, 2010). I challenge these trends through a serious examination of college sports and sports fandom.

Heeding the advice of Washington and Karen (2001), I take a macro-level approach to begin discovering how college sports “affect patterns of power in the larger political economy” (p. 203). As college sports remain controversial, awareness of differentiating characteristics and inherent bureaucracy is important in facilitating earnest conversation. I believe subject knowledge (i.e., knowing the name of the NCAA’s president, understanding the NCAA’s non-profit, voluntary classification) signifies investment and provides a base of people able to discuss and understand pervasive issues salient within media that compromise college sports.

This study is important because as college sports remain increasingly commercial and controversial, individuals should understand how they operate and how they differ from other, popular sports (i.e., professional). If invested consumers do not know basic facts about college sports and the NCAA and understand inherent complexity, bureaucracy, and uniqueness, (e.g., amateurism advocate, divisional differences), then the NCAA, member schools, or the media fail to adequately inform their target market and key stakeholders. More so, college sports may be unfairly criticized if invested consumers do not understand the uniqueness of college sports. I argue sports-media consumers should be aware of the complexity inherent in college sports.

Outline

Moving forward, I review relevant literature, present research questions and hypotheses, outline the employed method, impart results, and discuss findings and related implications. The literature review consists of nine sections. The first two sections in the literature review pertain to media in America. I first address how technological advancements continually transform information distribution and create a demand for media content. Next, I discuss how media have evolved to supply such content, and explain how this relates to sports-media.

In the following seven sections, I explain important components of college sports. First, I address the origins of college sports and the NCAA, an entity that lends itself to sensational media. I then formally define the NCAA and discuss the structure of big-time college sports, emphasizing its structure and complexity. Next, I explain how media involvement in college sports creates revenue streams and increases their popularity. After that, I show that such conditions fuel an arms race in big-time college sports that brings increased media scrutiny.

To conclude the literature review, I offer examples of media coverage surrounding issues in college sports, and explain why media consumers may be exposed to pertinent information. This includes facts surrounding the NCAA, the BCS, and amateurism. Based on the literature, I hypothesize that high sports-media consumption and fandom will both increase knowledge.

I then present a survey measuring individual's fandom, media consumption, knowledge of college sports, and ultimately attitudes towards reform. I explain the settings for the study, the specific procedures, and the delivery method for the survey. The following section presents the results of data collection, followed by a discussion of key findings, as well as limitations, implications and conclusions. As noted, the next section will explain the impact of technology on information and content distribution, including sports information and content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Mediated Society

Michael Schudson's *Discovering the News* (1978) chronicled the development of information distribution and mass media in the United States, attributing growth to landmark technological developments. His seminal work suggested that industrialization and the steam press created a significant shift in America – individuals began living and working in urban settings more than before. As a result, information became an increasingly valuable commodity.

Schudson stated that the development of the penny press in the 1830s (daily newspapers produced in abundance and available to the public at a reasonable price), and later the radio, television, and Internet (which came after Schudson's analysis), facilitated media advancement to disseminate information seamlessly and efficiently. Technological advances, he argued, led to mass production of information and increased the speed of information dissemination.

As such, however, individuals hold unrealistic and exaggerated expectations of the world due to abundant, free-flowing information (Boorstin, 1961). The "Graphic Revolution," characterized most by the television, created a demand for regularly occurring media content. Time and space in newspapers, radio, television, and now the Internet, must be filled with the content Americans expect because of the penny press revolution (i.e., "filling the news hole").

This idea of "filling the news hole" exists today. As naturally occurring events fail to pass the newsworthy-litmus-test, Americans, argued Boorstin, create pseudo-events (e.g., interviews, *sports*) as a means to fill time and space. Accessible information and high demand causes media to manufacture content and rely on pseudo-events, "synthetic, believable, passive, vivid, simplified and ambiguous" (pg. 185). Sports appear to be a perfect example of a pseudo-event.

William Leach's *Land of Desire* (1993) addressed this notion, maintaining that American's desire for personal satisfaction and consumption leaves Americans constantly searching for "the next big thing." Leach stated that advertisers penetrate the public through media, making the two indiscernible, commercial entities. The unified acceptance of mass-market consumerism among business, politics, religion, and educational institutions, aided by new technologies, captivates American society. "American corporate business," Leach stated, "in league with key institutions, began the transformation of American society into a society preoccupied with consumption, with comfort and bodily well-being, with luxury, spending, and acquisition"(XIII). Desire became democratized as everyone could consume similar content.

As a result, Americans remain obsessed with newness and change. Media leads the charge and serves as a vehicle for information. Important for this study, Bryant and Holt (2006) argue that growth in sports and sports media naturally coincided with the growth of media and information distribution as a whole. Regular reporting on sports in daily newspapers became another way to fill time and space; Broadcasting games became yet another way to reach the masses and fulfill the demands of a media-seeking public (Bryant & Holt, 2006).

In fact, sports and sports media in America was another natural outgrowth of media growth (Bellamy, 2006). Conditions that fueled general media growth (e.g., nationalization, immigration, technology) and created media routines and values also transformed sports media. Sports may actually present the most ideal vehicle to sell information, as they inherently present winners and losers and enable seamless consumption (print, digital, or live) (Bellamy, 2006). Thus, media growth helped sports in America grow, creating consumers and new avenues to do so (media). The following section addresses the historical development of media routines and values and shows how they apply to sports reporting (especially concerning college sports).

News Production

Douglas Cater (1959) argued that media, particularly news, have evolved to fit the American lifestyle – It is instantaneous and continuous. As such, media adheres to routines and values that now help define it. Routines include the presentation of conflicting possibilities and supporting evidence, and the structuring of information in an appropriate sequence (Tuchman 1973). Values primarily revolve around newsworthiness, which is defined by the timeliness of information and the extent to which it is conflictual, personalized, and relevant to the market. Routines and values ultimately transform output. “News is a manufactured good, the product of a set of social, economic, and political institutions and practices” (Schudson, 2003, p. 13).

Though these arguments arose from political research, research shows sports media adhere to similar routines and values (Bellamy, 2006). Media and sports actors (e.g., athletes, coaches) enjoy an interdependent relationship to fulfill journalistic norms, routines, and values, similar to politicians and media as intrinsic internal and external media influences and characteristics create partially synthetic, predominately predictable news intended to fill the news hole (Bryant & Holt, 2006). In fact, values, (e.g., dichotomous, conflictual, personal) hold true more so for sports reporting than other areas, such as business or politics.

Bryant and Holt (2006) attribute such conditions to live broadcasts of games that forced sports-media to evolve. Media began covering areas not addressed during games (i.e., off-field news), and as a result, expanded sports-media. This evolution continues today, as thousands of media outlets inform consumers through specialization, interactive-two-way communication, and dramatic reporting (Real, 2006). One area sports-media frequently covers due to controversial and inherently newsworthy characteristics is college sports. The following sections outline, in order, the origins, the governing body (NCAA), and the structure of college sports.

The Origins of College Sports and the NCAA

College sports, the predominant form of amateur (non-paid) athletics in the United States and complex in nature, consistently garner substantial media coverage (Zimbalist, 1999). Numerous amateur organizations exist (e.g., National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics - NAIA); however, Washington (2004) argues the NCAA monopolized power in college sports. Accordingly, Depken and Wilson (2006) argue the public and media most often associate college sports with NCAA-sponsored sports, specifically Division I men's basketball and football ("revenue sports"). I am primarily concerned with these, "big-time," college sports.

Historically, college sports emerged amidst limited regulation and professionalism (Crowley, 2006). As a result, institutions aligned with similar institutions to create conferences, and shortly thereafter, per President Theodore Roosevelt's advice, formed The Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) (renamed the NCAA in 1910). Thus, the NCAA evolved from upheaval to subsequent formalization and institutionalization (Koch & Leonard, 1978). Today, the NCAA is recognized for member institutions, regulatory practices, and the notion of amateurism they propagate (Washington, 2004). The NCAA, synonymous with college sports, represents a formal institution defined by voluntary membership, structured bylaws, and self-regulation, as well as a group of schools competing in sports (Stern, 1981).

Therefore, the NCAA "the organization," one of "the most powerful nongovernmental [regulators] in America" (Epstein & Anderson, 2009, p. 116) is central to college sports. Yet, this unique, complex, and powerful entity is tremendously misunderstood (Potuto, 2007). "One of the most talked about and widely known private associations" (Potuto, 2007, p. 259), the NCAA is an organization made of its own members and a national office responsible for assisting member schools and housing and governing over 1,200 schools and 23 sports.

The NCAA

Broadly speaking, the NCAA is an association of institutions that compete in college sports. It is also an extremely bureaucratic, constantly evolving, nongovernmental regulatory agency (Epstein & Anderson, 2009). A non-profit organization that disperses 96% of its revenues to member institutions and conferences, the NCAA is an association “whose members agree to a codified (but alterable) set of regulations” intended to maintain order for competition, but also in the recruiting and retaining of athletes (Depken & Wilson, 2006).

Further, the NCAA has three membership classifications, Division I, II, and III, with “presidential committees” leading each division (Potuto, 2007). Representatives of presidential committees combine to create the NCAA Executive Committee to oversee the functions of the NCAA and ensure that each division remains consistent with its “basic purposes, fundamental policies, and general principles of the association.” Division I, my primary concern and considered the most powerful, operates under a committee structure led by athletic administrators or faculty representatives (not the national office) (Epstein & Anderson, 2009).

Perhaps most important to note, member institutions combine with the national office to create rules and policies. The national office maintains responsibility for assisting members with the creation, understanding, and enforcement of rules and the promotion of college sports. A recent pilot study surveying college students (n = 421) indicates knowledge of NCAA facts is low⁴. Accordingly, Sports Illustrated’s (SI) Stewart Mandel said in a recent interview⁵, “the single biggest causes of confusion for the public, which the NCAA does a terrible job of clearing up, is that membership and the [national office] are two different things” (Mandel, 2010).

⁴ (n = 421) 33.5% identified the NCAA as a non-profit; 13.5% identified the governing branch. See Appendix III for a complete explanation of the pilot study, including the instrument.

⁵ See Appendix IV for the full interview with SI’s lead college football writer, Stewart Mandel.

The Structure of College Sports

Big-time, Division I sports maintain residence within predominately large, state institutions that combine to create conferences. Among the 262 schools classified as research or doctoral universities by the Carnegie Foundation, 77% reside within Division I (Sweitzer, 2009). Conferences provide opportunities for on-field and economic success, foster regional identities, and provide context for competition. Conference members generally resemble each other in terms of geographic proximity and institutional makeup. Sweitzer stated that conference affiliation and allocated resources ultimately determines division membership.

Divisions work together to maintain the NCAA, similar to professional organizations but different because athletes are not paid. Instead, athletes receive a scholarship covering tuition, housing, and books (anything more is considered “an extra benefit”). This too is important, as oft-publicized scandals in college sports frequently revolve around players receiving various forms of improper/extra benefits from coaches, boosters, or agents.

Thus, while many seemingly recognize the NCAA purely for its role as a governing body, one must know that the NCAA is *primarily* an organization of institutions competing in organized, college sports. Division I membership provides exposure, guarantees an opportunity to qualify for postseason play in basketball or football, and acts as the “driver” for college sports. Division I also houses schools with large expenditures and revenues that bring media scrutiny.

The following section builds on this idea that divisional and conference affiliation helps shape the landscape of college sports. The big-time nature of college sports, explained next, also explains how current conditions in college sports create an arms race. This arms race spurs media coverage and criticism. Coverage, coupled with the bureaucratic structure, leads to complexity and issues that are unique to “big-time college sports” (Division I revenue sports).

College Sports: Mediated, Popular, and Commercial

Seminal works discussing big-time college sports argue they are highly mediated, widely popular, and as a result, extremely commercial (Adler & Adler, 1991; Zimbalist, 1999). Sports, at any level, represent a mediated product reflecting a production of reality defined by those who profit from them (Southall, Southall, & Dwyer, 2009). Unlike other American institutions (e.g., business, law), sports remain *primarily* mediated, shaping individuals' sports-related schema through commentary, editorials, and selection (Frey & Eitzen, 1991).

College sports remain heavily mediated in particular (Southall et al., 2009). Key actors (e.g., NCAA, schools, corporate partners, media entities) who stand to gain from media exposure create media content to facilitate revenues. In fact, Coleman, Gallo, Mason, and Steagall (2010) argue media affects college revenue sports more than any other sport, as media members rank teams to directly or indirectly help determine postseason seeding in football and basketball.

Southall et al. (2009) attribute a highly mediated environment, in part, to the deregulation of the cable industry in 1977 that created a shift from “sport-specific logic” to one where sports became a pervasive and highly valuable commodity to sponsors and broadcast companies. Further deregulation in 1984, when the Supreme Court granted institutions and conferences autonomy to seek their own television deals absent of the NCAA, further expanded the mainstream footprint of college sports. Today, member institutions and broadcast companies enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship similar to political actors and media (Cook, 2005) or professional sports leagues and media (Bellamy, 2006). Southall et al. state,

“Television producers and directors, as well as newspaper editors and journalists, decree which event aspects fans will experience. In a collaborative effort, producers, directors, and sanctioning organizing committees consciously or subconsciously telescope events, magnifying or minimizing certain elements of the occasion or personalities to fit into the parameters established by the network, sponsors, and/or the sport's sanctioning body or league” (p.156).

Thus, media advancement and increased involvement over the last thirty years made college sports more accessible and aided substantial growth in their popularity. In 2009, nineteen of America's twenty largest stadiums hosted a college football team (Rees & Schnepel, 2009). Total live attendance for college football in 2006 totaled 48 million, twice that of the three of the four, major professional organizations (NFL, NBA, NHL) (Baade, Baumann, & Matheson, 2008). Aside from some NASCAR and Professional Golf Association (PGA) Tour events, college football's most successful programs generate the largest live, paid attendance. Ticket revenues in football and men's basketball combined totaled over \$750 million in 1999.

Yet, mediated college sports remain even more popular. The BCS⁶ National Championship Game consistently ranks as the second most watched sporting event (behind the Super Bowl) (Southall et al., 2009). The 2011 game (though ratings were down) broke the record for most watched, cable television program, gaining a 16.1 rating (ESPN, 2010).

Dedicated fanfare and commodification of college sports leads to increased commercialization and substantial economic gains crucial for their existence. The NCAA and member schools support themselves through broadcasting rights and attendance, while "revenue sports" finance all other sports (McCormick & McCormick, 2008). From 1980-1989, NCAA Tournament broadcasting rights fees increased 900% (Coakley, 1990), and revenues continue to grow today (Kahn, 2007). The 2005 NCAA tournament totaled \$564 million in broadcast revenues alone, more than a season worth of MLB games. In 2009, FOX charged an average of \$950,000 for a 30-second spot during the National Championship game (Southall et al., 2009).

⁶ College football's powerful coalition of postseason bowls that guarantees admission to six of Division 1 FBS' twelve conferences (plus Notre Dame when they qualify). The BCS is one of the most controversial issues surrounding college sports. Presidents and NCAA administrators claim that the BCS preserves the sport's historical post-season bowl format. Detractors, including President Barack Obama and the NBA Maverick's owner Mark Cuban have publicly vowed to change the system between 2008 and 2010.

Therefore, based on the NCAA's recent deal with CBS to air the NCAA Tournament - \$10.8 billion for 14 years - scholars correctly deem NCAA sports "big business" (Benford, 2007). Commercialization "has been a natural outgrowth of the huge increase in the popularity of college sports" (McCormick & McCormick, 2008, p. 538) and now fosters a \$60 billion yearly industry. Games remain highly competitive entities, serving as an advertising vehicle for sponsors and institutions and providing a platform for television networks (chiefly Entertainment and Sports Programming Network [ESPN]) to gain maintain audience shares (Eitzen, 1999).

Immense popularity and commercialization therefore positions college sports as a central component to institutional sustainability and collegiate life, especially at large, state institutions (Martin & Christy, 2010). So much so, head football coaches are more known than university presidents and are often the highest paid state employee. Accordingly, schools devote large resources to maintain their presence. Proponents argue college sports create brand equity by being known generally and for specializations, establish loyalty, and display worth (Toma, Dunbrow, & Hartley, 2005). Most importantly, college sports extend past campus, "[holding] a powerful place in the American psyche" as Americans remain captivated with the games and the constant debate surrounding controversial issues (e.g., BCS) (Harris, 2009).⁷

Harris (2009) argues institutions now, often reluctantly, embrace their potential by using sports as a branding vehicle. Branding through sports influences external perceptions and encourages relationships with external stakeholders (e.g., alumni, media members, politicians). Mediated college sports ultimately serve as a "front porch," an exposure vehicle for institutions, and dramatically increase competition among institutions (Larimore & Chitiyo, 2007).

⁷ In 2010, ESPN concluded the "30 for 30" documentary series. The top three most watched films all pertained to college sports (ESPN, 2010). The most watched show dealt with amateurism and the NCAA's expulsion the Southern Methodist University's football team.

The Arms Race Effect: Increased Attention and Scrutiny

Yet, extant research also documents over commercialization, the incompatibility of college sports and academia, and the extent to which such conditions damage institutional reputations and fuel media coverage (Buer, 2009; Sperber, 2000).⁸ Scholars argue this popular, commercialized, entity creates an “arms race” in which institutions vie for the best coaches, players, facilities, and most recently, conference affiliation, with no regard for the economic, academic, or societal ramifications (Langelett, 2003). Supporting evidence exists in exorbitant recruiting costs and coaching salaries (Dumond, Lynch, and Platania, 2008).⁹

The arms race, coupled with a highly-formalized environment defined by rules to protect “amateurism,” lends itself to heightened media scrutiny and attention, raising serious questions about revenue sports’ amateur status, the “cartel” structure of the NCAA, and the recruiting and retaining of athletes (Kihl, 2009). Some argue the arms race decreases amateurism, and that winning and the association of success with goals (e.g., profit, visibility) now outweigh intrinsic motivations idealistically professed by the NCAA (Frey & Eitzen, 1991).

Thus, while the NCAA exerts positive influences (Steiber, 1991), and member institutions consistently evolve (i.e., Title IX to promote gender equality) (Zimbalist, 1999), bureaucracy plagues the system (Renick, 1974). Renick deemed the system inherently flawed as power rests within individuals associated with the program, (e.g., administrators, boosters), not athletes. While academia increasingly empowered the student, Renick believed sports continued to quell them. The result is a flawed system supporting “significant economic and legal interests of important institutions...(McCormick & McCormick, 2008, p. 496).”

⁸ See: *Beer and Circus* (Sperber, 2000).

⁹ 2001 average recruiting cost: \$526,000; 2003 average head football coach salary: \$388k.

Indeed, opponents now lament the system for bureaucracy, corruption (e.g., BCS) and “athlete deviance” (e.g., pay-for-play) (Schroeder, 2010). Evidence of increased scrutiny exists in sanctions, empirical inquiry, reform movements, frequently reported/sensationalized scandals surrounding rules infractions, and government involvement (O’Connor, 2006). As enforcement and reform efforts remain well publicized, problems appear pervasive.¹⁰

In relation to amateurism (primarily), the NCAA placed at least one football program on probation every two years from 1953-2003 (Depken & Wilson, 2006). In 2002 alone, six Southeastern Conference (SEC) schools were on probation or under investigation (O’Connor, 2006). In a 1989 survey of 122 Division I football coaches, participants estimated half of all programs committed a major infraction within the prior five years (Cullen, Latessa, & Byrne, 1990). A survey of basketball and football players found that 40% of athletes committed an infraction during the recruiting process, and 70% did while in school (Cullen & Latessa, 1998).

In fact, some argue college athletes are simply prone to breaking rules (Lederman, 1995). As a result, the public remains aware of problems increased scrutiny. A Knight Commission poll showed that Americans are aware of problems (Knight, 2006). Sixty percent said college sports are more professional than amateur; 61% said college sports are too commercial (Knight, 2006).

The mere creation of The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and other reform movements signified increased scrutiny concerning college sports (Knight, 2006). While reform movements fall short in yielding overhaul reform (due to the inaction of academics and administrators, extreme bureaucracy, and powerful legal representation), they contextualize the complexity of the situation and illuminate problems (Martin & Christy, 2010).

¹⁰ A 1990 Harris poll of the public, legislators, academics, and administrators revealed that more than 80% of viewed college sports as “out of control” and “undermining the initiatives of colleges and universities.”

Media Attention to Off-Field Matters

Important for this study, scholars argue media consistently publicize off-field matters, in terms of NCAA violations and actual-legal cases (Stern, 1981). Player misconduct yields considerable media coverage (Dumond, Lynch, & Platania, 2008). Recruiting violations fuel media coverage and evoke a “perception that recruiting is a sordid and tawdry affair” (p. 68). Legal cases against the BCS and media members reporting reform efforts appear to have a similar effect. These appear to increase the complexities surrounding college sports.

From a media perspective, this makes sense. As noted, sports-media maintains many of the same characteristics of other areas, relying on the same norms, values, and routines to maintain a narrative and produce desirable content. More so, as sports-media preys on negative and controversial stories, pieces focused on the BCS or payola scandals seem even more predictable, as stories appear to frame similar aspects (Real, 2006).

In sum, while college sports have “engendered controversy and stimulated debate” since their inception, the arms race further fuels debate and news coverage (Buer, 2009). Sack (2009) summed up the unique dynamic surrounding college sports, stating, when economic sustainability is threatened, “everyone concedes that college sports is a business...But when [reform is advocated], the NCAA insists that college sports is merely an amateur recreational outlet for college students” (p. 126). Thus, debate in college sports may be nothing new, but the attention it garners via sport-specific and mainstream media is (Ridpath, 2008).

The next section will discuss the type of information sports-media consumers may encounter, based on media reporting habits. Based on the literature presented thus far, the arms race fuels complexity and controversy. Media characteristics, formed by internal and external influences, lead to coverage of controversial and complex parts of college sports.

The Consumer Perspective

Price and Tewksbury (1996) argue media frame or present stories in a predictable manner consistent with accepted news values. The inclusion or exclusion of information subsequently affects how consumers process information. For sports-media, the same holds true, as particular stories appear more newsworthy than others. Newsworthy stories predictably gain more attention, and most importantly, contain facts and/or arguments. Two themes that appear to recur include amateurism and football's postseason.

When discussing football's postseason, media may frame the story around the legality of the BCS (i.e., possible violation of the Sherman Act) or the defense of BCS executives (i.e., "maintaining the tradition of college football"). Media may also emphasize the lack of a playoff to decide the national champion (as seen in *all* other NCAA-sponsored sports, including other football divisions). Last, media may highlight the system's exclusivity to members of "automatic qualifying" (AQ) conferences.¹¹ The *Washington Post*'s Sally Jenkins recently stated:

"Since 2004, nine undefeated teams have been denied chances to play for the college football national championship, thanks to the current Bowl Championship Series scheme, because they don't play in the right conferences...."

[The BCS] is a system in which fraternal preference trumps excellence, and a half-dozen elites control the market, the profits, and the access, via a double-super-secret poll formula that no one can understand without a special decoder ring...It's a system that says to no to [non-automatic qualifiers] which don't belong to the privileged club: 'No matter what you did all season, it was never going to matter in the competitive sense. Your fate was outside of your hands.

The BCS has taken the essential principle of competition - that those who perform best should be acknowledged and rewarded - and replaced it with a caste system. We would find this detestable in any other aspect of society, yet it's somehow tolerated in college football, because we think it's too trivial for governmental action, and because the cartel called the BCS sells us speciously on the "tradition" of the bowl system...." (Washington Post, 2010).

¹¹ AQ conferences include the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big East, Big 10, Big 12, Pacific 12 (Pac-12), and Southeastern Conference (SEC).

Similarly, media addresses amateurism issues, as seen in 2010, with great regularity. Journalist Stewart Mandel said in the a recent interview, the “overall concept of amateurism, which has come under attack due to recent agent scandals and the increased awareness of the business side of the sport and how many dollars are involved,” is the most pressing issue facing college sports. “For the first time, he stated, “there is some sentiment within college sports that it is time to revisit one of the NCAA's most deeply held values [amateurism].”

As such, certain, recurring pieces of information and themes arise within this discussion. These include athlete exploitation (i.e., everyone, including the guy selling popcorn profits, but the athletes do not) or descriptive characteristics and the role of the NCAA, its leaders, and rules (i.e., investigating schools for violations and/or placing sanctions on members proven to have broken NCAA rules). For example, USA Today’s Steve Wieberg wrote the following piece in a 2010 season review, one littered with NCAA investigations, sanctions, and subsequent headlines:

“College athletes are not to be paid, not to cash in on their prominence, never to cross any kind of line of professionalism....The NCAA has largely stood firm on Bylaw 12 — in which it spells out the dos and don'ts — as television, marketing and other revenue run ever deeper, spending on coaches and other personnel continues to climb and calls mount for those on the field to get something beyond a scholarship...Critics rail that keeping players amateur — i.e., unpaid — in an otherwise highly commercial enterprise is an injustice (USA Today, 2010).”

Therefore, discussions surrounding amateurism scandals, amateurism, the BCS, and the lack of a playoff in college football, now resonate with the discussion of college sports. More so, coverage of these and other issues appear to make college sports more complex. Based on the theory presented, consumers of sports-media most likely remain aware of the controversy and complexity surrounding these issues and college sports generally. The next section presents hypotheses and research questions based on this assumption. Hypotheses and research questions primarily pertain to fandom, media consumption, and knowledge acquisition.

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I will investigate whether fandom, specifically sports fandom, and sports-media consumption (i.e., volume, primary source, habits, and behaviors) affect knowledge of college sports. The following hypotheses and research questions are drawn from the literature presented in the preceding sections. They are developed to fill holes in sports fandom literature.

As noted, Wann (2006) argues sports fans place significant value on sports and consume high levels of sports content (e.g., directly and mediated, team merchandise, sponsorship). This includes watching games in person, but also via media. Therefore:

H1: High fandom will lead to high media consumption.

ELM's model for cognitive processing argues that investment in the subject leads to greater attention to the message and increased elaboration (Antcil, 1984). Fandom is also largely mediated by internal motivation and ability. By equating fandom with issue involvement, sports fans will consume sports-media more centrally and learn as result. Thus:

H2: High fandom will lead to high knowledge.

Although fandom should certainly lead to increased knowledge, it does not guarantee attention to related media content. Research on media consumption (Prior, 2005) and sports-media consumption (Bellamy, 2006) often highlight increased audience fragmentation. Research concerned with college sports describes college sports fandom as a passionate niche that regularly consumes media and engages in online discourse (Benigni, Porter, & Wood, 2009). Therefore, because media consumption will measure attention to sports-media generally, in terms of volume and habits, as well as attention to college sports in particular, I predict:

H3: High media consumption will lead to high knowledge.

In addition to these hypotheses, I seek to discover supplemental relationships. For instance, given the uniqueness, complexity, and controversy surrounding college sports, I seek to gauge respondents' opinions regarding some pervasive issues. It is also important to discover differences among groups, including racial groups, gender orientation, and groups of people who engage in similar consumption habits (i.e., high attention to news, regular game watching, preference for a particular media type). Thus, I present the following research questions:

RQ1: Do gender differences exist in relation to fandom, media consumption, and knowledge?

RQ2: Do differences exist between racial groups in relation to fandom, media consumption, and knowledge?

RQ3: Do media preferences lead to increased knowledge when compared to with each other?

RQ4: Do particular consumption behaviors or habits lead to increased knowledge?

RQ5: Do high consumers of website and fan site sports-media possess higher knowledge, than low consumers of this media?

RQ6: Does high fandom, media consumption, and/or knowledge lead to increased support for reforming controversial issues in college sports?

METHOD

I conducted the following study to investigate how fandom and media consumption impact one's knowledge of facts surrounding college sports – a complex entity by definition. To measure levels of fandom, media consumption, and knowledge of college sports and the NCAA, I conducted an online survey of college undergraduates. The following section details the method employed to collect data necessary for analysis, including the sampling method, the construction of the research instrument, and the delivery of the instrument.

Subjects and Setting

This study comprised a survey of college undergraduates from a large, state university. I administered the survey online through Qualtrics - an external survey tool designed to build and host online surveys - to members of a mass communication "subject pool. The pool is available to *any* student enrolled in a Mass Communication class at the study's host university. The sample, while not derived from systematic random sampling, was particularly relevant for this study because sports remain a central component of student-life at the school this study was conducted, thus ensuring a sample that was at least broadly aware that college sports exist.

The subject pool automatically notifies students of the pool's existence and opportunity to register with the service upon commencement of each semester. Students can sign up and participate in studies listed through the pool's online database (given that they meet general requirements, i.e., are eighteen years of age). Students receive regular emails regarding newly available studies, complete with links to a list of studies. Participation is always voluntary and guarantees credit points for students who successfully complete the requirements of a given study. Students receive .5 points for every 30 minutes they participate in a subject pool study.

Procedures and Measures

I began this project with a pilot study ($n = 421$) in the preceding semester, which despite considerable limitations¹² yielded a significant finding. An analysis of variance found that those who consumed five to six hours of college sports-media scored significantly higher on the five-item knowledge quiz ($M = 1.33$) than those who consumed two hours or less ($M = 0.5$, $F(4, 420) = 9.98$, $p < .01$). I made a number of changes, however, upon review of the pilot study and prior to distribution of the survey instrument for this study.

First, I added a fandom measure. As noted in the literature review, fandom is the idea that individuals place significant value on a particular entity, arguably more so than anything else (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). This extends to areas such as pop-culture, drama, or music, however, most fandom research gauges sports fandom. To do so, studies often employ the Sport Fandom Questionnaire, which consists of five Likert-type scale items with a response range from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree) (Wann, 2002). This valid and reliable scale (Chronbach's $\alpha = .94$) determines fandom levels by attaching a numerical value to responses. The questionnaire ultimately gauges how essential one believes sports to be as a part of life.

For this study, I used a modified version of the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (see Table 1 for complete details of the fandom measure used in this study). Rather than supply a seven-point scale, I elected to use a five-point scale. Scales still ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, yet consisted of a mid-point of three, rather than five. This scale followed the format of a recent sports fandom study gauging media consumption and media behavior in relation to fandom and interactivity on Internet web and fan sites (Benigni, Porter, & Wood, 2009).

¹² The pilot study was conducted during a large lecture class. Students responded through Iclickers, devices commonly used to track attendance and participation. Data analysis yielded an average response rate (76%), and an even lower completion rate (54%). Final analysis included only complete entries (i.e., response to all questions) ($n=421$). See Appendix III for full details.

Table 1. Fandom-measure items*

I consider myself a sports fan

My friends see me as a sports fan.

Following sports is the most enjoyable form of entertainment.

My life would be less enjoyable if I couldn't follow sports.

Being a sports fan is very important to me.

*Responses ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

Next, I developed a series of questions to comprehensively measure respondent's sports-media consumption in terms of volume, habits, and primary source. Scales implemented originated from Hetherington's (1996) study that gauged media consumption and attention to an entity – the economy. The scales ultimately attached a score ranging from 0-10 for respondents.

In said study, respondents answered four questions. The first two questions asked respondents how many days per week they read the newspaper or watched television news. The following two questions gauged individual's attention to economic issues discussed in the 1992 election via television or print media, based on a five-point Likert-type scale. Responses ranged from not at all to very close. Hetherington adjusted scores for these two variables to make each variable equally weighted by subtracting one and multiplying by 1.75 and dividing sum responses by 2.8 to generate a score ranging from zero to ten.

Due to the similar nature of this study, I chose to modify this method for measuring media consumption and attention to an entity. Rather than only include television and print news, I added radio and the Internet as media consumption choices. See Tables 2-4 for complete details of the consumption measures used in this study.

In addition, based on literature that distinguishes between sport-game content and non-game content (i.e., news) (Bellamy, 2006), I also included attention to games and non-game content, as well as consumption of college sports game content and non-game content in particular in the consumption section. Based on the altered scale, individual's consumption scores ranged from 0-96. Responses were divided by 9.6 to generate a consumption volume score ranging from zero to ten, just as Hetherington (1996) did.

I also altered the survey instrument to gauge habits, characteristics, and activity on sport-specific, online websites (ESPN.com) and fan sites (Yahoo.com). Questions asked respondents their primary consumption type for games and non-game content, as well as how often they visit sports websites and fan sites. The following tables represent the consumption measures.

Table 2. Sports-media consumption items*

In an average week, how often do you:

Watch sports games on television?

Read game summaries in newspapers?

Watch sports games online?

Listen to sports games on the radio?

Watch non-game sports content on TV?

Read non-game sports content in newspapers?

Go online for non-game, sports content?

Listen to non-game, sports content on the radio?

*Responses ranged from zero (0) days to seven (7).

Table 3. Attention to college sports items*

How often do you:

Follow college games on television

Follow college games in newspapers

Follow college games online

Follow college games on radio?

How often do you:

Follow non-game college content on television?

Follow non-game college content in newspapers?

Follow non-game college content online?

Follow non-game college content on radio?

*Responses ranged from Never (1) to Very Often (5).

Table 4. Website and fan site, online activity items*

How often do you:

Visit any online sports sites? **

Visit sport forums or message boards? ***

Post content on any online sports sites? **

Post content on sports forums or message boards? ***

* Responses ranged from Never (1) to Very Often (5).

* This includes sites such as ESPN.com, Rivals.com, Yahoo Sports, lsusports.com, etc.

** This includes sites such as Rivals.com, Scout.com, tigerdroppings.com, etc.

In addition to measuring fandom and media consumption, I measured knowledge of college sports. These items tested knowledge related to college sports generally (i.e., conference affiliation of a given school), as well as information specific to the NCAA (i.e., football scholarship limit). I measured individual's knowledge through a twenty-item knowledge questionnaire. All questions featured multiple-choice responses.

The question format resembled Delli Carpini and Keeter's (1996) five-item political knowledge index ($\alpha = .71$), which asked respondents matter-of-the-fact questions.¹³ Due to the exploratory nature of this study (to my knowledge, this is the first attempt to measure knowledge of college sports), I included twenty questions in the survey. As noted throughout, college sports remain both complex and controversial. I included questions that capture such circumstances, including the role of the NCAA, characteristics surrounding the NCAA, conference affiliation of teams, controversial rules, and characteristics of various bowl games.

All questions followed the format of the political knowledge index by presenting a clear, indisputable, correct answer (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Due to the predominately low scores in the pilot study, which pertained to the NCAA, I added questions that would appear more obvious to sports fans to ensure greater variance among respondents. All questions included four answer choices, as well as an "I don't know" option. Table 5 presents all twenty questions in the same order presented to respondents, as well as corresponding, correct answers. See Index I for the full survey, including the knowledge quiz, complete with all answer choices.

¹³ *What Americans know about politics and why it matters* (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), presented a general way to test individual's political knowledge. For instance, respondents are asked to name the current Vice President or the political party currently in charge of the House of Representatives. The questions I presented to respondents mirrored this model. For instance, I asked individuals who the president of the NCAA is, or how many divisions the NCAA has. See Appendix V for the complete Political Knowledge Index.

Table 5. Knowledge items

What conference does Florida State University compete in?	Atlantic Coast (ACC)
What is the scholarship limit for Division I, FBS football teams?	85
Where is the SEC Football Conference Championship game played?	Atlanta, GA
When is "National Signing Day" for football?	1st Wed. in Feb.
When 16 teams remain in the NCAA tournament, what is this called?	Sweet 16
Where is the NCAA's national headquarters located?	Indianapolis, IN
Where is the College World Series Final Four played?	Omaha, NE
Who is the current president of the NCAA?	Mark Emmert
When 8 teams remain in the NCAA Tournament, what is it called?	Elite 8
Which best describes the NCAA's official classification?	Voluntary, non-profit
Which school does not compete in the Big 12?	Texas Christian Univ.
How many divisions does the NCAA have?	3
How many schools belong to the SEC?	12
What is the only school to receive the death penalty?	Southern Methodist
What conference does University of Cincinnati compete in?	Big East
Which is not a BCS bowl game?	Cotton Bowl
Who won the 2010 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament?	Duke Univ.
Which is not a BCS conference?	Mountain West
What state is the Fiesta Bowl played in?	Arizona
The NCAA owns and operates the BCS. True or false?	False

Although the goals of this paper centered on two primary independent variables - fandom and media consumption - and one primary dependent variable – knowledge - the survey also included secondary variables to answer research questions previously presented. To investigate any links between individual characteristics, media consumption, fandom, and knowledge, I included two standard demographic items – race and gender. Although studies often include additional demographic items, such as income, education, or work experience, I did not because of the nature of the homogenous sample (all college undergraduates).

To try and discover relationships between primary variables, including fandom, media consumption, and knowledge, and attitudes towards reform, I included a series of statements related to issues that appear pervasive in the discussion of college sports. Similar to the fandom measure, all statements included five-point Likert-type scales to gauge opinions surrounding pervasive issues in college sports. Table 6 presents these items in abbreviated form. See Appendix I for the full survey, including the full reform statements presented to respondents.

Table 6. Attitudes towards reform items*

College athletes should be paid.

College football needs a playoff.

The NCAA needs stricter punishments for rules violations.

Athletic scholarships should cover four years, instead of one.

Schools should be required to interview a minority candidate.

Women deserve greater opportunities in college sports.

* Responses ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

In sum, I developed measures based on existing research related to fandom (Benigni, Porter, Wood, 2009), media consumption (Hetherington, 1996), and knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). I included two primary independent variables (fandom, media consumption) and one primary dependent variable (knowledge). Secondary variables included race, gender, and attitudes. Below, in Table 7, I present a summary of these variables, as well as accompanying measures outlined above. After Table 7, I conclude the method section by discussing the survey composition and the delivery of the survey. I then present results gathered from the survey.

Table 7. Summary of variables and measures items

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Measure</u>
Independent Variables	
1. Fandom	Scale – Table 1
2a. Media Consumption (Volume)	Scale – Tables 2 and 3
2b. Media Consumption (Habits)	Factor/cluster Analysis – Tables 2 and 3
2c. Primary media sources	Nominal variable
2d. Online activity (Volume)	Modified Scale – Table 4
3. Gender	Nominal variable
4. Race	Nominal Variable
Dependent Variables	
1. Knowledge	Total score, out of 20 – Table 5
2. Attitudes	Individual scores for each item – Table 6

Survey Composition

After constructing the measures, I entered all items included in Table 7 into Qualtrics, the host for the online survey. I also included informational, transition pages. Starting with the first page, I included a welcome note, informing participants that joining the survey was completely voluntary and stressing the need to be informed about the nature of the survey. Next, I included a brief description of the study. Given the nature of this study (testing knowledge), I asked respondents to not rely on outside assistance when answering questions:

This study is concerned with what the public knows about college sports. We have developed a short questionnaire designed to test individual's knowledge. The questionnaire is brief and should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. DUE TO THE NATURE OF THIS PROJECT, IT IS ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE THAT YOU ANSWER QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANY OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE. As researchers, we understand you could find these answers. WE KINDLY REQUEST, HOWEVER, THAT YOU DO NOT. WE ASK THAT YOU ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN ONE SESSION. PLEASE DO NOT SAVE YOUR PROGRESS AND RETURN. PLEASE DO NOT SEARCH FOR ANSWERS ONLINE. If this sounds like something you are interested in doing, please proceed. The next page is a consent form. Please read it. Then, enter your 5-digit MEL number on the following page.

Next, I outlined the specifics of the study, including the location, the number of possible participants, and the amount of time required for completion. Details also included a guarantee for full confidentiality and anonymity, as well as the contact information for the researchers and the Institutional Review Board, Office of the Vice President for Research, Louisiana State University. The following page then asked respondents who agreed to participate to enter their unique, 5-digit subject pool ID. This number is randomly generated and not attached to any other user information. I then included all measures as outlined in Table 7. The final page thanked respondents for their participation.

Delivery of the Survey

I distributed the survey through the subject pool's online-study database, a tool available to faculty and graduate students. To gain access, one must meet requirements outlined by the subject pool's director. This includes a request for participants, IRB approval, a description of the study, and a copy of the instrument. Applicants must apply for a slot and receive approval.

My study met all requirements and the program director approved it for 200 students. Upon approval, I uploaded the survey URL and description to the subject-pool database. Delivery steps discussed below reflect the pool's standard methods.

When new studies are added to the database, students receive an email notifying them of such. In the case of this study, students received an email informing them that "The Assessment of College Sports" (chosen title for posting purposes) had been added. Individuals who followed the link were directed to the description of the study, a place to sign up, and a link to the survey. To entice the sample to respond, students were informed they would receive .5 credit points that could be applied to any mass communication class they were currently enrolled in, per standard subject-pool policy. To further stimulate responses, I sent three follow-up emails during the ten days the survey was active to individuals who had signed up but had not yet completed the survey. The email outlined the need for response by the deadline and the penalty for failure to do so. Those who signed up but did not complete the survey lost .5 points.

Clearly originating from the researchers, the study description on the subject pool site and in the survey included contact information for the researcher, the chair of the thesis committee, and the Institutional Review Board. The description clearly communicated the purpose of the study, the need for full compliance, and the time in which the survey would be available. I activated the survey on February 18, 2011. The open period ended on until February 28, 2011.

RESULTS

Of the 200 slots available to students, 197 were filled between February 18 and February 28, 2011. From that group, 191 respondents started the survey, however, five respondents failed to complete the survey, and two entered an incorrect MEL ID. I eliminated these respondents for analysis. I present the following results based on the responses of participants that followed directions (i.e., entered an acceptable MEL ID) and completed the survey (n = 184).

Demographics

As noted, the sample was inherently homogenous – all respondents were students enrolled in undergraduate classes at a large, state institution. Accordingly, the sample lacked diversity for items measured and those left out of the study. One hundred and thirty-seven respondents (74.5%) identified themselves as female, and 47 (25.5%) identified themselves as male. Of the 184 respondents who completed the survey, 149 (81%) identified themselves as white, 17 (9.2%) black, 10 (5.4%) Hispanic/Latino, 5 (2.7%) Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3 (1.6%) other. See Table 8 for the demographic composition.

Table 8. Demographic Information

<u>Demographic</u>			<u>% of Respondents</u>
Gender	Male	47	25.5
	Female	137	74.5
Race	White	149	81
	Black	17	9.2
	Latino	10	5.4
	Asian	5	2.7
	Other	3	1.6

*N = 184

Descriptives and Frequencies

The second portion of the survey asked respondents about their level of sports-fandom. As outlined in the method section (see Table 1), respondents answered five questions based on a five-item Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale proved reliable (Chronbach’s alpha = .93). Respondents most often agreed with Fandom 1, which read, “I consider myself a sports fan” (M = 3.94), and were least likely to agree with Fandom 3, which read, “following sports is the most enjoyable form of entertainment” (M = 2.71). As shown in the table below, four of the five means for fandom fell on the positive side of the midpoint. Further analysis of fandom responses can be found in the following section.

Table 9. Fandom frequencies and mean responses

<u>Fandom</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SA</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Fandom 1	11 (6%)	14 (7.6%)	9 (4.9%)	91 (49.5%)	59 (32.1%)	3.94	1.1
Fandom 2	14 (7.6%)	31 (16.8%)	27 (14.7%)	63 (34.2%)	49 (26.6%)	3.55	1.26
Fandom 3	31 (16.8%)	64 (34.8%)	36 (19.6%)	34 (18.5%)	19 (10.3%)	2.71	1.24
Fandom 4	21 (11.4%)	44 (23.9%)	26 (14.1%)	66 (35.9%)	27 (14.7%)	3.18	1.28
Fandom 5	22 (12%)	30 (16.3%)	43 (23.4%)	61 (33.2%)	28 (15.2%)	3.23	1.24

*N = 184

The next set of questions, listed in matrix form, asked respondents how many days per week (0-7) they consume sports game content and non-game sports content, via four media forms (television, print, Internet, radio). Respondents were also asked to rate how often they consume game and non-game content related to college sports (never [1] to quite often [5]).

On average, respondents consumed sports games (M = 1.93, SD = 1.78) and non-game sports content (i.e., news) (M = 2.86, SD = 2.49) most often via television. The fact that both cases represent the highest mean for consumption of game and non-game content per week, however, signifies predominately low, overall consumption. Consumption of non-game, sports content was a higher overall, with all means, except one, radio (M = 1.49), averaging more than two days of weekly consumption. Table 10 (below), presents the mean and standard deviation scores for weekly consumption of sports games and non-game sports content.

Table 10. Game, non-game average weekly consumption (0-7)

<u>Consumption</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Consumption</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Games TV	1.93	1.78	Non-game TV	2.86	2.49
Games Print	1.38	2.02	Non-game Online	2.62	2.66
Games Radio	0.72	1.28	Non-game Print	2.27	2.2
Games Online	0.58	1.32	Non-game radio	1.49	2.32

* N = 184

In assessing how closely respondents followed college sports games and non-game, college sports content via the same media, respondents show similar consumption characteristics. Television was the most used media for consumption of college games (M = 3.46, SD = 1.15). Consumption of non-game, college sports content showed that respondents consumed non-game sports content via television with the greatest frequency (M = 3.32, SD = 1.3), and the Internet second most frequently (M = 3.07, SD = 1.40).

Table 11. Attention to college games, non-game college content (1-5)

<u>College Consumption</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>College Consumption</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Games TV	3.46	1.15	Non-game TV	3.32	1.3
Games Online	2.98	1.35	Non-game Online	3.07	1.4
Games Print	2.53	1.13	Non-game Print	2.78	1.2
Games Radio	1.9	0.98	Non-game radio	2.07	1.08

*N = 184

A nominal measure implemented in the next section of the survey further verified findings found in the consumption measurement scales. For sports games, nearly 80% of respondents (147) said that they use television as their primary source for sports games, with 10.3% (19) indicating they do not follow sports games, 2.7% (5) saying online, and .5% (1) radio. For non-game sports content (news), the breakdown was more evenly dispersed. Seventy-nine respondents (49.2%) identified television as their primary source for news; 66 respondents (35.9%) indicated the Internet as primary source. Table 12 presents these findings in entirety.

Table 12. Primary source for sports games, non-game content; college games, college non-game

<u>Primary Source</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>TV</u>	<u>Print</u>	<u>Online</u>	<u>Radio</u>
Games	19 (10.3%)	147 (79.9%)	5 (2.7%)	12 (6.5%)	1 (.5%)
Non-game content	20 (10.9%)	79 (42.9%)	16 (8.7%)	66 (35.9%)	3 (1.6%)
College games	12 (6.5%)	141 (76.6%)	12 (17.6%)	16 (8.7%)	1 (.5%)
Non-game college content	17 (9.2%)	82 (44.6%)	24 (13%)	58 (31.5%)	3 (1.6%)

*N = 184

I designed the final consumption matrix to measure the frequency with which respondents visited and posted on sports websites and fan sites/forums/message boards. It is worth noting, the majority of respondents (56.5%) indicated they at least visited sports websites sometimes. As a whole, however, respondents exhibited limited consumption of sports and participation on websites and fan sites. No average responses met or surpassed the “sometimes” response (3). Table 13 summarizes the findings for this final consumption measure.

Table 13. Website and fan site activity: Frequencies and descriptives

<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Quite Often</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Visit web	35 (19%)	45 (24.5%)	49 (26.6%)	29 (15.8%)	26 (14.1%)	2.82	1.30
Visit fan	72 (39%)	56 (30.4%)	29 (15.8%)	15 (8.2%)	12 (6.5%)	2.13	1.21
Post web	140 (76%)	22 (12%)	12 (6.5%)	7 (3.8%)	3 (1.6%)	1.43	0.90
Post fan	134 (73%)	23 (12.5%)	18 (9.8%)	5 (2.7%)	4 (2.2%)	1.49	0.94

*N = 184

Upon completion of the consumption section, respondents answered twenty, multiple-choice questions formed to gauge knowledge (Chronbach’s alpha = .84). The percentage of individuals who answered each question correctly varied throughout. On average, respondents scored a 38%. Based on the results below (Table 14), individuals answered questions five (64.1%), seven (66.8%), and nine (58.7%) correctly with the greatest frequency. Conversely, respondents rarely answered questions two (14.1%), ten (14.1%), and twelve (10.3%) correctly. Total scores (i.e., respondents’ knowledge score, the dependent variable), average scores, and the dispersion of scores are discussed in the following results section, constructing the indices.

Table 14. Knowledge - percentage of correct answers by question

<u>Question**</u>	-	<u>% correct</u>	<u>Question**</u>	-	<u>% correct</u>
Q1	59	32.1	Q11	82	44.6
Q2	26	14.1	Q12	19	10.3
Q3	99	53.8	Q13	77	41.8
Q4	90	48.9	Q14	47	22.5
Q5	118	64.1	Q15	39	21.2
Q6	49	26.6	Q16	53	28.8
Q7	123	66.8	Q17	87	47.3
Q8	31	16.8	Q18	82	44.6
Q9	108	58.7	Q19	85	46.2
Q10	26	14.1	Q20	102	55.4

*N = 184.

**Knowledge questions with corresponding, correct answers can be found in Table 6.

Constructing the Indices

To begin testing the hypothesis and answering the research questions, I constructed a number of indices. For the purposes of data analysis, and based on the preference for nominal independent variables and ordinal dependent variables, principal component factor analysis was the primary method for constructing variables for fandom and media consumption. The following section details how measures were created based on responses. As referenced in Table 8 and outlined in the method (procedures and measures), the following appendices are derived from a strategically constructed survey where items carry particular characteristics.

First, principal components factor analysis of the five items measuring fandom (Chronbach's alpha = .94), using varimax rotation, resulted in the loading on one factor. I then recoded scores into a nominal, dichotomous variable. I coded all scores at or below zero as a zero (low fans), and recoded all scores greater than zero a one (high fans). As a whole, the sample was majority high fans (56%), although the difference was minimal (low = 43%). The breakdown of low and high fans, based on the principal component factor analysis, is presented below (Table 15), sorted by gender. Percentages are derived from the total sample (N = 184). For instance, 20% of the total sample was high fan, males.

Table 15. Fandom high, low, sorted by gender

	<u>Low Fandom</u> % of respondents	<u>High Fandom</u> % of respondents
Male	5%	20%
Female	38%	36%

*N = 184

To assign respondents a consumption volume score, I combined all responses to consumption frequency measures (Tables 2 and 3), except those unique to online sports websites and fan sites (Table 5), and then divided by 9.6. The altered scale (Chronbach's alpha = .92) shows that the predominately female sample consumes low to moderate levels of sports-media, including media related to college sports (M = 3.75, SD = 1.93). For further comparative purposes, consumption volume was also broken down into a dichotomous variable. I coded all respondents who fell below the mean as a low consumer. I coded those who fell above the mean as high consumers. In total, I coded 53% as low consumers, 47% high.

To further determine how media consumption affects knowledge of college sports, I conducted a principal component factor analysis of the 16 items measuring media consumption frequency (Tables 2 and 3) (Chronbach's alpha = .92) using varimax rotation that resulted in four factors (results in Table 16). The first factor explained 24.1% of the variance, the second factor explained 21.89% of the variance, the third 15.98%, and the fourth, 12.91%.

The first factor, labeled "news," consisted of five measures in total, including all four measures of non-game sports content, as well as the measure for online consumption of non-game, college sports content. The second factor, labeled "college," contained five items that dealt with consumption of college games and non-game content in particular. The third factor, labeled "games," contained four measures of game consumption. The fourth factor, labeled "radio," consisted of two items measuring consumption of college games and news via radio.

I then converted each role factor into a standardized factor score. I performed a cluster analysis to determine the combinations of these factors that regularly occur. Given that a five-cluster analysis with one outlier group is preferable, I determined two, three, four, and five-cluster solutions. I decided that the four-factor solution was the best fit, with the convergence occurring after 6 iterations. Thus, I used the four-factor solution for comparative purposes.

Euclidean distances indicated that the four-cluster solution provided cluster memberships most unique from each other. F ratios were also the largest in the four-cluster solution, showing that each variable within the cluster analysis was weighted enough to create unique clusters. The first cluster contained 51 respondents who ranked highest in news and college consumption. The second cluster featured 60 respondents with low overall consumption. The third cluster included 57 respondents high in games, and the fourth (16 respondents) was radio-specific.

Table 16. Factor analysis of participant consumption habits

<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Factor Loadings</u>			
	1	2	3	4
News Online	0.856			
News TV	0.828			
News Radio	0.688			
News Print	0.685			
College News Online	0.638			
College Games TV		0.765		
College Games Print		0.722		
College Games Online		0.701		
College News Print		0.64		
College News TV		0.632		
Games Online			0.755	
Games Radio			0.727	
Games TV			0.655	
Games Print			0.649	
College News Radio				0.78
College Games Radio				0.774

*N = 184

Similarly, I conducted a principal component factor analysis for the four questions gauging respondent's activity on sports websites and fan sites (visiting and posting on each) (Chronbach's alpha = .86). Principal components factor analysis of the four items, using varimax rotation, resulted in the loading on one factor. I then recoded scores into a nominal, dichotomous variable. I coded all scores at or below zero as a zero (low consumers) and all scores greater than zero as a one (high consumers).

In sum, measures for fandom and consumption yielded a data set from which I created indices. I created indices for fandom (low, high) and consumption (volume, behaviors, habits, web/fan site activity). I used these indices when answering research questions and testing hypothesis related to knowledge and attitudes.

The last index, knowledge, featured a summated scale derived from totaling correct answers per respondent. Scores ranged from 0-19 and on average, respondents answered between seven and eight questions out of twenty correctly ($M = 7.62$, $SD = 4.49$). Similar to consumption and fandom, I recoded knowledge into a dichotomous variable for comparative purposes (with attitudes, a secondary dependent variable with accompanying research questions). As such, 52.7% fell below the mean and labeled as "low knowledge," and 47.3% labeled "high knowledge." The primary dependent measure for data analysis, however, is the 20-point knowledge index constructed through the totaling of respondent's scores.

The following section discusses the results of data analysis, originating from statistical tests comparing the indices discussed in this section for fandom and consumption with the knowledge index. I conducted tests of statistical significance at the traditional probability level of .05. Results approaching significance are not reported below.

Tests of Hypotheses and Research Questions

H1: High fandom will lead to high media consumption.

I predicted that high fandom would lead to high media consumption. Results of a one-way analysis of variance found that those in the high fandom group consume significantly more sports-media ($M = 4.73$) than those in the low fandom group ($M = 2.46$, $F(1, 183) = 93.45$, $p < .001$). Results therefore support H1, as the comparison of means shows a significant difference between the two groups. Results from a two-tailed Pearson Correlation test also showed a significant relationship between the variables.¹⁴

H2: High fandom will lead to high knowledge.

I hypothesized that high fandom would lead to increased knowledge by participants. Results of a one-way analysis of variance found that those in the high fandom group scored significantly higher on the knowledge measure ($M = 9.36$) than those in the low fandom group ($M = 5.36$, $F(1, 183) = 44.33$, $p < .001$). Results therefore support H2. Results from a two-tailed Pearson Correlation test also showed a significant relationship between the variables.¹⁵

H3: High media consumption will lead to high knowledge.

I also predicted media consumption would impact knowledge. By creating the consumption volume measure and splitting individuals into one of two groups (low and high), a one-way analysis of variance found that those in the high consumption group scored significantly higher on the knowledge measure ($M = 9.64$) than those in the low consumption group ($M = 5.80$, $F(1, 183) = 40.95$, $p < .001$). Results therefore support H3. Results from a two-tailed Pearson Correlation test also showed a significant relationship between the variables¹⁶

¹⁴ The two variables (total fandom, 0-10 consumption) were correlated, $r(183) = .67$, $p < .01$.

¹⁵ The two variables (total fandom, total knowledge) were correlated, $r(183) = .55$, $p < .01$.

¹⁶ The two variables (0-10 consumption, total knowledge) were correlated, $r(183) = .54$, $p < .01$.

RQ1: Do gender differences exist in relation to fandom, media consumption, and knowledge?

First, a one-way analysis of variance between gender and respondent's fandom factorial score found males to rank significantly higher in fandom ($M = .49$) than females ($M = -.17$, $F(1, 183) = 16.54$, $p < .001$). Next, a one-way analysis of variance between gender and respondent's consumption volume score found males consume significantly more sports-media ($M = 5.33$) than females ($M = 3.20$, $F(1, 183) = 55.07$), $p < .001$. Last, a one-way analysis of variance found males scored significantly higher on the knowledge measure ($M = 11.23$) than females ($M = 6.38$, $F(1, 183) = 52.54$, $p < .001$).

RQ2: Do differences exist between racial groups in relation to fandom, media consumption, and knowledge?

I conducted one-way analysis of variance between racial groups and fandom, racial groups and media consumption, and racial groups and knowledge. None of these mean comparisons yielded significant findings.

RQ3: Does media preference lead to increased knowledge when compared to with each other?

A one-way analysis of variance found significant differences between preferred non-game content groups. Tukey followup procedures showed that those who identified television as a primary source for non-game content scored significantly higher in knowledge ($M = 7.88$) than those who said "none" ($M = 4.35$, $F(1, 183) = 4.01$, $p < .05$). Tukey followup procedures found those who use the Internet as a primary source for non-game content score significantly higher in knowledge ($M = 8.59$) than those who said "none" ($M = 4.35$, $F(1, 183) = 4.01$, $p < .01$).

A one-way analysis of variance also found significant differences between preferred non-game, college content groups. Tukey followup procedures showed that those who identified television as their primary source for non-game, college content scored significantly higher ($M = 7.78$) than those who said “none” ($M = 3.70$, $F(1, 183) = 6.28$, $p < .01$). Tukey followup procedures also determined that those who identified the Internet as their primary source for non-game, college content score significantly higher ($M = 9.16$) than those who said none ($M = 3.70$, $F(1, 183) = 6.28$, $p < .001$) and those who said print ($M = 6.13$, $F(1, 183) = 6.28$, $p < .05$).

RQ4: Do particular consumption behaviors or consumer habits lead to increased knowledge?

A one-way analysis of variance between observed consumption cluster groups (characterizing respondent’s consumption habits and behaviors) and respondent’s knowledge scores found significant results in how consumption habits impact knowledge. Tukey followup procedures found that those in the “high college and news” cluster scored significantly higher ($M = 10.22$) than those in the “overall low” cluster ($M = 4.95$, $F(1, 183) = 16.95$, $p < .001$), and the “gamers” cluster ($M = 7.67$, $F(1, 183) = 16.95$, $p < .01$).

RQ5: Do high consumers of website and fan site sports-media possess higher knowledge, than low consumers of this media?

Similar to the fandom measure, I reduced website and fan site activity through a factor analysis, producing a split of low and high. Results of a one-way analysis of variance found that those in the high website and fan site consumption group scored significantly higher on the knowledge measure ($M = 10.27$) than those in the low website and fan site consumption group ($M = 6.21$, $F(1, 183) = 41.76$, $p < .001$).

RQ6: Does high fandom, media consumption, and/or knowledge lead to increased support for reforming controversial issues in college sports?

Results of a one-way analysis of variance found those in the high fandom group agree with the notion that “athletes should be paid” significantly more ($M = 2.24$) than those in the low fandom group ($M = 1.86$, $F(1, 183) = 5.43$, $p < .05$). Neither consumption (low, high) nor knowledge (low, high) membership significantly impacted responses to the proposition, “athletes should be paid.”

For the second attitude measure, results of a one-way analysis of variance found those in the high fandom group agree with the statement “college football needs a playoff” significantly more ($M = 3.94$) than those in the low fandom group ($M = 3.51$, $F(1, 183) = 7.93$, $p < .01$). Similarly, a one-way analysis of variance found those in the high consumption group agree with the same statement significantly more ($M = 3.97$) than those in the low consumption group ($M = 3.57$, $F(1, 183) = 6.88$, $p < .01$). Membership in the high or low knowledge group did not significantly impact responses to the statement, “college football needs a playoff.”

Next, results of one-way analyses of variance found no significant results for the impact of fandom, consumption, or knowledge, when responding to the statement “the NCAA needs stricter punishments for players, schools, and/or players found to break rules.”

The fourth attitude statement read, “athletic scholarships should cover athletes for four years rather than one” (scholarships only guarantee student-athletes one year, and are renewable on a yearly basis). A one-way analysis of variance revealed that membership in one of the two fandom groups, high or low, did not significantly impact responses. A one-way analysis comparing the means of the low knowledge group and the high knowledge yielded equally insignificant results. A one-way analysis of variance, comparing the means of low media

consumers and high media consumers, however, did yield significant results. High consumers agreed with the statement “athletic scholarships should cover athletes for four years rather than one” significantly more ($M = 3.37$) than those in the low consumption group ($M = 2.96$, $F(1, 183) = 6.98$, $p < .01$).

The fifth attitude measure stated, “schools should be required to interview a minority candidate before making a hire” (in the NFL, this is known as the Rooney Rule – teams must interview a minority candidate before hiring a new coach). Results of a one-way analysis of variance found no significant results when comparing the means of those in the high fandom group and those in the low fandom group. A one-way analysis of variance comparing high and low consumers also produced insignificant results. Interestingly, a one-way analysis of variance did find that members in the low knowledge group agreed with this statement significantly more ($M = 2.80$) than those in the high knowledge group ($M = 2.38$, $F(1, 183) = 7.32$, $p < .01$).

Last, results of one-way analyses of variance found no significant results for the impact of fandom, consumption, or knowledge, on agreeing with the statement, “women need greater representation in college sports.”

DISCUSSION

Fandom Led to Increased Knowledge

Respondents demonstrated greater knowledge of more basic facts (i.e., the location of the College Baseball World Series) than more intricate, NCAA-specific items (i.e., the scholarship limit for Division I FBS football teams). In fact, for questions most connected to complex concepts (i.e., official classification of the NCAA), respondents scored especially low. Even so, findings show that sports fans know more about college sports than comparatively low fans.

Although one may assume such, one could argue that knowledge can act independently of interest in the subject. For example, if an individual lives in an area where something is incredibly popular (e.g., college sports in the South), he or she may come to know facts regardless of his or her level of attachment to sports in general. The findings presented in this study do not debunk such a claim, however, they do clearly show that sports fandom leads to significantly higher knowledge than membership in the low fandom group.

Therefore, interest in the subject (fandom) does lead to increased knowledge. This is important, because fandom appears to act similarly in cognition as issue involvement does in persuasion. Interest in sports does lead to central processing, just as interest in a persuasive message leads to attention, which in turn leads to knowledge (similar to a change in attitude).

This finding implies that general interest in sports leads to knowledge acquisition of facts related to college sports, independent of a preference for college sports. Due to the pervasiveness of college sports in sports-media, those who value sports and attend to sports-media as a result, come to learn about college sports through mere exposure. Results speak to the popularity of college sports and indicate that sports fans remain aware of characteristics unique to college sports and accompanying discussion that takes place within sports-media.

Media Consumption Led to Increased Knowledge

Along the same lines, I also verified the second hypothesis. Individuals considered high consumers of sports-media scored significantly higher on the knowledge measure than low consumers. The difference was nearly double, as high consumers scored roughly 50% better than low consumers did. Thus, sports fans do not only consume sports-media, but they gain knowledge through explicit attention to both games and non-game content.

This finding supports prior research. For instance, political scholars measure levels of political knowledge, as well as media fragmentation and its possible effects. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) argued the politically ignorant lack knowledge due to a lack of access to sufficient information. They concluded, “making more information easily accessible is likely to increase what people know, especially for the individuals and groups least able to become informed through motivation or ability alone” (p.217). Results indicate that an abundance of readily available information does increase awareness. In our case, abundant sports information allows sports fans to consume content and learn.

More so, findings indicate that media consumption is a deliberate action of a sports fan that leads some to become more knowledgeable. “Today’s fan,” wrote Benigni, Porter, and Wood (2009), “requires immediacy, incisive information, and interactive outlets to fulfill needs.” Results imply that media do provide incisive information. Results also show that fandom does influence behaviors (i.e., watching games, reading about sports) and reinforces preferences (i.e., a liking for sports) (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). As a result, knowledge increases.

The implications of these results are again supportive of issue-involvement in ELM. Further, results imply that while fandom increases knowledge, so too does media consumption. Thus, individuals must not only be sports fans, but must attend to sports media to learn.

High News, High College Cluster Scored the Highest

Along the same lines, I found that those who consumed high levels of college sports and non-game content scored higher than all other groups on the knowledge measure. Further, individuals who consumed low levels of sports-media as a whole, those in the “overall low” cluster, scored significantly less than each of the other three clusters. This, perhaps more so than H3, supports the idea that issue involvement leads to sharp attention and knowledge acquisition.

Individuals who responded to consuming high amounts of non-game content and college content (game and non-game) essentially represent high consumers and college fans. These individuals do not only watch games, but also seek and consume content aside from games. This group (individuals who placed value in college sports) scoring the highest signifies that selective exposure to sports-media and college sports does lead to acquisition of facts surrounding college sports. Attention to college sports-media in particular, rather than sports-media generally (or low or no attention), is therefore important for understanding the complexity of college sports and accompanying facts (e.g., conference affiliation).

The implications of this appear powerful. Results indicate that college sports-media consumption is niche-specific. Given, the complexity of college sports, and even more so, the controversy and debate surrounding college sports, results indicate that an opportunity exists for the NCAA and member schools to reach key stakeholders and at least defend their stances. Given the immense amount of criticism directed at particular rules and practices, the NCAA has access to invested consumers to engage in open dialogue and two-way communication.

More so, given the overall lack of awareness of more complex rules, the NCAA and member schools have an opportunity to further educate invested consumers. Doing so may minimize current backlash. Dialogue may also induce issue reformation.

Visiting and Participating on Sports Web/Fan Sites Led to Increased Knowledge

Results show that individuals who visit and participate on sports websites and fan sites possess greater knowledge of college sports than those who, comparatively, do not. This supports research cited throughout this paper (from which the website and fan site consumption measure was derived) (Benigni, Porter, and Wood, 2009). Sports websites, and fan sites especially, serve as a place that the most devoted fans go to share information and discuss topics relevant to their conference, team, and/or favorite sport.

Raney (2006) stated that sports fans consume sports-media to satisfy emotional, behavioral, and cognitive needs. Given the large amounts of information available via sports websites and fan sites, results indicate consumers of these media fulfill a cognitive need and acquire knowledge at high levels through said media. This reinforces audience fragmentation and tendencies to reinforce preferences. More so, it implies that information is shared via these open, niche-specific media, creating a population of knowledgeable and active fans.

Similar to the prior section, an opportunity exists for the NCAA and members to reach key stakeholders via these media. If criticism arises from these consumers in particular, the opportunity is there to defend controversial characteristics. More specific knowledge could also be increased through communication and dialogue with this invested group of consumers.

Television and Internet Use Led to Increased Knowledge

Identifying television or Internet as preferred source for non-game content lead to higher knowledge. Results do not identify one media as *the* strongest determinant of knowledge, however, do show that primary television or Internet scored significantly higher than those who said, “none, I do not follow sports/college sports.” Results may imply these media represent the ideal media of educated, sports-media consumers, or that they provide the most information.

Fans and Sports-Media Consumers Want a Playoff

Based on the line of hypotheses and research questions presented, I assumed that fandom would increase media consumption, which would increase knowledge, which would then lead to increased support for reform. Following such logic, individuals gain knowledge through interest and exposure, both of college sports' complexity and of pervasive issues. Ultimately, media-savvy, knowledgeable fans would support well-publicized reform efforts. Knowledge, however, proved to be a non-factor in influencing attitudes towards reforming six, key issues in college sports. Fandom and media consumption, however, did affect attitudes.

For instance, high fans and high media consumers agreed that college football needs a playoff more so than low fans and low consumers. This signifies that high fans and high-media consumers remain aware of problems surrounding the BCS (arguably the most publicized issue). Given the constant debate surrounding the BCS, sports fans and sports-media consumers would be hard pressed to be unaware of the numerous playoff advocates. More so, given the presence of playoff avocation and/or BCS bashing within and among sports-media members, such persuasive content (intended or not) may be influencing individuals who consume this content.

The majority of other findings related to the sixth research question yielded insignificant results, perhaps illuminating the need for frequent media publicizing of issues. From an observation standpoint, it appears that Title IX enforcement or the creation of a "Rooney Rule" in college sports is less talked about in media. Given that neither fandom, media consumption, nor knowledge lead to increased support for reform issues outside of the creation of a playoff in football (high fans did support paying athletes more than low fans, but both were low), results indicate that media acts as an important leader in reform talks. It appears that media must at least shed light on issues, if not occasionally offer editorial supports for reform.

High Fandom Led to High Media Consumption

As predicted, individuals considered high fans scored significantly higher on the multiple-item consumption measure implemented in this study. Thus, sports fans consume higher levels of sports-media (both games and non-game content) than non-sports fans. When put into context of prior research, this makes sense.

Fans of an entity attend to said entity at varying levels. To satisfy the emotional attachment to that entity, individuals engage in activities associated with it. For sports fans, consuming both games and news is a way to do so and is attributable to interest in the subject (Wann, 2002). Results presented here support this argument.

In addition, this finding coincides with research that paints society as increasingly fragmented (Prior, 2005). Prior argued more media simply distracts individuals, leading to increased levels of entertainment consumption and decreased levels of news. Individuals control the information they receive, selectively attending to content that coincides with their preferences while avoiding exposure to that which does not. Based on the results presented here, sports, a popular-entertainment niche, appear to be another way to reinforce niche preferences.

Implications of this finding could be powerful, when considering sports' place in the world's larger structure. If a fragmented society places a high value on sports, yet neglects other areas of society, people may be manipulated by elites. Polarizing political scholar and activist Noam Chomsky spoke about this in the 1992 film, *Manufacturing Consent*. Chomsky stated:

“Take, say, sports - that's another crucial example of the indoctrination system, in my view. For one thing...it offers people something to pay attention to that's of no importance. That keeps them from worrying about...things that matter to their lives that they might have some idea of doing something about. In fact, it's striking to see the intelligence that's used by ordinary people in [discussions of] sports [as opposed to political and social issues]. [If you listen to sports radio, the callers possess] the most exotic information and understanding about all kind of arcane issues. And the press undoubtedly does a lot with this.”

Gender Differences Existed

I asked whether males or females score differently on the study's primary measures. By comparing the mean scores of males and females in relation to fandom, media consumption, and knowledge, results show that males rank higher in all three. Males were scored significantly higher on the fandom measure, the consumption measure, and the knowledge measure.

This supports prior research that says males tend to rank higher in sports fandom (Wann, 1995). The fact that males, higher sports fans as a whole, consume higher sports-media and rank higher in college sports knowledge than females fits with the findings of this study – High fandom leads to high consumption, consumption and fandom lead to higher knowledge. More so, because research shows that fandom is a group trait (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), results indicate that sports fandom is a trait males possess more than females.

Given societal expectations and stereotypes of males in today's media climate (i.e., cliché beer commercials portraying sports fandom), this finding makes sense when put in context. Popular college sports remain predominately male (men's basketball, football). Given this, and sports' historical roots as male activities, males *should* rank higher in fandom than females.

No Racial Differences Existed

Race did not impact how respondents scored on any of these three measures. This is most likely due to a homogenous sample consisting of primarily white, females. The number of respondents represented in any of the other groups was rather low. A limitation discussed later in this section, homogeneity most likely caused for a lack deviation between groups.

Thus, findings in no way indicate that sports-fandom is not race specific. In fact, prior research states that sports-fandom is seen in white males most often (Dionisio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008). This research simply lacked in diversity among racial groups.

Limitations

Three major limitations stand out in this study. First, the sample was predominately female, which, based on the results presented here, might not be ideal for the nature of this study. Due to the fact that males ranked higher in fandom than did females (who were much more evenly split), a replication of this study should try and ensure a more balanced sample, if not a predominately male sample. As it stands, the predominately female, completely college student sample does not lend itself to high levels of external validity. Thus, the sample was a limitation.

Next, the knowledge measure was unique to this study. While the twenty items attempted to follow prior research by asking factual questions, the reliability of the knowledge measure can certainly be questioned. Through future research, this measure can be adjusted through trial and error similar to Delli Carpini & Keeter. Further, the measure perhaps failed to include varied forms of the knowledge of college sports. In other words, perhaps individuals who scored low on this knowledge measure know about non-revenue college sports than revenue sports. Thus, the measure, while admirable, may not have been the best way to test knowledge of college sports. Future research may attempt to include more variation among questions by including items unique to non-revenue sports, as well as items related to specific teams.

Last, the inability to monitor students while taking the survey was certainly a limitation. The inability to place students in an observable, experiment-based setting (to ensure that all answers were answered without outside assistance) may lead some to question the validity of these findings. Respondents could very well have searched on the Internet for correct choices and I would have no way of knowing. Time limits did not allow that for this study, however, this must be controlled for in similar, future studies. Thus, future research must consider these limitations and others not included when looking to forge new, related research projects.

Directions for Future Research

Given the high number of opinion leaders in college sports-media, future research might consider the effects of consuming persuasive messages related to controversial and complex issues. Druckman & Nelson (2003) note, “a framing effect occurs when in the course of describing an issue or event, a speaker’s emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions” (p. 730). Thus, future research may present one of two opinions regarding a reform issue (plus a neutral, control story) to see how editorials impact attitudes about that reform.

Next, given the claims made in this paper regarding the complexity of college sports, future research might include a content analysis of news coverage surrounding college sports. In other words, a study may consider measuring the extent to which media accurately portrays the NCAA and controversial issues. This analysis could also gauge media tone towards the NCAA and characteristics unique to college sports. Research may also seek to find variance in tone and accuracy across media outlets, measuring the effects of ownership type and intended audience.

Third, given that website and fan site consumers possessed higher knowledge than low web/fan site consumers, a future study may analyze information on these sites and discourse on accompanying message boards. This study could measure how often users discuss rules and regulations unique to college sports. It may also consider how often these sites feature communication arising from the NCAA and member institutions.

Last, another method for gauging knowledge - possibly a focus group – may be implemented in future studies to gauge latent knowledge. By supplying information to subjects, involvement’s relation to knowledge may be more accurately gauged. Either way, research must attempt to find a balance between recognition (multiple choice) and recall (fill in the blank).

Conclusion

Despite aforementioned limitations, given the exploratory nature of this study, findings undoubtedly add to the body of knowledge concerning sports fandom. As noted in the literature review, scholars have noted the extent to which sports fans obsess over teams and players, and as a result, become knowledgeable experts (Gantz & Wenner, 1995). These claims, however, remained anecdotal and lacked quantitative backing.

Based on findings presented here, one can argue that high fandom leads to increased sports-media consumption, and as a result, knowledge acquisition of the entity being studied (college sports in this case). Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model presented earlier, these findings link cognitive processing literature with fandom research. This too is a contribution.

Perhaps most importantly, results indicate that sports fans remain aware of the complexity and controversy now synonymous with college sports, as well as general facts. The literature review argued that media involvement increases popularity and revenues, which together increase competition, scrutiny, and criticism. Although respondents lacked knowledge pertaining to the NCAA, results indicate that sports fans know about college sports. This speaks to the general pervasiveness and popularity of college sports.

In sum, while these results are by no means causal they are meaningful. Given the complex nature of college sports, it is encouraging that sports fans remain relatively aware of facts surrounding it. While knowledge of more NCAA-specific information can still be improved, findings demonstrate that sports fans not only attend to sports media, but also do so through elaborated thought and central processing. This is key because as college sports continue to receive significant criticism, an opportunity exists to reach a demographic of knowledgeable college sports fans and ultimately reduce confusion.

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APPENDIX I: SURVEY TOOL

Hello, and thank you for your interest in this study. You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Details about this study are discussed in the following pages. It is important that you understand this information so you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

This study is concerned with what the public knows about college sports. We have developed a short questionnaire designed to test individual's knowledge. The questionnaire is brief and should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. DUE TO THE NATURE OF THIS PROJECT, IT IS ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE THAT YOU ANSWER QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANY OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE. As researchers, we understand you could find these answers. WE KINDLY REQUEST, HOWEVER, THAT YOU DO NOT. WE ASK THAT YOU ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN ONE SESSION. PLEASE DO NOT SAVE YOUR PROGRESS AND RETURN. PLEASE DO NOT SEARCH FOR ANSWERS ONLINE. If this sounds like something you are interested in doing, please proceed. The next page is a consent form. Please read it. Then, enter your 5-digit MEL number on the following page.

Where will the study be conducted?

This research study will be conducted online.

How many people will take part in this study?

Undergraduates who are 18+ years of age enrolled in the mass communication classes will participate in this research study. Thus, any vulnerable population (e.g., children under the age of 18, mentally impaired persons, pregnant women, prisoners, and the aged) will not be in the study. If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of roughly 200 people in this study.

How long will your part in this study last?

The study will take 15-30 minutes (maximum) to complete. There will be NO follow-up. What will happen if you take part in the study? In this study you will complete an online survey.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may also expect to benefit by participating in this study by receiving credit for your participation requirement.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

There are no known risks in participating in this study, however, there may be uncommon or previously unknown risks. You should report any problems to the researcher.

How will your privacy be protected?

Your LSU ID will only appear in the records for verifying your participation. Your responses will only be associated with a code number that we assign, but that number is not and will not be connected in any way with your name. Thus, there will be no way to identify which responses are yours. The data will only be accessible to the researchers, and will be stored separately from

anything that might identify you. All data collected from this study will be kept on a password-protected computer and paper forms will be kept in a locked cabinet behind a locked door. Data from this study may be kept for seven years, in keeping with the requirements of academic journals, after which time the data may be destroyed. In any presentations, written reports, or publications, no one will be identifiable and only group results will be presented. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, LSU will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?

You will receive a half hour of research credit for participating in this study. However, your participation is completely voluntary. You may discontinue participation NOW with no penalties.

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any question you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the following researchers:

Principal Investigator: Teddy Greener; Rank: Master's Student; LSU Department: Mass Communication LSU Phone number: 225-819-6675; Email Address: tedgreener@gmail.com

Principal Faculty Member: Dr. Lance Porter; LSU Department: Mass Communication LSU Phone Number: 225-578-7377; Email Address: lporter@lsu.edu

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 225-578-8692 or by email to IRB@lsu.edu.

“The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225)578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers' obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.”

Please enter your 5-Digit MEL Number (for credit purposes) below if you agree with the above statement and would like to participate. If not, please close this window now. Thank you.

Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

Which of the following would you say best describes your race?

- White
- African-American/Black
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Other

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with each.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

- I consider myself a sports fan.
- My friends see me as a sports fan.
- I believe that following sports is the most enjoyable form of entertainment.
- My life would be less enjoyable if I were not allowed to follow sports.
- Being a sports fan is very important to me.

The following questions are related to consumption of sports media. Please note the difference between "sports games" and "non-game, sports content." When we say "games," we mean ACTUAL games. When we say "non-game, sports content," we mean *any* content related to sports OTHER THAN actual games. This includes watching sports shows on TV (e.g., Sportscenter, FSN Final Score), reading about sports in newspapers/magazines (e.g., Sports Illustrated), going online to watch videos or read news and commentary, (e.g., Rivals.com), or listening to sports radio shows (e.g., Dan Patrick Show, Scot Van Pelt Show).

In an average week, how many days do you

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

- Watch sports games on TV?
- Read boxscores / game summaries in newspapers?
- Watch sports games online?
- Listen to sports game on the radio?

In an average week, how many days do you

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

- Watch non-game sports content on TV?
- Read non-game sports content in newspapers?
- Go online for non-game, sports content?
- Listen to non-game, sports content on the radio?

How often do you follow college sports games or boxscores using the following media?

Never Rarely Sometimes Quite Often Very Often

TV
Newspapers
Online
Radio

How often do you follow non-game sports content related to college sports using the following media?

Never Rarely Sometimes Quite Often Very Often

TV
Newspapers
Online
Radio

In general, what is your primary source for?

None TV Newspapers Internet Radio

Sports games
Non-game, sports content

In general, what is your primary source for?

None TV Newspapers Internet Radio

College sports games
Non-game, sports content for college sports

How often do you?

Never Rarely Sometimes Quite Often Very Often

Visit any Internet sports sites (e.g., ESPN.com, Rivals.com, Yahoo Sports, lsusports.com, etc.)?
Visit fan-based sports websites, forums, message boards (Rivals.com, Scout.com, etc.)?
Post content on Internet sports sites?
Post content on fan-based sports websites, forums, message boards?

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. There are 20 questions in total. This is in no way a quiz. Your answers are highly valued, so please take your time and do your best to answer. If you are not necessarily sure of the correct answer, mark "I Don't Know."

As noted in the beginning portion of this survey, please DO NOT RELY ON ANY OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE. Your compliance is vital for accurate results.

What conference does Florida State University (FSU) compete in?

- A) Southeastern Conference (SEC)
- B) Big East
- C) Atlantic Coast (ACC)
- D) Sun Belt
- E) I don't know

What is the maximum number of scholarships the NCAA permits Division I FBS (formerly known as 1A) football members to use for a given season?

- A) 120
- B) 65
- C) 85
- D) 100
- E) I don't know

Where is the Southeastern (SEC) Conference Championship Football game typically played?

- A) New Orleans, Louisiana
- B) Birmingham, Alabama
- C) Orlando, Florida
- D) Atlanta, Georgia
- E) I don't know

"National Signing Day," the first time a high school senior may sign a letter of intent to sign a scholarship agreement to play football at a given school, typically falls on:

- A) January 15
- B) 1st Wednesday in February
- C) June 1
- D) Last Friday in March
- E) I don't know

The NCAA Basketball Tournament begins with a field of 64 teams. As the field is narrowed, rounds are typically referred to by a nickname. When 16 teams remain, which of the following best describes this round of the tournament?

- A) Super 16
- B) Superb 16
- C) Sweet 16
- D) Sexy 16
- E) I don't know

Where is the NCAA's National Headquarters located?

- A) Seattle, Washington
- B) Indianapolis, Indiana
- C) Orlando, Florida
- D) New York, New York
- E) I don't know

Where is the College World Series (baseball) Final 4 played?

- A) Eugene, Oregon
- B) Omaha, Nebraska
- C) Miami, Florida
- D) St. Louis, Missouri
- E) I don't know

Who is the current President of the NCAA?

- A) Myles Brand
- B) Oliver Luck
- C) Mark Emmert
- D) Dan Bebe
- E) I don't know

When 8 teams are left in the NCAA Basketball Tournament, what is this generally called?

- A) Elite 8
- B) Awesome 8
- C) Great 8
- D) Super 8
- E) I don't know

Which of the following descriptions best describes the NCAA's official classification?

- A) Voluntary, Non-profit
- B) Voluntary, For-profit
- C) Non-voluntary, Non-profit
- D) Non-Voluntary, For-profit
- E) I don't know

Which of the following schools DOES NOT compete in the Big 12 Conference?

- A) University of Texas
- B) Texas Christian University
- C) Texas A&M University
- D) Baylor University
- E) I don't know

How many PRIMARY (not including subdivisions like 1-A and 1-AA in football) does the NCAA have?

- A) 2
- B) 3
- C) 4
- D) 5
- E) I don't know

How many schools belong to the Southeastern (SEC) Conference?

- A) 8
- B) 10
- C) 12
- D) 14
- E) I don't know

When schools break NCAA rules, the NCAA will investigate that school and sometimes issue a sanction. The most severe punishment is the complete suspension of a sport program, known as the "Death Penalty." Which of the following is THE ONLY to ever receive the Death Penalty?

- A) University of Southern California
- B) Southern Methodist University
- C) Marshall University
- D) University of Miami
- E) I don't know

What conference does The University of Cincinnati compete in?

- A) Big Ten
- B) Conference USA (C-USA)
- C) Big East
- D) Mid-American Conference (MAC)
- E) I don't know

The Bowl Championship Series (BCS) includes FIVE bowl games. Four are "traditional" bowl games, one is known as The National Championship Game. Which of the following IS NOT a BCS bowl game?

- A) Rose Bowl
- B) Sugar Bowl
- C) Cotton Bowl
- D) Fiesta Bowl
- E) I don't know

Which of the following teams won the 2010 Men's NCAA Basketball Tournament?

- A) West Virginia University
- B) North Carolina University
- C) Duke University
- D) Michigan State University
- E) I don't know

The BCS guarantees entry to the champion of SIX of Division 1 FBS conference champions. These conferences are commonly referred to as “BCS conferences.” Which of the following IS NOT a BCS Conference?

- A) Big East
- B) Mountain West
- C) Atlantic Coast (ACC)
- D) Big 10
- E) I don't know

Which state is the Fiesta Bowl played in?

- A) California
- B) Arizona
- C) Texas
- D) New Mexico
- E) I don't know

The NCAA owns and operates the Bowl Championship Series (BCS).

- A) True
- B) False

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with each.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

College athletes should be paid.

College football needs a playoff.

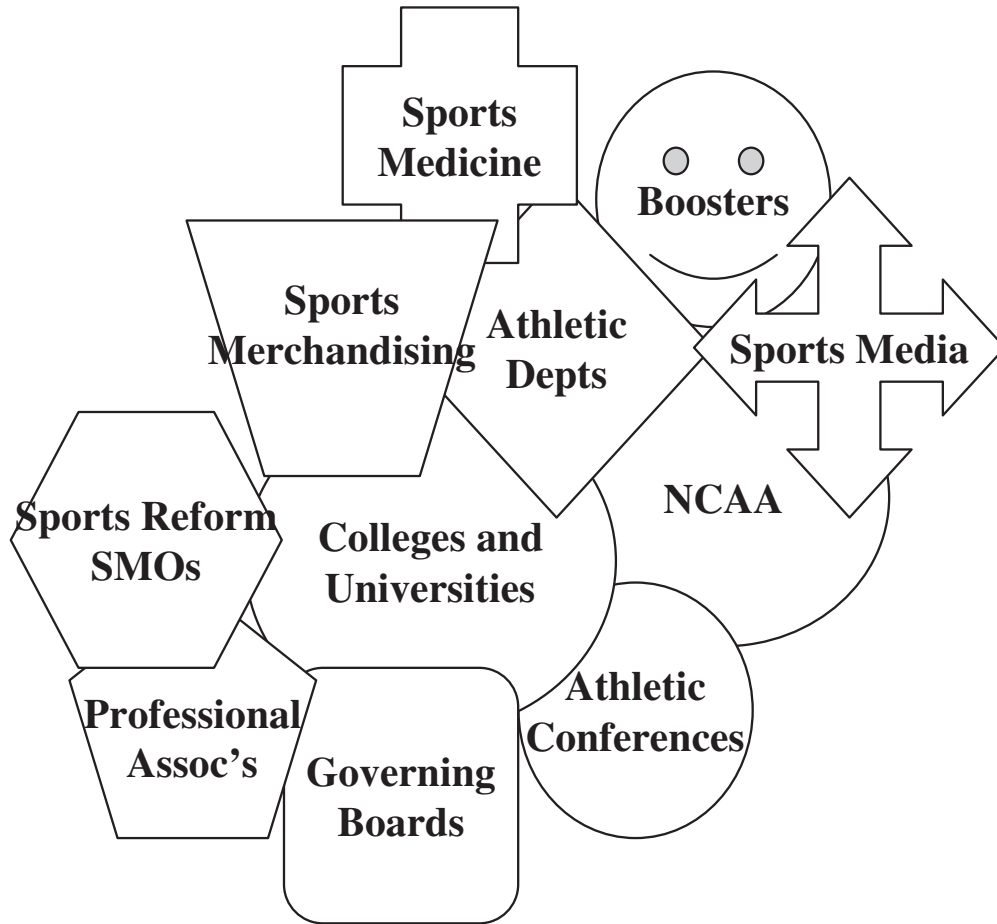
The NCAA needs stricter punishments for schools/coaches/players found to break rules.

Athletic scholarships should cover athletes for four years, instead of one.

Schools should be required to interview a minority candidate before making a decision.

Women deserve greater opportunities in college sports.

APPENDIX II: INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC'S MULTI-ORGANIZATIONAL FIELD



*Figure from: Benford, 2007, p. 8.

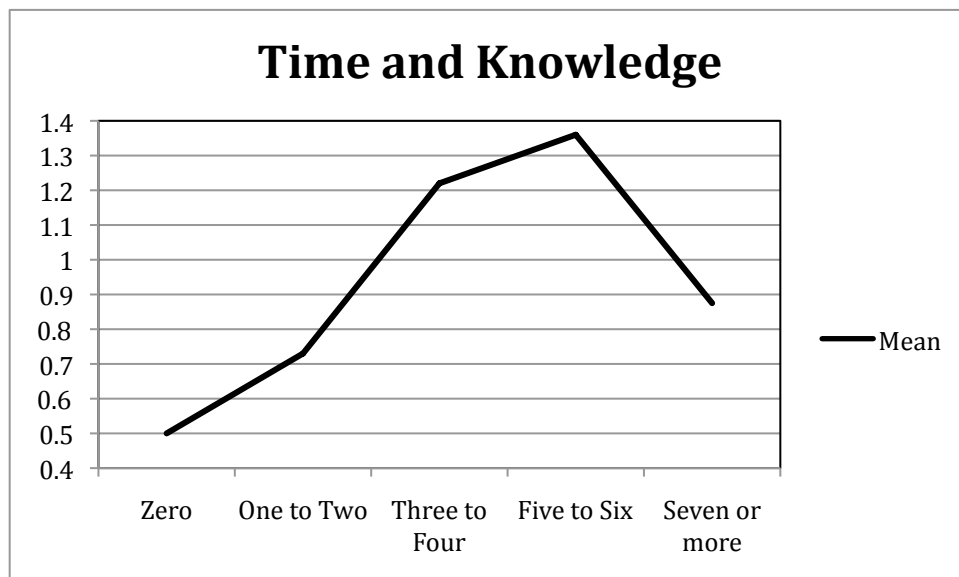
APPENDIX III: PILOT STUDY

To try and gauge basic knowledge pertaining to the NCAA, as well as attitudes towards the organization and related issues, I implemented a short survey. Respondents' (n=421) involvement was completely voluntary. The sample used for data analysis here, however, is rather limited. Students answered questions via "clickers" – I introduced the topic to the students, primed them with strictly matter of the fact information concerning the NCAA, and then went through the questions. Many students walked in late and did not answer the first part; others started but did not finish. The class was roughly 800 students, so it still yielded a substantial sample.

Students first answered basic media consumption questions, including the amount of time spent reading about college sports and their preferred outlet. Students were then presented with a definition of the NCAA and the organization's mission statement. Their role as college sports' governing body was spelled out clearly. Upon doing so, I then had students complete four, multiple-choice items regarding the NCAA. For analysis, I collapsed responses into a dichotomous value representing correct (1) and incorrect responses (0).

Students were then presented with six questions intended to gauge their attitudes about college sports, media coverage of scandals, and towards the NCAA. Resulting frequencies are remarkably unimpressive, with the majority of questions yielding neutral as the most frequent response. The mean for answers to all six, five-item statements hovered around 3. Subsequent comparison of attitudes and knowledge, as well as attitudes and descriptive variables that attitudes are evenly dispersed. This is most likely due to general apathy and disinterest on the part of a problematic sample, but it may also be related to knowledge. Individuals may not possess knowledge sufficient enough to make strong judgments.

The pilot study's key finding is presented below. When examining the effect between hours spent reading about college sports and knowledge about the NCAA, a One-Way ANOVA shows that greater attention to associated media is positively and significantly related to higher knowledge ($F=9.98$, $df=4$, $p<.01$). The dip in the graph represents one individual who spend seven or more hours of sports media per day.



APPENDIX IV: STEWART MANDEL INTERVIEW

Ted Greener: What is the most pressing issue in collegiate sports today? Why?

Stewart Mandel: The overall concept of amateurism, which has come under attack due to recent agent scandals and the increased awareness of the business side of the sport and how many dollars are involved. For the first time, there is some sentiment within college athletics that it's time to revisit some of the NCAA's most deeply held values.

TG: Can you explain who the NCAA is and what it does?

SM: The NCAA is the association of its member institutions -- i.e. all schools that participate in college athletics at the Division I, II or III level. It administers championships, enacts and enforces rules and regulates amateurism.

TG: In light of the 2010 agent scandals, do you believe the NCAA adequately enforces rules? What do you believe to be its biggest obstacle in doing so effectively?

SM: I believe they do as good job as possible given extremely limited manpower, lack of subpoena power and the overwhelming amount of rules (many of them trivial) they have to enforce.

TG: Do you think the public has incorrect perceptions as to what the NCAA is?

SM: I think 98 percent of the public doesn't know what the NCAA is or what it does.

TG: Do you believe media, as a whole, covers the NCAA accurately?

SM: I think the small core of people that cover the NCAA on a regular basis and understand its admittedly complex investigative process do a good job. But that still leaves many, many beat writers and general columnists who don't fully understand the process yet to write and opine about it.

TG: In your mind, what is wrong with the NCAA?

SM: It is asked to do more than is humanly possible and therefore ends up directing a lot of time and resources toward trivial matters at the expense of the two major, revenue-driving sports, which are littered with problems.

TG: If you could change one thing about the NCAA, what would it be?

SM: I would re-organize it to deal individually with each sport (i.e., there would be an NCAA for football, an NCAA for basketball, an NCAA for baseball, etc.). There would be a "president" of each sport.

TG: Is there anything else you would like to add?

SM: Just that the two single biggest causes of confusion for the public, which the NCAA does a terrible job of clearing up, is that A) the membership and the staff in Indy are two different things, and B) the NCAA has no oversight or involvement in the BCS.

APPENDIX V: POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE INDEX

1. Do you happen to know what job or political job is now held by [insert current vice president]?
2. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not? Is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?
3. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?
4. Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington before the last election?
5. Would you say that one of the parties is more conservative than the other at a national level? Which party is more conservative?

*Political Knowledge Index from: Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 306.

VITA

Theodore Charles Greener was born in Norwalk, Connecticut, to William and Leigh Ann Greener. Theodore earned his bachelor's of communication studies from West Virginia University in December 2008. After working seven months at Universal Sports Network, Theodore began work toward his master's in mass communication from Louisiana State University in August 2009. During his graduate education, Theodore served as a graduate teaching assistant for the mass communication department, assisting with a software-based, Visual Communication class. He focused his research on college sports, the NCAA, and documentary film. Theodore received his master's of mass communication in May, 2011.