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Just do it: Sport apparel branding on Twitter

By

Kelsey Slater

A Thesis
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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science
in Kinesiology (Sport Administration)
in the College of Education

Mississippi State, Mississippi

May 2018

Just do it: Sport apparel branding on Twitter

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Collegiate athletic departments are experiencing large financial growth in part to their relationships with sport apparel brands. The big three apparel companies of Nike, adidas, and Under Armour control all athletic department apparel contracts within the Power 5 conferences. This study examined what benefits apparel companies receive from their connection to collegiate basketball teams by analyzing the frequency and use of the brand name and brand hashtag on Twitter by fans of fifteen collegiate sport organizations. Through the lens of the social capital theory, the researcher found a limited connection between the sport apparel brands and the individual basketball teams. The finding suggested that sport apparel brands need to develop a new social media strategy in order to better connect with the collegiate basketball fans in an online environment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

College athletic departments are making more money than ever before thanks to factors including television contracts, donations from boosters and endorsement deals which include apparel contracts (Hobson & Rich, 2015). Of the three biggest sport apparel companies in the United States (i.e., Nike, adidas, and Under Armour), Nike has 44 of the 65 apparel contracts with universities in the Power Five conferences, including three of the largest contracts: Ohio State which has a 15-year contract worth $16.8 million per year, Texas (15 years, $16.67 million per year) and Michigan (11 years, $15.73 per year). However, Under Armour has the largest contract in collegiate athletics, a 15-year agreement with UCLA worth $18.67 a year (Schwerman, 2017). Under Armour paid a premium price for the UCLA contract in order to break into the West Coast market, which is an important factor for apparel companies when they reach agreements with universities (Wharton, 2016). These apparel companies spend tens of millions of dollars on college athletics for multiple reasons including merchandising and marketing opportunities. This includes exposure on television and social media especially during nationally broadcast football and basketball games during which millions of people have the opportunity to see their brand (Butler-Young, 2016). In addition, the increased use of social media has given brands the opportunity to forge more direct relationships with their customers (Holt, 2016).

While athletes, sport organizations and brands choose to use many different forms of social media, Twitter has become the dominant platform for use in sports (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson, 2011). In addition, scholars have examined the relationship between brands and consumers on social media (Eun, Sook & Yongjun, 2011; Kim, Sung & Kang, 2014; Liu, Burns & Hou, 2017). Do, Ko, and Woodside (2015) specifically examined the apparel brand Nike to analyze the effect of brand-related sport sponsorship via social media on the quality of the brand-consumer relationship. They found that the brand can improve its image through sport sponsorship on social media by directly engaging with consumers in order to increase consumer involvement with the brand's products (Do et al., 2015). With sport apparel brands spending large amounts of money to associate with college athletic departments, those brands are thus also purchasing the ability to build a relationship with the fans of the college sports team (Butler-Young, 2016). Different brands communicate different messages and values on Twitter, and researchers have suggested examining how fans of the brands utilize Twitter (Lee & Kahle, 2016).

An important aspect of Twitter use is the hashtag, which is a way for Twitter users to tag content and gain membership into an online community (Yang, Sun, Zhang & Mei, 2012). Hashtags are important for brands, and when they are successful they can be pivotal for the brand recognition for the company (Hennessey, 2016). Nike has successfully used the hashtag, #justdoit, and many Twitter users mention the hashtag when they tweet photos of their workout exploits while wearing Nike shoes and apparel (Hennessey, 2016). Scholars have examined hashtag use during major sporting events such as the Olympic Games, collegiate national championships, the World Series and the

French Open (Blaszka, Burch, Frederick, Clavio & Walsh, 2012; Delia & Armstrong, 2015; Hambrick & Pegoraro, 2014; Smith & Smith, 2012). Delia and Armstrong (2015) examined Twitter use to discuss sponsors of the French open and discovered that the sponsors were mentioned in less than 1% of tweets that mentioned the hashtag #FrenchOpen. Based on that result, it is important to examine further whether the sponsorship of an event or sports team can lead to increase mentions or discussion on social media.

Nike, adidas, and Under Armour spend tens of millions of dollars every year to be associated with university athletic departments (Schwerman, 2017). Through that financial commitment, the sport apparel brands are attempting to connect to the university community including the fans of the collegiate basketball programs. This research is looking to answer whether fans of the sport brands are using the brand's hashtag when posting about the affiliated collegiate basketball program on Twitter. For the purpose of this study, the use of social media represents fan interest. Scholars have used Twitter Followers or Facebook Likes to indicate consumer interest in an athlete or sport product (Jensen, Ervin, and Dittmore, 2014; Perez, 2013; Watanabe, Yan, and Soebbing, 2015). In addition, scholars found that athletes who used Twitter to engage with followers, the online conversation simulated a real social relationship (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012). Therefore, it is appropriate for the current study to use Twitter to indicate consumer interest because when users choose to follow or like a page they are demonstrating that they are looking for more information about the sport product. In addition, this research will examine whether the online conversations vary based on different brands. This study will expand on the research of Lee and Kahle

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(2016) who performed a content analysis of the four largest sport apparel brands to determine the values and emotions that the brands express on Twitter. The scholars determined that the brands expressed different messages on Twitter, and this research will evaluate if the fans follow that pattern when tweeting about the different brands.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this review of literature is to examine the networks of Twitter users and sport apparel brands through the lens of social capital. Additionally, this review will discuss the growth and use of Twitter as a social media platform in the sports field. This review will explore the use of hashtags on Twitter and in regard to sports teams and events. In addition, this review will examine social capital in its role in the sports field and how social capital is developed online. Lastly, this review will analyze how brand relationships are formed on Twitter including how the brands interact with fans.

Twitter and Sport

Social media including Twitter developed as part of Web 2.0 (DiNucci, 1999). Web 1.0 was based on the website creator adding content with the desired outcome of people visiting the site and simply reading the posted content (Pegoraro, 2010). Web 2.0 focused on a user-based interface in which individuals create and share content. The phrase Web 2.0 was coined by DiNucci (1999) who said, "The web will be understood not as screenfuls of text and graphics but as a transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens" (p. 32). The evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 occurred concurrently with the rise of social media as the new platforms facilitated a new type of

human connection that was not found in other web-based media (Ovadia, 2009). Twitter is one of those platforms, and currently has 330 million users (Statista, 2018).

Athletes and sports teams are drawn to social media because they can easily foster connections with their fans (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson, 2011). Fans enjoy using social media, Twitter in particular, because it provides the perception that they possess a direct line to celebrities and athletes (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Hambrick et al., 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk 2012; Pegoraro, 2010; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012;). This direct line of contact is created when a Twitter user signs up for a free account and then chooses specific individuals to "follow." By following a specific Twitter user, one can access their posts, known as "tweets," and can respond or interact accordingly through retweeting, liking, or replying to individual tweets (Ovadia, 2009; Pegoraro, 2010). As described by Clavio (2011), previous literature focused on two main areas including content-based research and audience-based research.

Content-based studies focused on the information that is produced by the teams, athletes and sports media (Clavio, 2011). For example, many previous content-based studies examined how athletes use Twitter (Coche, 2014; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, Pedersen, & Burch, 2014; Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk 2012; Pegoraro 2010). This line of research found that athletes primarily use Twitter as a direct line to their fans, as opposed to having their messages disseminated – and possibly, filtered - by traditional public relations and media outlets (Hambrick et al., 2010). A noteworthy quality of Twitter is the concept of perceived authenticity. This idea is defined as the belief that a Twitter account is controlled directly by the person as

opposed to a third party. This question is dependent on that idea where the athletes themselves are posting on Twitter. Popular media has found that athletes prefer to be purists and choose to control their own accounts and message (Cohen, 2009). Audience-based research has examined the factors that will influence social media consumption, including characteristics, demographics, and gratifications (Clavio, 2011). Clavio and Kian (2010) performed an audience-based inquiry by studying the Twitter followers of a retired female athlete and found that the audience was predominantly caucasian, educated and wealthy. In addition, the scholars discovered that the audience chose to follow this athlete because they believed the athlete was an expert in the sport (Clavio & Kian, 2010). Many of these studies rely on the concept that social media use represents fan interest, as Twitter Followers or Facebook Likes have been used to indicate consumer interest in an athlete or sport product (Jensen et al., 2014; Perez, 2013; Watanabe et al., 2015). This concept is important for measuring how consumers interact with brands on Twitter.

Hashtag Use

An important part of interaction on Twitter is the use of the hashtag. Kwan, Lee, Park and Moon (2010) defined the hashtag as a way for Twitter users "to create and follow a thread of discussion by prefixing a word with a '#' character" (p. 592). Motivations for using hashtags vary between Twitter users, but Efron (2011) identified multiple benefits of using hashtags including increasing topical access to tweets so that Twitter users can follow tags and find groups of people discussing topics they are interested in and easily filter information. Researchers also found that hashtags serve as a way for users to both tag content and gain membership into an online community by

joining with other users who are communicating about the same topic (Yang, Sun, Zhang & Mei, 2012).

Researchers have examined how hashtags have been used in relationship to sports teams and events (Blaszka et al., 2012; Delia & Armstrong, 2015; Hambrick & Pegoraro, 2014; Smith & Smith, 2012). Blaszka et al. (2012) found that individuals who used #WorldSeries did so in order to express fanship. Smith and Smith (2012) examined the use of hashtags during the finals of the 2012 College World Series. The researchers determined that there were five main hashtags that were used from each team in conjunction with the popular #CWS hashtag, some of the hashtags were officially related to the school while others were created by users (Smith & Smith, 2012). The study determined that the use of the hashtag #CWS created a virtual environment that pulled together a particular audience, which connects fans through the use of the team-specific hashtags or recognizes opposing fans (Smith & Smith, 2012). A study surrounding the 2014 Sochi Winter Games examined three social networks within Twitter that formed around the hashtags #CheersToSochi, #WeAreWinter and #SochiProblems. The scholars used social network analyses to determine the similarities and differences between the three networks (Hambrick & Pegoraro, 2014). The researchers found that all of the observed networks experienced growth, however one of the networks was comparatively smaller than the other two networks. The scholars also noted that users with both large and small numbers of followers received substantial retweets, showing that users both large and small could influence the network (Hambrick & Pegoraro, 2014).

Delia and Armstrong (2015) examined the mentioning of sponsors on Twitter in conjunction with the hashtag, #FrenchOpen during the 2013 French Open tennis

tournament. The researchers found that the hashtag for the tournament was used almost 300,000 times, but the 22 sponsors were only mentioned a total of 1,138 times including only 22 posts originating from the sponsor's Twitter accounts. The researchers opined that due to the low number of sponsor related tweets during the tournament, if the sponsors want to generate more social media conversation the sponsors must consider strategies for increasing that conversation (Delia & Armstrong, 2015).

Social Capital

The concept of social capital has existed from the time of early philosophers, but has become modernized by sociologists in order to relate to more contemporary situations including the relationships between people within groups. Bourdieu (1986) described social capital as the actual or potential resources that a person or entity can gain due to membership within a group. Therefore, the amount of social capital controlled by an actor is dependent on the number of connections that the actor has, and the connections that the members of the actor's network possesses (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman (1988) identified three forms of social capital: obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms. Obligations and expectations is the concept that if an individual fulfills and obligation to another individual, the second individual has the expectation to reciprocate the original action. Information channels are the way that information is passed through the social structure and how that information will result in action. Social norms are defined as the rules of a group of people that facilitate certain actions as well as limiting other actions (Coleman, 1988). Through these forms, social capital can produce activity in which actors use the social structure to achieve goals or fulfill interests (Coleman, 1988). Nahapiet and Ghosha (1998) identified three different

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dimensions within social capital: structure, relational and cognitive. Structure dimensions relate to the network ties and the network organization, and how information flows through the network. Relational dimensions include concepts such as trust, obligations and norms. Cognitive dimensions related to the shared narratives of people within the same network (Nahapiet & Ghosha, 1998). Quan-Haase and Wellman (2004) researched how the internet affects social capital and hypothesized that the internet will contribute new forms of communication and interaction. Those new forms of interaction include social media. Due to social media, the structural dimensions of networks have changed. This includes how information moves through the network, and how relationships form.

Studies have examined how social media affects social capital (Chang & Zhu, 2012; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Jun, Kim & Lang, 2017; Lin & Lu, 2011; Nam, Kim, Kwon, 2016; Sajuria et al., 2015; Yen, 2016). Ellison et al. (2007) found that there is a positive relationship between Facebook use and the establishment and continuance of social capital. The existence of the online community does not eliminate the offline networks, but it may support relationships that are altered by distance (Ellison et al., 2007). Lin & Lu (2011) used the framework of Nahapiet and Ghosha (1998) and found that the three dimensions of social capital can influence the continued use of Facebook fan pages. Sajuria, vanHeerde-Hudson, Hudson, Dasandi, and Theocharis, (2015) studied online social capital on Twitter and found evidence that indicated social capital can be formed online by bringing together like-minded people through the sharing of information. However, the researchers did not examine whether the content of the tweets and the connections between users could build trust and norms which could provide evidence for the building of social capital in an online environment (Sajuria et al., 2015).

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Scholars have applied this framework to determine the relationship of sport to social capital.

The existing literature of the relationship between sport and social capital pertains primarily to how sport contributes to social ties, the connection between social capital and sport participation, and the role of sport in a community (Geoff, Richard & Allison, 2012; Jarvie, 2003; Perks, 2007; Widdop, Cutts & Jarvie, 2016). There is a positive correlation between participation in sport and sustaining a community and strengthening social ties (Jarvie, 2003; Perks, 2007). Jarvie (2003) found that youth sport participation let to high involvement within the community as an adult. Phua (2012) studied the use of Facebook by football fans and found that the online experience is enhanced through the use of social media in terms of social capital. The sample of fans mostly formed weak ties with fans of the same team, but concurrently expanded their social network through new connections, this increased the potential for social capital through the expansion of information channels. In addition, Widdop et al., (2016) found that additional research regarding social networks is important to further understand the relationship between sport and social capital. In addition to the need to use the network perspective to examine sport and social capital, there has been limited research on sport business and brands and its relationship to social capital (Spaaij & Westerbeek, 2010). The researchers examined how sport businesses can utilize consumer social responsibility activities in order to produce social capital. They found that the social capital produced is largely determined by the business objectives of the organization and the network that the business is a part of (Spaaij & Westerbeek, 2010).

Brand Relationships on Twitter

The rise of social media has allowed companies to forge relationships directly with their customers (Holt, 2016). Eun, et al. (2011) found that Twitter is used by brands to establish and maintain relationships with consumers. Kim, et al. (2014) determined that the closer the relationship the followers of brands have with the brand, the more likely they are to retweet brand tweets. In addition, as consumers engage with these brands on social networking sites such as Twitter, they create a large amount of data regarding their experiences with the brand and the brand's products (Liu et al., 2017). The scholars found that people were more than three times more likely to express negative sentiments than to compliment the brands (Liu et al., 2017). However, in the same study, Liu, et al. (2017) noted that compared to the other industries examined, sport footwear brands had the highest number of positive and neutral tweets. In addition to the research regarding general brand relationships, there have been numerous studies that have explored the value of social media marketing for athletes, sport organizations and sports products on Twitter (Brison, Byon, & Baker, 2016; Do et al., 2015; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, & Chadwick, 2015; Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, & Chadwick, 2017; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012; Sukjoon, Petrick & Backman, 2017; Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, & Blaszka, 2013; Watkins & Lee, 2016). However, scholars have examined social media marketing from different perspectives.

Scholars have researched the value of social media marketing and branding on Twitter from the perspective of the professional athlete (Brison et al., 2016; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). Studies found that online social networks create an opportunity for professional athletes to endorse a variety of products and by

sprinkling the promotional messages amongst the athlete's personal messages will make the advertising more genuine (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). Brison et al. (2016) found that an athlete endorsement can have a positive effect on an unfamiliar brand, thus supporting the concept that consumer attitudes can be affected by social media (Brison et al., 2016).

There have also been studies examining fan perception of a sport organization's brand on social media (Parganas et al., 2015; Parganas et al., 2017; Sukjoon et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2013; Watkins & Lee, 2016). Sport organizations rely on branding in order to have positive perception in the minds of their fans and potential fans. Parganas et al. (2015) found that fans were more likely to interact with the sport organization's Twitter feed when discussing the product-related attributes of the brand. Product attributes refer to core products of the team, including the sporting event and players, and research can determine what types of tweets will increase engagement with the consumers of the sport products (Parganas et al., 2015). Watkins and Lee (2016) evaluated the Twitter and Instagram feeds of a large southern U.S. university athletic program and found that Twitter was used to connect with fans while Instagram is better suited for creating brand associations due to its status as a visual based media. These findings were further supported by Sukjoon et al. (2017), who found that Twitter is important for university athletic departments in order to establish and foster relationships between their teams and fans. These studies all noted that the relationship with consumers will encourage continued engagement on Twitter and other social media outlets (Parganas et al., 2015; Parganas et al., 2017; Sukjoon et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2013; Watkins & Lee, 2016).

However, few studies have applied this research approach to how sport apparel brands use Twitter.

Scholars used the apparel brand Nike as a case study to examine the effect of brand sport sponsorship via social media on the quality of the brand-consumer relationship (Do et al., 2015). They found that the brand can improve its image through sport-sponsorship via social media use by directly engaging with consumers in order to increase consumer involvement with the brand's products (Do et al., 2015). The researchers suggest that companies should use social media to engage consumers in genuine interaction which could lead to increased involvement and positive brand-consumer relationships (Do et al., 2015). Lee and Kahle (2016) performed a content analysis of the four largest sport apparel brands to determine the values and emotions that the brands express on Twitter. The researchers found that Nike was most likely to tweet about accomplishment, and tweeted about that value more than any brand or sport organization in the study (Lee & Kahle, 2016). By contrast, adidas tweeted about the value of fun and enjoyment in association with its brand (Lee & Kahle, 2016). The brands communicate different messages and values on Twitter, and the researchers suggested that future research examine how fans of the brands tweet (Lee & Kahle, 2016). Based on the previous research and the goals of this study the following research questions were developed:

Research Questions

RQ1: Do fans of college basketball teams tweet using the corresponding brand's
hashtags?

RQ2: Are certain brand hashtags more popular than others?

RQ3: How do the conversations of different brands vary

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research will consist of a content analysis of data collected during a 14-day period from the social media platform Twitter. Similar to the study performed by Lee and Kahle (2016) which evaluated sport apparel brands' use of Twitter in terms of social media content the brands produced, this study will examine how fans interact with the brand on Twitter, and how they use the brand hashtags in relation to college basketball teams.

Among sport apparel brands, adidas and Nike have the largest U.S. market share, with adidas surpassing the Air Jordan brand to become the second best-selling footwear behind Nike in the U.S. (La Monica, 2017). Nike and adidas are also featured on the Forbes Global 2000, which measures the world's most valuable public companies. In the most recent listing, Nike was ranked the second-most valuable apparel company only behind Christian Dior (Williams, 2017). Recently, adidas has been gaining ground on Nike, almost doubling its previous market share in the U.S. market from 6.6% to 11.3% while Nike fell from 39% to 37% (Morgan, 2017). This increase in U.S. market share from adidas is part of the reason why Under Armour's North America sales were down 12 percent for the last fiscal quarter (Thomas, 2017).

One of the biggest markets for sport apparel companies is in the field of collegiate sports, with companies willing to invest large amounts. For example, Nike entered a $252 million/15-year contract with the Ohio State University, and Under Armour signed the University of Notre Dame to a 10-year contract for more than $90 million (Bulter-Young, 2016). In addition to the market value of Nike, adidas, and Under Armour and the impact on the professional and collegiate sports community, the three brands also each have a substantial following on Twitter (Twitter, 2017).

Among sport apparel brands, Nike has the most followers with more than 7 million, followed by Nike-owned Jordan brand with 3.4 million, NikeFootball with 3.3 million then adidas with 3.2 million followers. The brands also have sport-specific and accounts which have millions of followers on their own. The most popular for Nike is @nikefootball (American football) while adidas' is @adidasfootball (soccer); both have more than 3 million followers. The only non-Nike or adidas account in the top ten among sporting goods brands is Puma. Under Armour is 13th on the list with just under 1 million followers, however if sport specific accounts of Nike and adidas were removed from the list, Under Armour would be fifth overall (twittercounter.com, 2017).

Units of Analysis

The units of analysis included Twitter data surrounding three major sport apparel brands of Nike, adidas and Under Armour, and five of the universities that each brand sponsors. The 15 universities selected all have significance in collegiate basketball, and data was gathered in the early part of the 2017-18 conference season. The five Nike universities include the University of Kentucky (UK), Duke University (Duke), University of North Carolina (UNC), University of Connecticut (UConn) and Michigan

State University (MSU). UNC was selected because it is the reigning 2017 champion and has the most Final Four NCAA tournament appearances in history. Duke was selected because it was the champion in 2015, and has five total NCAA championships. UK was the 2012 NCAA champion, and is second on the all-time list for NCAA championships with eight (allbrackets.com, 2017). In addition, UK has won the past three Southeastern Conference (SEC) championships (secsports.com, 2017). MSU has reached the Final Four in 2010 and 2015, and won the 2000 NCAA tournament (allbrackets.com, 2017). MSU has also won the most Big Ten men's basketball tournament championships with five since the conference added a tournament in 1998, with MSU's most recent win coming in 2016 (bigten.org, 2017). UConn won the 2011 and 2014 men's NCAA championships, and the Huskies' women's basketball team won four consecutive national titles from 2012-2016 and had a 111-game win streak from 2015-2017, the longest in NCAA basketball history (Chiusano, 2017).

The five adidas universities included the University of Kansas (KU), University of Louisville (UL), Indiana University (IU), Mississippi State University (MSST), and University of Miami (Miami). KU won the national championship most recently in 2008 to bring its total up to three NCAA championships, and the Jayhawks were also the runner-up in 2012. UL won the championship in 2013 (allbrackets.com, 2017) and signed a $160 million contract with adidas in 2017, which is the fourth most lucrative apparel deal in collegiate athletics (Chiari, 2017). IU has had a historically strong basketball program with five NCAA championships. Miami has reached the Sweet Sixteen three times and won the Atlantic Coast Conference in 2013 (coachesdatabase.com, 2017), and Miami was also the first university to sign and all-sports contract with an apparel

company (Muzenrieder, 2015). MSST made its mark on NCAA basketball with the women's team making their first NCAA final in 2017 by snapping the 111-win streak of UConn (Chiusano, 2017). In addition, Miami and UL were both mentioned in an FBI investigation in a corruption scandal regarding adidas and prominent Adidas-sponsored collegiate athletic programs (Tracy, 2017).

The five Under Armour universities included the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), University of Wisconsin (UW), University of Maryland (UM), University of Notre Dame (ND), and University of South Carolina (SC). UCLA has the record for the most NCAA tournament titles with 11, including seven consecutive titles from 1967 to 1973. UW has had success in recent years with a Final Four appearance in 2014 and a runner-up finish in 2015 (allbrackets.com). ND made consecutive Elite Eights in 2015 and 2016 (Litman, 2017). UM won an NCAA championship in 2002 (allbrackets.com, 2017), and UM is also the flagship athletic program for Under Armour, as Under Armour founder and CEO Kevin Plank is a UM graduate and former UM student athlete (Tracy, 2015). South Carolina's men's basketball team won its first NCAA tournament game since 1973 en route to the Final Four in 2017 (Rutherford, 2017). In addition, the SC women's basketball team was the 2017 NCAA champion (Goldberg, 2017).

Data Gathering

The researcher used Tweet Archivist to collect the data from Twitter using different search queries, then performed a content analysis on emerging trends within the Twitter data. Tweet Archivist is a Twitter analytics software that pulls tweets from Twitter based on search queries. The software polls Twitter once an hour, continuously

updating the archive for a period of time set by the researcher. Each archive can be downloaded to an Adobe PDF or Microsoft Excel file that includes the Tweet content, the individual's username, universal date and time stamp and any media content included in the tweet (Billings, Burch & Zimmerman, 2015). Many previous studies have used content analysis to discover trends in Twitter data (Clavio, 2010; Hambrick et al., 2010; Lee and Kahle, 2016). Multiple search queries will be used to determine if the sports brands are mentioned in conjunction with the handles and hashtags associated with the universities they sponsor. Previous studies have examined the use of hashtags in relation to sport organizations and events (Blaszka et al., 2012; Delia & Armstrong, 2015; Smith & Smith, 2012).

First, the researcher performed individual queries to determine the frequency of use of the brand hashtags, basketball team Twitter handle, university athletic department hashtag, and the basketball team specific hashtag independent of other variables. The researcher then searched the six main queries to examine tweets mentioning the *basketball team handle with the brand hashtag*, *the basketball team handle with brand name*, *university athletic department hashtag with brand hashtag*, *university athletic department hashtag with brand name*, *basketball team specific hashtag with brand hashtag*, and *basketball team specific hashtag with brand name*. The brand hashtags that were used are the current hashtags based on the current Twitter account information. For Nike the brand hashtag is *#JustDoIt*, the adidas brand hashtag is *#HereToCreate* and the brand Under Armour is *#WEWILL* (Twitter, 2018). All of the selected basketball teams have their own Twitter feeds; however, not every basketball team has a unique hashtag mentioned on their Twitter feed, as some only use the athletic department featured

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hashtag, and an example is MSST, which ubiquitously uses the hashtag #hailstate for all sports. These different queries examined the types of conversations about sport brands regarding collegiate basketball and the data was collected during the period of January 15, 2018 to January 28, 2018 when all of the teams played conference opponents and all teams but one played in four games.

Statistical Analysis

The researcher used SPSS statistical software to perform independent t-tests in order to determine if the difference between using the brand name versus the use of the brand's hashtag is statistically significant for each university. In addition, the researcher used an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the differences between the use of the different brands and its hashtags. The researcher used SPSS to determine if there is a correlation between the total number of tweets and the number of tweets that mention the brand. The researcher also used SPSS to determine if there is a correlation between the conversations about each brand. Using independent t-tests was appropriate because the units of analysis are not dependent on each other. In addition, ANOVA was an appropriate method of analysis for comparing hashtag use between the different brands because there are multiple independent variables. Correlations are also appropriate to determine if there was a relationship between the different variables. (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2015).

Pilot Study

At the start of the college basketball nonconference season in November 2017, the researcher performed a pilot study examining tweets related to the five Nike schools over

a period of three days. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine whether the team hashtags, brand hashtags, and team specific Twitter handles are used and if there is data. Using Tweet Archivist, Twitter was polled after the researcher inputted six queries for each of the five teams and also 15 queries that included the individual team hashtags, team Twitter handles, brand hashtag and team specific hashtag (Table 1). The collected data from the individual queries showed that there is considerable use of the hashtags and Twitter handles with nine of the individual queries having more than 100 mentions on Twitter in the three-day period (Table 1).

Table 1　　　　*List of Queries and Number of Collected Tweets*

Query	Collected Tweets	Query	Collected Tweets
#SpartanDawg	56	@DukeMBB	6282
#SpartanDawg *Nike*	0	@DukeMBB Nike	2
#SpartanDawg #JustDoIt	0	@DukeMBB #JustDoIt	0
@MSU_Basketball	811	#GoDuke	873
@MSU_Basketball Nike	30	#GoDuke Nike	0
@MSU_Basketball #JustDoIt	0	#GoDuke #JustDoIt	0
#GoGreen	2871	#GoHeels	1814
#GoGreen Nike	0	#GoHeels Nike	0
#GoGreen #JustDoIt	2	#GoHeels #JustDoIt	0
#BBN	4247	@UNC_Basketball	1332
#BBN Nike	3	@UNC_Basketball Nike	1
#BBN #JustDoIt	0	@UNC_Basketball #JustDoIt	0
@KentuckyMBB	2099	#CarolinaSZN	883
@KentuckyMBB Nike	1	#CarolinaSZN Nike	0
@KentuckeyMBB #JustDoIt	0	#CarolinaSZN #JustDoIt	0
#EmbraceTheBattle	14	#UConnNation	1378
#EmbraceTheBattle Nike	0	#UConnNation Nike	0
#EmbraceTheBattle #JustDoIt	0	#UConnNation #JustDoIt	0
#HereComesDuke	1160	@UConnMBB	248
#HereComesDuke Nike	0	@UConnMBB Nike	2
#HereComesDuke #JustDoIt	0	@UConnMBB #JustDoIt	0
#JustDoIt	1704		

Although there is a small number of tweets that use both the basketball team and the

brand, there was a difference between the frequency of the use of the hashtag versus the

use of the brand name. From the content analysis of the collected tweets, the most

common trends within the six queries included discussion of branded uniforms,

individual player statistics, and merchandise (Table 2).

Table 2   *Content Analysis of Tweets by Query*

Query	Branded Uniforms	Individual Player Statistics	Mechandise	Other	Total Collected Tweets
"#SpartanDawg" & "Nike"	0	0	0	0	0
"#SpartanDawg" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"@MSU_Basketball" & "Nike	30	0	0	0	30
"@MSU_Basketball" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"#GoGreen" & "Nike"	0	0	0	0	0
"#GoGreen" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	2	2
"#BBN" & "Nike"	0	0	1	2	3
"#BBN" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"@KentuckyMBB" & "Nike"	0	1	0	0	1
"@KentuckyMBB" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"#EmbraceTheBattle" & "Nike"	0	0	0	0	0
"#EmbraceTheBattle" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"#HereComesDuke" & "Nike"	0	0	0	0	0
"#HereComesDuke" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"@DukeMBB" & "Nike"	0	2	0	0	2
"@DukeMBB" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"#GoDuke" & "Nike"	0	0	0	0	0
"#GoDuke" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"#GoHeels" & "Nike"	0	0	0	0	0
"#GoHeels" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"@UNC_Basketball" & "Nike"	0	0	0	1	1
"@UNC_Basketball" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"#CarolinaSZN" & "Nike"	0	0	0	0	0
"#CarolinaSZN" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"#UConnNation" & "Nike"	0	0	0	0	0
"#UConnNation" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
"@UConnMBB" & "Nike"	2	0	0	0	2
"@UConnMBB" & "#JustDoIt"	0	0	0	0	0
Total	32	3	1	5	41

However, due to the small sample size of the analyzed the tweets during the pilot study

the researcher anticipated additional trends to be discovered during the main study. The

pilot study additionally informed the researcher that the hashtags and Twitter handles are

used on Twitter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Use of Brand Hashtags

The mentions of sport apparel brand hashtags totaled 50,551 during the 14-day

period of data collection. There were 36,060 mentions of the adidas hashtag:

#HereToCreate, which was the most of any single recorded Twitter handle or hashtag

during the study. Nike's hashtag *#JustDoIt* was recorded 12,189 times, and Under

Armour's hashtag *#WeWill* was mentioned 2,302 times. The mentions of the basketball

team handles, athletic department hashtag and respective team-specific hashtags are

shown in Table 3.

Table 3   *Total Collected Tweets by Handle or Hashtag*

Under Armour Handles/Hashtags	Number of Tweets	adidas handles/hashtags	Number of Tweets	Nike Handles/Hashtags	Number of Tweets
@NDMBB	1608	@HailStateMBK	3192	@KentuckyMBB	28632
#NotDoneYet	1734	#hailstate	18267	#BBN	28520
#GoIrish	8644	@IndianaMBB	9198	#EmbraceTheBattle	5
@TerrapinHoops	3992	#GoIU	1038	@DukeMBB	35325
#FearTheTurtle	2242	#iubb	13720	#goduke	2989
@BadgerMBB	5021	@KUHoops	17720	#HereComesDuke	8452
#OnWisconsin	4311	#Kubball	22925	@UNC_Basketball	24152
#Badgers	9808	#RockChalk	6052	#goheels	6901
@GamecockMBB	10279	@LouisvilleMBB	4635	#CarolinaSZN	8494
#Gamecocks	17532	#GoCards	5178	@MSU_Basketball	7427
@UCLAMBB	2556	#L1C4	4657	#gogreen	22245
#GoBruins	5607	@CanesHoops	6261	#SpartanDawg	390
		#GoCanes	2203	@UConnMBB	1976
				#UConnNation	1884
Under Schools Armour Total	73334	Adidas Schools Total	115046	Nike Schools Total	177392

Between the 15 universities representing the three brands, 365,772 tweets were collected

(N = 365,772). Within the total collected tweets, only two tweets (<0.00001%) also

mentioned the sponsors hashtag, and both of those tweets mentioned the Nike-related

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hashtag *#JustDoIt*. Only 597 tweets (0.002%) mentioned the brand name. Both of sets of

tweets are shown in Table 4.

Table 4   *Total Collected Tweets including Brand Name or Brand Hashtag*

Twitter Queries Nike	Total Tweets	Twitter Queries adidas	Total Tweets	Twitter Queries Under Armour	Total Tweets
#BBN Nike	60	#RockChalk adidas	2	#Gamecocks Under Armour	0
#BBN #JustDoIt	1	#RockChalk #HereToCreate	0	#Gamecocks #WEWILL	0
@KentuckyMBB Nike	13	@KUHoops adidas	7	@GamecocksMBB Under Armour	0
@KentuckyMBB #JustDoIt	1	@KUHoops #HereToCreate	0	@GamecocksMBB #WEWILL	0
#EmbraceTheBattle Nike	0	#KUBball adidas	6	#GoBruins Under Armour	0
#EmbraceTheBattle #JustDoIt	0	#KUBball #HereToCreate	0	#GoBruins #WEWILL	0
#GoDuke Nike	1	#GoCards adidas	4	@UCLAMBB Under Armour	0
#GoDuke #JustDoIt	0	#GoCards #HereToCreate	0	@UCLAMBB #WEWILL	0
@DukeMBB Nike	17	@LouisvilleMBB adidas	1	#Badgers Under Armour	0
@DukeMBB #JustDoIt	0	@LouisvilleMBB #HereToCreate	0	#Badgers #WEWILL	0
#HereComesDuke Nike	1	#L1C4 adidas	2	@BadgerMBB Under Armour	0
#HereComesDuke #JustDoIt	0	#L1C4 #HereToCreate	0	@BadgerMBB #WEWILL	0
#GoHeels Nike	1	#GoIU adidas	0	#OnWisconsin Under Armour	0
#GoHeels #JustDoIt	0	#GoIU #HereToCreate	0	#OnWisconsin #WEWILL	0
@UNC_Basketball Nike	20	@IndianaMBB adidas	2	#FearTheTurtle Under Armour	0
@UNC_Basketball #JustDoIt	0	@IndianaMBB #HereToCreate	0	#FearTheTurtle #WEWILL	0
#CarolinaSZN Nike	2	#iubb adidas	3	@TerrapinHoops Under Armour	0
#CarolinaSZN #JustDoIt	0	#iubb #HereToCreate	0	@TerrapinHoops #WEWILL	0
@UConnMBB Nike	1	#hailstate adidas	22	#GoIrish Under Armour	2
@UConnMBB #JustDoIt	0	#hailstate #HereToCreate	0	#GoIrish #WEWILL	0
#UConnNation Nike	0	@HailStateMBK adidas	0	@NDmbb Under Armour	0
#UConnNation #JustDoIt	0	@HailStateMBK #HereToCreate	0	@NDmbb #WEWILL	0
#GoGreen Nike	309	#GoCanes adidas	0	#NotDoneYet Under Armour	0
#GoGreen #JustDoIt	0	#GoCanes #HereToCreate	0	#NotDoneYet #WEWILL	0
@MSU_Basketball Nike	120	@CanesHoops adidas	1		
@MSU_Basketball #JustDoIt	0	@CanesHoops #HereToCreate	0		
#SpartanDawg Nike	0				
#SpartanDawg #JustDoIt	0				

A breakdown of total collected tweets by university, including total number of branded

tweets, is shown in Table 5.

Table 5   *Percentage of tweets including brand hashtag or brand name by school*

Univeristy	Total Tweets	Branded Tweets	% of Branded Tweets
UK	57157	75	0.0013
Duke	46766	19	0.0004
UConn	3860	1	0.0003
MSU	30062	429	0.0143
UNC	39547	23	0.0006
MSST	21459	22	0.0010
KU	46697	15	0.0003
Miami	8464	1	0.0001
IU	23956	5	0.0002
UL	14470	7	0.0005
ND	11986	2	0.0002
UW	19140	0	0.0000
UCLA	8163	0	0.0000
UM	6234	0	0.0000
SC	27811	0	0.0000

Kentucky (UK) has the highest total number of tweets, however the university that has the highest percentage of tweets that mention the brand is Michigan State University (MSU) which just over 1%. It was found that there is an insignificant correlation between the total number of tweets and the number of tweets that mention the brand, $r = .23$, $p = .42$.

Within the 597 tweets, the brand name *Nike* was mentioned 547 times (91.62%), *adidas* was mentioned 50 times (8.37%) and *Under Armour* was mentioned only twice (0.34%). Since the brand hashtags were only used in two instances, and only in regard to *Nike* universities, there was not enough data to determine whether there is a significant difference between the use of the brand hashtag and the brand name for any of the data

sets including the adidas or Under Armour schools. However, an insignificant correlation was found between total mentions of the brand hashtag and mentions of the hashtag in conjunction with the basketball handle or hashtag, r = -0.23, p = .85.

As shown in Table 4, there were two datasets in which both the brand name and the brand hashtag were used in conjunction with the university hashtag. However, there was not a significant difference between the use of the brand name, *Nike*, and the hashtag *#JustDoIt* in conjunction with the athletic department hashtag *#BBN* as assessed by the collected tweets (*M* = 30.50, *SD* = 41.72), 95% CI [-344.33, 405.33] *t*(1) = 1.03, *p* = .489. In addition, there was not a significant difference between the use of the brand name, *Nike*, and the hashtag*: #JustDoIt* in conjunction with the basketball team handle *@KentuckyMBB* as assessed by the collected tweets (*M* = 7, *SD* = 8.485), 95% CI [-69.24, 83.24] *t*(1) = 1.17, *p* = .451. In addition to comparing the individual pairs, each university's set of queries included basketball team handle, university specific hashtag, and basketball team specific hashtag to determine whether there was a significant difference between the total numbers of tweets that used the brand name compared to the use of the brand hashtag.

On average, Twitter users who tweeted using Kentucky (UK) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *Nike* (*M* = 24.33, *SD* = 31.57) than use the hashtag *#JustDoIt* (*M* = .67, *SD* = .577). This difference, 23.67, 95% CI [-26.94, 74.27], was not significant *t*(4) = 1.30, *p* = .26. Twitter users who tweeted using Duke handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *Nike* (*M* = 6.33, *SD* = 9.24) than use the hashtag *#JustDoIt* (*M* = 0, *SD* = 0). This difference, 6.33, 95% CI [-8.474, 21.41], was not significant *t*(4) = 1.19, *p* = .30. Twitter users who tweeted using North

Carolina (UNC) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *Nike* ($M =$ 7.67, $SD =$ 10.69) than use the hashtag *#JustDoIt* ($M = 0$, $SD = 0$). This difference, 7.67, 95% CI [-9.473, 24.81], was not significant $t(4) = 1.24$, $p = .28$. Twitter users who tweeted using Connecticut (UConn) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *Nike* ($M = .50$, $SD = .71$) than use the hashtag *#JustDoIt* ($M = 0$, $SD = 0$). However, this difference, .50, 95% CI [-1.65, 2.65], was not significant $t(2) = 1.0$, $p = $ .42. Twitter users who tweeted using Michigan State (MSU) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *Nike* ($M = 143.0$, $SD = 155.78$) than use the hashtag *#JustDoIt* ($M = 0$, $SD = 0$). This difference, 143.0, 95% CI [-106.71, 392.71] also was not significant $t(4) = 1.59$, $p = .19$.

Twitter users who tweeted using Kansas (KU) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *adidas* ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 2.65$) than use the hashtag *#HereToCreate* ($M = 0$, $SD = 0$). This difference, 5.0, 95% CI [.76, 9.24], was significant $t(4) = 3.27$, $p = .03$. Twitter users who tweeted using Louisville (LU) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *adidas* ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.53$) than use the hashtag *#HereToCreate* ($M = 0$, $SD = 0$). This difference, 2.33, 95% CI [-0.16, 4.78], was not significant $t(4) = 2.65$, $p = .06$. Twitter users who tweeted using Indiana (IU) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *adidas* ($M = 1.67$, $SD = $ 1.53) than use the hashtag *#HereToCreate* ($M = 0$, $SD = 0$). This difference, 1.67, 95% CI [-0.78, 4.12], was not significant $t(4) = 1.89$, $p = .132$. Twitter users who tweeted using Miami handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *adidas* ($M = .50$, SD $= .71$) than use the hashtag *#HereToCreate* ($M = 0$, $SD = 0$). This difference, .50, 95% CI [-1.65, 2.65], was not significant $t(2) = 1.0$, $p = .42$. Twitter users who tweeted using

Mississippi State (MSST) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *adidas* (*M* = 11.0, *SD* = 15.56) than use the hashtag *#HereToCreate* (*M* = 0, *SD* = 0). This difference, 11.0, 95% CI [-36.33, 58.33], was not significant *t*(2) = 1.0, *p* = .42.

Twitter users who tweeted using Notre Dame (ND) handles and hashtags were more likely to use the brand name *Under Armour* (*M* = .67, *SD* = 1.16) than use the hashtag *#WEWILL* (*M* = 0, *SD* = 0). This difference, 0.67, 95% CI [-1.18, 2.52], was not significant *t*(4) = 1.00, *p* = .37. The other Under Armour affiliated universities: Wisconsin (UW), South Carolina (SC), Maryland (UM) and UCLA, do not have a calculated t-value because there were no tweets mentioning either *Under Armour* or *#WEWILL*, which means that the standard deviation would be zero.

Due to the limited amount of data, it was not possible to perform an ANOVA to compare the use of the brand hashtag in conjunction with the basketball handles and hashtags. However, a two-way contingency analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a relationship between the brand (Nike, adidas, Under Armour) and hashtag use (used, not used). The two variables were found to be significantly related, χ^2(1, n = 599) = 591.03, p < .001.

It is important to note that for this research both original tweets and retweets (posts that were originally created by one user and then reposted by another user) were counted as unique mentions of the brand name or the brand's hashtag. In addition, it is important to understand that not every basketball team had its own specific hashtag, and therefore there is not the same number of analyzed hashtags for each of the three brands (Table 3).

Content of Branded Tweets

The 599 tweets featuring the respective brands were coded based on emerging themes that were observed during the pilot study as well as new themes that emerged during data collection. The tweets were placed in to seven categories including *uniforms*, discussion of team's uniforms; *merchandise,* team apparel or shoes available for purchase; *team information*, general information about team wins or player statistics; *general university fanship*, expression of fanship of the university not specific to particular team; *other sports*, discussion of sports other than men's basketball; *scandal,* discussion of negative events regarding the university and brand; and *other,* which identified tweets that did not fit the other categories.

The content analysis of the 547 tweets (n = 547) regarding the *Nike* universities is found in Table 6, the *adidas* university-related tweets are found in Table 7, and the tweets collected about Under Armour are found in Table 8.

Table 6   *Content Analysis of Twitter Queries regarding Nike Universities*

Twitter Queries	Uniforms	Merchandise	Team Information	General University Fanship	Other Sports	Scandal	Other	Total Tweets
#BBN Nike	0	11	22	27	0	0	0	60
#BBN #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
@KentuckyMBB Nike	0	0	8	0	0	0	5	13
@KentuckyMBB #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
#EmbraceTheBattle Nike	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#EmbraceTheBattle #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoDuke Nike	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
#GoDuke #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@DukeMBB Nike	0	10	6	0	0	0	1	17
@DukeMBB #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#HereComesDuke Nike	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
#HereComesDuke #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoHeels Nike	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
#GoHeels #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@UNC_Basketball Nike	0	3	1	0	14	0	2	20
@UNC_Basketball #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#CarolinaSZN Nike	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
#CarolinaSZN #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@UConnMBB Nike	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
@UConnMBB #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#UConnNation Nike	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#UConnNation #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoGreen Nike	0	0	0	0	304	0	5	309
#GoGreen #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@MSU_Basketball Nike	7	55	0	0	0	58	0	120
@MSU_Basketball #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#SpartanDawg Nike	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#SpartanDawg #JustDoIt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Nike Tweets	7	80	38	27	319	58	18	547
Percentage of Total	1%	15%	7%	5%	58%	11%	3%	100%

Table 7

Content Analysis of Twitter Queries regarding adidas Universities

Twitter Queries	Uniforms	Merchandise	Team Information	General University Fanship	Other Sports	Scandal	Other	Total Tweets
#RockChalk adidas	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
#RockChalk #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@KUHoops adidas	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7
@KUHoops #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#KUBball adidas	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	6
#KUBball #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoCards adidas	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	4
#GoCards #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@LouisvilleMBB adidas	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
@LouisvilleMBB #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#L1C4 adidas	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
#L1C4 #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoIU adidas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoIU #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@IndianaMBB adidas	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
@IndianaMBB #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#iubb adidas	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
#iubb #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#hailstate adidas	0	1	0	0	21	0	0	22
#hailstate #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@HailStateMBK adidas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@HailStateMBK #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoCanes adidas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoCanes #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@CanesHoops adidas	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
@CanesHoops #HereToCreate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total adidas Tweets	3	2	0	3	23	18	1	50
Percentage of Total	6%	4%	0%	6%	46%	36%	2%	100%

Table 8   *Content Analysis of Twitter Queries regarding Under Armour*

Universities

Twitter Queries	Uniforms	Merchandise	Team Information	General University Fanship	Other Sports	Scandal	Other	Total Tweets
#Gamecocks Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#Gamecocks #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@GamecocksMBB Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@GamecocksMBB #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoBruins Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoBruins #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@UCLAMBB Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@UCLAMBB #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#Badgers Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#Badgers #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@BadgerMBB Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@BadgerMBB #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#OnWisconsin Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#OnWisconsin #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#FearTheTurtle Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#FearTheTurtle #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@TerrapinHoops Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@TerrapinHoops #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#GoIrish Under Armour	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
#GoIrish #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@NDmbb Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
@NDmbb #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#NotDoneYet Under Armour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#NotDoneYet #WEWILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Tweets	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Percentage of Total	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Under Armour's only two tweets were both related to merchandise, but adidas and Nike, had more total tweets with the highest percentage of tweets falling into the other sports category with 46% and 58.3% respectively. The second-highest percentage of tweets for Nike were tweets in the merchandise category, but in adidas the second highest was in the scandal category. One interesting result was that 6.9% of Nike tweets were categorized into team information, but there were no Under Armour or adidas tweets that fit into that same category. Although the data is limited there is a difference in magnitude of overall conversation between the brands, with Nike representing 91% of the total tweets. In addition, there is not a significant difference between the categorized tweets about the individual brands. A one-way independent analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine the effects of the brand (Nike vs. adidas vs. Under Armour) on tweets per category. Results revealed no significant effect, $F(2, 18) = 3.26$, p

= .06. However, there was a strong positive correlation in the relationship between the categorized Nike tweets and the categorized of the adidas tweets, $r = .781$, $p = .04$. Whereas there was almost no correlation in the relationship between the categorized Nike tweets and the categorized Under Armour tweets, $r = .01$, $p = .99$. It was also found that there was a weak negative correlation between the categorized adidas tweets and the categorized Under Armour tweets, $r = -0.24$, $p = .60$.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Sport apparel brands have played a significant role in the collegiate athletic industry since 1987, when Nike signed the University of Miami to the first all-sports contract (Muzenrieder, 2015). Apparel contracts have come a long way since the original Miami deal, as companies are now spending tens of millions of dollars each year in both cash and equipment to have a relationship with university athletic departments (Schwerman, 2017). Apparel companies receive benefits such as television exposure as well as merchandising and marketing opportunities (Butler-Young, 2016). With the rise of social media, brands now have the opportunity to establish a direct relationship with potential customers (Holt, 2016). Scholars have examined how brands interact and form relationships on Twitter (Eun, et al., 2011; Kim, et al. 2014, & Liu, et al., 2017) and have also looked at the value of social media marketing and sponsorship for athletes and sport organizations (Brison, et al., 2016; Do et al., 2015; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Parganas, et al., 2015; Parganas, et al., 2017; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012; Sukjoon, et al., 2017; Walsh, et al., 2013; Watkins & Lee, 2016). In the current study, the researcher used Twitter to examine how people discuss college basketball teams and the teams affiliated brand in an online community.

Brand Mentions on Twitter

RQ1 asked whether fans of the respective college basketball teams in this study use the affiliated brand's hashtag. Delia and Armstrong (2015) found that Twitter users did not often mention the sponsors in conjunction with the hashtag, #FrenchOpen. This was consistent with the findings of the current study, in which the branded tweets made up less than 0.01% of the total collected tweets. In addition, similar to the previous study by Delia and Armstrong (2015), the current study found that none of the tweets were produced by the brands themselves. There was also a large amount of conversation about each of the individual teams, with an average of more than 24,000 tweets collected per team. However, Nike, adidas, and Under Armour are closer to the core sport product, basketball, compared to the sponsors that were studied during the French Open. For example, during the French Open the most mentioned sponsor was FedEx, which does not relate to the core product of the French Open, which is tennis. Nike, adidas and Under Armour all have products that directly relate to basketball, including equipment and apparel. Therefore, there is more of an opportunity for sport apparel brands to connect to fans of collegiate basketball teams because the interest in basketball is directly related to the products they manufacture.

RQ2 asked whether certain brand hashtags were more popular than others. Amongst the collected tweets Nike had 91% of the total sponsorship mentions within the sample, which indicates that it is able to generate the greatest amount of online conversation in regard to collegiate basketball compared to the other two brands. However, the number of mentions is so few that none of the three brands generated any

conversation in comparison to the total number of tweets. Kansas was the only university where the Twitter users were significantly more likely to use the brand name instead of the brand hashtag across all three queries. However, the brand name was only mentioned by Twitter users 15 times and the brand's hashtag was never mentioned within the 46,697 collected tweets. So, while there was a significant difference in mentions, there was still less than 0.001% of the conversation that mentioned both adidas and the Kansas handle and hashtags. If the sport apparel brands are interested in creating an online conversation or community in conjunction with collegiate basketball teams, they many need to consider a new social media strategy in order to encourage discussion

The limited sponsorship discussion does not give a clear direction on how to more effectively encourage interaction on social media. The single most popular tweet that mentioned the sponsor was retweeted 303 times. That tweet, which included the brand name "Nike" and the Michigan State (MSU) athletic department hashtag, *#GoGreen*, announced a shoe giveaway at a women's basketball game. That tweet and the subsequent retweets, made up for 51% of the total tweets that mentioned any brand, but as it still represented less than 0.01% of the tweets that mentioned the MSU hashtags or Twitter handle. Giveaways and promotions could be a way to successfully increase brand mentions, but there is nothing to suggest that they would strengthen a customer's relationship with the brand or encourage brand loyalty.

Social capital is actual or potential resources that a person or entity can gain due to membership within a group (Bourdieu, 1986). Through sponsorship deals, the brands are hoping to acquire resources from gaining membership within the university athletic community by purchasing an endorsement contract with that university. The sport apparel

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brands gain social capital in multiple ways through their association with the universities. They gain access to information channels by being a part of the athletic community and through advertisements at collegiate sporting events. They potentially gain social capital through the relationships with athletes that could lead to long-term deals if an athlete reaches the professional level (Butler-Young, 2016). There are additional opportunities for brands to receive social media exposure through these partnerships.

Sajuria et al. (2015) examined online social capital and found that social capital could be created on Twitter but did not examine whether the content of the tweets and the connections between users could build trust and norms. Based on the current study, it is clear that the brands are not building social capital on Twitter with respect to the collegiate basketball teams and the online community that surrounds each team. The implication is that brands do not actively attempt to relate to fans of the basketball team on social media. However, it is important to note that each of these university athletic departments and basketball teams have thousands - and sometimes even millions - of followers (Twitter, 2018). Therefore, the brands are missing out an opportunity to easily connect to a large number of people. However, while researchers have found that it is possible to build social capital in an online environment (Ellison et al., 2007; Sajuria et al., 2015), there is not enough research that proves that building social capital online is the most effective use of resources for brands who are interested in acquiring resources from membership to another group.

In addition, no tweets within the sample originated from the any of the brands that either acknowledge the connection to the university or to celebrate success of the team. It the brand initiates discussion or interaction they can control the message to potential

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customers. If the brands want to strengthen their relationships with the fans of the collegiate basketball teams, they need to embrace a new social media strategy. New strategies could include the brand making targeted social media posts during key games, especially during rivalry games, conference tournaments, or the NCAA championship. By utilizing championship events, the brands have the opportunity to connect to fans within the virtual environment that would be created during the specific event. As previously mentioned, giveaways and promotions could be another avenue that brands could explore in order to stimulate online conversation. However, that conversation may not lead to a lasting relationship between the brand and the customers and may not be the most effective way to increase social media presence.

Hashtag Use

Further answering RQ2, the brand hashtags were almost never used in conjunction with the basketball team handles and athletic department hashtags, and never used in conjunction with the basketball team specific hashtags. The hashtags are at the center of each brand's marketing campaign, but each hashtag has different history and meaning for each brand. Nike's "Just Do It", which was introduced in 1988, is the one of the oldest and most recognized slogans among all brands (Gianatasio, 2013). In comparison, adidas and Under Armour unveiled new hashtags to go along with marketing campaigns that they introduced in 2017. The adidas hashtag *#HereToCreate* was first unveiled as part of their "Create Yours" collection that was released during the NCAA college basketball tournaments in 2017 (Boone, 2017). Under Armour also recently adopted a new hashtag, *#WEWILL*, which was an evolution of its old hashtag, *#IWILL*, in order to emphasize their message about the power of sport and teamwork (Barker, 2017).

Based on historical significance and the longtime establishment of the Nike hashtag, it was hypothesized that it would be the most used hashtag overall. However, within the current sample, *#HereToCreate* was mentioned almost three times as often which suggested that adidas has the most successful hashtag of the three brands. With *#WEWILL* only mentioned under 3,000 times, which was considerably less than the other two brands' hashtags, it can be inferred that this is not as successful of a hashtag as the Nike and adidas hashtags.

Previous research has found that hashtag use in sports is primarily to express fanship or to join or follow an online community (Blaszka et al., 2012; Smith & Smith, 2012). In the case of Under Armour, the brand is not creating a large online community on Twitter using through the use of their hashtag. Unlike Nike, Under Armour has had slogan turnover with its original slogan "Protect this House" only appearing in 2003 (Sutherlin, 2016). However, the adidas hashtag and marketing campaign is also less than a year old, and that was the most used hashtag across the entire data set. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that a hashtag needs long-term exposure among potential customers in order to be successfully used to encourage conversation. Based on the current results, it can be concluded that Under Armour has considerably fewer fans than Nike and adidas, which is consistent with Under Armour only controlling 2.4% of the market share of footwear in the U.S. (Roberts, 2017). However, with a brand hashtag used only twice in the total collected tweets, it is clear that fans of the basketball teams do not use the hashtag of the corresponding brand. Therefore, the fans of the specific teams are not creating a virtual environment in which they are also communicating about the associated brand. While there is a conversation about the teams and the brands separately, the lack

of an online community makes it impossible for the brands to strengthen relationships and increase social capital, as they are not gaining membership into the university community through Twitter.

Negative Sentiments on Twitter

RQ3 asked how the conversations relating to each brand are different. Within the 599 tweets collected that mentioned both the brand and the basketball team handle or related hashtag, most of the tweets expressed positive or neutral sentiments. The tweets that expressed positive sentiments often expressed a liking for the shoes or apparel including a tweet from a user named Lydia Knoll who tweeted "Both my teams killing it on the court... @IndianaMBB and @adidas" A second example of a positive tweet includes a reply tweet from 'BarryB' who was commenting on a post about an upcoming shoe release and said "@2Ballz1Strike @PlayStation @Nike @Yg_Trece @DukeMBB I'm telling you bro I have to have these ASAP. I want to hoop in them soooooo bad." An example of a tweet that expressed a negative sentiment came from a user named Bradley Richardson who tweeted: "@Nike why do you have to ruin @MSU_Basketball uniforms?" There were also tweets that did not express a positive or negative sentiment, but were more informational, an example of a neutral tweet came from a user named Alex Bozich who tweeted: "Indiana going with the adidas Ice uniforms today. #iubb" This finding contradicts previous research, where scholars found that users were more than three times more likely to express negative sentiments than to compliment the brands (Liu et al., 2017). However, compared to the other industries examined, sport footwear brands had the highest number of positive and neutral tweets although still had an industry average of 40% negative tweets (Liu et al., 2017). The current study found

that in general, tweets that discussed the brand in conjunction with the basketball team contained more positive and neutral tweets overall.

The tweets that expressed negative sentiment only appeared in two of the categories, *uniforms* and *scandal*. However, there were also tweets about uniforms that were positive sentiments where users were complementing the uniforms of their respective teams. The *scandal* category also had tweets that expressed negative sentiments about the brand. There were negative tweets regarding adidas that were focused on the current FBI investigation about a broad conspiracy where student-athletes were compensated in order to commit to a certain university (Rapaport, 2017). An example of a tweet that expressed negative sentiment regarding the investigation came from user Brad Turner "@Big12Conference @KUHoops Is Newman one of the players ADIDAS helped KU land, you know, paid him to attend KU? This tweet highlighted the negative connection between adidas and Kansas, but as this scandal is still developing it is difficult to determine what effect the scandal will have on people's opinions towards adidas in the future.

There were also tweets that expressed negative sentiment in the *scandal* category, regarding the recent MSU sexual harassment scandal concerning team doctor Larry Nasser (Dator, 2018). These tweets discussed the complaint of a survivor who encouraged Nike to drop its sponsorship of MSU in response to sexual harassment conviction. These tweets, while not directly negative in nature, do bring association to Nike with the sexual harassment scandal. However, the sample later included tweets that supported the fact that Nike listened to a survivor's complaint about the brand's association with MSU including a tweet from Catherine who posted "Thank you for

listening, @Nike. After today's @espn coverage of @MSU_Football @MSU_Basketball's assault coverups, its clear the culture problem runs deep and that reputation, big wins and money are @MSU_Athletics #1 priority." From this example, it is possible for the brand to make a positive spin on a negative association and distance themselves from scandal. Given these examples, there is an opportunity for brands to encourage more positive sentiment on Twitter. This is an additional motivation for brands to focus on using social media to connect to fans of collegiate basketball, as the discussion is more positive than the reported tweets about the brands from in previous literature.

What are the Brands Paying for?

As previously mentioned, apparel companies give university athletic programs athletic gear worth tens of millions of dollars in retail value, in addition to tens of millions in cash considerations (Schwerman, 2017). These multi-million-dollar contracts give the brands exposure during nationally televised contests, and merchandising opportunities in which big-name schools sell a large amount of product to their fan bases (Butler-Young, 2016). In 2012, the Collegiate Licensing Company estimated there had been $4.62 billion in retail sales of collegiate licensed merchandise, selling more apparel and gear than every major American sports league other than Major League Baseball. The NCAA men's basketball tournament accounts for ten million dollars in retail sales on its own (Greenberg, 2013). Therefore, it is clear that there is a huge market for sporting apparel amongst fans of college basketball. From the amount of revenue generated on collegiate licensed retail sales, it can be inferred that brands are primarily paying university athletic departments for the potential merchandising opportunities.

The content of Nike-affiliated tweets found that only 15% of tweets dealt specifically with merchandise and adidas was even less with only 4% of the collected tweets. Under Armour had 100% of its collected tweets reference merchandise, but with only two total tweets the sample is too small to say that Under Armour is only concerned with increasing merchandising opportunities via Twitter. There was a stronger correlation between the content of the tweets that mentioned Nike and adidas than with Under Armour, demonstrating that there was a stronger relationship between how people talked about Nike and how people tweeted about adidas than how people tweeted with Under Armour. As previously mentioned, there were no produced tweets directly by the brands Twitter handle, in the sample that also mentioned the basketball team handle or associated hashtag. There is an opportunity for brands to promote team specific merchandise via Twitter. Previous literature found that online social networks create an opportunity for professional athletes to endorse a variety of products and by sprinkling the promotional messages amongst the athlete's personal messages will make the advertising more genuine (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). It is possible for brands to use that same manner where they incorporate more direct marketing posts that are targeted at a specific fan base.

These brands' main Twitter focus is in advertising products, and featuring celebrity endorsers, so there is less availability to intersperse promotional posts because so many of their posts are already focused on promoting products. However, sprinkling targeted messages about specific collegiate teams may be an effective strategy and seem more genuine especially during championship events like the NCAA tournament. If brands are already making their investment back and increasing their net profit through

the sale of collegiate licensed apparel it is possible that they do not see the point of increasing attention to Twitter and other social media for additional marketing purposes. However, with the large number of users on Twitter and other social media platforms it is an outlet that these brands should not ignore because there is an opportunity to disseminate information to a large population for a low cost.

In conclusion, sport apparel brands benefit from their connection to university athletic department and college basketball. Although the scandals at Michigan State and some adidas universities have brought negative media attention to collegiate athletics, it is not possible to determine if these scandals will affect the relationships the brands have with universities, the brands ability to attract new consumers, or the profitability of each brand. However, the brands do not appear to be attempting to grow or strengthen that connection through the use of social media, and fans of those collegiate basketball teams do not appear to be motivated to engage in discussion about the brands. Therefore, the brands are not gaining social capital through their association with the basketball teams in the online Twitter environment. However, with the large merchandise sales, it is possible that the brands are not concerned with building social capital online because they are already gaining entrance into the community by other means. In addition, if the brands' goals are to increase merchandising they may already have the most effective marketing strategy that does not include Twitter and other social media platforms.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The limitations of this study include that the schedules of the selected basketball teams did not allow for each team to play an even number of games, with ND only having three games while all of the other teams participating in four games. While this is

a limitation, the discussion that takes place while games are not happening is just as important as the discussion that happens during games because the brands are attempting to build a relationship with the community as a whole and not just during athletic contests. Additional limitations included the selection of teams which required equal distribution of teams from all three brands, as Nike affiliated schools had a distinct advantage in championship history and recent success. In addition, each basketball team did not all have a basketball team specific hashtag, which gave the Under Armour two fewer queries and adidas one fewer query compared to Nike. An additional limitation of this study is that the users who mentioned the brands in conjunction with the basketball team are assumed to be fans of either the team or the brand. However, some of the people who tweeted included journalists such as Alex Bozich and adidas campus agent Lydia Knoll, therefore it is difficult to know whether the individual Twitter users can be described as fans or if they are promoting professional interests.

The current study determined that Twitter users do use the hashtags of sport apparel brands but not when combined with collegiate basketball handles or hashtags. Future research could include examining the motivations for why people utilize brand hashtags. In addition, this study found that some hashtags were used with greater frequency than others, future research could examine what makes a hashtag successful. More research could determine the relationship between sport businesses and social capital specifically to decide if social capital can be built in an online environment. The current study found that the brands are not building an online relationship with fans of collegiate basketball teams, but more research could be completed to determine if the

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brands are more successful with building online ties with fans of other collegiate or

professional sports teams.

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