Pinterest and Female Sport Fans: Gaining a Foothold in the Male-Dominated Sport World

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Female sport fans account for over 45% of the fan base in some major professional sport leagues. This study analyzes every verified Pinterest account from teams in the 4 major North American sport leagues to investigate how teams use a social network consisting largely of female users to reach this growing target audience. The study finds that sport teams use Pinterest to promote purchasable items, share information about the team, highlight the fan experience, and share creative content—although to a lesser extent than the typical Pinterest user. Differences between leagues and details of content frames are discussed. Future directives for understanding how sport teams use Pinterest are presented, and the utility of visual framing for investigating new media is discussed.

Keywords: framing, sport fandom, sport marketing, social media

> *The "social media" platform is now an access point—to the club, to the players, to promotions, to ticket sales, to the story that's being told.*
> (Cohen, 2012, para. 17)
> —Andy Feffer, chief operating officer for the Washington Nationals

Consumption of sport entertainment media has historically been a male-dominated market, but recent studies have shown how female fans seem to be gaining traction in the world of sport (Oates, 2012; Peterson & Raney, 2008; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). In 2010, *The New York Times* reported that female fans made up 45% of the fan base for Major League Baseball (MLB), 44% for the National Football League (NFL), and 36% for the National Basketball Association (NBA), according to research conducted by the leagues (Thomas, 2010). Less than one fifth of fans had been female as of 1998, according to Scarborough Sports Marketing, representing a doubling to quadrupling of female fan share for the leagues in a little more than a decade (Vogt, 2002).

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This recent and rapid shift in fan demographics has left sport teams searching for a communication tool that caters to the growing number of female sport fans. Many professional sport teams are turning to Pinterest, a social-media platform catering to an 87% female population (Tekobbe, 2013). Pinterest is the third-most-used and fastest-growing social network, used by one in every three female Internet users in the United States (Duggan & Smith, 2013). It is a social-media site that allows users to "pin" visual images to various boards, organizing them and saving them for future perusal. These visual images are the primary focus of the site, and users can categorize their images for themselves or other users.

Limited previous research on Pinterest shows that female users are more likely than male users to pin items they can buy (Hall & Zarro, 2012; Ottoni et al., 2013) or create "wish lists" of items they would like to have (Hall & Zarro, 2012), underscoring the unique communication opportunity Pinterest provides: a community of female fans actively seeking out commercial items. In addition, the limited amount of direct communication permitted on Pinterest makes the visual aspects of this social network the primary draw (Ottoni et al., 2013). In relation to female sport fans, "marketing strategies targeted specifically at females buying merchandise appear to be a ripe avenue toward increasing revenues" (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002, p. 17).

This study employed a content analysis to investigate which professional sport leagues and teams are using Pinterest. Using framing theory, the study attempts to clarify whether teams use Pinterest to reach female fans or attempt to situate Pinterest as a new opportunity to masculinize an otherwise predominantly feminine space. Most relevant is whether sport teams frame their Pinterest accounts in a different way from what might be thought of as a more traditional presentation of sport. More succinctly, how are traditional sport teams using a nontraditional outlet to reach female fans?

Literature Review

Sport communication is a unique form of communication among social groups, as a fan's loyalty is rarely something that can be bought or sold (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). Thus, it is critical for professional sport organizations and leagues to present information targeting specific demographics that match the sport organization's precise needs. Historically, fans have identified themselves with a favorite team, considering this a relationship that is built and maintained. In recent years, sport communication specialists have used social media as an opportunity to meet their fan base's relational need by allowing them to take a "peek behind the scene" in an effort to further humanize their favorite organizations (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010, p. 396). Sport executives have found that there are potentially significant benefits of using social media to connect with their fan bases on a relational level (Williams & Chinn, 2010), such as being able to frame information in a specific way. However, as social media have grown, they have shown signs of demographic fragmentation (Duggan & Smith, 2013), meaning that it may no longer be possible to only use one social-media platform to meet the needs of an entire fan base. There are a multitude of new social-media platforms, and each has a specific way of communicating a message. For instance, Facebook and Twitter require user-generated

media to build relationships between the brand and the communities they serve, while Pinterest is predominantly used to communicate in a unidirectional format aimed from the brand or team to the targeted demographic. Pinterest allows users to create a visual representation of their online experience by pinning and collecting their favorite Web sites, pictures, and links.

Framing

When considering framing from a mass-communication perspective, a frame describes the way a message is tailored to invoke a specific interpretation by the viewer (de Vreese, 2005; Entman, 1993; Patterson, 1993; Tankard, 2001). Previous research has shown that the persuasive impact on an individual can be seen through the promotion of behavior adoption by that individual; however, personal interpretation of the message is a strong determinant of the outcome (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984).

Although framing theory was originally applied in the field of mass communication to investigate how news-media outlets emphasize certain aspects of news to facilitate an understanding by the public, its theoretical use has grown. The current study investigated how sport teams frame the messages they are sending to a predominantly female audience and how they are "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman, 2009, p. 5).

Framing is a two-step process composed of frame building and frame setting (de Vreese, 2005). First, frame building describes the ways in which a message is constructed to highlight desired aspects for the consumer. The preferred outcome of frame building is to promote certain behavior adoptions or specific ways of thinking in the minds of the receivers. Second, frame setting occurs when the receiver processes the message against previous ideals and beliefs. Tversky, Kahneman, and Choice (1981) state that it is not only how the individual perceives the message but also how the individual feels about the resulting frame in the outcome behavior. According to de Vreese, the promotion of behavior adoption in an individual can only be seen after both steps have taken place.

Because Pinterest is largely visual and includes very little text, the current study used visual framing as the theoretical framework. According to Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, and Hardin (2002), the power of images to convey meaning in sport communication is significant. Rowe (1999) also states that images are conceivably the most powerful of all sport-media texts. Because of this, visual-based media outlets such as Pinterest should provide researchers with a clear vision of the messages teams are trying to project and what target demographic they are trying to reach. By using visual framing as a lens for the current content analysis, we looked at what frames are indicated by "pins" from each team and sport league.

Gitlin (1980) identifies three main functions of framing: selection, emphasis, and exclusion. These three functions are critically important when viewing the visual communication between an organization and specific consumer demographics. Gitlin's concepts were directly applied to the current study, which sought to determine how sport teams communicate with their female fans by viewing what individual teams choose to pin (selection), what pinning categories occur more regularly (emphasis), and what pinning categories are nonexistent (exclusion).

Women as Sport Fans

Previous literature has established that men and women consume sport media in different ways (Angelini, 2008; Cooper & Tang, 2012; Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000; Gantz & Wenner, 1991, 1995; Tang & Cooper, 2012) and seemingly hints at an enhanced role of socialization for the female sport fan. Literature on the topic has noted how women were more likely to watch a sporting event because others were doing so, or for companionship (Gantz, Wang, Paul, & Potter, 2006; Gantz & Wenner, 1991, 1995).

Women consume sport to strengthen social bonds, "not within sports culture, but within their own romantic relationships and larger family units" (Ruihley & Billings, 2012, p. 437; Whiteside & Hardin, 2011). Gantz and Wenner (1991) also observed a link between the "homemaker" responsibilities that women have been traditionally expected to perform and the consumption of sport. Women were more likely to engage in multiple "domestic" activities—such as cooking—while they were watching a sporting event (Gantz & Wenner, 1991). Several other studies corroborated this idea, stating that people (particularly women) were more likely to be involved with a sport team when they had the opportunity to interact and bond with other people who were going to watch the same game (Funk, Ridinger & Moorman, 2004; Gantz, 1981; Wann, 1995).

Similarly, women were more likely to engage in sport consumption because they liked "watching a sporting event with friends and family, cheering at a sporting event, and watching and attending sporting events" (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000, p. 227). Female fantasy-sport players participated more for entertainment reasons than male users (Ruihley & Billings, 2012), and while women find enjoyment in sport consumption, sport does not take up as much time in a woman's life as it does a man's (Gantz & Wenner, 1991). Women were also more likely to watch pregame telecasts "in an attempt to prove their legitimacy" (Tainsky, Kerwin, Xu, & Zhou, 2014, p. 13). This emphasizes the social aspect of sport consumption, which may play a part in women's likelihood to consume not only a sporting event itself but also associated team media—such as a Pinterest account.

Gender differences have also been observed in enjoyment of sport based on content. Studies have shown men to enjoy violent, combative sports more than women (Bryant, Comisky, & Zillmann, 1981; Sargent, Zillmann, & Weaver, 1998). As Raney and Depalma (2006) note, many sports require acts of violence as part of the competition, making violence within the game commonplace. Players who may bear no hostility toward one another off the field still engage in violence to achieve in-game goals (e.g., a hockey player checks an opponent to separate him from the puck, a linebacker sacks a quarterback to prevent him from completing a pass). Physical violence is but one form of aggression, a type of antisocial behavior that is "psychologically or physically injurious to another person or persons" (Greenberg, Edison, Korzenny, Fernandez-Collado, & Atkin, 1980, p. 102). Aggression can be communicated through violent acts but is more frequently transmitted through words or images conveying hostility (Greenberg et al., 1980; see also Glascock, 2008; Potter & Vaughan, 1997). Again, in the suspense of sporting competition, aggression may be seen as necessary for peak performance (e.g., trash talking toward an opponent as a means of getting "fired up" for a game).

Similarly, Gan et al. (1997) found that men were more likely to experience enjoyment when a game was very suspenseful. Women had a greater level of enjoyment when sporting events had a moderate level of suspense and experienced declines in enjoyment for "nail-biter" contests that were decided in the final moments (Gan, Tuggle, Mitrook, Coussement, & Zillmann, 1997; see also, Wann, 1995). This gender difference in sport enjoyment has its roots in the socialization of gender:

> Males are socialized to be competitive and aggressive (characteristics that are surely perpetuated through male involvement in sports), while females generally are socialized to be noncompetitive and submissive. As a result, males often take a dominant (and often domineering) role in the male–female relationship. . . . Thus, because males tend to view more sports than females, a natural consequence of the socialization process is that females acquiesce to and join in sports viewing with their male family members. (Raney, 2006, p. 324)

However, there are signs these roles may be shifting. Recent sport-media studies in both perceived violence (Raney & Kinnally, 2009) and suspense (Peterson & Raney, 2008) failed to support gender differences, leaving the current state of the influence of both content variables in some doubt.

Pinterest and Gender

Pinterest organizes and categorizes the online experience, giving users a space to collect things they enjoy, whether it is clothes, merchandise, recipes, or any other number of topics available online. In the site itself, boards function as tools for organization; they are created and defined by the user. Each board can then be tagged in broader categories defined by the Pinterest developers, such as Women's Fashion, Food & Drink, or Sports. Other users can then find boards and pins according to the category of the board they are pinned to, either by searching for a specific topic or by casually scanning through an entire category. Users can repin any existing pin to their own board or create new pins directly from outside sites. Another aspect of Pinterest is that "all information on the network is public even to outsiders" (Ottoni et al., 2013, p. 2). Unlike many other platforms in social media, a person is not required to be a member of Pinterest to view the content of pins and boards.

The visual elements of Pinterest are its primary draw (Ottoni et al., 2013), as there is no social interaction between users other than repinning, liking, or commenting on a pin. There is no direct message feature, and users cannot comment or write to each other outside of the comments on a pin. Unlike social-media giant Facebook, relationships on Pinterest are one-way. An individual can follow any other user without requiring that they be followed back. Many users do, however, link their Pinterest accounts to their Facebook accounts, simultaneously verifying themselves as a "real" person and allowing other users to communicate with them outside of Pinterest. A user's individual Pinterest profile contains no more than a name, a short description of the user (usually less than a sentence), and their boards. The primary action on Pinterest is described as social collecting (Zarro & Hall, 2012) rather than strictly social interaction exemplified by other social-media sites.

Because Pinterest is a relatively new form of social media, the academic literature on it is still in its infancy. A preliminary study (Ottoni et al., 2013) examined over 861 million pins, 2 million users, and almost 22 million boards (using analytic software) to determine the characteristics of pins, boards, and the pinners themselves. Female users' most popular categories were Food & Drink, Women's Fashion, and DIY (do-it-yourself) Crafts; male users were most likely to pin the categories Art, Photography, and Other. That same study also focused on purchasing habits on Pinterest. The researchers used a search tool involving a dollar sign ($) to determine which categories most often contained purchasable items. The most common categories with purchasable items were Women's Fashion, DIY Crafts, and Home Décor. Among female users, the study found that purchasable items were from these same categories, yet male users most often pinned purchasable items to Women's Fashion, Products, and DIY Crafts (Ottoni et al., 2013). Overall, Women's Fashion was the category most likely to contain purchasable items. One of the most relevant findings of this study was that "females tend to make more use of the network's commercial capabilities" (Ottoni et al., 2013, p. 8).

More evidence of the marketing power of Pinterest is that not only are there a high number of pins that are directly purchasable items but also "images on Pinterest often represent a physical object that people want to have" (Hall & Zarro, 2012, p. 8). Many users have boards framed as "wish lists" of clothing, art, furniture, jewelry, or other items users explicitly state they want to possess. In addition, the most popular sources of pins are blogs and e-commerce sites, both of which can contain items for sale (Hall & Zarro, 2012). Users often pin directly from sites that allow them to buy products, even going so far as to create unique pins containing multiple items of clothing, accessories, and jewelry they can long for and share with other users, effectively framing these items as products that are "wanted."

Pinterest features an overwhelmingly female user base (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Ottoni et al., 2013; Tekobbe, 2013), which is critical to marketers as "women generally make 85% of household purchases and women use Pinterest to track things they like" (Tekobbe, 2013, p. 382). Pinterest provides female users with a place to organize and classify different visual images that they like. One study found that pinners had "a strong focus on material related to food and drink, décor and design, and DIY and crafts" (Hall & Zarro, 2012, p. 6), thus continuing to emphasize some of the more feminine aspects of Pinterest. Pinterest is a female-driven and female-dominated online environment, where female users are more likely to be repinned than male users (Gilbert, Bakhshi, Chang, & Terveen, 2013).

Marketing to female fans is an important avenue for leagues and teams to consider, as "women typically buy merchandise for their families and purchase over 70% of all licensed [sport] merchandise" (Fink et al., 2002, p. 17; Lopiano, 1997). It may also be vital to consider nontraditional sport marketing outlets, as female fans are less likely to use traditional outlets such as print media to follow their favorite team (Fink et al., 2002). Pinterest users regularly pin purchasable items (Ottoni et al., 2013), which is an important consideration for sport marketers, as "female spectators indicated that they were more likely to purchase more merchandise in the future" (Fink et al., 2002, p. 17). These women may use Pinterest as an avenue for determining which sport merchandise they are interested in and want to save for future purchases.

Tekobbe (2013) examined the technological gender gap and Pinterest's role in helping women find a voice on the Internet. She states that Pinterest "is read through male cultural scripts of how women should spend their time" (p. 389), leading to many Internet commenters criticizing Pinterest and its users for catering to a time-wasting, wedding-obsessed female audience and creating little to no original content. Tekobbe chastises these pundits, arguing that Pinterest provides a context for women to categorize their online experience. By creating Pinterest accounts, then, sport teams not only cater to a female audience but also frame the way in which their online activities should be experienced.

Research Questions

Although women and men may identify as sport fans in equal numbers, men are more likely to strongly identify as fans, and women are more likely to consume sport in a social manner (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). In the past, women often felt marginalized from a largely male-dominated world of sport fandom. This may be changing, as women may be seeking an outlet for their sport fandom. The majority of top-tier sport teams have Pinterest accounts, and it can be reasonably inferred from the demographics of Pinterest that these accounts are directed at a largely female audience.

Because of the lack of previous research on Pinterest, and particularly sport media and Pinterest, this study set out to describe some of the characteristics of sport teams' Pinterest accounts. Thus, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: Which sport leagues have the strongest presence on Pinterest?

RQ2: Which sport teams have the strongest presence on Pinterest?

Because women have been shown to use Pinterest to create wish lists of items they desire, it is important to understand how sport teams are framing their Pinterest accounts. Previous literature has pointed out the marketing power of Pinterest (Hall & Zarro, 2012; Ottoni et al., 2013) but has also identified popular content categories such as crafts or food and drink that might move beyond professional sport teams' normal social-marketing efforts (Hall & Zarro, 2012). Therefore, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ3: What frames are most prominent among sport teams' Pinterest accounts?

RQ4: Is there a difference in the framing of Pinterest accounts between leagues?

Previous research (Bryant et al, 1981; Sargent et al., 1998) has shown that women's enjoyment of sport is lessened when violence is increased. However, more recent findings (Raney & Kinnally, 2009) cast some doubt as to whether this is still the case. The current study was concerned with whether sport teams' Pinterest boards provide this violent content. Therefore the following research question was proposed:

RQ5: What is the ratio of passive content as compared with aggressive/violent content on sport teams' Pinterest accounts?

Although there has been limited previous research on Pinterest, one study did find that female users are more likely to pin the categories Food & Drink and DIY Crafts (Ottoni et al., 2013). These categories are not usually associated with the same type of purchasable items that appear in women's apparel, which was another popular topic for female users (Ottoni et al., 2013). These types of activities are not usually associated with traditional male sport fandom, but they do appear regularly on Pinterest. Thus, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ6a: To what extent are sport teams pinning content about food and drink?

RQ6b: To what extent are sport teams pinning content about crafts?

Method

To answer the research questions, a content analysis of Pinterest accounts for major North American professional sport teams was conducted in October 2013. For the purposes of this study, major professional sport teams were defined as members of the traditional "Big Four" North American sport leagues (a common practice, see Mondello & Pedersen, 2003). All teams from MLB, the NBA, the NFL, and the National Hockey League (NHL) that had official Pinterest accounts were included in the sample. Because of the prevalence of fraudulent accounts (including the fairly popular "official" page of the NFL—which uses a misleading URL and sells, among other items, New York Yankees garden gnomes), only Pinterest accounts that were directly linked from a league or team's official Web page were included in the sample. This sampling method resulted in 80 verified team accounts (30 of 30 MLB teams, 19 of 30 NHL teams, 16 of 30 NBA teams, and 15 of 32 NFL teams), 65.6% of teams in the four leagues.

There were two units of analysis used in this study. The first was team account, and the second was an individual board that a team created. Because each board is sorted by category, it was considered appropriate for a unit of analysis, especially considering that the primary interest of this study was content categories. The first unit of analysis, team account, collected information to inform RQs 1 and 2. Accounts were coded for the name of the team, league association, and a number of usage and interaction variables including the total number of boards (an organized collection of pins) and pins (individual items placed on a board) posted, the number of likes the account gave to other users' pins, the number of total account followers, and the number of accounts the team follows.

Two coders were first provided with a coding book for team accounts and trained using similar material outside the sample—in this case, the Pinterest accounts of Major League Soccer teams. Both coders were graduate students who were experienced in coding and performing content analysis. Intercoder reliability was established using 26% of the sample of team accounts (due to rounding up to complete entire accounts) and resulted in a reliability level (measured using Cohen's Kappa) of $\kappa = 1.00$ for variables associated with team accounts. The remainder of the sample was then divided among the coders.

The second unit of analysis examined individual boards in the Pinterest accounts. On Pinterest, a board is similar to a folder or smaller group of items that is generally collected together by a user according to topic. Similar to the accounts,

boards were coded for the name of the team, league association, number of pins included on the board, and number of followers for the board (users can follow accounts or individual boards, so the two numbers are not necessarily equal). In addition, coders documented the name of the board and its placement within the account. Placement was coded from left to right, where the first board in an account appears in the top left corner. Boards were also categorized into one of 24 content categories. Content categories included (but were not limited to) apparel, merchandise, game photography, and promotional materials. These content categories roughly corresponded with categories that Pinterest users themselves can assign to a board, such as Women's Clothing or Food & Drink. Additional categories were added from a pretest of sport and nonsport Pinterest boards that were not included in the final sample ($N = 140$). Some categories were subdivided for more specific analysis. For example, apparel was divided into men's, women's, children's, and unisex. Mass-produced nonclothing items were categorized as merchandise, while one-of-a-kind collectors' items were categorized as memorabilia (see Table 1 for all coding categories).

For boards that included pins from more than one category, coders were instructed to select the best-fitting category for the majority (or, in the absence of a majority, plurality) of the pins on a board. For example, a board containing eight pins displaying coffee mugs and wall calendars and two pins displaying T-shirts would be coded as merchandise. If the board did not adhere to any single predominant category, coders were instructed to select "other."

For data analysis, categories were merged to form four distinct content frames. The purchasable frame consisted of categories relating to merchandise and apparel presented for sale. The team frame consisted of categories relating to players and coaches, whether involved in game play or off the field. The fan-experience frame consisted of categories relating to images of fans or attempts by the team to attract fans to events. The creative frame consisted of categories relating to artistic expression through words, images, and DIY crafts (see Table 1 for all categories within each frame). Finally, coders determined whether the board consisted predominantly of violent or aggressive imagery.

Coding of violence followed the National Coalition on Television Violence operationalization of "hostile and intentional acts of one person against another through physical force" ("NCTV Says," 1981, p. 63), with hostility being understood as the competition between two opposing sides in the sport (Raney & Depalma, 2006). Following the example of Greenberg et al. (1980) and others, the current study considered aggression beyond purely physical expressions of violence— specifically, hostile messages toward another party, such as an intimidating stare toward an opponent, or a poster or meme levying a threat toward a rival (again, within the context of sporting competition). Presence of violence or aggression was coded as a dichotomous variable ($0 = $ no; $1 = $ yes).

As they were for the individual accounts, coders were provided with a coding book for individual boards and trained using Major League Soccer boards. Intercoder reliability was established using 26% of the sample, and an analysis using Cohen's kappa resulted in a reliability of $\kappa = .96$ for the individual boards. Kappa values for the two most subjective variables, board category ($\kappa = .72$) and presence of violence ($\kappa = .99$), remained strong. The remainder of the sample was then divided among the two coders.

Table 1   Percentages of Type and Frame of Board

Frame and type of board	Percentage	
	Within sample	Within frame
Purchasable	**24.9**	
unisex	4.2	17.1
men's	4.9	19.8
women's	5.3	21.3
kid's	3.1	12.4
merchandise	5.8	23.3
memorabilia	1.5	6.2
Team	**30.8**	
on the field	8.3	27.0
off the field	9.1	29.4
vintage photography	4.7	15.4
rosters	2.5	8.2
players	2.6	8.4
coaches	0.4	1.2
community	3.2	10.4
Fan experience	**24.2**	
mascot/cheerleaders	4.6	19.1
fans	7.3	30.0
kids	1.0	4.3
animals	1.4	5.9
stadium	3.6	15.0
promos	6.2	25.7
Creative	**18.9**	
food/drink	4.2	22.1
crafts	4.2	22.5
location	2.2	11.7
quotes	5.9	31.3
weddings	2.3	12.4
Other	**1.2**	
other	1.2	100

Results

The 80 verified Pinterest accounts coded for this study produced 1,624 Pinterest boards. The 30 MLB team accounts had a total of 590 boards, with a mean of 19.97 boards per account ($SD = 9.20$); the 19 NHL teams produced 398 boards, with a mean of 20.95 ($SD = 11.26$) boards per account; the 16 NBA teams had a total of 296 boards, with a mean of 18.94 boards per account ($SD = 7.63$); and the 15 NFL teams produced 320 boards, with a mean of 21.73 boards per account ($SD = 8.71$).

RQ1 asked which sport leagues would have the strongest presence on Pinterest. All 30 of MLB's teams had official Pinterest accounts, with a mean of 9,230 followers. The Chicago Cubs were removed from this analysis, as the team account was an extreme outlier, having 1.2 million followers—almost eight times as many as the next-closest team. Correspondence with the team's social-media assistant revealed that one of the Cubs' boards, "Cubs Legends," was previously featured by Pinterest as a recommended board for new users (M. Reisert, personal communication, October 21, 2013). Considering that the registration process for Pinterest forces new users to follow at least one of the recommended boards before curating their own account, the Cubs received a distinct advantage in attracting followers over other teams in the study. Thus, it was reasonable to remove them from comparative analyses of followers between teams and leagues. The NBA had 16 teams with a mean of 1,418 followers per account. Fifteen NFL teams had a mean of 22,912 followers. The NHL had 19 teams with official Pinterest accounts, and these accounts had an average of 1,925 followers. A one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in number of followers was not significant, $F(3, 75) = 2.24$, $p < .05$.

RQ2 asked which sport teams would have the strongest presence on Pinterest. The mean number of followers for an individual team in the sample was 8,849 (including outliers, $SD = 27,202.76$). The team with the highest number of followers and therefore the strongest presence on Pinterest was the Chicago Cubs (MLB), who had 1,210,945 followers. Next were the Seattle Seahawks (NFL) with 144,948 followers and the Philadelphia Phillies (MLB) with 144,028 followers. The team with the fourth-strongest presence was the Buffalo Bills (NFL) with 138,679 followers, trailed by the Seattle Mariners (MLB) and the New England Patriots (NFL) with 36,185 and 15,488 followers, respectively. All of the other teams in the sample had fewer than 10,000 followers.

RQ3 asked which frames would be most prominent in Pinterest accounts of professional sport leagues. Boards were analyzed for frame and placement within an account. Overall, 500 boards (31% of the total sample) were framed as team, 404 boards (25%) were framed as purchasable, 393 boards were framed as fan experience (24%), and 307 boards were framed as creative (19%). The remaining 20 boards (1.2%) were categorized as "other" and were not included in a content frame.

Using frame as the independent variable and placement within an account as the dependent variable, an ANOVA was conducted to determine which frames were placed more prominently within an account. There was a significant difference between the placement of a board and its frame, $F(3, 1600) = 5.88$, $p < .001$. Purchasable was the most prominent frame, followed by team, fan experience, and creative. Post hoc tests showed that the purchasable frame was significantly more likely to be placed higher than fan experience, $p < .05$, and also significantly more likely to be placed higher than boards framed as creative, $p < .001$. Thus,

Table 2   Framing of Pinterest Boards by Sports Leagues

Frame	MLB*	NBA*	NFL	NHL*
Purchasable	191 (32%)	73 (25%)	88 (28%)	52 (13%)
Team	153 (26%)	127 (43%)	87 (27%)	133 (33%)
Fan experience	168 (29%)	53 (18%)	75 (23%)	97 (24%)
Creative	78 (13%)	43 (15%)	70 (22%)	116 (29%)
Total	590	296	320	398

Note. MLB = Major League Baseball; NBA = National Basketball Association; NFL = National Football League; NHL = National Hockey League. Overall significance $p < .001$.

*Significance within league $p < .001$.

addressing RQ3, team was the most frequent frame, while purchasable items were placed more prominently than other frames.

RQ4 asked if there is a difference in the framing of Pinterest accounts between leagues. Chi-square tests showed the overall difference between leagues and framing was significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 1604) = 101.94, p < .001$, meaning that different leagues did frame their Pinterest accounts differently. Primarily, MLB was most likely to frame Pinterest accounts as purchasable and fan experience, whereas the NBA was most likely to use the team frame, and the NHL was most likely to use creative. In addition, there was a significant difference in the number of boards using each frame in three of the four leagues: MLB, $\chi^2(3, N = 590) = 48.63, p < .001$; NBA, $\chi^2(3, N = 296) = 56.92, p < .001$; and NHL, $\chi^2(3, N = 398) = 36.75, p < .001$. Table 2 displays which boards were used in each league.

RQ5 examined the ratio of violent/aggressive content compared with passive content found in sport teams' Pinterest accounts. Of the total 1,624 boards, 1,616 were found to be passive, and only eight total boards were found to contain aggressive content. Chi-square revealed that this difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 1624) = 1592.16, p < .001$.

RQ6a asked to what extent sport teams pinned content about food and drink. There were 68 total food/drink boards found, which accounted for 4.2% of the overall sample. RQ6b asked to what extent sport teams pinned content about crafts. Sixty-nine total boards about crafts were found, accounting for another 4.2% of the sample. In total, 8.4% of the sample was about either food/drink or crafts.

Discussion

The content analysis yielded many interesting findings about the presence of professional sport teams on Pinterest, the ways that those teams build frames incorporating many of Pinterest's distinguishing elements, and the differences between sport leagues in both respects. It further demonstrates the capability of framing theory, and visual framing in particular, to describe and explain new social-media platforms.

Presence on Pinterest

While all of the "Big Four" North American professional sport leagues had teams that used Pinterest, only one, MLB, had embraced it league-wide. This is likely

because of MLB Advanced Media, the league's digital arm, which exercises oversight of team Web sites, streaming applications, and other online ventures, valuing consistency across team interfaces (Salter, 2012). Indeed, MLB was the only league in which team Pinterest pages shared boards (i.e., the exact same board was displayed on multiple team pages). The other three leagues had less than universal participation (the NFL not even achieving a majority) and showed no evidence of shared promotional directives among their teams.

The NFL and MLB have established the largest Pinterest followings, with the NBA and NHL lagging far behind. The NHL's small following may coincide with its position as the least viewed of the "Big Four" North American sports. The NBA's similarly low number of followers on the overwhelmingly female social network might be attributable to the league's failure to attract female fans at the same rate as the NFL and MLB (Thomas, 2010). However, extreme variance in the number of followers for individual teams suggests that more consistent adoption and promotion of Pinterest accounts across leagues may be needed before means can serve as practical representations of league prominence on the social-networking site. In its current state of adoption, it might be more accurate to say a few teams, regardless of sport, have achieved large followings on Pinterest, while most teams have yet to find (or potentially even attempt) a way to draw fans to their pages.

Such attempts to attract followers may need to rely on marketing efforts outside the social-media platform itself. This study found that being an active part of the Pinterest community did not seem to affect a team's popularity. Teams that "liked" other users' pins or followed other users were no more likely to be followed than teams that forewent those social behaviors. This might be because Pinterest does not require reciprocal "friendship," so users might not expect interaction with accounts they follow. The number of boards posted also did not correlate with more followers, suggesting that active publishing of content is not sufficient to attract fans.

What becomes clear is that sport teams have not yet drawn the attention of the majority of Pinterest users. Collectively, the professional sport teams in this study did not approach the most-followed individual accounts on Pinterest, many of which have surpassed 5 million followers ("Who to Follow," 2013). However, this is not to suggest that sport teams are ignoring the interests of Pinterest users, as the frame analysis revealed.

Frames of Pinterest Content

The four frames used to explain the content shared on sport teams' boards were fairly evenly dispersed. However, deeper inspection reveals some interesting findings. Perhaps the most appealing use of Pinterest for teams is to promote purchasable items. The purchasable frame was the second-most employed in the study, although this finding might underestimate its prominence. Analysis of board placement revealed that boards using the purchasable frame were most likely to be featured at the top of a team's list of boards—prime positioning for attracting the most attention from people browsing the page. Combining the ability of Pinterest users to arrange their boards in any order they wish and the literature that shows that female users were more apt to use purchasable pins (Ottoni et al., 2013), it stands to reason that this priority placement of purchasable items is intentional and exhibits Gitlin's (1980) "emphasis" function of frame building. This indicates that teams are recognizing the marketing power of Pinterest and attempting to sell

merchandise and memorabilia to fans through a social-media outlet that caters to a predominantly female audience with the power to make sport-related purchasing decisions (Fink et al., 2002).

The team frame was the most frequently used, but perhaps not in the way one would expect in a traditional sport medium. Rather than copious amounts of game-play and roster images, Pinterest team frames relied slightly more on off-the-field images, including community outreach events, as well as noncoded subcategories like media interactions, vacation photos, and fashion shoots. Fans were almost as important as players in the Pinterest presentation of sport. The fan-experience frame accounted for close to a fourth of all content, and it featured fans representing their favorite teams at the games and in the community. The creative frame featured the most distinctively Pinterest-tailored elements in the study, although it is interesting that it accounted for the smallest number of boards. While craft and food/drink boards were not uncommon, they did not approach the prevalence of the Pinterest world at large. Whether it was focusing more heavily on fans or presenting players in a softer light, sport accounts still appeared to be more comfortable with refocusing traditional frames than implementing more foreign frames, suggesting a more convenient selection technique by frame builders (Gitlin, 1980).

Some differences in content were observed between sport leagues. The most dramatic splits were between purchasable and creative frames. MLB, NFL, and NBA teams each devoted the smallest portion of their boards to the creative frame, while MLB and NFL teams each devoted the largest portion of boards to the purchasable frame. Conversely, NHL teams had the highest percentage of boards in the creative frame but the lowest percentage of boards in the purchasable frame. This relationship is especially interesting since many of the arts, crafts, recipes, and other content in the creative frame are not marketed directly by the teams. For the majority of professional sport teams, fan expression was celebrated, but fan creations were not featured as prominently as team-sponsored merchandise and apparel. Professional sport teams, while they have made attempts to fit into the Pinterest motif, have not fully integrated themselves as members of the Pinterest community—which places much more emphasis on the creative. Finally, an extremely small number of boards consisted of primarily violent or aggressive content. This is not entirely surprising, especially since most categories lack natural avenues for displaying such imagery. Of the eight violent or aggressive boards in the sample, seven were in the game-play photography category. The remaining one board appeared in the mascot/cheerleader category. However, violent or aggressive boards still represented just 5.5% of the game-play photography category. This figure is of some interest, especially since two of the four sports in the sample—football and hockey—include considerable amounts of violent game play (Sargent et al., 1998), and all sports engage in at least some level of "trash talking" toward rivals. Perhaps, then, there could be some credence to the notion that sport teams minimize violent and aggressive content for their Pinterest audience, but the current study alone is not adequate to validate such a claim. Taken together with the frame analysis, it does further suggest that sport teams are not relying on the same presentations found in the masculinized sport world, even as they fail to fully conform to the conventions of a largely feminine social-media platform.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides a methodological and theoretical approach to better understand how visual framing is used in modern, image-heavy social media. To our knowledge, this is the first study to use framing theory to investigate the social-networking site Pinterest. In the current Web environment, the proliferation of image-heavy news and entertainment (e.g., Buzzfeed) and social media (e.g., Instagram, Flickr, Tumblr, and Pinterest), visual framing seems an appropriate theoretical lens through which to see how disseminators are building visual narratives, and if those frames "set" to affect users who can act as content curators. As Entman (2007) states, "frames introduce or raise the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way" (p. 164). In this case, sport teams may be using Pinterest to highlight purchasable items such as jerseys or other merchandise to emphasize to female fans that these are the most important items associated with a sport team.

The current study found particular utility in applying Gitlin's (1980) frame-building functions of selection, emphasis, and exclusion. To present themselves to a Pinterest audience, sport teams selected frames that were similar to traditional sport narratives, emphasized a purchasable frame that fit well with the target audience and medium, and excluded violent or aggressive content that research suggests might have been poorly received by the target audience.

Practical Implications

The timeliness of this study and significance and implications of the findings are important because they are met by the recent shift in fan demographics that has left sport marketers and communicators searching for communication tools that cater to the growing number of female sport fans (Fink et al., 2002). Pinterest has presented professional teams and leagues with a unique landscape accepted by female fans as a legitimate platform to foster relationships that are profitable to both consumer and communicators. This study offers a basis of knowledge that future studies can use to explore this new intersection of female sport fans and targeted sport communication.

While Pinterest shows great potential as a space to market purchasable items to fans, teams must find a way to get those fans to pay attention. Sport teams' Pinterest followings trail far behind other social-media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, despite Pinterest's now boasting more active users than the latter (Duggan & Smith, 2013). However, many users of social media actively engage with multiple platforms (Duggan & Smith, 2013), suggesting that cross-platform promotions may be successful in attracting new followers to a team's Pinterest page. Similarly, Facebook and Twitter buttons have become ubiquitous in marketing efforts; perhaps more widespread incorporation of the Pinterest logo on promotional items could also increase fan exposure to the team's page. The most elaborate promotion observed in the sample was MLB's "Pin Your Turf"—a collaboration with the DIY Network in which fans could register via Pinterest for a chance for a backyard renovation from the show *Lawn Crashers*. The board attracted almost 70,000 followers, more than all but four professional sport teams. (Since the board was created by DIY

Network, neither Pinterest nor the researchers counted it toward any MLB team's total follower count.)

Certainly, the ability for purchasable items to be such an integral part of a social-media presence makes Pinterest a desirable destination for sport teams. However, arts, crafts, and other exhibitions of creativity are what led to Pinterest's popularity and distinguish it from its peers. In this respect, sport teams are not completely ignoring the creative frame, but they are drastically downplaying it in relation to the average user. Such content may simply be outside of the expertise of social-media managers for professional sport teams. Or, more purposefully, these DIY-type projects could be seen as a threat to purchasable items—as evidenced by the financially thriving leagues' lack of such content. The NHL, on the other hand, attempting to increase its fan base to the levels of the other leagues, emphasizes the creative frame that draws people to Pinterest in the first place.

The distinct frames used in this study rarely gave coders problems, but perhaps they should have. Sport teams would do well to link purchasable marketing efforts with the creative content that makes Pinterest unique, rather than keeping them on separate boards, almost like the sacrosanct wall between news and advertising in traditional media. Even the traditional team and fan frames—repurposed to give users the feel of an all-access pass—could incorporate marketing appeals. For instance, a board giving users a glimpse at what it is like to be a fan in the stands for a game (very common among the sample) could also include information about how to purchase tickets or team apparel so that the user can easily become a part of the experience being described.

Limitations and Future Research

This study proposed to examine all Pinterest accounts for teams in the "Big Four" North American professional sport leagues. It is not impossible that a legitimate account might have failed to meet the verification standard for inclusion in the sample (i.e., a Pinterest account is operated by the team but is not linked to on the team's official Web site). This is an unlikely scenario, and failure to include such a link would suggest the lack of investment said team placed in the particular social-media strategy. This study's verification method instead gave preference to preventing any fraudulent accounts from being included in the sample. Regardless, as Pinterest continues to grow in popularity, the remaining one third of teams in these leagues could be likely to open accounts soon. Future studies should monitor their progress.

This study used accounts and boards as the units of analyses. Both seemed appropriate for answering the research questions, and the coding scheme achieved very strong intercoder reliability across a more than adequate portion of the sample (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). However, as content analyses of text sometimes see the need to isolate individual words from larger paragraphs, so too might a study of Pinterest benefit from examining individual pins in larger boards. Obviously, this becomes an issue of labor and efficiency versus accuracy. By using the board as the unit of analysis, our coders performed coding based on the majority category for pins within the board. While most boards fit neatly into categories, those that were an amalgamation of pins covering various categories were cumbersome using the current methodology. The presence of violence, for instance, might have benefitted from examination of individual pins, as many boards featuring photographs of

game play included violent imagery, but in very few boards did violence constitute the majority of pins needed to code the board as "violent." While results would almost certainly maintain nonsignificance, future studies evaluating very specific phenomena may consider using pins as a more precise unit of analysis.

The current research is part of an early wave of scholarly investigation of Pinterest. As with any new medium, research is based on literature relating to other forms of media and contains a certain degree of experimentation in conceptualization and methodology. The results are intended to form a descriptive base of knowledge for future investigations. Subsequent research should seek to measure the effects of users' interaction with Pinterest content. For instance, does the purchasable frame actually encourage purchase decisions? Does the fan-experience frame strengthen ties between a team and its fan base? Answers to such questions would advance the frame building of the current study to the frame-setting effect on audiences.

Future research is also needed to more deeply analyze the use of traditional visual frames against the use of nontraditional visual frames to target new and unique demographics using new communication platforms. In addition, future research could focus on how media audiences' attitudes toward the use of traditional visual frames in sport communication are affected by these frames. This current analysis looks at Pinterest and gender, but a greater analysis of the use of visual framing of sport media is needed if future sport communicators wish to better connect with targeted demographics using multiple platforms.

Conclusion

By analyzing the Pinterest boards of professional sport teams, the current content analysis reviewed how traditional sport teams are currently using a nontraditional outlet to reach female fans. The portrayal of a sport team on Pinterest bears similarities to traditional sport media—there are images of the team, fans, and items for sale—but the intricacies of these frames seem to be much different. The team is portrayed not as much by game action as by off-the-field, behind-the-scenes snapshots of players' lives. Fans shift from being mere spectators to active participants and even creators. Purchasable items become the prominent attraction. Meanwhile, the creative side to Pinterest, which drives its popularity, is the frame that professional sport teams have been least likely to employ, especially in leagues where purchasable items are most heavily promoted. Overall, the findings suggest that sport teams are adjusting their frame-building strategies to function in a space dominated by female users—particularly the use of the purchasable frame; however, the use of traditional sport communication frames has not been disregarded in this search to reach new fans.

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