Changing the Game: How NFL Players are using Twitter to increase Fan Engagement for their
Benefit

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Abstract

This study presents the results of research conducted on Pro Bowl NFL players and their social media posting habits, specifically what type of content the players were posting on the social media platform Twitter. The purpose of this research was to identify what nine of the top ten most voted upon Pro Bowl NFL players were posting about on Twitter, in order to establish a guideline for other NFL players to use when posting on Twitter to gain more Pro Bowl votes from fans. With the high bankruptcy rate and low average length of an NFL career, it would be beneficial to NFL players to have a guideline to help them capitalize on potential bonuses like the bonuses that come with being elected to the NFL Pro Bowl. This is a qualitative research paper that uses content analysis to compare the results of data from two separate time frames. In designing this study, it was assumed that the most voted upon Pro Bowl NFL players would be posting content that would have positive effects on their relationships with fans because of their success in being in the top ten for Pro Bowl voted for NFL players, essentially using some form of Impression Management (IM) technique. Data from the content the nine subjects posted was collected during two separate time frames in order to be compared to each other. While the findings in this research yielded useful data as a starting point, it is not enough to make general conclusions on whether the content posted by the top voted on NFL Pro Bowl players could be used as guidelines for other NFL players to receive more fan votes.

Keywords: Impression Management Techniques, Fandom, Fanship, Group Think, Parasocial relationships, NFL, Social media relationships, Twitter relationships, NFL Pro Bowl Voting, Athlete- fan relationship.

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Introduction

Every year, the National Football League (NFL) promotes an annual all-star game which they call the Pro Bowl. The Pro Bowl gives fans the opportunity to see players from different teams around the league playing together on one field. In an attempt to increase fan interest in the Pro Bowl, the NFL has implemented fan voting through the social media platform Twitter. Fans now have a vote to decide which NFL players will be selected to the Pro Bowl. There are several benefits for an NFL player to be selected to a Pro Bowl and with the fan voting on Twitter, players have started to use Twitter to build relationships with fans. Through the relationships built on Twitter, NFL players establish a fan base for themselves in an effort to help elect themselves to the Pro Bowl. It is important to recognize how NFL players use social media to build and maintain relationships with fans.

It is in an NFL player's best interest financially to be elected to a Pro Bowl. NFL players have an average career length of just over three years (Molon, 2014). This means that players need to capitalize on every earning potential they have while they are still in the NFL. The majority of NFL player contracts have performance bonuses for playing in the Pro Bowl with payouts of thirty thousand dollars for the losing team and sixty thousand dollars for the winning team as compensation (Helling, 2017). NFL players understand what is at stake financially for them and so they have turned their attention to building a relationship with the voting fans.

This research will exam the Twitter content posted by the top voted upon Pro Bowl NFL players. By examining the Twitter posting habits of the top voted upon Pro Bowl players, the results in this research will show how the NFL players could be using impression management techniques on Twitter to attract more fan votes during the Pro Bowl voting period compared to the offseason. With eighty percent of NFL players going broke after retirement it is essential that

something be done to help NFL players capitalize on the finical opportunities while in the NFL (Steinberg, 2015). The results of this research can be used as a guide for other NFL players on how certain impression management techniques could be used to create positive support with voting fans.

Literature Review

There have been several studies done on relationships between celebrities (includes professional athletes) and their fans. There are several key concepts that can be taken away from the other studies to help understand the relationship between fan and player in order to interpret the results of this study. The main focus of this research is to identify how might NFL players be using Impression Management (IM) techniques through their Twitter accounts to create an image of themselves that is fan friendly.

IM used in celebrities has been the focal point of several studies. The studies concerning IM are the most relatable to the research being conducted in this study. Although the communication theory IM is the main theory to be used in this research, it is essential to understand several other theories and concepts that play rolls in building the relationship between fan and NFL player. These include; social identity theory, the notion of fandom or fanship, and parasocial relationships. It will also be important to understand the NFL's social media campaign promoting fan engagement. This will help set the stage for why Twitter is important and how social media is evolving the fan experience with the NFL.

Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel developed the social identity theory in 1979, as a way to explain the human desire to form groups. Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory suggest that people gain a source of pride and self-esteem by belonging to a group which helps provide that person a social identity.

McLeod's use of Henri Tajfel social identity theory in his research has several differences from the research that will be conducted in this paper. In McLeod's research, he was focused on discovering personal motivating factors for why individuals seek out groups. The objectives in his research were to identify the positive emotions that some individuals feel from having a connection with others. This is highly relatable to the sports world when it comes to opponent fan bases. An opponent is an adversary that is viewed in a negative aspect compared to the team in which the fan is supporting. In research study conducted by Moritz Riesner, Michael Netter, and Günther Pernul (2013), they concluded there is a need for a more complex online security system to protect personal information on different desired levels. Riesner, Netter, and Pernul (2013) stated in their research the difficulty that people are having in socially identifying with a multiple groups online and keeping that information separate from other members of the group.

Fanship and Fandom

There are many positive effects that come from belonging to a group. In some instances, people will behave in ways that will increase their chances to keep those positive effects in their life. When strong relationships are built within a group, personal beliefs are often shared and adopted by the group which is referred to as group think. The group's beliefs become the guiding force for how the group should behave and thus the notion of fandom is created (Reysen and Llyod, 2012). Fandom is created with like-minded fans sharing their beliefs and ideas to each other. Under those principles, to be in the group a person would need to have similar like-minded ideas and beliefs with the other members (Hiel, Hautman, and etc., 2007). The same principle goes for a fan's desire to support like-minded players. The sense of belonging and being accepted in a group will often make it easy for fans to accept each other's views as long as there

is a strong shared common belief. It is easier to accept other beliefs and concepts if there is a strong bond already formed between the fans.

Both fanship and fandom are group action concepts meaning that the members act and do as the group does. In some instances, fans support players because they feel an obligation to the group to do so. Fandom is when an individual adopts a larger group's beliefs and ideas as one's own ideas. Fanship is when an individual identifies themselves as having common interest with other fans.

There was a study by researchers Ali Hasaan, Katri Kerem, Rui Biscaia, and Kwame J.A. Agyemang (2016), that sought to identify the reasons for why fans chose to support certain players. Results of the study supported the conclusion that an Athlete's personal brand was essential to creating a positive perception of themselves and increasing fan loyalty (Hassan, Kerem, and etc., 2016). When fans identify players who have a self-image that a fan likes it creates helps to create a relationship. Like mindedness is shared in the athlete's brand through their lifestyle, personal appeal, ethnicity, entertainment, and physical attractiveness (2016). Notions of fanship and fandom are more reasons for why some player content may be appealing to some fans. Passion is a strong emotion that a lot of fans share. They are passionate about their team and they like the players to be passionate about the team as well. An athlete's brand on social media will show how the player is conducting themselves. Sometimes that is all that is needed for fans to gauge that player's passion level for the team.

Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships are often relationships that a media consumer believes has developed between themselves and a media figure they have never met (Rubin, 2015). This kind of relationship often occurs between fans and celebrities. Social media platforms like Twitter

have given fans even more opportunity to create parasocial relationships with players. Fans are now able to follow a player's life through social media and fans are given the chance to communicate with that player. The enticement for fans to put forth a lot of time and effort into following their favorite players is there in the form of the chance that player might respond to a fan's Twitter message.

Research conducted by Jamaal Brown (2013), identified the common reasons for why fans use social media, and one of those reasons was that fans believed they had a better chance at getting the attention of their favorite athlete on social media. The results of Brown's study show continuous attempts by fans to communicate with players over a period of weeks without response from the players. Social media has created an allure for some fans who cannot pass up the chance at communicating with a player. Beth Jacobson's research (2010), yielded results that showed some fans will devote considerably large amounts of time every week in attempt to communicate with their favorite players. Even when their messages go unanswered by the players, fans continue to follow them on social media.

Jamaal Brown's (2013) research is different in the way that his focus was understanding why fans seek engagement with players on social media. Jacobson was focused on discovering how much time fans were spending on social media and why they were spending that much time on social media. Her results show large amounts of interest by fans to engage with players.

The importance of parasocial relationships in the fan and player relationship is it shows another type of content that fans would have a positive response to. Fans are looking for some kind of two-way communication through social media with the players. It is worth mentioning that parasocial relationships are not permanent. There are instances in which the players reach out and actually desire two-way communication themselves with the fans. Ann Pegorgraro's

(2016) research on the type of content players Tweeted about showed a desired interest from players to interact with the fans. Players were asking the fans for their opinions to questions. Some players even have designated times each week for two-way communication to occur between the player and fans through social media. Fans appreciate the two-way communication because it satisfies the emotional needs that are sought after in a parasocial relationship since they finally received their desired feedback from the athlete. Two-way communication also goes a long way in maintaining relationships. When both sides are receiving positive results from a relationship it can explain why fans continue to support that player.

Fan and Player Bond

Social media platforms like Twitter offer fans the opportunity to fulfill their social needs. Scott Martin (2012), illustrated that social media is a behind the scenes look into the lives of NFL players. A player's personal life on Twitter is something that the television cameras cannot show on the playing field. By following players on Twitter, fans feel like they are developing a deeper human bond by seeing behind the scenes into a player's life off the field. When players show something from their personal lives away from football it can create a feeling within the public called public-private mapping (Dumitriu, 2015). If the public sees something that they feel is forbidden than this can create interest from a wider scale audience (Dumitriu, 2015).

Martin (2012) examined NFL players, Twitter, and what fans enjoyed about Twitter being used by players. It was the human bond that Martin wanted to concentrate on by determining that the behind the scenes view into a player's life made fans feel special emotions that brought them closer to the player. In this research, the close bond between player and fan can be an underlining reason for why some players are generating more fan interest on Twitter.

Fans feel like they are special because they think they are seeing more than the average

fan who is not following that player. The special feeling a fan may receive can keep them loyal to the player. New input from social media adds more drama and spectacle to the sport often making it more entertaining which in turns attracts a wider audience (Dumitriu, 2015). More relationships can be built between player and fan with the player divulging more about their personal lives through social media. This helps athletes seem more relatable to the average fan and that makes the fans more comfortable building the relationship with the player (Malerk, 2012). Likability is important for a player to have with the fans. Positive similarities between player and fan translates to likability of the player.

Impression Management

Impression management can be defined as attempting to control how people perceive, evaluate, and read information about an entity or person (Schneider, 1981). It is about getting people to see the image that person wants others to see of them. Impression management is often referred to as a goal-oriented behavior (Goffman, 1959). When someone uses IM tactics they are doing so in order to obtain a specific final outcome that they have in mind. DuBrin (2010) believed that it is human nature to create a good impression and that the more the managed impression is related to an individual's goals then the more motivated that individual is to accomplish the desired impression. E.J. Hegarty (1976) illustrates how impressions are the most important objectives for all company politics. Whether it is an individual or group there is a common desire to create an impression for one's self. Positive impressions are often seen as the difference maker for what is successful. The impression created by a person is their identity and it can influence situations and establish expected norms (McKenna and Thomson 2015).

Tactics of Impression Management

There are several tactics that people and corporations can chose from when it comes to picking an effective IM tactic. Basking and blasting are two tactics that are common in sports. These techniques are considered indirect tactics because the tactics use positive or negative information about something in which one is associated with which leaves it up to the observer to interpret the material (Cialdini and Richardson, 1980). The player does not directly tell the audience what to think but rather choices material to show the audience in hopes that it will likely lead the audience to a desired conclusion of the player. An example of blasting would be to post material about another player being suspended and an example of basking would be to post material about your own rewards as a player.

Cialdini and Richardson (1980) concentrated their research on how celebrities used social media in interaction with other celebrities. Most of their research focused on celebrities using blasting techniques directed towards other celebrities for which they have issues with. While the basking tactic was often used in discussion about organizations or affiliates that celebrities were associated with and how they had a positive influence for the celebrity.

Some tactics are less controllable by the person trying to create an impression than blasting and basking. Ethnicity, gender, and race play a role in impression management techniques because of the stereotypes that exist in society (Shulman, 2017). Based upon the three uncontrollable factors, there will be an impression created about that person from society stereotypes. This means that some impressions take time to recreate to establish new beliefs. The longer a player is on Twitter could be a determining factor for how many fans they have following them.

One of the biggest ways in which athletes have previously used impression management techniques is to recreate their image after a negative experience. In order to compensate for a

visible failing, athletes will try to describe themselves in highly favorable terms to an observer (Schneider, 1969). Players recognize the importance of having support of the fans and often fans will be more understanding to a player who was involved in a negative act if that player shows changes.

In a study by Kwame Agyemang and Antonio Williams (2016) on how celebrities manage impression management on social media sites, the IM tactics used reveled that celebrities tend to use IM in a positive way. Defensive IM tactics are sparingly used, while most celebrities focus on positive media relationship building (Agyemang and Williams, 2016). Based on that study, celebrities are typically avoiding behavior that has negative connotations. Instead of attacking others, celebrities try to build and expand their brand by using social media to their advantage. Often this would entail them promoting their own brand, merchandise, events, or some organization for which they are affiliated. This tactic is used to expand the social media reach of a celebrity. By showing followers on social media that they have more to offer their followers than just words on a social media site, their value as a celebrity increases. The more a celebrity has to offer their fans the wider the audience they can appeal to is.

NFL Shift and Social Media

The NFL's social media movement started off as a slow transition. In an effort to protect television rights with the television networks the NFL limited the use of social media by players and teams. Teams and players were not allowed to post any media from the games and there were no social media posts allowed 90 minutes before, during, and 90 minutes after the game (Wallace, 2017). Essentially the NFL, wanted fans to have to tune into the league approved networks in order to gain information. However social media brought new options for fans to gain access to NFL content and there was an increasing number of cable cancelations because

fans were seeking their NFL information on the other sources. It was not till the decline in Pro Bowl viewership that the NFL realized the importance of social media (Davis, 2009). Getting fan attention on the Pro Bowl game was challenging because the Pro Bowl was played after the Super Bowl, but the majority of fans lost interest in games after the Super Bowl. The NFL made an effort to move the Pro Bowl before the Super Bowl, but the media was focused on the week-long preparations to get ready for the Super Bowl which created a lack of media interest in the game hurting fan viewership (Davis, 2009).

In 2016, the NFL made a deal with Twitter to allow the social media platform to stream NFL games. Greg Isaacs who was VP of Digital Media for the NFL at the time, stated that they predicted, "50 to 80 percent of NFL fans watch games with a second screen" (Zafar, 2017). 75 percent of fans watched games on a smart phone, 26 percent on a tablet, and on average a fan would spend 99 minutes a month watching the NFL on a second screen (Burke, 2016). Television was no longer the only way in which fans were tuning into the games, so the NFL made sure they would tap into the second screen market by doing a deal with Twitter. This was made possible because of the analytical results from live Twitter conversations. NFL used Adobe social analytic on social media sites to analyze NFL football talk by fans (Murphy, 2013). For years the NFL collected data from live Twitter conversations about the NFL and helped the league recognize the potential for concurrently conversations during games.

The NFL promotes fans to engage in conversations about their teams during games. As of 2015, every NFL team had their own Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts (Platt, 2015). At that time Snapchat was slowly being adopted by NFL teams. Teams like the Saints would snap their fans the upcoming schedule for games and the Eagles would show locker room scenes providing a behind the scenes look for fans. The NFL even created a Facebook guide to

successful campaigns on Facebook for teams to follow that included; keeping it simple, encouraging participation, rewarding dedication, real time engagement with fans, and promoting events to fans (Platt, 2015). It is clear that the NFL has become more engaged on their social media rules for the league.

As of 2017, the NFL is encouraging all players to get involved on social media. The NFL reveled recently that they are looking to hire on people to help players create a more successful social media presence. In the job listing put out by the NFL, the league is seeking individuals who can put together helpful packages to teach players how to market themselves on social media (Putterman, 2017). The NFL is even going as far as asking the new employee, listed as Coordinator of Social Media Initiatives, to monitor player accounts and provide feedback to players on what content is successfully marketing the players and what content is not (Putterman, 2017). Understanding the NFL's push for more social media use is essential in understanding the role players are in on social platforms. As an employee of the league, what they say and do on social media could have possible consequences for them in the NFL. The NFL hiring people to tell players what to post could be a sign that they have been coached on impression management techniques in order to market their image alongside the league. Are the most voted for NFL Pro Bowl players using impression management techniques on twitter?

Methods

This research study will be a qualitative content analysis because it will exam material already created in written form on Twitter which will be used to develop trending topics. The focus of the paper is to identify what type of content highly voted upon NFL Pro Bowl players are posting on their social media accounts. This paper will also look at what types of content is being posted most often. For the purpose of this study it is more important to discover the

popular types of content being posted rather than the amount of social media posting by the NFL players.

Platform

The first step in this research project is to identify a social media platform that would yield sufficient content to be analyzed and is relevant to the NFL Pro Bowl. Twitter is a suitable social media platform because of the relationship that Twitter has with the NFL. In 2016, the NFL started to allow fans to use social media platforms to vote NFL players to the Pro Bowl via Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Mayer, 2016). Twitter is unique from the other social media platforms because of the NFL's exclusive deals with Twitter. As part of the NFL's growing social media push amongst league players, 2016 was the first year that the NFL allowed their football games to be live streamed over the Twitter platform. The NFL wants fans to interact with the league through Twitter and now allows fans to vote for NFL Pro Bowl players from their own Twitter accounts using at symbol and hashtag. Voting via Facebook must be done through an NFL team's website or the NFL's official Facebook and Instagram where votes are limited to originally created content only. The ease for which the NFL has created for Pro Bowl voting via Twitter, the leagues known relationship with Twitter, along with the positive features of the Twitter platform itself makes Twitter a relevant social media platform to gather data from for this research.

Twitter's platform offers a unique way for players and fans to interact on the platform together. Founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Twitter was designed to be a platform in which friends could see what their friends were doing and share their status updates (MacArthur, 2017). The platform was designed to be SMS- based communication which meant that there would be a character limit of 140 characters per Tweet (message posted on Twitter), so that it would fit the

character limits cell phone providers had for text messages. As recent as 2017, Twitter has begun

to expand the character limit to 280 characters per Tweet. In order to communicate with other

users on the platform the use of the @ symbol combined with another user's username and the

hashtag symbol were implemented as ways to alert users to when a Tweet was directed at them.

The hashtag features let users identify trending topics and find conversations that they are

interested in. In 2010, Twitter added the retweet function to the platform that allowed users to

repost other user's original post, giving credit to the creator of the post and sharing the post with

other users.

For this research study, it is essential to discover what type of content NFL players are

Tweeting about. The Twitter platform allows users to view all the Tweets ever created by a user,

unless deleted by the user, providing a convenient way to track the content that NFL players

have posted about. Knowing how many followers an NFL player has is also convenient for

discovering the potential reach of each of the player's Tweets. The retweet function on Twitter

also helps distinguish the difference between originally created content from the user and content

created by others. A retweet and the @ symbol signals that there is two-way communication on

the platform. Retweets show user recognition of another user's communication. Twitter is

sufficient platform to gather the essential data for this research study.

Subjects

The subjects of this research will be NFL players. In order to be chosen for this research,

the NFL players must have received enough fan votes to be in the top ten players in terms of

votes for the 2017 Pro Bowl and they must have an active Twitter account. It is essential for

players to be in the top ten in Pro Bowl votes, so the data collected in this research comes from a

respectable source of subjects. This research is meant to analyze that data from the top Pro Bowl

voted NFL players in order to make a social media plan for other NFL players to follow. Subjects were taken from the top ten most voted for Pro Bowl players because the results for the Pro Bowl votes are listed by the top ten voted upon players, followed by the most voted-on players at each positon. Fan Page List is a website that tracks professional athletes on social media, and the data found on the website was used to discover what athletes from the list of top ten voted upon NFL Pro Bowl had a Twitter. It is essential that all subjects in this study have a Twitter in order for their Tweets to be analyzed.

Using the criteria for choosing subjects from the list for this study, Tom Brady was the only NFL player without a Twitter account on this list which eliminates him from this study. This research will consist of nine players; Ezekiel Elliott, Dak Prescott, Antonio Brown, Derek Carr, Matt Ryan, Julio Jones, Odell Beckham Jr., David Johnson, and Drew Brees.

Time Frame

Now that the setting for the study (Twitter) and the subjects have been decided upon it is important to decide a time frame for the study. Two different four-week periods will be used to collect the data from the nine players' Twitter accounts. There needs to be different time periods in order to help establish the possible use of Impression Management Techniques by the players. Two separate time frames will provide data that can be compared and analyzed against each other in order to establish if and changes occur in the type of content being posted on Twitter. By using two-time frames, one being a time frame during the NFL offseason and the other period being a time during the Twitter NFL Pro Bowl voting time frame. Differences in the content posted by the NFL players being examined in this research during the two-time frames will yield results showing how the players might be using IM techniques on Twitter.

Four weeks was chosen because it aligns with the time frame for Pro Bowl voting. Pro Bowl voting last on average four weeks. The four-week time frames to be analyzed is the start of Pro Bowl voting on October 16, 2016 and ending November 12, 2016. The second four-week period to be analyzed is starting on March 09, 2017 and ending April 05, 2017. To potentially get the most drastic differences in content posted on Twitter the time frame in March was chosen to be the opposite of the middle of the football season (NFL Pro Bowl voting period), which is the start of the NFL Offseason March 09, 2017 (Heck, 2017).

Content

The content categories for classifying the content in each Tweet needed to broad enough to understand the main purpose of each Tweet. At the same time this research did not require extreme specification that could lead to an overwhelming number of categories for each Tweet which means that there can be overlapping categories. Therefore, each Tweet will be classified into categories based on what is deemed the main content of each Tweet.

Twitter adds the variable of retweets where some of the content on a player's Twitter is content created by other users that the player has reposted. The retweets will be categorized under the same categories that the player created Tweets are. It is important to include the retweets because it is still content that appears on the player's Twitter account in the time frames. In order for a retweet to appear on a player's Twitter account than the player would have to have done it themselves. The main thing to remember with a retweet is that the player wanted that type of content regardless of who created it, to be on their Twitter account and so it should be collected for this study as content the player post about.

As far as how to conduct this research, it is essential that there is access to the Twitter platform. Although Twitter is accessible through a computer, it is designed for the mobile device making it more convenient to use on a mobile device which would require the creation of a Twitter account. All nine of the subjects in the study have open Twitter accounts, which means their Twitter accounts can be accessed by simply searching for their profile. There are several ways to record the data for the categorization of the Tweets one of which is chart to tally the number of Tweets under each category. The data that is collected from the nine subjects will be used to compare the results from the two separate time frames. All the data from each player in each time frame will be combined together for that category within the two separate categories. This research is focused on the difference in category frequency and not the differences in posting habits of the nine subjects in this study.

Results

There are fifteen categories that became evident in the results during the content collection on the player's Twitter accounts are; Interest, Family, Sponsors, Behind the Scenes, Quotes, Appreciation, Fan Interaction, Personal Brand, Religious, NFL, College, Highlights, Statistics, Charity, and Humor. The following is a better explanation of what makes a Tweet fall into one of the fifteen categories.

Interest is the first category identified. It is any Tweet that shows what the player is personally interested in outside of the other fourteen categories. For example, Drew Brees retweeted a picture of a beer with the caption, "The best way to celebrate MLB Opening Day!" David Johnson also tweeted, "Hanging with my python friend" with a picture of him holding a python.

Family is any Tweet that focuses on the player's family. For example, Antonio brown tweeted a picture of his daughter with the caption, "Student of the week baby girl." Another example, Derek Carr tweeted, "Dinner with my beautiful queen and these two-last night…" with a link to his wife's Instagram account.

Sponsors is any Tweet that mentions a sponsor of the that athlete in a promotional way. For example, Dak Prescott tweeted, "Excited to be part of the @NicholasAir Family…". Another example, Odell Beckham Jr retweeted a tweet from Footlocker that shows Odell Beckham Jr in a commercial for Nike.

 Behind the scenes is anytime the Tweet involves a behind the scenes look into the private life of the player whether it is at work or their personal life. It is something that not everyone is privileged in knowing. For example, Antonio Brown tweeted a picture of him working out with fellow NFL wide receivers at a park with the caption, "Hollywood park work with my bro." Another example, David Johnson tweeted a workout video of himself with the caption, "Explosiveness 100."

Quotes are one of the vague categories because of the text message like feature of twitter where a Tweet to the unknowing may just look like a random message. Any Tweet where the content cannot be labeled without insider knowledge to the meaning is labeled a Quote. An example, Derek Carr tweeted, "Yes indeed! Work! No secrets… just hard work. Do What others want to do but choose not to." Another example, Derek Carr tweeted, "Get out and find the treasure in someone today! Don't just pass them by! Everyone you encounter has a treasure inside! Help them find it!"

Appreciation is anytime the Tweet is showing appreciation for a person or group outside of the other fourteen categories. An example, Dak Prescott tweeted, "I LOVE my fans!" Another example, Odell Beckham Jr tweeted, "Thanks to the service men & women at McGuire AFB for spending their day with me last week."

Fan interaction is anytime the Tweet is in response to a fan or is intended to create fan conversation through the Twitter platform. An example, David Johnson tweeted a response to a fan asking what his favorite Disney movie was and the tweet said, "Oooo that's tough…. Lion King… No all Toy Story movies." Another example from David Johnson, was a reply tweet to a young fan wearing his David Johnson jersey which David Johnson captioned, "Really cool dude."

Personal brand is when the Tweet is in mention to the player's own brand of merchandise. An example, Odell Beckham Jr tweeted a picture of his bracelets for sale with the caption, "Back in yo." Another example, Ezekiel Elliott tweeted, "shopzeke.com."

Religious Tweets are any Tweets that contain a religious message. An example, Derek Carr tweeted a Bible quote a captioned it, "We are victorious through Him." Another example, Odell Beckham Jr tweeted, "Lord thank u for removing my negative energy and forgive me for my thoughts. Positivity provides for positive actions…"

NFL is when the player is Tweeting about his team or the league as a whole. An example, Odell Beckham Jr retweeted the Pro Bowl voting results for the New York Giants. Another example, Odell Beckham Jr tweeted, "Bring the swagger to #NYGvsDAL on Sunday."

College is when the player is Tweeting about colleges. An example, Dak Prescott tweeted, "I hope Bulldogs Are filing into Dallas on this Special Final Four Addition Of Maroon

Friday!" Another example, Drew Brees tweeted, "proud of my Boilermakers! Great season fellas!"

Highlights is when the Tweet involves a highlight of the athletes. An example, Derek Carr tweeting a video of himself throwing the football with the caption, "Dimeeeeeeeeee." Another example, Odell Beckham Jr tweeted a video highlight of himself with the caption, "givin you a reason to smile."

Statistics is when the tweet talks about the players performance in terms of numbers. An example, David Johnson retweeted a tweet from NFL Films with the caption, "2016 RB receiving yd leader/1,200 yd rusher @DavidJohnson3..." Another example, David Johnson retweeted Pro Football Focus with the caption, "Cardinals RB David Johnson ran 177 routes at either outside or slot WR in 2016. That's over 100 more than the average RB (74.5)."

Charity is any Tweet that has to do with charities or people who are in need. An example, Ezekiel Elliot promotes a charity by retweeting Gil Brandt with the caption, "More than 30 pairs of NFL shoes being auctioned for charity." Another example, Ezekiel Elliott retweeted B/R Kicks with the caption, "Adopt. Volunteer. Prevent Cruelty."

Humor is any Tweet that is intended to be funny in principle. Odell Beckham Jr retweeted a funny commercial with the caption, "BOOM, CLIFF! Give the lady her purple bear." Another example, Ezekiel Elliot tweeted a Valentine's Day card with his picture on it which said, "Feed Me Candy."

Time frame 1 (October 16, 2016 through December 13, 2016), there were 183 original Tweets from the nine subjects in this study. Listed in order from most to least frequently categorized Tweets in this time period were; interests (22), sponsors (21), fan interaction (20),

behind the scenes (19), quotes (18), college (16), religion (13), family (11), appreciation (9), NFL (8), highlights (8), personal brand (7), humor (6), charity (4), and statistics (1). During the same time frame, there were 165 retweets by the nine subjects in the study. Listed in order from most to least frequently used categorized Tweets in this time period were; fan interaction (69), statistics (21), behind the scenes (19), college (9), NFL (8), sponsor (7), charity (6), highlights (5), humor (5), family (4), quote (4), Interest (4), appreciation (3), and personal brand (1).

Time frame 2 (March 09, 2017 through April 05, 2017), there were 182 original Tweets created from the nine subjects in the study combined. Categories listed in order of most frequently used to least frequently used were; fan interaction (39), interest (24), quote (24), college (22), family (21), behind the scenes (17), sponsor (8), religious (7), NFL (5), appreciation (5), highlights (4), charity (4), and personal brand (2). During this same time period, there were 49 retweets combined amongst the nine subjects. In order from most frequently used category to least frequently used category was; fan interaction (21), interest (7), highlights (5), statistics (4), NFL (3), sponsor (2), charity (2), behind the scenes (2), religious (1), quote (1), and college (1).

Discussion

One of the biggest results of this study was finding out that fan engagement was the number one category for combined tweets in both time frames. It has been established that fans try to engage with players on social media in the hopes of receiving two-way communication with the player (Pegorgraro, 2016). The subjects in this study are highly engaged with the fans on social media which creates a highly positive relationship between the player and fans. This data from the study shows that the nine of the top ten most voted for Pro Bowl players are posting or reposting content on Twitter that is engaging fans or is encouraging dialogue to occur between fan and player. Highly voted for Pro Bowl players show a combined interest in

appealing to this specific market for fans based on the content that they post about on Twitter. One of the biggest impression techniques that is evident when players engage their fans on Twitter is doing someone a favor to gain approval. Fans are wanting that two-way communication with players and when the players communicate with the fans they are satisfying that desire for the fans. If a player were to use favors to create a likability impression about themselves, giving the fans that two-way communication is one way in which they could do that.

College category is one of the other three categories that are present in two of the time frames top five most frequent content categories. Knowing how fan bases and fans view others as belonging to the same group or out of group people, shows how players can gather fan support through group association. Players posting about certain colleges in both a positive and negative way could generate support or backlash. A positive post about a certain college would most likely generate positive feelings in return to that player from the fans in that fan base. Even a negative post about a college could still generate positive support from a fan base as it would show association with other fans who also oppose the same team for which the negative post was directed at. The college category is one in which support can be both generated and taken away. For that reason, in order for the college category to be of actual positive use to gather Pro Bowl votes NFL players would have to be aware of the fan bases that they wish to create support from and those who they will generate backlash from. A player who was using an impression management technique to create a desired image of themselves might use the technique of association by attaching themselves with an organization. In the college category, players would associate themselves with a college. Through that association impressions can be made by fans in regard to that player based on the impressions fans have established with that college.

Interest is the third and final common category in both time frames top five most frequently posted categories. When a player post or retweets something that shows what that player's personal interest includes that shares something personal about the player with the fans. The notion of fandom and group think was discussed earlier in this research as a potential reason for why some fans support a player. It is believed under those notions that like-minded individuals would support other like-minded individuals. A player sharing with potential voters something that tells the fans what that player's interest are opens the player up to potential support. Fans have more information now to identify whether or not that particular player is someone who they can support or not based on similarities or differences in each other's beliefs and interests.

Player interest is a powerful category for players because there are various impression management techniques that a player could use when sharing their interest that could help them create a desired image of themselves. One of the impression management techniques that can be used is the self-promoting tactic. A player may be interested in a variety of things, but they choose to only share the personal interest of theirs that would benefit themselves in some way. Players can self-promote can promote an interest of theirs that they think would be shared by others and by showing their interest in that particular thing it could open the door to establishing a relationship with more people through a shared common interest. Activities or things that could carry more negative connotations with it could be chosen to be avoided by the player even if they are truly interested in those things. This ties in with the impression management technique of association. The interest players self-promote themselves as having will associate them with those interest and the connotations that come with those interest.

By comparing the variation of each category ranked from most to least utilized between the two-time frames, there are only four categories that vary by more than four ranks of each other. The larger majority of the categories are close in frequency, which would show that the posting habits of the nine subjects changed very little between the two-time frames. It is still a possibility that the subjects in this study are aware of the positive benefits that posting content of certain categories is more positive than others and so they are continuously using IM techniques year-round to preserve their image to the fans at all times.

Of the top five categories for combined Tweets and retweets in the two separate time frames, three categories are present in both top five categories; fan interaction, interest, and college. Each of the top three categories share strong connections to impression management techniques.

Fan interaction is classified as actions by the players that engage fans in conversation. The impression management technique of doing someone a favor and flattery is evident in players encouraging fan interaction. Questions by fans and answers by the players is the most popular type of fan interaction in this study. This can be viewed as that players are doing the fans a favor by answering the questions that fans have instead of simple ignoring the fans. The example of David Johnson telling a fan that he is cool from the example in the results page is a form of flattery that can increase Johnson's likability by fans.

When a player shares their personal interests on twitter they are sharing information about themselves with fans. The impression management of self-promoting can be seen in the type of interest that players choose to share about themselves. In the example from Drew Brees where he tweets about celebrating MLB opening day with a beer, he is choosing to associate

himself on some level with beer and baseball. Fans see shared interest and connection grow between players and fans.

Player's talking about colleges in their tweets is when players use the impression management technique of association. By posting about a certain college, players are managing the organizations in which they will be associated with. This is another way in which an impression management of technique such as association, can help create bonds and connections with fans through shared associations.

Conclusion

Since there seemed to be little difference in the player's posting habits between the 2-time periods, no conclusion can be conveyed to suggest methods or strategies to give other players when they are trying to enhance their image that will work with certainty. However, it seems that other players can follow the top strategies as far as providing a guideline for other NFL players to follow. It is reasonable to say from the results in this study that top strategies for players is that they should interact with fans, talk about colleges in way to appeal to the large fan bases of those colleges, and open up to followers by sharing their personal interest with fans on social media. This conclusion should be used as a starting block for players to use in order to expand their fan support which in turn could generate more fan votes for the Pro Bowl.

There are a few minor alterations that could be made to the structure of this study to yield more results. More data from the subjects would provide a better conclusion for what type of content is being posted more frequently. The time frames for both time periods would need to be expanded. A larger time frame would help to counter some of the factors that affected the results in this study. Some of the subjects in this study could have been out of Internet contention to post

to Twitter because the start of the NFL offseason is a popular time for player travel. A larger time frame could help determine if changes in the frequency in certain categories is related to certain content being more available and relatable during the football season as compared to the offseason. Examples would be that there is most likely more behind the scenes content being made during football season and players are more likely to have more family content during the offseason when they are at home with their families. Including even more social media platforms would be beneficial not only for the extra data that that would provide, but also for discovering the differences in social media platform use by the players. It is a possibility that certain players may use one social media platform more than another or they may use different social media platforms to post specific content only on that specific platform.

One way that this research could be expanded to provide a better insight on determining if certain types of content categories may help NFL players get more Pro Bowl votes than other categories would be to compare Pro Bowl players' Twitter content to the Twitter content of NFL players who did not make the Pro Bowl. Finding any significant differences in the frequency of categories between Pro Bowl players and non-Pro Bowl players could provide helpful feedback in knowing how a NFL player could use IM techniques and change their posting habits to appeal to some of the same voters as the Pro Bowl players. This research was focused on identifying the most commonly used content categories and how those categories could be viewed as part of IM techniques that the top Pro Bowl voted on players used in order to establish a guide for other players to follow in the hopes of gaining similar success. The proposed expanded research would be helpful in establishing what type of content works and what type of content may not work based on the differences between the two groups.

This study would need to be expanded and the players would need their posting habits compared to themselves in different time frames in order to determine the individual posting habits of players. In that study, the content could be classified as either positive or negative and compare two-time frames to see if players post more positive content when it is Pro Bowl voting time compared to another time frame. There were also a few factors that could heavily influence the outcome of the results in this study which makes it hard to say with certainty that players are purposely posting certain content categories more during certain time frames than others. An example is that the behind the scenes category being more in time frame 1 than 2 could be related to the fact that there is more content to be created during the NFL season than the offseason.

Future research that expands on the foundation that this research created should help to further expand the guidelines for what players should post about on social media in order to capitalize on their maximum financial gains while in the NFL. Based on the results of the most frequently posted about categories, it can be concluded that the most voted for Pro Bowl players are posting content on Twitter that resonates in a positive way with fans. This would be concurrent actions of someone who may be using Impression management techniques to create a desired image of themselves portrayed to others that could help them gain popularity with fans, which in turn could potentially become Pro Bowl votes for players.

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