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Sports Fans' Media Usage at a Kansas City Chiefs' Fan Club

by

Robert J. Huebert

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
School of Mass Communications
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football

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my loving parents, Bob and Linda Huebert, and my wonderful sister, Laura. You are my rock of stability and strength. When everything feels like it is crashing around me, you show me that the complicated things are really not all that bad in the grand scheme of life. Graduate school was unbelievably challenging, and you were always available to listen to my frustrations and provide clear paths for completing my projects. You inspire me to shoot for the stars; I am just filling up my tank.

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To all my fellow classmates that have finished their degree, congratulations! It has been an extremely arduous thirty-six credits! To those working on their thesis, my only word of advice is to wrap it up and do not let it hang over your head. This is one

project that you need to complete in order to graduate; however, do not think of it as a fire breathing dragon, think of it as an opportunity to show the world what you can do.

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ABSTRACT

The media play a major role in every part of American society by distributing content that has value to individuals, and a National Football League (NFL) sports fan club is no different. This study examines how members of a Kansas City Chiefs' fan club use media to stay connected to their team and socialize with fellow members. Social identification theory explains that when an individual comes together with one or more individuals with like-minded interests, they form social bonds. Their shared interests allow them to disseminate Chiefs' information through content gathered from media usage. To understand how the Chiefs' fans use media, the author conducted research at a Kansas City Chiefs' sports club at a local bar in a large Southeastern city in the United States. The researcher used observation, participation, and interviews to collect information on the media usage of fan club members. The results find that the majority of members logged on to KCStar.com and KCChiefs.com when they wanted to read about the team from sources that lived in the Kansas City Region. When the members wanted to follow the games live, one person listened to play-by-play on their cellular phone, while others followed Internet updates on sports Web sites, or watched the games on television with the other fan club members.

Chapter One

Introduction

Sport in the United States serves functions that bypass age, sex, race, income, and socio-economic status. It allows all individuals to experience competition in one form or another, be it as a competitor or as a fan. For those reasons, all individuals can feel involved in some aspect, as there are both mental and/or physical sports that bring people together in competition. One of the most popular sports in America is football. The sport is brutal and requires extreme physical conditioning that allows the player to use their bodies in awe-inspiring acts. Professional football creates levels of fandom that represents all lifestyles. Through the mass communication medium of television and social networking Web sites, fans form unique interpretive communities that create social identities.

This thesis examines a sports fan club located in a large metropolitan Southeastern city in the United States. The fan club is for the National Football League (NFL) team, the Kansas City Chiefs. On game day, fans come together from diverse regions of the city, backgrounds, and professions to form interpretive communities and watch the games live on television. Social identification theory explains the reasons why individuals act the way they do when in groups that share common interests. One goal of this study is to interview the fan club members and understand how the media play a role in their sports consumption. An additional goal is to bring a level of understanding of media usage among fan club members. The author plans to add value to existing

literature of media usage among sports fans by asking fan club members about their media use and how they use it in their everyday lives. Pertinent questions for the interviewees include: How often do you seek information about your team? Do you search news stories online? Do you chat with other fans online? Do you play fantasy football? Does one medium (i.e. television or Internet) provide more credible news reports than another medium? How do you know what information to trust?

The research paper is broken down into eight chapters. Chapter 2 presents a brief background on American football and the reasons why it is popular in American culture. After, the author explains the various means of media content delivery.

Chapter 3 is a review of the literature; first, the author defines sports fandom for the purpose of the paper. Fandom is explored through levels of fandom, affiliations on game day, unique fan roles, brand identification, fan behavior, as a religion and tradition, as mythology, interest in memorabilia/halls of fame, and fan violence. Second, interpretive communities are explained, rules of socialization are stated, locations, schemas that exist, “us” and “them” mentalities, as well as escapism. Third, media usage is incorporated into the study to describe how regular fans use and interact with other fans through the media. Finally, social identification theory is defined, “in-group” and “out-group” ideas are explained, ideas of validation are explored, and then examples of social identification in the sporting world are researched.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of conducting interviews, as well as the researcher’s observation and participation with the fan club. The final chapters present the results, discussion, limitations of the study. Finally, the researcher presents a conclusion from the gathered facts collected during his time spent with the fan club.

Chapter Two

Background

Celebrating one's favorite team is fun; celebrating it with others is an experience. It is one thing to witness the games with friends and family in the hometown of a sports team, but completely different with other people from their former region celebrating a commonly liked team (Kraszewski, 2008). Football is exalted because it is a game of inches, of passion, of brutality, and of camaraderie. Moreover, for that, it is the most popular sport in the United States. Football is a team game; no one player can win it alone (e.g. golf or bowling). Fans identify with teams through proximity, familial history, and winning. Team wins creates positive social feelings that make individuals feel good about themselves (Crisp et al., 2007). Oriard (1998) stated it another way and said, "The beauty of football, to be sure, is often less pure, more instrumental: the clumsy catch made by a falling receiver, the receiver's awkward stutter step to keep his feet in play before scrambling out of bounds, the quarterback's mad scramble for a first down just beyond his pursuer's grasp" (p. 2).

In today's society, different media exist in which to follow one's favorite sports team: AM/FM radio stations, broadcast television for regional games, cable television, the Internet, and for the tech savvy consumer, on their cellular phone. Individuals can access football games anywhere at any time during the season. Sometimes there is a cost to viewing the games, such as on the premium channels of cable television, but the games

are available. For the purpose of this study, the researcher intends to describe how a typical fan club member uses media to follow their team and interact with other fan club members.

The Kansas City Chiefs are a highly cherished sports team in America with a passionate following of fans throughout the states. Their history includes major championships, as well as stories of legendary sports figures and compelling games that are passed down generation to generation. The next section of the thesis includes relevant literature pertaining to sports fandom, interpretive communities, and media usage among individuals. The information is then examined through social identity theory for a research goal to better understand how regular sports fans use media to gain information on the Kansas City Chiefs' football club, and how they connect with their fellow club members.

Chapter Three

Sports Fandom

Creating a standardized definition of fandom is difficult; everyone knows what a “fan” is, but the academic version is more problematic. Hills (2002) suggested that a fan has cultist or enthusiastic views of their particular passion. However, Hills distinguished between “cult fan” and “fan” as a “separation of terms have never been entirely convincing” (p. 10). Distinct differences occur between a fan and a spectator because not all spectators are fans. Sloan (1979) found that sports viewers range from non-fans, to observers, or spectators, to highly avid fans. James and Ridinger (2002) classified three fandom levels as “strong loyalty,” “loyal fan,” and “not a fan.” Giulianotti (2002) described the sports fan as someone who develops a form of intimacy or love for a club or its specific players. He said, “The individual fan experiences the club, its traditions, its star players and fellow supporters through a market-centered set of relationships...the fans’ consumption practices are oriented toward enhancing the collective consciousness” (p. 36). The fan is someone who actively participates in celebrating their team, and fandom is the participation of the fan in their respective communities. Lindquist (2006) said,

“To experience American football with others is to participate in a foundational (even mythic) national narrative: the official form, symbols, and performance of this contest enact ideals like innovation, perseverance,

and achievement—ideals central to that structure of feeling commonly known as the American Dream. (p.447)”

A spectator is one who views a spectacle or a display. When a spectator observes a sporting event, the individual is often called a “fan,” which can be described as one who goes into a frenzy during key points in the game. This is derived from the Roman times, when priests sometimes became “so inspired by the goddess who worshiped in the ‘fane’ or temple, that they tore their robes and slashed their bodies in frenzied zeal” (Cheska, 1979, p. 55). This process was known as “fanaticus,” which meant “inspired by the fane” or “fanatic,” and became shortened to “fan.”

Jeffres, Neuendorf, and Atkins (2002) studied the way people use media to consume sports. Their results found that a relationship appeared to exist between media use, sports television viewing, and interest in participating as a fan.

For the purpose of this qualitative study, fan is defined as one who finds sports to be enjoyable because of the benefits of self-esteem, escape from everyday life, entertainment, aesthetic or artistic qualities, group affiliation, family needs, and socialization with others (Jacobson, 2003).

Fandom is not limited to sports; the focus of many studies describes the characteristics of other fan groups. Some of the most popular sub-genres of fandom include horror (including movies/television/magazine), car, motorcycle, science fiction (movies and television shows), technology (e.g. computers and video game software), and comic books. The fan genres have big conventions that connect fans to their objects of affection (e.g. writers, developers of movies/television series, concept or classic cars). Conventions are important because, like sports bars, it allows for individuals to come

together and experience their passion together. Fan communities exist that focus their attention on single authors and their works, such as the Lewis Carroll Society of Great Britain (Brooker, 2005).

Fandom is hierarchical; fans are divided into groups. Hierarchies exist upon multiple dimensions and can be broken down by knowledge, level of fandom, access to “inside” knowledge, and leaders (MacDonald, 1998; Hills, 2002). The hierarchies are from British football fan clubs. The hierarchy of knowledge refers to the fans’ position in the club in reference to how much knowledge they have about the team. The hierarchy of fandom refers to the amount of participation the fan gives, in terms of how much support they give (e.g. showing up for games, wearing the team’s colors, participating in rituals). The hierarchy of access describes how individuals know participants related to the team through friendships. Finally, the hierarchy of leaders refers to the pecking order of club members (e.g. all members know who the president is, who has been in the club the longest, who started the club, and who demonstrates the greatest support for the team). Hierarchy in sports fandom is important because of the levels of recognition, authority, and of the knowledge to direct and maintain the club.

Gantz and Wenner (1995) found evidence of varying levels of fandom: (a) fans, or those deeply committed to their team, (b) spectators, or those with casual indifference to what is happening in the game, and (c) non-fans, those who do not care about sports but are present to be in the company of others.

The atmosphere of a sporting event draws the audience member in and can cause greater feelings of affiliation with the team. At these events, men find the food, drink, and promotions exciting (e.g. giveaways), while women tend to be drawn to event attendance

by the atmosphere, including associated events such as half-time shows (Dietz-Uhler et al, 2000).

Kahle and Riley (2004) described the way sporting event fans have a tendency to take on “fan roles,” which include the informational, team member, team assistant, planning and coordinating, and nonsocial. The *informational* role wants to know as much as possible about their team and opponent. The fan, who adopts *the team member* role, takes on the emotions and physical responses of the team’s players. The *team assistant* role feels it is their duty to motivate the other fans that surround them and believe that what they do can assist their team to victory. This includes displaying a superstitious type of behavior, such as wearing the same outfit on game day that was worn during a previous victory. Fans who engage in the *planning and coordinating* role plan events such as tailgates or get-togethers for fellow fans; this is the most memorable part of the game for them. Finally, an individual in the *nonsocial* fan role experiences the game as a solitary activity that will be damaged in the presence of others.

Wann et al. (2001) argued that fandom is the result of a mix of internal and environmental forces, including environmental and personality factors. His study was based on the factors found by Sloan (1979), who found that individual, personality-based attributes and environmental/social factors are likely to determine if an individual becomes a sports fan or if they show disinterest. Environmental factors that can cause one to become a fan include sharing sporting activities with family and friends, encouragement from others, and engaging with like-minded individuals. Personality factors also play a role in establishing who becomes a fan; individuals showing a

competitive spirit, sensation-seekers, risk-takers, and those that seek group affiliation are very likely to become sports fans.

By joining a like-minded group, fans can have their needs fulfilled. Sloan (1979) identified six psychological functions that sports may serve for fans: belonging needs filled by identification with a team, diversion from the routine, stimulation, cathartic relief of tension and aggression, entertainment, and achievement felt through the accomplishments of their team. Every fan gets one or more of these psychological functions met by following a sports team. That is why being a fan of something creates positive feelings inside the individual.

Like a church, football and baseball fields are only used on special occasions and the game is performed in a place specifically designed for that purpose (Falk, 2005). Forney (2007) identified six dimensions of religion that distinctly match up with sports: (a) the dimension of ritual features through a facet of time, (b) sacred stories providing the basis for a belief system by way of narratives about key events, (c) the dimension of doctrine offering concise beliefs about the source of knowledge such as truths and how to solve problems, (d) the ethical aspect of a religion defining guidelines for the conduct of daily life, (e) the social dimension reveals modes of interaction with other human beings in relation to people outside and inside the religion, (f) and religions generate feelings and thoughts inside the individual in a dimension of experience. Forney also discussed another connection to religion, which is the weekly gathering of sports matches. They are organized around a similar time, week in and week out.

Sports fans increase the time involved with their teams due to sporting events becoming a tradition that coincides with key celebrations in life. In the NFL, the start of

the season represents the upcoming fall season, the Thanksgiving Day games are traditional, and the Super Bowl signifies the end of the season/start of the New Year. The NFL draft starts during springtime, which signifies a fresh start to the season. In summer, training camp begins during the time that people start taking family vacations.

Tradition also plays important roles in the lives of sports fans, and rituals tend to emerge. The expressive behavior shown through the act of rituals bonds the sports fans. It carries a symbolic message that communicates a commonly interpretive meaning to those involved (Cheska, 1979). Rituals can include singing songs about the teams during certain action points of the game, discussing team histories, showing up for pre-game activities, playing games, sitting in the same chair every game, etc. Eastman and Riggs (1994) studied ritualized fan behavior and found that ritualized viewing is one common means by which fans alter their experiences with television to the programs more relevance to their lives. It is distinct from other forms of repetitive fan behavior such as habit, traditions, or superstitions. Eastman and Riggs noted that this could explain the fans' sense of connectedness during sports games. The ritualized viewing gives fans a sense of security, in spite of the unknowable outcome of live events, which can often be mistaken for superstition.

A connection exists between professional football fans and sports mythology, specifically mythical beasts (football) and ideas of perfection. Fans revere players as spectacular, muscular animals, capable of tremendous feats on the gridiron. They also play injured when recuperation time is necessary. Individuals look up to football players as people completely extraordinary. Players are capable of doing athletic feats that normal people generally are not able to do.

Sports fandom leads to extreme passion for the collection and reverence of sports memorabilia. Forney (2007) studied sports memorabilia and found that sports fans convey the American belief in great individuals through the exalted importance of physical objects associated with great players. Objects, such as game-worn jerseys, athletic footwear, signatures on napkins, collections of rookie cards, create a bigger than life reverence of star athletes. Hoffman (2003) discovered reasons why fans collect sports items: nostalgia for the past, relaxation, the opportunity for profit, a means of promoting one's affiliations, as aesthetic appreciation, and the preservation of culture and/or history.

Halls of fame are institutions, where sports fans, media, coaches, and players elect the best athletes of their sport to be honored by a trophy or memorial items into their newly enshrined homes. Sports fans have the opportunity to visit and see special player and event memorabilia. The NFL's hall of fame is located in Canton, Ohio, and houses trophies, athletic sportswear, and shows classic games. It is a place where sports fans can go and bask in the glory of the past.

Sports fans, however, do not always share meaningful or positive experiences with other individuals who are involved in the sports world. Sometimes, emotion can get out of hand, and many teams and fans alike have seen the devastation it can cause (Falk, 2005). Fan violence can explode due to home teams losing, errors committed by players during key moments, and in response to other fans actions or comments. In a 2003 post-season game, Oakland Raiders fans set fire to cars, and eighty people were arrested, all due to the fact that they lost to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 48-21. In December 2001, Cleveland Browns fans threw bottles and other objects onto the field after officials overturned a call that helped Jacksonville win the game. The game was stopped for a half

hour, and after the fact, several Jaguar players said they feared for their safety.

Philadelphia Eagles fans are known to be some of the very worst in the NFL. In 1989, fans pelted the Dallas Cowboys coach, Jimmy Johnson, with snowballs as he left the field. They also cheered when opposing receiver Michael Irvin went down after a devastating injury in 1999.

Interpretive Community

Fish (1980) introduced the concept of interpretive community. He suggested that it was not the text that produced meaning, but the community that gathered to interpret the text and produce meaning (Yannopoulou and Elliott, 2008). Interpretive communities use shared meanings that are developed through ongoing social interaction. Fish (1980) explained,

“Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies ... these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around ... An interpretive community is not objective because, as a bundle of interests, of particular purposes and goals, its perspective is interested rather than neutral; but by the very same reasoning, the meanings and texts produced by an interpretive community are not subjective because they do not proceed from an isolated individual but from a public and conventional point of view.” (p. 14)

Frey (2004) described a group as being a socially constructed concept, not a reified entity that is assumed to exist in some objective sense. For the purpose of this study, the researcher defines community as a group of people that interacts with each other under a unified connecting concept. Through this definition, one must assume that the gathering of sports fan club members represents a community coming together for one purpose: to experience the football games together and share in a common history.

It is important to note that the interpretive community is not a distinct place with defined geographical boundaries (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). The interpretive community is a group of individuals who examine a text together and analyze and interpret what they are seeing. Interpretive groups, according to Berkowitz and TerKeurst (1999), are “composed of people engaged in common activities and common purposes who employ a common frame of reference for interpreting their social settings” (p. 127). Fish (1976) observed, “The only ‘proof’ of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community,” a concept that fits sports fans better than most “interpretive communities” (p. 484).

Sociologists use “in-group, out-group distinctions” to differentiate between group members. The in-group consists of one’s peers, while the out-group is those that are in a different boundary than the in-group (Kornblum, 2000). This distinction is essential with sports team fans, such as the Steelers or Red Sox, because the individual can sense real feelings of hatred and anger towards opposing teams. This also deals with power functions of good/evil, order/chaos, man/woman, and have/have not (Cheska, 1979). People who cheer for their teams are “good” and the opponents “evil.” These qualities make cheering for the home or “good” team a bonding experience.

Lemish (1982) created rules of viewing television in a public place: (a) a public viewer of television adjusts to the setting; (b) a public viewer of television adjusts to other viewers; (c) a public viewer of television adjusts to the television set; and (d) a public viewer of television is open for television-related social interaction. While watching sports in a public place, Lemish’s rules could effectively explain why relating to the “in-group” teams have little trouble initiating conversation with other members.

Brummett and Duncan (1990) studied three dimensions of televised sport spectating: the technology, the content or discourse, and the social context practiced when experiencing the discourse. They found that viewers' social practices were very different depending on where the television spectating took place. The way one acts in the privacy of their own home could be completely different from how they act when in a crowded sports bar, with loud screaming and drunken fans.

Eastman and Land's (1997) analysis of six public sports bars revealed four schemas for contextualizing public sports viewing: participation in a membership community, opportunity for social interaction, access to otherwise unobtainable events, and diversionary activity. Their analysis used participation and observation to understand the reasons why people watched sports together in public bars.

Individuals can identify with their team by wearing the teams' apparel or using language that identifies oneself as belonging to the specific group. Burke (1950) suggested that identification occurs when a speaker uses specific language or common themes to relate to the audience. For example, one can walk into a sports bar and identify with the favored team by saying something negative about the opponent. The person relating to the "in-group" would now be considered someone who cares about the approved team. Burke also argued that a need for people to identify always exists because they are separate, and in order to assimilate within a group, one can speak about common interests that show ones' interests are the same.

Forney (2007) and Falk (2005) wrote about the "us" versus "them" mentality in football and baseball. The home team and supporters are "us," and the visitors and their fans are "them." On the field, the opposing players try to only associate positively with

their own teammates, and the same can be said about fans of a particular sports team. Of course, the home team and opposition can become cordial (i.e. help another up off the ground), just as with the fan in the interpretive community who has to sit next to an opposing fan. However, there is a distinct, “no fraternization with the enemy” feel during game time (p. 152).

The need for fans to identify with a sports team has been observed for many years. The motivation of fans comes into question, and through interviews conducted by Dr. William Beausay, president of the Academy for the Psychology of Sports, of 800 football fans found that watching football games was far more therapeutic than six months of therapy for many individuals (Falk, 2005). This is because many individuals can focus their energy on something outside of day-to-day problems faced in the real world. The games provide entertainment, as well as hope, passion, and dedication to something far greater than themselves—the team.

Wann (1993) studied spectator identification with football aggression and defined spectator identification as, “The extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team’s performance, and view the team as representatives of themselves” (p. 135). He found that spectator aggression is more likely to occur in persons high in identification with the team, relative to those low in identification.

The interpretive communities in a large Southeastern city allows for individuals from old “homes” (e.g. birthplaces) to form new “homes” in other cities. These “new” homes are made to feel more homely by gathering with other likeminded individuals in a respected area (Kraszewski, 2008), and as is the case for this study, a Kansas City Chiefs

football fan club club located at local sports bar in a large, Southeastern city in the United States.

Media Usage

Today's media horizon presents almost unlimited ways of controlling how one wants to connect to their interests. Broadcast television utilizes news segments dedicated to sports at the local, college, and pro level. Newspaper articles have straight laced sports stories, as well as opinion pieces. The Internet contains billions of Web pages catering to boundless ideas and concepts. Individuals can receive text message updates about sports scores, blog right from their hand-held device, and go down to the local sports bar and watch fifteen games that are occurring at once. The literature review below focuses on how individuals use media, their level of trust in the content that exists, and how media create a society of sporting fanatics.

A study Lieberman (1991) conducted found that in 1990, 73 percent of a national sample of adults indicated they were either "very interested" or "fairly interested" in sports (Gantz et al., 2008, p. 64). Sports are considered a quintessential part of American culture, and the audience found ways to connect with their interests. It does not matter if one is participating in the sport, or is a spectator; sports can be enjoyed from the stands, to the fields, to the couch. Hugenberg (2008) said, "The beauty of the TV fan is that one shares those front row seats and one can be just as loyal from that position" (p. 25).

Anderson (2001) examined newspaper sports reporting from the 1950s through the 1980s and found that there was a transition from hero-worshipping to legitimate journalism occurring during the 1960s. The creation of *Sports Illustrated* in 1954 forced

journalists to go beyond the regular play-by-play to more meaningful stories about players, managers, teams, and the clubs' impact on their respective cities.

Arant and Anderson (2001) found that in 2000, more than 4,000 newspapers worldwide were available online, with 99% of major U.S. newspapers and most medium-sized papers having a presence on the web. The PEW Research Center (2009) showed that 62 percent of households reported using Internet access in the home in 2007, an increase from 18 percent in 1997, the first year the bureau collected data on Internet use. Tewksbury (2003) noted that a majority of people who relied on the Internet for news tended to visit the Web sites of traditional news media rather than Internet only news sites.

In the 2007 Up Front Opinion Study, conducted by TV guide network, sports programming emerged as the most sought-after genre, surpassing serialized drama, reality competition, and comedy in terms of the upfront demand (Gantz, et al, 2008). Between 1960 and 1988 the total number of hours allotted to sports programming on the three major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) increased by 600 percent from 300 hours to over 1800 hours (Wenner, 1989).

Coleman and McCombs (2007) studied how young individuals, aged 18 to 34 years old, use television and read newspapers less often than older generations for news. The young group spent an average of five hours online a day, considerably more than the over 35 years of age group. However, it was actually the Baby Boomers who said they spent their online time reading news. The 18 to 34 year group spent their time blogging, in chat rooms, and looking at non-news sites.

The National Football League is a distinctly American game, but in the 1980s, the commissioner of the league began pushing to enter foreign markets. In 1982, Channel 4 television in Great Britain started airing highlights of the NFL for 75 minutes a week. The content was fast paced and accessible, which differed from the sports coverage being offered in Britain. Cheerleader Productions, the company who produced the action, provided colorful graphics and a lively rock and roll soundtrack. The average weekly audience in 1982 was slightly more than one million people per show. By 1987-88, 3.7 million people tuned in weekly. For Super Bowl XXII, carried live, more than six million people viewed the spectacle (Guttmann, 2007).

Media usage is not limited to live broadcasts of games, or even highlights of the best play of the day on the major sports channels. DVDs are a popular option for NFL fans; there are DVDs of classic games, big player-to-player hits, and even DVDs that focus on singular seasons. Fans can watch them and remember where they were at the time the game was played and receive a feeling of nostalgia. “The beauty of the TV fan is that one shares those front row seats and one can be just as loyal from that position (Hugenberg, 2008, p. 25).

People become fans through the media; the media broadcast games on television, cable, radio, Internet, journalists cover sports stories in newspapers, magazines, and blogs. The passion flows through families and friends, and through game play, narratives are formed. Fans become hooked into the story lines that exist within each game. Often the narratives are between each team, their cities, the competing players, all of which is brought to the attention of the fan by journalists and broadcasters. Tudor (1992) studied the narratives of a soccer match between England and Cameroon in 1990. He found that

athletic contests run counter to the idea of the pre-determined narrative, as players and misplays often make a contest's outcome anything but certain. Sports commentary help shape stories that will make the game more exciting to the fan, and can heighten or deflate enthusiasm for what is occurring.

Robinson and Kohut (1988) studied news credibility about young adults, aged 18-24 years old, and older audiences. He found that older, more educated audiences tended to be the most critical of media, while younger, less educated news consumers were more likely to be accepting of news coverage and to evaluate the media as credible.

Bucy (2003) investigated media credibility through the combined effects of on-air and online network news exposure. First, he defined media credibility as perceptions of a news channel's believability, as distinct from individual sources, media organizations, or the content of the news itself. His definition differs from source credibility, which focuses on characteristics of message sends or individual speakers, such as trustworthiness and expertise. He found that perceptions of network news credibility are affected by channel used. Perceptions of credibility were enhanced when the channel used was consistent with the news source being evaluated, which suggested a channel congruence effect. Bucy's study found that younger audience members evaluated both TV and Net news to be significantly more credible overall than older audience members did.

Internet users can choose online news sources that share their preexisting views, whereas the tone of television, newspaper, and magazine news tends to be similar across channels (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Displacement theory would suggest that a traditional medium such as television would lose its audience to popular forms of new media, but

Ferguson and Perse (2000) found that the Internet supplements rather than replaces television viewing.

Perloff (1989) conducted research that aimed to find if public opinion shifted to negative attitudes due to a particular bias in reporting. He found that those who closely identified with a particular group and exhibited extreme attitudes towards other parties were very likely to interpret news coverage as hostile to personal views.

Fans are created when they start following their team with piquing interest. However, advertisements play a major role in piquing that interest. Certain exposure shows the constructed fan, passionate about a certain sport. Special ads tug on emotional experiences and make the viewer want to be a part of the experience. Kellner (2001) noted that sports become “a spectacle that sells the values of products, celebrities, and institutions of the media and consumer society” (p. 38).

Theoretical Framework

Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed social identification theory (SIT). The scholars attempted to describe the difference between the “personal” self and the “social” self (Brown, 2000). Tajfel and Turner (2004) described SIT as having three theoretical principles:

1. Individuals strive to achieve or maintain positive social identity.
2. Positive social identity is based largely on favorable comparisons that can be made between the “in-group” and some relevant “out-groups.”
3. When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive to leave their existing group and join a more positive distinct group.

According to Tajfel and Turner (2004), the “personal” self shuts down in the company of others and the “social” self emits. SIT further proposes that people strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity, thus boosting their self esteem and that this positive identity derives largely from favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and relevant out-group. Tajfel and Turner said, “Social groups...provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms” (p. 60).

Social identity theory has its roots in psychology and sets out to explain group processes and intergroup relations. It places major theoretical emphasis on the dynamic self that mediates the relationship between social structure and individual behavior. The theory is based on an idea that a social category provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category. Groups and their members are motivated to adopt behavioral strategies for maintaining favorable comparisons to the "in-group" (Hogg, et al., 1995). Ouwerkerk et al. (2000) found that in ongoing intergroup competition, people's strength of social identification would have a positive impact on their behavioral efforts when the status is low for in-group members.

Abrams and Hogg (1988) found that there are two motives for intergroup discrimination: a desire for cognitive coherence and a need for positive self-esteem. To enhance one's self-esteem, the member must evaluate the “in-group” positively. Discrimination occurs when individuals interpret a text and have a difference in opinion due to existing beliefs.

In any socially constructed group, there are leaders and followers. Hogg (2001) found that followers generally are more willing to agree and comply with the leader's ideas and suggestions. In his study, Hogg found that leaders distributed charismatic

qualities that attracted followers. The differences between the leaders and the followers are an example of the identities one creates in social circumstances. Peteraf and Shanley (1997) argued that managers and directors reduced uncertainty and coped with bounded rationality. Strong directors who provide a clear focus for the group are often successful, while groups with “weak identities” do not exist in any meaningful sense

An emotional connection exists between sporting fans when they create a social identity toward their respective teams. The sporting world provides many sources for strong and enduring social identification (Crisp et al., 2007). Postmes, Spears, and Lee (2005) argue that communication is essential in creating a social identity. In groups in which a common identity is available, norms for individual behavior may be deduced from group properties.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) applied social identification theory to organizational socialization, and they found that social identification leads to activities that are congruent with the identity of self. The identity of self changes when a person is participating with an organization. The change can be pro-group, or anti-group, but when the individual is active within the organization, their role adapts to where they stand in the organizational hierarchy.

Cameron and Lalonde (2001) studied the nature of women's and men's gender-derived social identification with a focus on the relationships between aspects of identity and gender-related ideology. They found that men's gender-related identities bear relatively weak relationships with their sex-role ideology and their perceptions of women's status. Women's perceived bonds with other group members tended to be

greater than men's. All group members will not necessarily exhibit social identity-relevant processes.

The “in-groups” refer to those that are actual members of a group, through social interaction; thus, the “out-group” is members who are not associated with the “in-group.” One way of achieving positive self-esteem is by making favorable comparisons between one’s “in-group” and a relevant “out-group.” Participants can form biases when “in-group” members perceive others negatively who are not in their own group. The idea of “good” people emerge between actual members, and those that are in conflicting groups are “bad” (Dietz-Uhler et. al, 2002).

The three ways spectators can maintain their social identities from individuals around them: basking in reflected glory, identifying with the “we” or “us” concept, and anger towards opponent or negative action on their team. The first tactic, basking in reflected glory, is used to enhance one’s self-esteem by associating with successful groups. Second, the member that associates with the “we” concept brings associates close together to fight again “them” or “they.” It increases solidarity to the group. The third tactic, anger towards another member, may not be reflected towards the opposing team, rather individuals who are not part of the “we” or “us” group (Falk, 2005).

Sports club fans denounce losers and praise winners, and sometimes those feelings can cause a team to define the person. Sociologists call the phenomenon “existential” validation, and it refers to the need to identify with a group, which gives the individual a sense of reality and worth. Football fans seek strength in identifying not only with the power of the game but also with winning. By identifying with symbols and groups, the individual receives an effect of “restoring and reinforcing their sense of self-

worth, meaning of life, and personal identity and competence through a variety of activities and interactions with the...social environment” (Ishiyama, 1993, p, 5).

The purpose of this research paper is to add to existing literature on how members of a NFL fan club use media to stay connected with their team. The researcher selected a Kansas City Chiefs’ fan club as his NFL fan club for the qualitative study. RQ1: How do fans use media to gather information on the Kansas City Chiefs? RQ2: Do fans use media to connect with other fan club members outside of the club?

Chapter Four

Methodology

To describe the nature of fan interaction on game day and to examine how fans use media, the researcher applied three approaches to the qualitative study: interviews, observation, and participation. The author's intention was to study the way sports fan club members use media to connect with other like-minded individuals. The site selected for the study was a sports bar that has a Kansas City Chiefs' fan club that regularly met on game days. The sports bar was located in a large, Southeastern city in the United States. By searching Chiefs' fan clubs online at Google.com, a fan club list was provided with locations. The author selected one that was in his region to conduct his research.

Bars encourage a mediated sports experience; generally, there is a plethora of televisions with excellent picture quality, people to watch the events, and as in the case of this study, a fan club that gathers to watch the games together. The sports bar provided a great atmosphere that allowed for drinking, eating, and even games (e.g. darts or pool). A sports bar was ideal for this study because the researcher used specific research to understand how fan club members use media in the sports setting. It was easy to participate and observe the individuals as bars generally have social atmospheres that facilitate participation.

The researcher is an avid professional football fan; however, he is not a fan of the Kansas City Chiefs, nor a normal participating member of a fan club. The researcher

went to the site four consecutive weeks for afternoon and night games. He had a notepad and recorder at all times to record detailed narrative reports for each visit.

The researcher chose interviewing as the primary objective because it allowed him to dive into the sports fans' personal experiences with the team, club members, and how they use the media to follow the Kansas City Chiefs. Rubin & Rubin (2005) described the qualitative interview as a useful method if one is looking for nuanced data, if one is looking for an entirely fresh view of a situation, or if one is looking for layers of discovery in which initial questions are asked to discover alternatives that are then explored in turn. Observation and participation were chosen to describe what else was occurring in the environment during the football games because the interviews alone would not give a complete understanding of what was occurring during the games. This study was conducted to understand how fan club members use media to follow their team and participate in NFL fandom.

Ten interviews were conducted at the Kansas City Chiefs' site, with a goal of interviewing five males and five females interviewed. In actuality, four females and six males participated and ranged from age 38 to 80. Both males and females were selected, to gain an understanding of what each sex experienced when they affiliated with other members of the club. The author also wanted to understand if men and women use media in the same fashion. The respondents were chosen at random.

The author created an interview protocol containing 17 questions, ranging from general questions, such as: how often they checked the news to find information on their team, to more in-depth questions, like if it was easier to connect with fellow fans in person or online. Social identity theory explains that sport fans create a social identity

towards their respective teams, and it is an emotional connection. Interviewing was the best way to understand how each individual used media to retrieve information on the Chiefs. It was the researcher's goal to understand why they participate in the club every week and how they use media. The questions were written as to draw out subjective responses from the participating individuals.

Chapter Five

Results

The interviewees included:

Dana, a 52-year-old advertising manager

Rick, a 58-year-old self-employed individual

Cindy, a 61-year-old homemaker

Bill, a 67-year-old retired individual

Linda, a 60-year-old real estate agent

Dick, an 80-year-old engineer

Walt, a 58-year-old retired police officer

Liz, a 50-year-old hotel manager

John, a 38-year-old engineer

Paul, a 40-year-old unemployed individual

The researcher started the interview by asked the respondents, “Why do you think people gather to watch football together?” Dana said, “Camaraderie. Cheering your team on together. Meeting other friends. A lot of us have been coming together fifteen, seventeen years. So it’s getting together with your friends, especially when you don’t have a great team like we don’t (sic).” Rick added, “I think it’s because you can support each other and feed off of the excitement.” Cindy commented, “Well, here, the reason

why we do it is because we don't get Chiefs' games on local television, unless they happen to be playing a Florida team. But, it also gives you, it's also more fun. You know, it's more fun to have other people around, and either cry in your beer or celebrate." Bill said, "Because it's cheaper than staying at home. The old saying that the NFL has priced themselves out of the local market. Just like labor unions pricing themselves out of the local market."

The individuals come together because of the excitement of watching the game with like-minded individuals. Next, the interviewer posed the following question: "What brought you to this sports club?" Walt said, "...the camaraderie. Living down here in Florida there aren't too many places where you can get information about Kansas City. You know, you can read the Kansas City Star online or any other Web sites, but in order to interact with other fans, it's much more fun to go to a sports club." Linda added, "We moved down from Kansas City. We've been Chiefs' fans for a long time, and this was the only one in town." Bill said, "Because I've been a Chiefs' fan for forty years and it's the only one around here." Cindy followed and said,

"Well, we ran into this person one day; I worked at a little fruit stand and we had been down here for several years. And anyways, this girl walks in with a Kansas City Chiefs' t-shirt on, and I said, 'oh, you're a Chiefs' fan! Where are you from?' And we got to talking and she said, 'oh, well you need to go to...' because we were trying to find some place to watch the games. So that's how we started with them, and that's been about eight or nine years ago."

Since the club is located outside of the Kansas City market, The Chiefs' football games can be watched at home with DirectTV, on the Internet, listened to on the radio, or followed as Internet updates online. The researcher was curious as to why the individuals

watched games with the fan club. Dick said, "It's more fun to have a bunch of people around that are noisy and make a lot of noise and have a lot of fun." John added, "For the camaraderie, for the excitement, to be together with a group, to get a little more fun out of the occasion. And to find a place to be together and watch it in person. Watching it live with fans is different than watching it at home or reading about it." Paul commented, "You know, the regular fans that come out here like to participate with others from their city."

"How often do you seek information on your team?" the interviewer asked. Rick commented, "Actually, I go on the Internet to find out what's going on with them [the Chiefs] several times a week. And I go to the Kansas City Star Web site and look at the Kansas City Star and I also look at CNBC and ESPN Web sites. I kind of like to compare to see what our sports writers are saying and what the other sports writers that aren't connected with the Chiefs are saying." Bill said, "Just the season. Maybe a couple times during the year when I hear something on TV like a trade, or someone looking to be a coach, I'll check into it, but other than that, I'm getting too old to worry about it." Dick added, "All the time. I check the Internet constantly, Kansas City Chiefs, Kansas City Star newspaper, and wherever else I can find it." Walt, commented,

"Well, the season is the big thing, but after the Super Bowl, you start looking around to see what the Chiefs need, as far as what positions, as they get ready for the draft. Pre-draft is great because you get to see what positions need to be filled and the prospects that could take their place. Then after the draft, my interest wanes until training camp. There's really nothing in between then. I know that come August and September that when they start practicing again, then you really get ready for football."

Clearly, the passion of football fans attracts them to follow the team year round. The research asked, “Do you use the Internet to follow your team?” Liz said, “I actually have the NFL Network downloaded on my phone. I was just looking at it now!” Cindy said,

“Yes and no. I mean, yeah, I use it, but it’s not something that I use every day. I’d say, it just depends on ...Let’s say they’re having a good season, then I’m going to read something down here about it. But if they’re having a bad season like they’re having this year, you wouldn’t even know that there was a Kansas City Chiefs’ football team. So that’s when I use the Internet more when I can’t find anything.”

Bill added,

“No. During the season I’m here so I know what’s going on. I watch the NFL broadcast NFL Live on Showtime, and I go to ESPN to see scores sometimes. We live in Arcadia, which is about 40 miles from here, so we leave before the game is over. So when I get home I’ll tune in to ESPN and get updates and sometimes I’ll go online because supposedly there is supposed to be a live feed for the games. But if you watch the ticker at the bottom of the TV screen and what they put on the Internet it’s five to ten minutes behind. And you would think that someone watching the game would be doing it on Tweeter [Twitter] which would be instant. Five minutes behind is too slow.”

Nine out of ten interviewees regularly read the hometown newspaper of the Kansas City Chiefs online. Next, the interviewees presented the other sites that they regularly received information from. Dana said, “KCChiefs.com, KCStar.com, which is the Kansas City Star newspaper, and ESPN.com.” Linda mentioned, “I just go to the Chiefs’ official Web site. If I want to know something about the team, I’ll go there.” Walt added,

“I use the Kansas City Chiefs’ Web site, it’s got everything from the media stuff to how to get tickets...It has fan forums, fan comments, blogs, photos. You can see what all the Chiefs’ fan are going to be doing, even though I’m not there, it’s still fun to follow.”

[Interviewer] Do you go to ESPN.com or SI.com [Sports Illustrated]?

“Yes, but not as often as I go to their home site. I mean, the brief news that you might get off the magazine sites are something that there may only be a bit of information on there. But if you go to the Web site, you get more information.”

There is a high readership of the hometown sports section online, but the participants also visit other sites as well. Paul said, “I read the Kansas City Chiefs’ web site every day. I read the KC Star...I’ll check that out about once a week.” John, the engineer, followed, “No, not really, unless I need to see the schedule really quick, I go there. Typically, all that major stuff is on FOX as well. I like the Fox Sports Network which I get through MSN.com. Sometimes ESPN.” Dick, the engineer, added, “I check the Internet constantly, Kansas City Chiefs, Kansas City Star newspaper, and wherever else I can find it.” Linda, the real estate agent, commented, “I don’t go on so much during the offseason. We actually talk to our friends from Kansas City because they hear things from the papers and the radio shows. Our friends tell us stuff that we can’t hear down here.”

The respondents are avid readers of web content, but how do they sort through all the news stories? Dana, the advertising manager, said, “I read some of the stories. I’m specifically interested in the Chiefs. I may not read all the other stuff about the other teams unless it’s something really important about a key player. But I’m a girl.” Walt commented, “I’ll sit and read the news stories. That is when I have the time to do that. I like to read my favorite sports writers from the Kansas City Star. I love when they have audio interviews on there—like blogs!” Bill, the retired individual, added, “Usually, well, I get a lot of E-mails from flying magazines because I’m a pilot. And I’ll scroll through

and whatever gets my attention, I'll read it. But if it doesn't get my attention then I'm not going to waste my time."

With so much information on the Internet, trust becomes a major issue. The interviewer asked, "Do you trust online news?" Rick, the self-employed individual, said, "(sic) Eh, yes and no. I mean, I think sportscasters are like anyone else, they're biased. They report about what their feelings are. But that may or may not be accurate. But I think for the most part I do." Cindy, the homemaker, added, "I don't believe in trusting the media entirely no matter what. I'm a firm believer in the fact that you believe about half of what you read and less of what you see on TV. I think you need to do your own research and find your own opinions." Bill commented,

"It depends on where it comes from. If it's from a large news agency and it's vetted, yes. But if it's a blogger, than no way in Hades. Anybody can say anything on Wikipedia, you know? You get what you get, and if you believe it, than shame on you. I was in a restaurant yesterday morning for breakfast and I heard a woman say at the table next to me, "Obama wants gasoline to go up to nine dollars a gallon!" I could' hardly contain myself, I wanted to get up and say, "listen you dumb bitch, ain't nobody in this world that wants gas to go up to nine dollars a gallon, even the people that are paying nine dollars a gallon!" It's this mentality that people have now a days that they'll read the Internet and they think it's the truth. And it has nothing to do with the truth. It's like my son-in-law, he'll believe anybody but me. Cause he don't like my point of view."

Linda said,

"No. Not completely. But there are a lot of things floating around on the Internet that are true, but it's hard to know what to believe. And it scares me a lot because you used to be able to believe your eyes, now with photo shop, you can't even believe your eyes! So you really have to take everything with a grain of salt."

John, the engineer, followed, "Well, I see how sensational it is, have I heard any other input from other sources? I never go strictly by the written word."

Sports columnists write their opinions on the team, as well as, how the team is doing in the league. The interviewer asked, “Do negative news stories about your team affect you?” Paul said, “Yes, but if they’re true, then I want the truth.” Liz, the hotel manager, added, “No, it doesn’t make me angry. It raises my blood pressure! But it doesn’t tear me up.” Linda said, “No, we’re [Chiefs’ fans] the biggest negative about our team. That why we like to enjoy misery that’s why we get along so well.” Walt agreed and added,

“No. There’s always going to be teams that you don’t like that are in your division, that’s the fun part. You take all news stories as they are, it’s just a part of the game. Some stories are going to be really good, when the team’s doing well, and you have to take the bad ones the same.”

The researcher asked, “How do you use social media to connect with other fans, such as blogs, or Facebook group sites?” Rick, the self-employed individual, said, “Nah, no. I’m not a big Facebook person. The only social media I use is the meetup.com site [where the Chiefs fan club is hosted online.]” Dick added, “Very rarely do I use Facebook.” Walt said, “I like to read my favorite sports writers from the Kansas City Star. I love when they have audio interviews on there—like blogs!” John commented, “No. I’m not the social type where I need to tell a lot of people things.” The overwhelming response to this question was a resounding no, with only Walt describing his interest enthusiastically.

Blogs and social media, according to the respondents, were not utilized often. The researcher asked, “Do you read or participate on message boards?” Walt said, “No I do not. My opinion doesn’t count. I don’t want anyone to know my opinion, unless I’m

being asked, like I am today.” John added, “No, I don’t do any of that stuff.” Dana, the advertising manager, said,

“Well, we have our meetup site. Our meetup.com site. You know, I arranged, organized that. And also on Facebook and MySpace and Plaxo. And every once and a while I’ll send a message to there that we’re meeting up for the game. [On the Facebook page] I think there is one for the club and I have my own personal one.”

Radio was once an essential part of the entertainment experience. The interviewer asked, “Do you listen to sports radio?” Cindy said, “[I listened to] radio in Kansas City. That was fine.” Dick added, “Not very often anymore; once in a while, but not very often.” Liz commented, “Yes...[but] I’m not sure what stations they are, I just turn my dial and when I find it, I keep it on there.” Walt said,

“The talk shows are Tampa talk shows. There is no real national news, especially the Chiefs! But they started on a big losing streak, so they weren’t talked about a lot. The talk shows don’t dwell on the bad teams too often. It seems that the media only talk about them when they beat the Redskins. It won’t last, so then I have to go to the web.”

The interviewer asked, “Do you watch specific broadcast or cable sports shows?” Rick, the self-employed individual, said, “Well, the first place I go to is usually the Kansas City Star. And I read the beat reporters that follow the team about what they have to say, and then I’ll go to CNBC or ESPN.” Bill, the retired individual, added,

“During the season I’m here so I know what’s going on. I watch the NFL broadcast NFL Live on Showtime, and I go to ESPN to see scores sometimes. We live in Arcadia which is about 40 miles from here, so we leave before the game is over. So when I get home I’ll tune in to ESPN and get updates and sometimes I’ll go online because supposedly there is supposed to be a live feed for the games. But if you watch the ticker at the bottom of the TV screen and what they put on the Internet it’s five to ten minutes behind. And you would think that someone watching the game would be doing it on Tweeter [Twitter] which would be instant. Five minutes behind is too slow.”

Dick said,

“[On watching football games] All of them. I watch as many games, college and professional that I can. In fact, I started the Iowa Club in Paradise in the late 90s, I think 1997. It’s one of the biggest college fan clubs around here. We average over a hundred people for a football game.”

“Do you ever follow Internet updates while watching the games on broadcast television?” Rick said, “No. No. I’m not that crazy.” Cindy added, “No, because I’m usually here watching the games.” Walt said, “Yes. When you play fantasy [football], they have the scores on the bottom of the screen.” Fantasy football is a game played with other individuals where they use statistics from live games to “play” against an opponent. If an actual player scores points, the “fantasy” owner gets points. The “fantasy” owner with the most points wins the head to head match up. John said,

“No, not particularly. I mean, once in a while, I’ll watch a game online because it’s not broadcasted, so you’ll get the benefit of the scores popping up. Just like when you watch ESPN, you’ll see the banner on the bottom.”

Hardcore fans follow news stories on their team constantly. The researcher asked, “How do you stay up-to-date on your team?” Linda said, “I’m up to date when I come here.” Dick added, “Basically, through the Kansas City Star and Chiefs online, and Dana sends out a newsletter once a month.” Cindy said, “Probably the local hometown paper because I don’t have, the local media is not available to me all the time. You know, in Kansas City, we have a whole section of the paper dedicated to the team.” John commented, “I guess the newspaper. Because it comes in the morning, I can go home at lunch and read it.”

Belonging to a sports club includes interacting with like-minded individuals. The researcher asked, “How do you communicate with other fans? Do you E-mail stories or pictures?” Walt said,

“I do not [send stories or E-mail the other fan club members]. The reason is that when I see my friends in person, I can say, “hey, did you see that article about how we got beat by San Diego last week?” It’s easier to talk in person. I don’t have friends on E-mail.”

Cindy added,

“I don’t. I’m not big into that. If I want to talk to somebody I’ll do it in person. But mainly through Dana, she sends things out. And I may respond to her about some specific comment or whatever. Like when she found this place this year, I wrote her back and said, “Yay!” It doesn’t get much better than this.”

Dana said,

“Every week for each game I get everyone together through E-mails and newsletters. The newsletter is a monthly thing, but I’m cutting back on it since I’m getting old. And then off-season it’s like three or four times. Plus, we have an annual dinner that started up last year, it’s every February.”

“How does your media use change/enhance before/during/after the season?” Liz, the year-old hotel manager, said, “As far as football goes, only during the season. That’s basically the only time that I’m watching ESPN. Only during the football season.” Dick, the engineer, said, “I try to follow it all year round, both NFL and college. I try to follow who is injured, who is retiring, who is quitting and going to another school, who is a free agent.” Walt said, “During the season it’s full on! I do fantasy [fantasy football] so it seems like every day I’m looking something up in the world of football. Like I said before, it drops off after the draft.” Dana added,

“Well, obviously there’s a lot more media use via E-mails and our Web site [meetup.com] and so forth during season because stuff is going on. I

will tell you that our local newspaper used to publish where all the fan clubs are meeting and stuff, and I don't think they've done that for the last three years even though every single year I E-mail and call News Press and the Punta Gorda paper and the Cape Coral Daily Breeze and there's a Naples paper. And I contact all of them to let them know where we are and they just don't publish that stuff anymore. I don't think it's good. I do what I can. I at least send out the news releases."

Rick said,

"Oh, well obviously I follow closer during the season. But in the off-season I like to see what's going on. And the only way you'll be able to do that is to follow the Kansas City Star because you're not going to get anything from anywhere else. So I'll go to the Star to see what's going on with them. And I'll follow the draft, see what they're going to do in the draft coming up and all that stuff... I spend the whole off-season waiting for the season. I look forward to the draft because you know it's getting closer to the season. I hate the down time."

Announcers play a big part of the football viewing experience. The researcher posed, "Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?" Dick said, "The ones that know what they're talking about and don't try and pick favorites. But Brent Musberger on ESPN is so biased and it seems that everything is coming to the end of the world with him." Walt said,

"No. National announcers are biased. I mean, you watch Troy Aikman (a Hall of Fame quarterback with the Dallas Cowboys) and nothing bad can ever happen to Dallas. He'll never criticize them. When former players become announcers, you can hear the prejudice in their voice."

Bill added,

"I would like to, but in a setting like this, most of the time you can't hear them. Whenever something is going on there's usually cheering and yelling and you'd be lucky to hear anything. I would like to have one of those headsets with an infrared laser so I could hear what was going on. Just like now, there's a pregame on, and there's guys up there talking. I don't even listen to these guys anyhow, they are a bunch of jokers [FOX pregame]. I want facts."

However, “Are there broadcasters or journalists that you are more inclined to believe than others?” Liz said, “No, I like them all about the same. I think they are all very knowledgeable, you may not agree with everything that they say, but I believe them all the same.” Paul added,

“Oh yes. Definitely. Do you want an example? Dan Dierdorf (a former NFL player). He definitely doesn’t like the Chiefs. He always has something negative to say about them, no matter what year it is. I don’t know if he has an axe to grind against them, but he always says something bad.”

Walt followed,

“Yes. But sometimes you hear a guy like John Madden (A famous ex-coach in the NFL) and he says the wildest things! But then sometimes they start giving statistics about your team or their opponent that you might not have known, so in that regard it’s good. I just hate when they go on and on about their teams.”

Bill commented,

“Yeah, the CBS pregame show because they have more facts. They lay it on the line. These guys here [FOX], they are joking and playing around, and grab assing because they are old jocks. That’s what they know. Other than that there’s nothing I really pay attention to in the media, other than maybe ESPN. I caught a show the other day on ESPN HD and it was on the old USFL. And it was a history on it, who were the owners, who were the players. And they focused on Herschel Walker, who held all sorts of records before he came to the NFL. And I thought that was really good.”

The researcher asked, “Do you ever watch classic games (classic games are historic NFL games that have a particularly meaningful play or outcome) on television or DVD?” Dana said, “Sometimes. Good classic games, like when the Chiefs actually won the Super Bowl or something.” Cindy added, “No. Not on DVD, but we might catch one on TV.” Bill said, “No, not all the time, but every now and again.” Dick added bluntly, “Rarely.”

Fantasy football is extremely popular within professional football fans. The researcher posed, “Do you participate in fantasy football? If so, how active are you?” Walt said, “I do. It keeps you close to all the games, not just Kansas City. I’m pretty active; I’m in two leagues.” Bill added, “No. I always wondered what it was about, but I never took the time to learn it.”

Ultimately, the researcher wanted to know: Can you connect with other fans better in person or online? The majority of respondents believed that the best way to communicate with other fans is in person. However, Bill said, “Either way, it don’t make any difference (sic). A fan is a fan. It doesn’t matter what team they’re for anything, as long as they like football.” Dick commented, “In person because I don’t contact many people online. Very little. I’m not smart enough to use a computer.” Walt added, “In person. That’s why I like going to the fan club. I mean, you can tell if someone’s a fan or not, or if someone’s just a wannabe. I’d rather do it in person.” Dana commented,

“Oh, in person I think! Because we’re here, it’s easier to connect when you’re with people. And the majority are my friends. You know, we all know each other, we all have something in common, and we’ve actually met. And we’re here week after week even though we’re 0 and 5.”

Rick added,

“Definitely in person. Well, I’m the sort of person that likes to talk to people face to face. I don’t like talking on the telephone, I don’t particularly like doing Web site stuff. I don’t text message, I don’t do all that stuff. You know, if I want to say something, I’ll talk to your face.”

Liz said,

“In person...Because they are in front of me. I don’t really use the Internet all that much to be honest with you, I just use it to basically check E-mail. When I get to come to the fan club, it’s great, because I can sit here and enjoy the games with other fans.”

Chapter 6

Discussion

One main reason that the fan club members of the Kansas City Chiefs' fan club attend every week is to watch the games together. The Chiefs' games are not broadcast in the region where the club is located. Lacking the games at home, the fans come together each week because they can watch the games for free, in an environment that facilitates socialization. The Chiefs' fans can go visit and watch the games wherever the game is broadcast; however, the fan club members that participated in this research study did not visit any random bar that offered the game. The members distinctly sought out other like-minded fans to experience the games together.

The Kansas City Chiefs' members come together on game day is to watch the games and experience a sense of camaraderie. The affiliates share a common interest in the Chiefs and they can experience the games together at the same time. The fans can let loose with screams when the team does well, like scoring a touchdown, or discuss how the team can do better, when things are not going the Chiefs' way. By coming together to examine a text together, which is the game itself, the fan club members form interpretive communities. The members also share information that they learn from friends, family, and journalists in the Kansas City region. Often, the members will find out some pertinent information about the Chiefs from their Kansas City sources and will share that information with the other members when they see them on game day. The game day

ritual of catching up with other like-minded fans helps create and maintain the shared bonds that the Chiefs' fan club provides.

In general, respondents did not make an effort to tune in to radio talk shows that feature NFL news. Only two out of ten interviewees mentioned listening to the radio as part of their information gathering. The two individuals only listened to specific football discussions when they were in the car and happened upon a sports talk radio show. Of the ten respondents, the majority of the Kansas City Chiefs' fan club members are not active radio users when seeking information on the Chiefs.

All of the respondents regularly use the Internet to seek information on the Kansas City Chiefs. The subjects browsed the Kansas City Star online the most out of all the mentioned Web sites. Next, according to the interviewees, was the Kansas City Chiefs' home site. Walt, a 58-year-old retired police officer, found this useful with pertinent information posted daily, as well as game schedules, player statistics, and photos of players. Dick, the oldest respondent at 80-years old, read the Kansas City Star online since he no longer lives near Kansas City. Surprisingly, Linda, a 60-year-old retired real estate agent said, "No, I really don't use it [the Internet]." According to her, she gets the majority of the Chiefs' information from her sons, who regularly follow the team but did not participate in the interview process.

Interviewees of the Kansas City Chiefs' fan club did not read the local newspaper to access information on their team. The local newspaper focused on the regional team and the two professional teams in the state. All of the members mentioned that they frequently check the local newspaper of the Kansas City Chiefs: The Kansas City Star.

This Web site features a local perspective of the Chiefs and gives the members distinct information that is not dispersed at the national level.

Pay television was utilized by the fan club members to access the games, since the club meets outside of the Kansas City region. The means by which the Chiefs' games are broadcast is DirectTV. Bill, a 67-year-old retired individual, said, "I watch the NFL broadcast NFL Live on Showtime, and I go to ESPN to see scores sometimes." The majority of respondents received news by sports shows on ESPN and the NFL Network, both of which are pay channels. Some of the interviewees also believed that they could get better information from sports shows on television rather than the Internet. Dick, age 80, said, "I get better information on television by far. But you have to take what you hear from them with a grain of salt."

Social media is not a tool that the fan club members use regularly. Only Dana, the 52-year-old advertising manager, said she has a Facebook account for the club. She also acknowledged that while she created the account, it largely remained inactive. The interviewees admitted that they appreciated the social aspect of the club and that they did not like going online to discuss what other people think about the club. The social aspect of the club largely remains during pre-game and game time for the members. Of the respondents, none mentioned that they regularly communicate with other fans outside of the club. No one mentioned using Twitter for updates. Bill, a 67-year-old retired individual, said, "No. It's a waste of time. I don't give a crap what someone else is doing." The fans do not use social media to discuss the team because they do not feel like they are the opinion leaders about the team. The members get the team information through journalists in the Kansas City area, who have better access to the team and

relevant information. Social media does not provide them with the best and most factual information that they seek. Adequately researched news stories by experienced journalists give the members the facts they need to stay updated on the Kansas City Chiefs.

The interviews provided distinct information about how the members communicated with other fan club members. Surprisingly, the participating respondents did not mention that they communicate with other members outside of the club. The members wait to hear from the club president, Dana, through her E-mails, about what is happening with the club, if there are certain upcoming celebrations, and what major news stories occur with the team. The fans only communicate when they come together on game day. They have friendships with the other members, but the bonds become secure when the team plays and the individuals watch together.

Since the debut of the Blackberry cellular phone, and more recently the success of the iPhone, having the Internet at ones fingertips has become the rage. The Pew Research Center (2009) found that 55% of Americans access the Internet wirelessly through their laptops or cellular devices. Unfortunately, only one interviewee responded to keeping updated with Kansas City Chiefs' information on her cell phone. Liz, a 50-year-old hotel manager, said, "I actually have the NFL Network downloaded on my phone. I was just looking at it now! [It gives me] Play by play, or radio. If I'm not watching it, I can plug in and listen to what's happening." No other member mentioned checking scores, reading news stories, or keeping track of their team by means of a cellular device.

Overall, from the discussions with the fan club members, there is not complete trust with the media. No one said they completely trust what the reporters or

commentators said; rather, they trust most information if it comes from a reputable sports news agency such as ESPN or Sports Illustrated. Rick, a 58-year-old self-employed individual, said, "I think sportscasters are like anyone else, they're biased. They report about what their feelings are. But that may or may not be accurate." Cindy, a 61-year-old homemaker, added, "I don't believe in trusting the media entirely no matter what. I'm a firm believer in the fact that you believe about half of what you read and less of what you see on TV. I think you need to do your own research." If the news agency reports facts, the fan club members will take it as the truth, whereas commentators, such as old players giving their opinions, are less trustworthy.

The information gathered from the interviews supports the main principles of social identification theory. The fan club members strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity by showing up on time for all games. They attend regularly, wear Kansas City Chiefs' apparel, and cheer loudly when the team does well. The members become part of the "in-group" through their associates with the Chiefs and the other fan club members. When the social identity becomes unsatisfactory, individuals will strive to leave their existing group and join a more positive group. A connection exists between a large number of members showing up for the first three weeks of the season. Hope for the team, a fresh start, and new players gave the fan club members something to be excited about. However, when the team started performing badly on the field, some fans stopped showing up to the fan club. The members became dispassionate with the team and stopped showing their support, thus leaving the group, be it temporarily or permanently.

Social identification theory describes the emotional connection that exists between "in-group" members. The researcher found the emotional connection to exist

firsthand during the interview process. During several interviews, the researcher was in a discussion with the respondents, when suddenly they would see a familiar face. The respondent shut down the conversation with the interviewer mid-sentence and started a new conversation with their friend. The emotional response to another fan club member validates the theory.

The Kansas City Chiefs' fan club members displayed the "we," "us," and "them" verbiage throughout the interviews. Dana, the advertising manager, said, "A lot of us have been coming together fifteen, seventeen years. So it's getting together with your friends, especially when you don't have a great team like we don't." Rick, the 58-year-old individual said, "I don't like them [speaking about reporters that are against the Chiefs], obviously, but I know that...I'll tell you what bothers me, it's when you get a biased opinion from a reporter that is obviously biased."

The goal of RQ1 was to understand how fans use media to gather information on the Kansas City Chiefs. The fan club members go to KCStar.com and KCChiefs.com to find information on the team from Kansas City insiders. The goal of RQ2 was to understand if fans use media to connect with other fan club members outside of the club. After interviewing the participants, the researcher found that the members do not connect with each other outside of the club. The members rely on e-newsletters and e-mails from the club president for fan club information.

Chapter 7

Limitations

The research found in this study is not generalizable to other fan clubs. Every fan club for every NFL team will have different practices and customs for the participating members. Members' ages will vary, fans' commitment and passion for their respective teams will differ, and individuals' media usage and habits will be different than what was found in this study. The results found in this study are pertinent only to the Chiefs' fan club that the researcher visited and cannot be used to compare with other fan clubs.

A limitation of the study includes conducting research at a bar instead of in a quiet area. Bars have many distractions such as background noise, games, food, and other things that can cause a person to lose focus. One distinct problem occurred while interviewing some participants. During a few interviews, the respondents became distracted when their friends came in to bar and walked over to initiate a conversation. The respondents were in the middle of the interview, but would then turn and talk with their friends for a few minutes, and then refocus on the interview at hand.

In the methodology section of this paper, the researcher wrote that a sports bar is an ideal location for conducting interviews, participating with the fan club members, and observing their behavior. However, after reporting the results, the researcher found that while a sports bar is a great location for observation and participation, it was less than ideal for conducting interviews. Perhaps it would have been better to collect willing

participants' E-mail addresses or telephone numbers to conduct the interviews outside of the distractions that bars provide.

Another limitation was time to conduct the interviews. The researcher chose to conduct the interview on-site, rather than by phone or E-mail. The personal touch allowed individuals to connect and share information freely, while phone and E-mail are impersonal. Time played a very important role in the duration of the interviews; obviously, the fans would not want to conduct the interviews during game time, as the reason they came to the bar in the first place was to watch the game. The earliest any fan member would come to the fan club was an hour before the game. By the time they settled in at their table, and the researcher presented the nature of the study, it did not leave for much time to keep the interview going if need be. The researcher did collect E-mail addresses to use if he needed to follow up with the participants, but he did not use them. After the game, the club members usually rushed out of the club because the game was over.

Another limitation was the number of actual fan club members that came weekly to the club. According to the president of the club Dana, there are over a hundred dues-paying members of the club. Unfortunately, the Kansas City Chiefs started off the 2009 season terribly; the club went from having 50-100 people show up the first three weeks, to about 12-30 members on weeks four through eight when the researcher was present. As the weeks went on, and the Chiefs kept losing, the less people showed up and participated. This made it difficult to find willing individuals that wanted to participate in the research project. Selecting another sports bar with a different NFL club would have provided more samples to add to the study. The overall study would have to change

though and be about sports club in general, not one about the Kansas City Chiefs. A survey given out to all fan clubs in one region describing media usage and social media habits would provide a larger sample and data that could possibly be generalizable to other fan clubs.

The fan club members ranged in age from thirty-eight to eighty; it was a great range to find out how individuals over thirty-five used media. However, younger individuals were not included in this study because no one under thirty-eight was available for the study. The older, participating individuals were the only respondents of the study; younger opinions were not gathered because they were not available to question. Ultimately, media usage of older individuals was gathered, but a younger voice and opinion was not heard.

Opinions from a group comprised of individuals aged eighteen to thirty-five would give insight into social media usage. Their opinions and suggestions for social media usage in the fan club could possibly create a better understanding of how to connect with other fan club members outside of the club. When thinking globally, perhaps fan clubs for the Chiefs' and other teams could form mega-groups on social sites. Unfortunately, the data gathered from the participating individuals over thirty-five did not give insight into the many uses of social media.

While writing the results section, the researcher chose the best answers that fit his questions and could have neglected other information. He subjectively chose the formatting of the study. To garnish a better understanding of the club, a survey might have helped to find out more information on media usage of fan club members. This could have been sent via E-mail to the database of members; the researcher only had

access to the limited number of individuals who showed up to watch the live games. The survey would have provided concrete data on how many hours a week they used the internet to find facts on the Chiefs, which Web sites they favored for information, and which sports news programs they preferred to tune in to for quality updates on the Kansas City Chiefs.

Another limitation of the qualitative study was the use of some closed-ended questions. Ideally, the researcher would have asked only open-ended questions, which would have allowed the respondents to give long, drawn out responses. However, when the researcher presented a closed-ended question, and received a one-word answer, the researcher did not press the respondent for more information. Had the researcher pressed to find the information sought in the question, perhaps the results would have given more in-depth information about media usage of the fan club members. A limitation that must be noted is the experience of the researcher. His limited experience with doing interviews in-person caused some questions to go unanswered.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Media usage plays an important role for information gathering in the fans' sports consumption. Browsing specific Internet Web sites is the main way that the Kansas City Chiefs' fans gather information on the club. Meetup.com gives information about the fan club, such as when it meets, the location, who belongs in the club, and it also has pictures and a message board. The main Web sites visited by the club members include ESPN.com, KCStar.com, and KCChiefs.com. Those sites give specific information on the Kansas City Chiefs and provide meaningful facts about the team. The research found a similar connection between Coleman and McCombs' (2007) study that found that baby boomers spent the majority of their time online reading news. The participants of this study rarely used social networking sites, read blogs, or participated on message boards.

The president of the club sends e-newsletters to the members explaining organizational events, Chiefs' player news, such as free agent signings, and pertinent club information. The members wait for this information to come to their E-mail because it fills them in on what is happening with the club. In general, the respondents did not communicate with each other via E-mail. They would wait until game day at the club, and then discuss team information with the other fan club members.

Robinson and Kohut (1988) found that older, more educated audiences tended to be the most critical of media, while younger, less educated news consumers were more likely to be accepting of news coverage and to evaluate the media as credible. This was

certainly true among the participating interviewees; they were most skeptical of former athletes who gave opinions on news shows because of their prior sports background.

Social identification theory explains some reasons as to why the participants attend the football viewings every game day. The fan club members seek to move from the “personal” self and they move towards the “social” self. They become “in-group” members when they physically go to the bar and interact with other members. They refer to themselves as “us” or “we” when talking about the Chiefs. However, the researcher found that one of the main reasons that fans came together to watch the game together was because the games were not broadcast in their region in the United States. The bar provided the games; the fan club organized a distinct location where a group of like-minded fans could celebrate their team together. Overall, the individuals met Eastman and Land’s (1997) schemas for contextualizing public sports viewing: participating in a membership community, opportunity for social interaction, access to otherwise unobtainable events, and diversionary activity.

Hogg (2001) found that followers generally are more willing to agree and comply with the leader’s ideas and suggestions. Dana, the club president, sends out e-newsletters and e-mails weekly to the fan club during the season. Her charismatic attitude attracts followers to the club and creates positive social bonds within the club. The group identity is strong due to the organization that the leader provides.

The author contributed to the existing literature of media usage of individuals over the age of thirty-five. He found that the individuals generally did not use social media to connect with other fan club members. The researcher believes that the club provides the social environment where the individuals can discuss the team and the

happenings of the fan club in person. When applying the lack of social media usage to strategic communication management, the author recommends giving incentives (such as team merchandise) to the individuals that participate most in social media. One idea is for the club president to set up a Twitter account and encourage participation online. A suggestion for future researcher would be to pursue social media and demonstrate how a fan club can utilize it to build strong membership ties outside of the club. A future research question for scholars is, how does an NFL fan club use social media to connect individuals over the age of thirty-five outside of a fan club?

The researcher recommends that sports organizations reach out to NFL fan clubs and provide incentives for participating with the fan clubs. A possible incentive includes giving prizes away to the members that attend the games most frequently. The incentives would create stronger binds to the team and provide marketing and sales opportunities for the teams and bars that hold the fan club members.

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Appendix A
Letter of Consent

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided to you to decide whether you wish to allow Robert J. Huebert to conduct research at Leapin' Lizards Bar and Grille. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to allow the researcher to conduct interviews at your location.

The purpose of this study is to further previous research of media usage and add value to the existing literature for a graduate level thesis. The procedure will be a study of Kansas City Chiefs' sports fans at a Chiefs' fan club in a large Southeastern city in the United States.

The study will consist of observation and participation of the fan club by the researcher, as well as interviews with fan club members. The goal of this study is to understand the media habits of fan club members at the sports bar. The researcher will record the interviews with a tape recorder. The recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet.

Do not hastate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I would be happy to share the findings with you after the research is completed. However, Leapin' Lizards will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know the location.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Signature of Participant

Date

Robert J. Huebert
University of South Florida
rhuebert@mail.usf.edu

Appendix B

Questionnaire

1. Why do you think people gather to watch football together?
2. What brought you to this sports club?
3. Why do you watch Chiefs' games with the fan club?
4. How often do you seek information on your team?
5. Do you use the Internet to follow your team?
6. What Web sites do you regularly check to follow your team?
7. When you go to a Web site, do you just look at the front-page info, or do you actually take the time to read stories?
8. Do you trust online news?
9. Do negative news stories about your team affect you?
10. How do you use social media to connect with other fans, such as blogs, or Facebook group sites?
11. Do you read or participate on message boards?
12. Do you listen to sports talk radio?
13. Do you watch specific broadcast/cable sports shows?
14. Do you ever follow Internet updates while watching the games on broadcast television?
15. How do you stay up-to-date on your team?
16. How do you communicate with other fans? Do you E-mail stories/pictures/etc?
17. How does your media use change/enhance before/during/after the season?
18. Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?
19. Are there broadcasters/journalists that you are more inclined to believe than fellow reporters?
20. Do you ever watch classic games on television/DVD?

21. Do you participate in fantasy football? How active are you?
22. Can you connect with other fans better in person, or online?
23. How old are you?
24. What's your occupation?
25. What salary bracket are you in? <25,000, 25,001-40,000, 40,001-65,000, 65,001-100,000, >100,001

Appendix C

Interviews

Interview 1 [Dana, 52, Advertising Manager]

Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

Camaraderie. Cheering your team on together. Meeting other friends. A lot of us have been coming together fifteen, seventeen years. So it's getting together with your friends, especially when you don't have a great team like we don't.

How did you end up at Leaping Lizards?

I looked every year for a good place to go, and I contacted Ben [The manager] and they were really interested. And it's interesting that one of the owners is a Kansas City Chiefs' fan. And her husband is our arch nemesis, a Raider fan. But that's how we ended up here, they wanted us, and they've been wonderful, and it's worked out well.

Why do you watch the Chiefs games with this fan club?

Because we're all Kansas City Chiefs' fans. And I think we're the only Kansas City game watch, and fan club in the Southwest Florida area.

How often do you seek out information on your team? Daily, year round, weekly?

Weekly.

And do you go to the Internet to follow your team?

Yes.

What sites?

KCChiefs.com, KCstar.com, which is the Kansas City Star newspaper, ESPN, you know, all the main sports channels.

When you go to a Web site, do you just look at the front-page information or do you take the time to read the stories?

I read some of the stories. I'm specifically interested in the Chiefs. I may not read all the other stuff about the other teams unless it's something really important about a key player. But I'm a girl.

Do you read or participate on message boards?

Well, we have our meetup site. Our meetup.com site. You know, I arranged, organized that. And also on Facebook and MySpace and Plaxo. And every once and a while I'll send a message to there that we're meeting up for the game.

Is the Facebook one specific for the club?

No. Wait, I think there is one for the club and I have my own personal one.

Do you read the hometown sports section online to follow your team?

Kansas City one sometimes, yes. Local Fort Myers, no, they have a terrible sports section.

Do you trust online news?

Sometimes. Yeah, I mean, I guess.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you?

No, not since we have a negative team right now. I mean, you kind of want to hear what other people have to say. And, I mean, you kind of learn a lot from that.

Do you only read about the NFL or do you watch sports news on television?

I watch sports news on television.

What do you watch?

ESPN mostly. And then, you know, when there's college or NFL games on I'll see the in between stuff (pre-game broadcast) that's on right now.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

No.

Can you connect better with fans in person or online?

Oh, in person, I think!

Why do you think that?

Because we're here, it's easier to connect when you're with people. And the majority are my friends. You know, we all know each other, we all have something in common, and we've actually met. And we're here week after week even though we're 0 and 5.

Do you ever follow Internet updates while watching the games?

No.

How do you know what information to trust when you go online? Like, do you trust the Kansas City paper more than a more popular site like ESPN.com?

Not necessarily, no. The Kansas City paper is probably more pro Kansas City than ESPN is. We do have some Kansas City reporters though that are pretty negative about the Chiefs.

Do you feel like you can trust their opinions more than ESPN?

No, not necessarily.

Do you think they are more biased?

Yes.

Where as ESPN may lay it out straight?

Well, it depends on who you're watching on ESPN too because some of those guys you know have their favorites. Just like Troy Aikman is always a commentator for the Cowboys. Well, that's not a bias at all is it? [sarcasm] It kind of depends on who it is and you kind of have to figure it out for yourself. Just like regular news or politics, you have to figure it out for yourself.

How do you communicate with other fan club members?

E-mail, mail, which we're going to try and slow down on since it's very involved. Newsletters, which we're cutting back on as well. Facebook.

How often do you E-mail the members?

Every week for each game. And then off season it's like three or four times. Plus, we have an annual dinner that started up last year, it's every February. We did it at the Sandy Hook last year.

Do you get everyone together through the E-mails, or the newsletters?

Both.

Is the newsletter paper that gets mailed to the members?

Yeah, it's a monthly thing, but I'm cutting back on it since I'm getting old. And I don't get paid for it.

How does your media use change during the season, and then after the season?

Well, obviously there's a lot more media use via E-mails and our Web site (meetup.com) and so forth during season because stuff is going on. I will tell you that our local newspaper used to publish where all the fan clubs are meeting and stuff, and I don't think they've done that for the last three years even though every single year I E-mail and call News Press and the Punta Gorda paper and the Cape Coral Daily Breeze and there's a Naples paper. And I contact all of them to let them know where we are and they just don't publish that stuff anymore. I don't think it's good. I do what I can. I at least send out the news releases.

Do you pay attention to the broadcasters during the game?

Yes, if you can hear them.

Are there broadcasters or journalists that you are more inclined to believe than others?

Probably. There are definitely some that I don't like.

Like ones that are pro Raiders?

Well, like Aikman. See, I like Chris Colinsworth, and he doesn't (she points to her neighbor). I think he's very non biased. You know, Lenny Dawson I love, he was the quarterback that took us to the Super Bowl, and of course he's going to be biased towards the Chiefs. But he knows we're terrible too.

Do you ever watch classic games on television or DVD?

Sometimes. Good classic games, like when the Chiefs actually won the Super Bowl or something.

You don't have to answer these next couple of questions, but they are for demographic purposes. How old are you?

I'm old. I'm in my low fifties. I'm fifty two.

What's your occupation?

I have my own little business. I'm in magazine advertising sales. International ad sales.

What's your salary bracket?

I don't really know because I haven't had a salary in three years. I finally got a new client. So I would say over 50, but less than one hundred thousand.

Interview 2 [Rick, 58, Self-Employed]

Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

I think it's because you can support each other and feed off of the excitement. Camaraderie, being able to get together and cheer your team.

How did you end up at this sports club?

Well, when I moved down here from Kansas City, I actively looked for some place to go for a Chiefs club. And I found where the Chiefs club meets and we've been bouncing around ever since. I came down here and found a club.

How did you originally find the club?

I ran into some people and picked up a [unintelligible] at the Yacht club and some somebody down there, I don't remember if they were wearing a Chiefs' hat or what and I asked him if they meet at such and such a place. And that's how I found out where they originally met.

Why do you watch Chiefs' games with the fan club and not at your house?

Because it's more fun to be with people who are fans. Not only that, but you can't get the games down here unless you have the NFL package. And I don't want to spend \$400 to watch...for the most part it's more fun to watch with fans.

How often do you seek information on your team, is it year round?

Acutally, I go on the Internet to find out what's going on with them [the Chiefs] several times a week. And I go to the Kansas City Star Web site and look at the Kansas City Star and I also look at CNBC and ESPN Web sites. I kind of like to compare to see what our sports writers are saying and what the other sports writers that aren't connected with the Chiefs are saying.

Are you reading just about the Chiefs or every team?

Mainly about the Chiefs, but I do look to see what's going on with some other teams. I got some friends of mine that are Giants fans, Jets fans, so I'll glance and see what they're doing, but for the most part I'll only look at the Chiefs.

Do you read or participate on message boards?

Just the one that the Chiefs' club has, it's called The Meetup [meetup.com]. Every once and a while I'll go in there and make a comment about what's going on.

Are you commenting on the Kansas City Chiefs or the fan club?

Both. Like last week I made a comment in there like, everyone knows that they aren't going to the Super Bowl this year. And, as normal, you start out the year you got a lot of people coming and then they lose a few games and you lose a few people. And then you lose a few more, you know, you got to support your team weather it wins or loses. You know, they are rebuilding, it's no secret to anybody, you just got to come down here and support them.

When you first go to read about your team, do you go to CNBC or ESPN, or do you go to the hometown paper?

Well, the first place I go to is usually the Kansas City Star. And I read the beat reporters that follow the team about what they have to say, and then I'll go to CNBC or ESPN.

Do you trust online news?

Eh, yes and no. I mean, I think sportscasters are like anyone else, they're biased. They report about what their feelings are. But that may or may not be accurate. But I think for the most part I do.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you?

I don't like them, obviously, but I know that...I'll tell you what bothers me, it's when you get a biased opinion from a reporter that is obviously biased. Dan Dierdorff is a good example. Dan Dierdorff doesn't like the Chiefs, so he always has something negative to say about them and he never says anything positive about them. And yeah, that bothers me. If you can't report accurate information, or show a biased opinion, then don't say anything.

Do you use social media to connect with other fans? Such as blogs, facebook...

Nah, no. I'm not a big Facebook person.

So the only social media that you would use is the meetup.com Web site?

Yes.

Do you connect better with fans in person or online?

Oh, definitely in person.

Why do you think that is?

Well, I'm the sort of person that likes to talk to people face to face. I don't like talking on the telephone, I don't particularly like doing Web site stuff. I don't text message, I don't do all that stuff. You know, if I want to say something, I'll talk to your face.

Do you ever follow Internet updates as you watch the games?

No. No. I'm not that crazy.

How do you communicate with other fans? Do you E-mail stories, pictures...?

No, I don't do that. Just talk in person.

How does your media use change before, during, and after the season?

Oh, well obviously I follow closer during the season. But in the off season I like to see what's going on. And the only way you'll be able to do that is to follow the Kansas City Star because you're not going to get anything from anywhere else. So I'll go to the Star to see what's going on with them. And I'll follow the draft, see what they're going to do in the draft coming up and all that stuff.

Some people enjoy the off-season just as much as the season...

No, no. I spend the whole off-season waiting for the season. I look forward to the draft because you know it's getting closer to the season. I hate the down time.

Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?

Oh yeah.

Are they ever for the Kansas City Chiefs or are they always against them?

Well some are. Some of them favor the Chiefs. I think Kevin Harlem, he used to be the Chiefs...he's usually pretty favorable to them.

Do you ever watch classic games on television or DVD?

Ah, I have, but not as a rule. I mean, they're over [the games].

These next few questions are for demographic purposes. How old are you?

I'm 58.

What's your occupation?

I'm self employed.

What salary bracket are you in?

\$65,000 to \$100,000.

Interview 3 [Cindy, 61, Homemaker]

Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

Well, here, the reason why we do it is because we don't get Chiefs' games on local television, unless they happen to be playing a Florida team. But, it also gives you, it's also more fun. You know, it's more fun to have other people around, and either cry in your beer or celebrate.

How did you end up at this sports club?

Well, we ran into this person one day; I worked at a little fruit stand and we had been down here for several years. And anyways, this girl walks in with a Kansas City Chiefs' t-shirt on, and I said, "oh, you're a chiefs fan! Where are you from?" And we got to talking and she said, "oh, well you need to go to..." because we were trying to find some place to watch the games. So that's how we started with them, and that's been about eight or nine years ago.

So you found out through your friends?

No, it was through a customer that had on a Kansas City Chiefs' sweat shirt on and it was like, "hey, where you from?" If you hadn't noticed, people from Missouri are very friendly and very outgoing. That's a Midwestern thing. I mean, if I heard that someone was from Missouri, I'd say, "Hey, where you from?" "Oh, I know where that is!" Let's face it, 90% of Floridians are not Floridians.

How often do you seek information on the Chiefs? Is it year round?

Pretty much. I have a brother-in-law who's a sportscaster in Kansas City, so even if sometimes I don't agree with what he does, I have a tendency to watch him, if we're up there. We're up there about three months out of the year. Well, also Dana [the president] sends us stuff.

She E-mails you stories?

Yeah, she will sometimes. Especially if there's something going on, like when they changed general managers and coach and things like that. And the other thing is, I check the NBC Web site in Kansas City because that's where my brother-in-law works. And I also check the Kansas City Star. Dana keeps in contact year round. You may not hear something every week, but you will hear something at least once a month.

How do you get communication from her?

E-mail.

Do you use the Internet to follow your team?

Yes and no. I mean, yeah, I use it, but it's not something that I use every day. I'd say, it just depends on ... Let's say they're having a good season, then I'm going to read something down here about it. But if they're having a bad season like they're having this

year, you wouldn't even know that there was a Kansas City Chiefs' football team. So that's when I use the Internet more when I can't find anything.

What Web sites do you go to?

Well, I go to the NBC Web site in Kansas City, the Kansas City Star, and I'll go to the Kansas City Chiefs' Web site. And then our, Dana's meetup.com site that she put on. I'll check it every once and a while.

Do you read or participate on message boards?

No.

What's your preference on getting information about your team, the hometown paper, broadcast television, or national broadcast shows?

Probably the local hometown paper because I don't have, the local media is not available to me all the time. You know, in Kansas City, we have a whole section of the paper dedicated to the team.

Do you trust the hometown paper more than national news?

No, I just think that they're more likely to cover the Kansas City Chiefs. I don't necessarily trust them more. I don't believe in trusting the media entirely no matter what. I'm a firm believer in the fact that you believe about half of what you read and less of what you see on TV. I think you need to do your own research and find your own opinions.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you personally?

Not unless I think they're mean spirited. You know, if they're just out to be a jerk, then yeah, it bothers me. But lately our team has been so bad, that they're just being honest. Sometimes I get into arguments with my brother in law because I think he's being too nasty, but that's what they're paid to do. The media, when it comes to sports, are supposed to be open minded; now we all know that isn't true. But, I think sometimes he goes overboard.

Do you ever use blogs, or Facebook, or other social media to follow the team?

No.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

No. Well, I take that back, a few years ago we picked teams every week, but it was just teams.

Did you do that with an online system?

Yes. One of the Web sites that I went to at the time offered a thing like, every week you could win a \$50 prize. And we did it for fun.

Can you connect with fans better in person or online?

In person.

Do you ever follow Internet updates while watching the games?

No, because I'm usually here watching the games.

How do you communicate with other fan club members? Do you ever E-mail or send pictures?

I don't. I'm not big into that. If I want to talk to somebody I'll do it in person. But mainly through Dana, she sends things out. And I may respond to her about some specific comment or whatever. Like when she found this place this year, I wrote her back and said, "Yay!" It doesn't get much better than this.

Does your media use change during and after the season?

Well, I'm sure it slacks off some in the offseason. I mean, we're football fans and we want to watch football. But I mean, I don't watch the draft necessarily. But we pay attention to it keep note.

Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?

Depends on who it is. Like last week, I thought it was horrible that Troy Aikman was announcing the Kansas City- Dallas game. It's absolutely...It's like Lynn Dawson, who was a famous quarterback for the Kansas City Chiefs, he broadcasted on radio in Kansas City. That's fine. But that would be like him being on national television broadcasting a Chiefs and a Dallas game. Well, if he's not prejudiced, then what's wrong with him?

Do you ever watch classic games on television or DVD?

No. Not on DVD, but we might catch one on TV.

These next few questions are for demographic purposes only. How old are you?
61.

What's your occupation?

Housewife.

What's your salary bracket?

I'd say \$40-\$55 thousand.

Interview 4 (Bill, 67, Retired)

Why do you think people gather to watch football here?

Because it's cheaper than staying at home. The old saying that the NFL has priced themselves out of the local market. Just like labor unions pricing themselves out of the local market.

Now, what brought you to this fan club?

Because I've been a Chiefs' fan for forty years and it's the only one around here.

How did you find out about it?

I saw it in the newspaper fifteen years ago.

How do you get information from this fan club?

By E-mail and newsletter.

How often does the E-mail and newsletter come?

The newsletter is monthly, but Dana's trying to convert it to E-mail.

Do you prefer the newsletter or E-mail?

E-mail is fine.

Why do you watch the Chiefs' games with this fan club?

Why? Because it's the only one around.

How often do you seek information on the Chiefs? Is it year round?

Just the season. Maybe a couple times during the year when I hear something on TV like a trade, or someone looking to be a coach, I'll check into it, but other than that, I'm getting too old to worry about it.

Do you use the Internet to follow the team?

No.

What do you use?

During the season I'm here so I know what's going on. I watch the NFL broadcast NFL Live on Showtime, and I go to ESPN to see scores sometimes. We live in Arcadia which is about 40 miles from here, so we leave before the game is over. So when I get home I'll tune in to ESPN and get updates and sometimes I'll go online because supposedly there is supposed to be a live feed for the games. But if you watch the ticker at the bottom of the TV screen and what they put on the Internet it's five to ten minutes behind. And you would think that someone watching the game would be doing it on Tweeter [Twitter] which would be instant. Five minutes behind is too slow.

Do you go to Facebook or Twitter or anything like that?

No. It's a waste of time. I don't give a crap what someone else is doing.

When you do go to a Web site, do you only read the front-page information, or do you take the time to read the stories?

Usually, well, I get a lot of E-mails from flying magazines because I'm a pilot. And I'll scroll through and whatever gets my attention, I'll read it. But if it doesn't get my attention then I'm not going to waste my time.

Do you ever do message boards?

No.

Do you read the hometown sports section online?

No.

Do you trust online news?

It depends on where it comes from. If it's from a large news agency and it's vetted, yes. But if it's a blogger, than no way in Hades. Anybody can say anything on Wikipedia, you know? You get what you get, and if you believe it, than shame on you. I was in a restaurant yesterday morning for breakfast and I heard a woman say at the table next to me, "Obama wants gasoline to go up to nine dollars a gallon!" I could hardly contain myself, I wanted to get up and say, "listen you dumb bitch, ain't nobody in this world that wants gas to go up to nine dollars a gallon, even the people that are paying nine dollars a gallon!" It's this mentality that people have now a days that they'll read the Internet and they think it's the truth. And it has nothing to do with the truth. It's like my son-in-law, he'll believe anybody but me. Cause he don't like my point of view.

When a negative news story comes out, does that affect you personally?

Nah, I could care less.

Do you only read about the NFL, or do you watch sports news on television?

The only one I really watch is the NFL show on Showtime. And I fast forward through that just to the part with the Chiefs.

So you don't follow other teams?

No. I used to do that, but since I don't root for them. The AFC West is where the Chiefs are and I primarily keep a bit of interest in that, and I think the Raiders will do pretty well, I know the rest of them don't have a snowball chance. The Raiders are 6-0. We've had the hardest schedule this year than we've had any year, and at 1-5 it shows.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

No. I always wondered what it was about, but I never took the time to learn it.

Can you connect better with fans online or in person?

Either way, it don't make any difference. A fan's a fan. It doesn't matter what team they're for anything, as long as they like football.

How do you know what information to trust?

Experience. When you've been around for fifty years watching the team and something screwball comes out, you pretty well know it. It's like the news on television, it's not the gospel. You know what to listen to and not.

How do you communicate with other fans? Do you E-mail with other fans, send stories, or pictures?

No. I only E-mail my high school classmates once or twice a year.

How does your media use change before, during, and after the year?

It falls off. After the season is over and the Super Bowl is over it goes off to the hills. Until next August when you got the pre-season and then it starts picking up.

Do you watch the classic games on TV or on DVD?

No, not all the time, but every now and again.

Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?

I would like to, but in a setting like this, most of the time you can't hear them. Whenever something is going on there's usually cheering and yelling and you'd be lucky to hear anything. I would like to have one of those headsets with an infrared laser so I could hear what was going on. Just like now, there's a pre-game on, and there's guys up there talking. I don't even listen to these guys anyhow, they are a bunch of jokers [FOX pregame]. I want facts.

Are there broadcasters that you are more inclined to believe than others?

Yeah, the CBS pregame show because they have more facts. They lay it on the line. These guys here [FOX], they are joking and playing around, and grab assing because they are old jocks. That's what they know. Other than that there's nothing I really pay attention to in the media, other than maybe ESPN. I caught a show the other day on ESPN HD and it was on the old USFL. And it was a history on it, who were the owners, who were the players. And they focused on Herschel Walker, who held all sorts of records before he came to the NFL. And I thought that was really good.

The next few questions are for demographic information. How old are you?

67.

What's your occupation?

90 percent retired.

And what salary bracket are you in?

Somewhere around \$30,000.

Interview 5 (Linda, 60, Real Estate Agent)

Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

Well, it's fun to see the same people, week in and week out. And it's fun to touch base with them because as a Chiefs' fan, there aren't a lot of places like this to connect with them.

What brought you to this sports club?

We moved down from Kansas City. We've been Chiefs' fans for a long time, and this was the only one in town.

How did you hear about it?

I don't really remember. There was a big bar down on 41 called Island Park, and they had a lot of televisions, and we had a group of people watching the Kansas City games, so in fact we started our own fan club.

Have you been around since the very beginning with this club?

Yes.

How do you get information from the fan club?

Dani [club president] E-mails us. But she's also using the member...she probably told you about it...the member meeting place meetup.com. Well, she uses that. That's not perfected and not many people here use it, very few of the members are on it.

Why do you think that is?

Because we're all old.

What's your preference on getting news from the club? Is it E-mail, a newsletter?

Well, Dani used to do the newsletters, but now it's the E-mails.

Do you ever send E-mails to fan club members?

No, not really.

Why do you watch Chiefs' games with this fan club?

Because they're fun and we don't have to buy the NFL package at home.

How often do you seek information on your team?

We keep an eye on them. I have the Chiefs' Web site as a favorite. And I go in and look at the roster. I don't go on so much during the offseason. We actually talk to our friends from Kansas City because they hear things from the papers and the radio shows. Our friends tell us stuff that we can't hear down here.

Do you use the Internet to follow the games?

No, not really, no.

When you do go to the Internet, do you go to the Kansas City Chiefs' homepage, or do you go to the hometown paper?

I just go to the Chiefs' official Web site. If I want to know something about the team, I'll go there.

Do you read or participate on message boards?

No.

Do you read the hometown paper online?

No.

Do you trust online news?

No. Not completely. But there are a lot of things floating around on the Internet that are true, but it's hard to know what to believe. And it scares me a lot because you used to be able to believe your eyes, now with photo shop, you can't even believe your eyes! So you really have to take everything with a grain of salt.

So how do you know what information to trust?

I take a little bit of information from different sources. I try to verify information through ask.com.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you?

No, we're [Chiefs' fans] the biggest negative about our team. That why we like to enjoy misery that's why we get along so well.

Do you ever use social media to connect with other fans? Like Facebook?

No, I don't use Facebook.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

No, I don't.

Can you connect with fans better in person or online?

In person. I do E-mail Dana [president] and her dad, but those are the only two people.

How do you stay up to date on your team?

I'm up to date when I come here.

How do you communicate with other fans, do you ever E-mail stories or pictures?

I only receive information through Dana.

Does your media use change before, during, or after the season?

Oh sure, during the offseason I don't do as much. Although sometimes I do get information from friends up in Kansas City. Friends will tell me news stories that they've read in the paper up there.

Do they have good journalists in Kansas City that cover the team?

Yes, they have several great writers.

Do you ever watch classic games on television or DVD?

Not really.

The next few questions are for demographic information. How old are you?

I'm 60 years old.

What's your occupation?

I'm a real estate agent and a retired flight attendant.

What's your salary bracket?

The bottom. \$25 to \$40,000.

Interview 6 (Dick, 80, Engineer)

Ok I am here with Dick. Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

I would assume it's because they enjoy the fellowship and the enthusiasm of the crowd.

What brought you to this sport's club?

Well, when the Chiefs moved over here, I moved over here.

How did you hear about the fan club?

My daughter started it back in 1990.

So you've been around since the beginning?

No, I moved down here in 1996.

Ok, then you started participating in the fan club?

Yes.

Why do you watch Chiefs' games with the fan club and not at home?

It's more fun to have a bunch of people around that are noisy and make a lot of noise and have a lot of fun.

How often do you seek information on your team? Is it year round?

All the time. I check the Internet constantly, Kansas City Chiefs, Kansas City Star newspaper, and wherever else I can find it.

Do you ever listen to sports talk radio?

Not very often anymore; once in a while, but not very often.

What sites did you say you followed online?

Kansas City Chiefs and Kansas City Star.com

Do you ever go to ESPN or Sports Illustrated?

As far as I'm concerned, ESPN and Sports Illustrated the magazine are useless.

Why is that?

They say what they want to make you think that they know everything. And a lot of times they have biased opinions. In fact, most of the time they are biased opinions.

So you think if you go to the Kansas City Star that you'll get better information?

I don't know if it's better information, but more. Those magazines really cater to all the teams and I don't think they do justice for any of them.

Do you read or participate on message boards?

No.

Do you trust online news?

It depends. I would say probably most of the time, but I take it all with a grain of salt.

How do you know what information to trust?

I really don't know.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you?

That's about all there is this year. And the answer is, sometimes.

Are the Chiefs getting better?

I have not made that determination yet. They will not get better until the coach gives up the job of offensive coordinator. I am convinced of that. You cannot be a head coach and offensive coordinator and do both jobs properly I don't think. And I'm not opinionated.

Do you ever use social media to connect with other fans? Such as blogs, or Facebook?

Very rarely.

Do you watch the NFL Network or ESPN to follow NFL updates?

All of them. I watch as many games, college and professional that I can. In fact, I started the Iowa Club in Paradise in the late 90s, I think 1997. It's one of the biggest college fan clubs around here. We average over a hundred people for a football game.

How do you communicate with other fan club members here?

Dana. She sends out E-mails all the time. And she lets me know if she hears anything. I have a couple of fans that E-mail me directly, but most of the contacts go through her.

Do you E-mail other people?

Very rarely, except through Dana.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

No.

Can you connect with fans better in person or online?

In person because I don't contact many people online. Very little. I'm not smart enough to use a computer.

How do you stay up to date on your team?

Basically, through the Kansas City Star and Chiefs online, and Dana sends out a newsletter once a month.

The newsletter—Is that through the mail or E-mail?

It used to be through snail mail, but now she does it all through E-mail.

Do you ever find yourself watching more information about the NFL during the offseason, during the season, or is it the same?

I try to follow it all year round, both NFL and college. I try to follow whose injured, whose retiring, whose quitting and going to another school, who is a free agent...

For you personally, do you get better information through television news shows or through the Internet?

Television by far. But you have to take what you hear from them with a grain of salt also.

Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?

The ones that know what they're talking about and don't try and pick favorites. But Brent Mushberger on ESPN is so biased and it seems that everything is coming to the end of the world with him.

Do you ever watch classic games on television or DVD?

Rarely.

These next questions are for demographic purposes only. You don't have to answer.

How old are you?

Eighty.

What's your occupation?

Retired instrument engineer.

What salary bracket are you in?

Between 25-40k.

Interview 7 (Walt, 58, Retired Police Officer)

Hi, I'm here with Walt. Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

It's a source of camaraderie. It brings everyone together. It's one thing that somebody can sit around and it happens now. It's something that everyone can sit around and talk about later. Everyone gets together and watches it.

Now, what brought you to this sports club?

Like I said, the camaraderie. Living down here in Florida there aren't too many places where you can get information about Kansas City. You know, you can read the Kansas

City Star online or any other Web sites, but in order to interact with other fans, it's much more fun to go to a sports club.

So how do you get information from the club? Do you get an E-mail?

No, most of the time I get it right from their Web site, the Kansas City Chiefs. They post comments, pregame reports, the post game comments, questions and answers from quarterbacks. You can really get a lot of information from there.

Why do you watch the Chiefs games at the sports club and not at your house?

Well, living in Florida you don't get Kansas City games. It's rare. I mean, if it's a Sunday or Monday night game, it might be on, but, with Kansas City not doing good, they don't get the best schedule, so you have to go watch it with someone who has Direct TV, or go to a sports bar. It's more fun at the sports bar where everyone can get together and have a good time.

Do you use the Internet to follow your team?

Yes, I do. I use the Kansas City Chiefs' Web site, it's got everything from the media stuff to how to get tickets...It has fan forums, fan comments, blogs, photos. You can see what all the Chiefs fan are going to be doing, even though I'm not there, it's still fun to follow.

Now, do you ever go to ESPN, Sports Illustrated.com, or any other sports site?

Yes, but not as often as I go to their home site. I mean, the brief news that you might get off the magazine sites are something that there may only be a bit of information on there. But if you go to the Web site, you get more information.

How often do you seek information on the Chiefs? Is it year round, or only in the season?

Well, the season is the big thing, but after the Super Bowl, you start looking around to see what the Chiefs need, as far as what positions, as they get ready for the draft. Pre draft is great because you get to see what positions need to be filled and the prospects that could take their place. Then after the draft, my interest wanes until training camp. There's really nothing in between then. I know that come August and September that when they start practicing again, then you really get ready for football.

When you go to a web site, do you only take a look at the headlines or do you actually take the time to read stories?

I'll sit and read the news stories. That is when I have the time to do that. I like to read my favorite sports writers from the Kansas City Star. I love when they have audio interviews on there—like blogs!

So you read blogs?

Yes.

How do you know it's not a 10-year-old in the basement writing a story versus a real news piece?

You can figure it all out. If there are statistics on there it helps. You can verify it with information you see on TV, like SportsCenter. There are some blogs that say Cassel had 3 interceptions; you just read that and go. You don't take nothing you read as Gospel, but it's a source of information that you can use to discuss with other people. I will trust the big name media and take the no-name person with a grain of salt.

Do you participate on message boards?

No I do not. My opinion doesn't count. I don't want anyone to know my opinion, unless I'm being asked, like I am today.

Do you read the hometown sports section online to follow your team?

Yes, the Kansas City Star.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you?

No. There's always going to be teams that you don't like that are in your division, that's the fun part. You take all news stories as they are, it's just a part of the game. Some stories are going to be really good, when the team's doing well, and you have to take the bad ones the same.

Do you participate in all forms of media: newspapers, TV, online, radio, listening to talk shows?

The talk shows are Tampa talk shows. There is no real national news, especially the Chiefs! But they started on a big losing streak, so they weren't talked about a lot. The talk shows don't dwell on the bad teams too often. It seems that the media only talk about them when they beat the Redskins. It won't last, so then I have to go to the web.

Do you use social media to connect with other fans?

I do not. I do not want to give anyone else my opinion.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

I do. It keeps you close to all the games, not just Kansas City.

How active are you?

Pretty active. I'm in two leagues.

Can you connect with fans better in person or online?

In person. That's why I like going to the fan club. I mean, you can tell if someone's a fan or not, or if someone's just a wannabe. I'd rather do it in person.

Do you ever follow Internet updates while you watch the games?

Yes. When you play fantasy [football], they have the scores on the bottom of the screen.

How do you communicate with other members of the fan club? Do you E-mail them, send stories or pictures?

I do not. The reason is that when I see my friends in person, I can say, "hey, did you see that article about how we got beat by San Diego last week?" It's easier to talk in person. I don't have friends on E-mail.

How does your media use change before, during, and after the season?

During the season it's full on! I do fantasy so it seems like everyday I'm looking something up in the world of football. Like I said before, it drops off after the draft.

Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?

No. National announcers are biased. I mean, you watch Troy Aikman and nothing bad can ever happen to Dallas. He'll never criticize them. When former players become announcers, you can hear the prejudice in their voice.

So you just tune them out?

Yes. But sometimes you hear a guy like Madden and he says the wildest things! But then sometimes they start giving statistics about your team or their opponent that you might not have known, so in that regard it's good. I just hate when they go on and on about their teams.

Do you ever watch classic games on TV or DVD?

If it's on I might watch a bit of it but I don't like to really sit around and watch TV.

How old are you?

58.

What's your occupation?

Retired policeman.

What salary bracket are you in?

Between 40-65k.

Interview 8 (Liz, 50, Hotel Manager)

Ok, I am here with Liz today. Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

The camaraderie, the entertainment and the fun.

How did you end up at this sports club?

I found it at the Kansas City Chiefs' web site.

How did you get involved with the Chiefs fan club in Fort Myers?

I just happened to run across it. I walked in on them. I went randomly to the bar one day and noticed that there were a lot of Chiefs' fans there.

How long have you been coming?

Probably 5 years.

How do you normally get information from the fan club?

Dana. She normally E-mails information out.

Do you prefer to get information through E-mails or normal mail?

E-mail.

How often do you seek information on the Chiefs?

Actually, my sons keep me updated. They know all the latest information because they follow the team religiously. And then they tell me what's going on.

Do you use the Internet to follow the team at all?

I actually have the NFL Network downloaded on my phone. I was just looking at it now!

Did that give you scores, or what did that give you?

Play by play, or radio. If I'm not watching it, I can plug in and listen to what's happening.

Would you say you use the phone the most to follow the Chiefs?

Yes.

Do you ever use the Kansas City Chiefs' Web site?

I have before. Not this year?

Not regularly?

No.

Do you ever read or participate on message boards?

No.

Do you read the hometown sports section online?

No.

Do you trust online news?

Yes.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you?

Well, of course. I'm a fan so I don't really want to see any negativity about my team.

Does it make you angry?

No, it doesn't make me angry. It raises my blood pressure! But it doesn't tear me up.

Do you ever use social media to connect with other fans?

No.

Do you ever listen to sports talk on the radio?

Yes.

What kind of stations?

I'm not sure what stations they are, I just turn my dial and when I find it, I keep it on there.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

No.

Can you connect with fans better in person or online?

In person.

Why?

Because they are in front of me. I don't really use the Internet all that much to be honest with you, I just use it to basically check E-mail. When I get to come to the fan club, it's great, because I can sit here and enjoy the games with other fans.

How do you communicate with other fan club members?

Talking.

Does your media use change before, during, or after the season?

No.

Do you find that you're more active during or after the season?

As far as football goes, only during the season. That's basically the only time that I'm watching ESPN. Only during the football season.

Do you follow the draft?

My sons do and we make it a big party day.

Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?

Yes.

Are there broadcasters that you are more inclined to believe than others?

No, I like them all about the same. I think they are all very knowledgeable, you may not agree with everything that they say, but I believe them all the same.

Do you ever watch classic games on television or DVD?

I have. It's not frequent, but I do on occasion.

These next questions are for demographic purposes, and you don't have to answer.

How old are you?

50.

What's your occupation?

I'm a hotel manager.

What salary bracket are you in?

40-50k.

Interview 9 (John, 38, Engineer)

OK, I am here with John today. Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

For the camaraderie, for the excitement, to be together with a group, to get a little more fun out of the occasion. And to find a place to be together and watch it in person. Watching it live with fans is different than watching it at home or reading about it.

What brought you to this sports club?

Access to different things about my team, and things like that. I can read about it or watch it online, but I'm not that far from the stadium so I can drive down and watch a game if I want to.

How do you get information from the fan club, do you get E-mails or newsletters?

I get information in all sorts of ways. Sometimes from their Web site. I once even saw something in the local paper about it. Dana will send an E-mail out sometimes about something special, whether it's a particular game, or a birthday.

How often do you seek information on your team, is it year round?

Not necessarily year round, but football is only played in the fall, so I just watch it during the fall season.

So once the season ends, you're done seeking information on the Chiefs?

Yes, but I don't know if I would define it as seeking, you know, if I find an article in the paper I'll read it. The important notices in the paper I'll follow, like a change in personnel or something. I don't go looking for it necessarily.

Do you use the Internet to follow your team?

Sometimes, but it depends on where I'm at, what's going on.

What sites do you go to?

Sometimes ESPN. I like the Fox Sports Network which I get through MSN.com.

Do you ever go to Kansas City Chiefs.com?

No, not really, unless I need to see the schedule really quick, I go there. Typically, all that major stuff is on FOX as well.

Ever read the Kansas City Star?

Sometimes I read it for general information about the team.

Do you read or participate on message boards?

No, I don't do any of that stuff.

Do you trust online news?

What do you meant trust?

Do you believe everything you read?

No.

How do you decide which information to trust?

Well, I see how sensational it is, have I heard any other input from other sources? I never go strictly be the written word.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you?

No, I'm not hardcore like some fans are. I didn't grow up in Kansas City, I just live and work there.

Do you use social media?

No. I'm not the social type where I need to tell a lot of people things.

Do you listen to sports talk radio?

Very rarely. It just depends on the situation. I don't go looking for it, nor do I have a set station.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

No.

Can you connect with fans better in person or online?

Probably in person or on the phone.

Why is that?

Because it's too impersonal online. I like to hear their voice. Online is very impersonal.

Do you ever follow Internet updates while watching the games on broadcast television?

No, not particularly. I mean, once in a while I'll watch a game online because it's not broadcast, so you'll get the benefit of the scores popping up. Just like when you watch ESPN, you'll see the banner on the bottom.

What's the number one way that you stay up to date on your team?

I guess the newspaper. Because it comes in the morning, I can go home at lunch and read it.

How do you communicate with other fan club members? Do you E-mail stories or pictures?

No. I just take advantage of the sports club for the specials and deals.

So one game day would be the only time that you really connect with them?

Yeah, probably. If at all. Unless I had a buddy who was a fan.

Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?

You mean, do I have a favorite announcer?

Yeah, I mean, do you pay attention to them?

I mean, when I watch the games I'll pay attention. There are a few of them that I like and dislike.

Do the things they say ever make you angry?

No, not really. I don't care.

Do you ever watch classic games on television or DVD?

Once in a while. If I come across it on the television I'll watch it. I only have regular cable, so they don't really play it all that often.

The next few questions are for demographic purposes. You don't have to answer them. How old are you?

38.

What's your occupation?

Electrical engineer.

What salary bracket are you in?

45-65k.

Interview 10 (Paul, 41, Unemployed)

I'm here with Paul. Why do you think people gather to watch football together?

I think for the camaraderie. You know, the regular fans that come out here like to participate with others from their city.

Are you from the Kansas City area?

I am from Kansas City and have been here for three years. I found out about the Chiefs' club down here and it's great.

How did you find out about the club?

Actually, I came in here to visit the restaurant and found out it was a KC Chiefs' fan club. I was super excited when I found out!

How do you get information from the fan club?

Through my E-mail. Dana, our director, has a KC Chiefs' Web site and gives us regular updates every week, and you also know how many people have been on there.

Does she send out an E-mail every week?

Yes, every week.

Do you get E-mail updates during the offseason or just during the season?

Offseason too. She'll send out updates like it the Chiefs acquired a certain free agent. And maybe once or twice in the summer time.

How often do you seek out information on the Chiefs, is it year round?

I actually get on Sports Radio 810. I did a sports internship when I was at Kansas City University five years ago in Kansas City, so I get on sports810.com everyday here in Florida.

Do you ever go on the Kansas City Chiefs' Web site?

Yes. Everyday.

What about the hometown newspaper, the KC Star?

The KC Star, I'll check that out about once a week.

Do you read or participate on message boards?

No.

Do you trust online news?

Pretty much. From what I see so far I do.

How do you gauge what information to trust and what information to push aside?

With my own inner judgment. If it seems preposterous, I don't trust it.

Do negative news stories about your team affect you?

Yes, but if they're true, then I want the truth.

Do you ever use social media to connect with other fans?

No. I know a couple of friends that do that, but personally, I do not.

Do you participate in fantasy football?

Not down here in Florida, but when I lived in Kansas City I did.

Can you connect with fans better in person or online? Why?

Because it's face to face. You know, it's the reality, the emotion. That's why I come to this Chiefs' fan club.

Do you ever follow Internet updates while you watch the games?

If I was at home and the Chiefs' game wasn't on, I would, but obviously, being here I do not have the Internet.

How do you connect with other fans in this fan club? Do you E-mail?

I get E-mails from other members, but I do not personally E-mail.

Do you ever E-mail stories or pictures?

No, to tell you the truth, I'm not that computer savvy.

Do you pay attention to the announcers during the game?

Yes.

Are there broadcasters that you're more inclined to believe than others?

Oh yes. Definitely. Do you want an example? Dan Dierdorf. He definitely doesn't like the Chiefs. He always has something negative to say about them, no matter what year it is. I don't know if he has an axe to grind against them, but he always says something bad.

Do you ever watch classic games on TV or DVD?

I have before. I'll put on old highlights of the Chiefs when we won in overtime, back when we were on Monday Night Football. But we haven't been on Monday Night Football in the last four years.

How old are you?

41.

What's your occupation?

Unemployed.

What's your salary bracket?

I'd say 45k.