MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT STRATEGIES FOR MID-MAJOR DIVISION I ATHLETIC DEPARTMENTS

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TESSA LYONS

DR. ROBIN BLOM – ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
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**Introduction**

The goal of this project is to create a beneficial content strategy for mid-major college athletic departments in the United States that will enhance their online communities. Budget size limits the number of employees and resources a mid-major marketing department can have as compared to budgets of schools in the power five conferences (ACC, SEC, Big 10, Pac 12, Big 12.) Mid-major programs also have less of a built-in community due to less success and national attention. Revenue sports such as basketball, football, baseball, and softball are more likely to have a more aide from the marketing department due to its economic value. This project aims to help sports such as soccer, tennis, gymnastics, golf, field hockey, and track and field that are less profiled and do not receive the same support. Marketing departments of mid-major athletic programs can use this project to enhance content and increase the fan base.

Historical research on social identity theory, online communities, and content strategy will first be presented from numerous scholarly sources to understand how to create content to gain attention online and at events. In this compilation of research, a discussion of social identity theory will examine self-categorization and in and out groups to look at the expansion of the theory from its early development. Next, a short discussion of online identities and its role in forming online communities with people that share interests to apply social identity theory but in an online space. An online community is the second overarching framework for this study as the use of identity is now considered in people’s joining of a community and the characteristics that coincide with regular, interactive members. Finally, content strategy is highlighted to see how it has become imperative to so many organizations and their interaction with users or customers. The research will explain content strategy and present suggestions of how it should be created,
noting that the possibilities will ultimately be determined by your underlying goals. This information will then be used to create a beneficial and effective content strategy to enrich online communities within Division-1 mid-major athletic departments.

The project is structured to make sure the university and its audience are understood before content is created. Analyzing the current state of the marketing department and its content will be another starting point. Goals are encouraged to be created to keep in mind as the content is built. Graphics and videos are attached and included in an appendix. Content calendars are included in another appendix to outline promotion and marketing that can be done in and out of season. Each section of the project has an example from Ball State University’s athletic department and the women’s tennis team’s social media platforms. The examples are all suggestions but should provide a basis engaging and interactive content
Motivations for sport fans to consume sports-related content will vary from person to person. Research demonstrated that the most common reasons for this consumption have traditionally been to be informed, part of a fan ship, and entertained as well as to pass time (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012). The use of Web 2.0 and social networking sites has not changed this, but has impacted access to almost any type of content. The internet has allowed more content creators to share works with audiences, which on their part can constantly accept that content with a phone or computer connected to the World Wide Web (Deprez, Mechant, & Hoebeke, 2013; Haugh & Watkins, 2016; Witkemper et al., 2012). For instance, in the case of sports, “new communication technologies provide fans with unprecedented access to athletes, making it so they no longer rely on information from television, print media, and sports talk radio” (Deprez et al., 2013, p. 107). Fans can still attend games or matches, but traditional avenues of distribution of content has been joined with instant gratification from a computer screen or mobile device (Haugh & Watkins, 2016).

The Internet can be considered a “catalyst” to boost communication and information to bring audiences a renewed appreciation for convenience and instant access to whatever a user chooses (Deprez et al., 2013, p. 107). In this realm, “social network sites are particularly useful tools…as they create new opportunities for ordinary people to compete for others’ attention” (Rui & Stefanone, 2016, p. 400). Almost 84% of American adolescents (8-19-years old) have access to the Internet where they are averaging 22 minutes per day on social networking sites (Hou, Komlodi, Lutters, Hercegfi, Preece, & Druin, 2014), although that figure may already be outdated with the rapid growth of mobile use in recent years. Young adults find themselves on these networking sites more frequently than any other hobby (Coyne, Padilla-Walker,
Howard, 2013, p. 125). Over thirty percent of the adults in the United States have access to social media sites, which they are actively using (Koteyko & Hunt, 2015, p. 1). Facebook, the largest social networking site, has a membership base of over 1.3 billion users. These platforms are used as “status updates, the uploading and sharing of pictures, video clips and web links, and the use of chat windows and messaging options” (p. 1). Facebook and Twitter continue to be the most popular social media outlets and add new users every day. Users of social networking sites have been given a platform to share all types of information and have few restrictions on the amount of information posted. Other than Twitter, which limits 140 characters to a tweet, users can post infinitely to their profiles.

Sports organizations, teams, leagues, and athletes have worked hand in hand with social networking sites as “fast-evolving news” can be updated more rapidly (Deprez et al., 2013, p. 107). People have turned to the sites for “the most desired gratifications sought include[ing] hearing about players and roster moves as they happen, learning information faster than other people, reading tweets if unable to watch the game, and learning about upcoming games” (Haugh & Watkins, 2016, p. 281). During Super Bowl 50 in 2016, there was a total of 27 million game related tweets posted and viewed by over four billion users (Flynn, 2016).

Social networking sites have also allowed sports teams to become more personal with their fans and followers. There is now no limit on the amount of information that can be distributed and, on top of this, viewers can receive it instantaneously. Aside from gaining information, the interactivity also allowed for “sports organizations and athletes as a tool to communicate with fans” (Witkemper et al., 2012, p. 170). Professional athletes also commonly engage on social networking sites providing fans with an even closer look to the athlete’s everyday life. For example, NBA superstar LeBron James regularly posts videos of him and his
sons in their house dancing or playing video games. These videos allowed fans to see James in a different role, a father, then they normally see him on court, thus creating a more relatable connection to a fan who might be parents of children the same age. The way athletes use the platform varies, but nowadays many consider it an opportunity to raise awareness for topics of their choice. Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson has posted regularly about his trips to children’s hospitals and encouraged viewers to donate to foundations he works with. Being able to view the athletes outside of their sports environment has allowed for sports organizations to be more than just a team that is competing.

Combining sports and social networking sites amplified the identification of fans with the team. However, such identification does not happen overnight. Social identity theory explains this is an ongoing process of “a shared or collective representation of who one is and involves self-categorization, self-esteem, and commitment components” (Wang & Tai, 2011, p. 111). Self-categorization is the most important aspect of identify socially, in relation to sports, as a person would categorize themselves into a group of members: the specific team organization (Stets & Burke, 2000). People belong to a group in order to boost their well-being and self-esteem (Cheng & Guo, 2014, p. 232). Team identification allows fans to become part of the team and that becomes the in-group as it pertains to the fan base (Haugh & Watkins, 2016, p. 278).

A fan base is also viewed as a community that is created through social identification and self-categorization. Authors Cheng and Guo (2014) labeled a fan base as “an interest-based” virtual community because the people in it “share their opinions, insights, perspectives and experiences with each other” and “collectively seek to attain goals through computer-mediated communication” (p. 229). The word community might first suggest a neighborhood or location of numerous residents. In fact, researchers found there was overlap between geographical based
communities and online communities (Blanchard & Markus, 2007). A sports community or fan base is enriched online with opportunities for users to engage with people sharing the same interests. The commitment to this community increases over time as the identification process was maximized through “increased productivity” because of its importance to the user (Worchel, 1991, p. 391). Fans will continue to commit to the team and the online community when they feel supported and informed (Blanchard & Markus, 2007).

Those fans feel supportive and informed within the online community of their team of choice through an informative content strategy. Content strategy is a process to create and publish content to your target audience with the desired information (Andrews, Boyne, Law, & Walker, 2009). The audience can be provided with stories, visuals, and variety of forms of interaction to stay up to date. Roles can include “people working in marketing, web design, or corporate communications, such as user experience design specialists, and corporate communication specialists, who all share a goal of integrating organizational content” (Clark, 2016, p. 11). The goal for a sports organization is to give their fans content that is interactive and informative.

Sporting organizations have garnered constant attention through social networking sites and content for their online communities. People seek out teams to identify and interact with. Subsequently, the need for the organization to develop appealing and engaging content has increased priority. Historical research needs to be discussed to understand how to achieve this. The next section of this project will build on research that details social identity theory and self-categorization into in and out groups to properly recognize the process of a person identifying with the school’s athletic teams. Online identities will also be addressed due to the relation of the technologically based platform at hand. Next, research on the creation of online communities
will grant information to what members want from this content and the common attributes of the members. Lastly, content strategy needs to be defined as it has evolved into a centerpiece in organizations to distribute information and regularly involve users.

**Social Identity Theory**

“Identities are the shared social meanings that persons attribute to themselves in a role” (Burke & Reitzes, 1991, p. 242). People look to identify with someone or something around them thus making it a social experience no matter the environment. This section will start with the history of social identity theory from its origin in the early 1970’s and its credited author, Henri Tajfel. Other discussions will be included from researchers who thoroughly examined Tajfel’s theory and expanded it to its current state in contemporary literature. Self-categorization was added to the theory by Josh Turner (1983) to introduce in and out groups as a part of the theory to explain how people place themselves in their identity.

Henri Tajfel (1972) formulated the concept of social identity and classified it as “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership” (p. 309). Consequently, “social identity creates an interpretive structure to guide people to behave and feel in social context” (Shih & Huang, 2012, p. 630). Identity has been imperative to people’s lives and they would much rather “belong to groups that give them a positive social identity” (Bourhis & Montreuil, 2015, p. 758). This theory’s focus on groups made it unique to other theories in relation to identification (Insko, Schopler, Kennedy, Dahl, Graetz, & Drigotas, 1992).

Burke and Reitzes (1991) explained the theory thoroughly showing its importance to a person’s social interactions. “Individuals use their identities as thermostats to assess the identity implications of interactions and initiate behaviors that maintain or restore congruency between
identity and the reflected appraisals” (p. 242). The authors argued the way people react with temperature: the thermostat reads a temperature in relation to the environment and the person acts accordingly (turns on air condition or heat). People assess their identity within a setting and determine if they want to match it (in-group) or avoid it (out-group). If an in-group is selected, a person would engage in role-appropriate actions. In this discussion of identification, the term “affiliation” became synonymous to an inter-group relationship (Shih & Huang, 2012, p. 630).

This identification process could happen in any environment, but wherever it occurs, it will affect the person’s daily interactions in in-groups and out-groups. Stets and Burke (2000) considered the process something that will shape many of their future interactions and beliefs. “Having a particular social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group’s perspective” (p. 226). Maybe a person did not immediately identify fully with a group at the beginning of their identification process. However, “individuals who identify with the group feel a strong attraction to the group independent of individual attachments within the group” (p. 227).

Tajfel’s theory has been heavily expanded on over the last few decades with two main sociocognitive processes: self-categorization and self-enhancement (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Self-categorization will be discussed in this review with much more detail as the theory pertains to the project. Self-enhancement is important nonetheless because of its discussion on identity in relation to others. However, as related to this project, categorization will take precedent because the goal is to understand why people place themselves into a specific category.

John Turner developed the self-categorization theory from social identity theory in the early 1980s. Self-categorization became a necessary part to the social identity theory discussion.
The strength of this theory lies in its depersonalization and eliminates “perceptions, feelings, and action in terms of self-contextually relevant” identification (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 262). The authors defined it as “the operation of the categorization process as the cognitive basis of group behavior” (p. 260). In other words, how people examine where they do and do not fit in.

“Categorization is a basic cognitive process that operates on social and nonsocial stimuli alike to highlight and bring into focus those aspects of experience which are subjectively meaningful in a particular context” (p. 261).

Factors to consider during the self-categorization process were “attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, styles of speech, and other properties that are believed to be correlated with the relevant intergroup categorization” (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 225). Hogg et al. (1995) considers those factors to be prototypes. “Because members of the same group generally find themselves placed relatively similarly in the same social field, their prototypes usually are very similar” (p. 261). These prototypes “spontaneously emerged and changed with the attributes of category insiders and outsiders” (Huddy, 2001, p. 133).

Social groups are a branch off the self-categorization process. People went through this comparison process to place themselves in a group of people with similar identities. (Stets & Burke, 2000). The two groups are so-called in and out groups. “Through a social comparison process, persons are similar to the self are categorized with the self and are labeled the in-group” and “persons who differ from the self are categorized as the out-group” (pp. 227-8). A person’s identity then became one in the same with the labeled in-group and opposes the labeled out-group. People often “define themselves based on the degree to which they are similar or different from others in their surroundings” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 260). The identity of the in-group was accentuated as “perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members” and also “of
the perceived differences between the self and out-group members.” (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 228).

In-group members generalized perceptions were heightened and made more uniformed with other members in the in-group. The underlying perceptions from out-group members also impacted the in-group member’s opinions by making the in-groups’ beliefs stronger as if to embolden them against the out-group (Burke & Stets, 2000). Once identity within in-group was acknowledged, there was a “greater commitment to the group and to less desire to leave the group” (p. 229). From then, “the individual must determine that the group is important or central to his or her identity.” If deemed important, “the individual will spend personal effort for the in-group” and “increase their productivity” (Worchel, 1991, pp. 390-1).

Social identity theory, self-categorization, and in and out groups are the main pieces of this projects’ theoretical framework. Understanding this sense of belonging and affiliation people need to form his or her identity will enrich the content strategy being created in this project. While there continues to be an ongoing “interest in the social aspects of the self and the extent to which individuals define themselves in terms of their relationships to others and to social groups,” the frameworks discussed above fit best with this project and its goal (Brewer & Gardner, 1996, p. 83). The goal of this project is to create an identity with the content. The identification with the content should create an “us versus them environment” us being the university and them being the opponents as it relates to college athletics (Haugh & Watkins, 2016, p. 281). “People sustain an ongoing stable relationship with a group after developing mutual bonds and mutual positive psychological attachments” (Shih & Huang, 2012, p. 630). This bond needs to be created with the person and our content to achieve a strong online
community with people who have an online identity. The next section will examine online identity briefly to completely understand the creation of an online community.

**Online Identity**

Social identity theory has allowed researchers to understand the identity of people in a physical world and “for a theoretical lens to explain the influence of identity on behavior” (p. 1762). This review must examine online identities as well because of its emphasis on electronic interaction. “Online identity is defined as the configuration of the defining characteristics of a person in online space” (p. 1761). In person, the identity parallels the physical being (Kim et al., 2011). How people communicate and interact via a computer or mobile will depend on their online identity and it is very important to note that this can be different than their identity created through categorization. (Kim et al., 2011). Behind a computer screen a person finds “like-minded individuals on the Internet” to form and express his or hers chosen identity (LaRose & Eastin, 2004, p. 373). Another large difference between social identity and online identity lies in online interactions. An online identity can be created without people knowing the person’s “real name…, social background…, and value systems” making it less about social psychology (Ma & Agarwal, 2007, p. 59). Studies have also found that people take on numerous online identities (Ma & Agarwal, 2007; Preece, 2001; Blanchard & Markus, 2004).

Online identity presents more limitations with “availability of such visual or textual representations” being more restricted than face-to-face social interactions (p. 1762). However, the behaviors defining a person’s online identity come from those visual and textual representations (Dennen, 2015; Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007). Multiple identities can be created “through digital appropriation and manipulation of text, images, icons, and hyperlinks” and exemplify a form of “self-expression” (Schau & Gilly, 2003, p. 387). As it relates to users on the
social networking site Facebook, they “predominantly construct their identities implicitly through various activities on the site such as showing, rather than explicitly through language” (Koteyko & Hunt, 2015, p. 2).

Vanessa Dennen (2015) described three online identity options for users. The first one suggested an online identity that portrays a person’s actual identity and would largely be used for networking or marketing. Next, a pseudonym identity was implied “for individuals who do not wish to have their…real name searched online or who wish to create an online identity centered around an alternate identity” (p. 656). Lastly, the author included anonymity as a third option to combine the previous two with by remaining anonymous but engaging in similar behavior to their real identity.

Online identity is an extension of social identity theory and the research above describes how the two compare and differ. Both are necessary to understand people’s interactions with our content and to create the best possible content strategy for the different types of identities. Next, online communities will be examined through studies that discovered how they are formed and how people interact within them.

**Online Communities**

“People of all ages are coming online in large numbers to talk with friends, family, colleagues, people living near and far, some of whom they will never see, know or even have contact with again” (Preece, 2001, p. 349). Researchers have taken an interest to the communities that form in those spaces online such as “blogs, microblogs; social networking sites; online forums; chat rooms; and gaming for various purposes” due to extremely high numbers (Kerr, Mortimer, Dickinson, & Waller, 2012; Hou et al., 2014, p. 375). A firm definition has yet to be nailed down. The framework stems from a “place-based community” or
“neighborhood” but has since evolved with technology (Blanchard & Markus, 2004, p. 67) A place-based neighborhood would not be considered a community until behaviors of emotional support come to fruition. Researchers believed just because geographically members of a neighborhood live close does not make them a community. Acknowledging that there is some overlap in research on place-based communities and neighborhoods with research on online communities also highlighted how the research has evolved. The ambiguity of these definitions were found through all studies as authors site multiple sources for answers. One glimpse of overlap was seen with Howard Rheingold who is credited with the earliest association (Ren et al., 2007). Understanding online communities will be a large part of this review to be able to create content that will create a community. Online communities will be examined in this section alongside two particular studies that highlight the creation of the communities and the components of them.

Prior to “the advent of telecommunications technology, definitions of community focused on close-knit groups in a single location” (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005, para. 2). This quickly became out of date as “the development of modern transportation and telecommunication systems increased personal mobility and reduced the costs of communicating across distances” (para. 2). In 1993, Howard Rheingold set a base for researchers to begin studying online communities. He defined them as:

cultural aggregations that emerge when enough people bump into each other often enough in cyberspace. A virtual community is a group of people who may or may not meet one another face-to-face, and who exchange words and ideas through mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks. (Preece, 2001, p. 348)
An example of a relevant community is America Online otherwise known as AOL. This internet provider “built a successful customer base of over 29 million people by understanding people’s need to connect” (p. 348). More recently in 2001, Jenny Preece defined it as “a group of like-minded people whose purpose is to support each other, to learn and to promote their understanding via electronic collaboration in a group” in her study on determining and measuring success in online communities, (p. 348). More recent definitions looked to the emotional connection in these communities and the “intense feelings of camaraderie, empathy and support that they observed among people in the online spaces they studied” (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005, para 3). Collaboration allowed these “people [to] come together to get and give information or support, to learn or to find company” (p. 348). There are no restrictions in size; “The community can be local, national, international, small or large” (p. 348).

More researchers want to study its membership over the past decade rather than defining online communities. This could entail “noting similarities and differences of each new member and comparing them with characteristics of members who are regarded as being within the community” (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005, para 4). Researchers tried to understand “what people do in online spaces, how they express themselves, what motivates them, how they govern themselves, what attracts people to participate, and why some people prefer to observe rather than contribute” (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005, para 6). Ethnography, linguistic analysis, social network analysis, visualization techniques, and online interviews were just a few methods used to understand those fields within online communities. (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005).

Ma and Agarwal (2007) presented a study examining the membership of online communities. The authors surveyed two online communities that represented a space for “relationships or emotional support” and “common interests or information exchange” (p. 52).
Members were asked about their identities and contribution to the communities. The results of their study showed “when individuals felt that other community members verified their salient identities (personal or social, or both), they were more satisfied with their community experiences, and were more likely to participate in knowledge contribution” (p. 58). This means when a member of an online community felt comfortable and accepted, the amount of knowledge contributed was increased. Their findings provided evidence “that identity verification is also important for computer-mediated communication” and there was “a need for mutual understanding for smooth online social interactions” (p. 58). This study can be used to understand the interactions within an online community and the motivations behind members involved.

Another study by Blanchard and Markus (2007) highlighted the membership of online communities by examining whether the sense of community found in face-to-face communities can be found in online communities and if so, whether they display the same behaviors. The researchers described the dimensions of place-based communities as feelings of membership, feelings of influence, and integration and fulfillment of needs. Blanchard and Markus (2007) found that behaviors in a virtual community were noted as membership, belonging, group symbols, influence, enforcing and challenging norms, exchange of support among members, and shared emotional connections. A group of people with interest in working for sporting events were tested through observation and interviews (p. 70). The researchers found similarities between sense of community in face-to-face communities and online communities with feelings of membership and shared emotional connections occurring most often in this study. The behaviors observed also showed overlap to a sense of community in instances with exchange of support, the creation of identity, and the production of trust. In conclusion, they believed an
online community was a “settlement in which a sense of virtual community co-exists with a set of community-like behaviors and processes,” which happened when “people enact them and…continue enacting them over time” (p. 77). This study was useful to comprehend a supportive online community and how it can lead to a stronger, emotional environment even with the removal of face-to-face communities.

The definition from Rheingold was important because it laid the groundwork for researchers to expand on it but this section shifted its focus toward the study of specific members in the communities and their characteristics. With “very few [online communities being] successful at retaining their members and motivating member knowledge contribution” it was important for this project to use these frameworks and results in the creation of the content strategy for a community (Ma, 2007, p. 42). Incorporating this information with the identification process, the final framework for this project is content strategy to achieve influential and interactive members of our online community.

Content Strategy

As seen in any framework, the research and studies done on content strategy are always evolving and present countless perspectives. Its relevance has been expedited as technology and new media became important to companies (Clark, 2016). The research presented in this section will show the evolution of content strategy, the components of it, and how it is now being used. It will end by discussing sports related content, which is imperative to this project. The framework was seen as “messy and complex and it is unlikely that organizations can be placed in mutually exclusive boxes that assume each organization has only a single strategic stance” to many researchers and especially those in the content strategy profession (Andrews et al., 2009, p, 5). The number of websites with content has reached over a billion and provide users with almost
unlimited access to information (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). This statistic emphasized the problems that can arise in content creation due to the competition but also pointed to the importance of learning how to create content to reach maximum effectivity and not get lost in this never-ending sea of information.

At its core, content strategy is “an organizational vision for information and an action plan for achieving it” (Batova & Andersen, 2016, p. 2). This includes “defining business goals, accounting for an organization’s content corpus, and developing an organization-wide strategy for producing, evaluating, governing, and publishing that content” (p. 2). Researchers want people to understand the variations that could fall under the content strategy title across companies: Content strategy incorporates “content acquisition, content delivery, content engagement, and/or content management” (Clark, 2016, p. 8). The process requires various departments within an organization or company and the strategy will then vary to their goal. The roles to create content also depend on the organization and its objective but a broad list of the people involved are “various specialized writing communities, including professional and technical communication, marketing communication, and web development” (Ashley & Tuten, 2015, p. 18).

Fiona Cullinan’s (2013) article mapped out the path of this topic and how it has taken off as a career since 1996. The author pointed to the increase of “tools, channels and platforms” that provided “more content than ever” (n.p.). There was negativity with content overload and its deterioration to standards of effective content. “The cost and skills barriers to publishing have virtually disappeared overnight; anyone can now publish, and thing brings both threats and opportunities” (n.p.). From 2004 to 2013, the term increased its popularity search percentage
from 13% to 80% (2013). In Dave Clark’s literature review on content strategy he discussed why there was an addition and emphasis on the topic:

Many communicators spent the late 1990s and early 2000s arguing for epistemological and strategic changes to professional communication, arguing that we must redefine ourselves as knowledge creators, as contributors to technological development, as information designers, that we must fundamentally, get ourselves and our companies past the nation that we are simply agents of information transfer. (2016, p. 7)

The focus should be on the “consumer’s aspirations, insights and experiences, and feelings” when creating content (Cullinan, 2013, n.p.). Involvement was also very important when creating content and researchers found a positive correlation to user engagement and financial performance (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Frazer (1983) suggested analyzing the history and development of the target market and encouraged looking at primary competitors and their strategies. Furlow’s (2011) found benefits in a company partnering with a nonprofit to gain social value and awareness for the company and hopefully funding for the nonprofit. Her examples included American Express pairing with Charge Against Hunger, Starbucks pairing with Product (RED), and Dawn dish soap’s involvement with saving wildlife. These components of content strategy did not touch on every piece due to its expensive components. Researchers placed emphasis for content strategists to consider the company’s goals and aspirations with creating the content (Clark, 2016; Batova & Andersen, 2016).

Sports-related content “provide fans with unprecedented access to athletes, making it so they no longer have to rely on information television, print media, and sports talk radio” (Haugh & Watkins, 2016, p. 279). This type of content coincided immediate gratification and interactivity that our 21st century users regularly demand (Ruggerio, 2000). Researchers
suggested a large use of social networking sites in content creation due to the “fast-evolving news” that comes with sporting events and organizations (Deprez et al., 2013, p. 107). Similarly, to the problems that came from the extravagant amount of content, “some social media efforts become an experimental free-for-all that rarely result in the desired outcome” (Ashley & Tuten, 2015, p. 17). The fan base expected a great deal from content and this can make it hard to be constantly successful. A few expectations from fans were score updates, game day notes, player statistics, and product endorsement (Haugh & Watkins, 2016; Deprez et al., 2013). The content should be interactive to engage and maintain the fan base, but above all it should be instantaneous. Researchers have found Twitter to be a perfect platform for sports content as it has continued to add thousands of followers every day. Organizations “must seize the opportunity to use Twitter to reach…[fans] who do not use traditional media such as printed newspapers” (Deprez et al., 2013, 108).

Social networking sites will be imperative to this project and the research on content strategy allowed for a better understanding of how to reach an audience. Overall, this research was beneficial to begin to create the necessary content for a Division-1 mid-major athletic department. It will clearly require an integration of team members from varying departments. However, the research provided the more important understanding of the constituents that should be involved in creating the content and particularly reaching the fan base of users following the sports teams. Distributing the content is one facet but the emphasis will be on creating content to engage the fans and entice them to habitually return to gain more information.

**Summary**

The research on social identity theory, online identity, online communities, and content strategy will be exemplified in this project. The goal is to “make innovative connections and
relationships between individuals” through this content to “shift from a transactional perspective to an interactional perspective where the [team] becomes a part of the [fan’s] own identity” (Ashley & Tuten, 2015, p. 17). If this is done, the athletic department should see “increased traffic to the brand Web sites, improved search rankings, and more loyalty among” fans, which would encapsulate the goal of the project (p. 17).

The completion of this project hopes to add to previous projects and research on content strategies in collegiate athletics but also incorporate the importance of identity and online communities when creating it. It should provide a groundwork for other mid-major division I athletic departments to increase their online community through this content strategy. With these frameworks setting the groundwork for an understanding of identity, online communities, and content strategy, a strategy will be created that reflects those and be used for years to come for social media and marketing in athletic departments.

Method

The topic for this project evolved from coursework in the journalism graduate program and daily responsibilities as the person in charge of the women’s tennis social media. JOUR 650, Media Audiences and Content Strategy, required a final project that created a content strategy for any company. Its structure overlaps with the one seen in the project here. Analyzing the Ball State Sports website and the content that the department had already created was another starting point for the project. All the content presented below was created for Ball State’s women’s tennis team, which would be considered a mid-major division I program that lacks support from marketing departments. If any of the materials in the project can be used for a smaller sized marketing department in college athletics, it will have done its job.
Body of Project

- Business Background
  - The business background should describe the history of the school and specifically detail how it became a university.
    - Ball State University began as a private university in 1876 called Eastern Indiana Normal School but was foreclosed in 1917. Immediately following this, the Ball brothers bought the institution and it was eventually renamed Ball State Teachers College. In 1961, it was changed to a fully independent Indiana State University and named Ball State College. By this time, the enrollment was up to over 10,000 students and the campus began to expand to accommodate to those numbers. Due to the expansion, the name was changed to Ball State University in 1965.
  - Give statistics on the school such as how many people attend, what department is its strongest or why people attend the school.
    - Currently, the campus makes up most of the mid-sized city in Indiana. It includes 109 buildings and spans across 731 acres. Main features include Shafer Tower, Frog Baby Fountain, and Beneficence statue. Roughly 22,000 students attend the university with the Teacher’s College continuing to be the main attraction for undergrad and graduate students. Almost 75% of the student body are Indiana residents and 59% are females.
  - Famous alumnus is important to list because people might only know a school because of one or two people.
    - David Letterman is one of the most notable alumnae from the university. He graduated from the school in 1969 opened the David Letterman Communication and Media Building in 2007. Letterman also has a scholarship for C students that fall in the middle of their class for GPA.
    - Angela Ahrendts was the former CEO of Burberry and is currently a VP at Apple. She graduated from Ball State in 1982. Forbes ranked Ahrendts the 25th most powerful woman in the world in 2015.
- John Schnatter is the founder and CEO of Papa John’s Pizza. He graduated from Ball State in 1983.
- Jim Davis is the creator of Garfield and graduated from Ball State in 1967.

- Athletic Alumnus
  - Willie Snead was a wide receiver for the Cardinals and entered the draft after his junior year in 2014. He was signed as a free agent with the Browns but is now part of the New Orleans Saints.
  - Bonzi Wells was a small forward for the Cardinals and stayed all four years from 1994-1998. Wells was drafted 11th in the first round of the draft and played in the NBA for 10 years. His jersey is retired in Worthen Arena.
  - Brad Maynard was a punter for Ball State and was selected in the 3rd round of the draft in 1997. He played for the Giants in their 2000 Super Bowl appearance and was inducted into the MAC Hall of Fame in 2013.

- What sport dominates the attention of fans and what sport is extremely successful in terms of winning?
  - Ball State University is a NCAA Division 1 athletic department that competes in the Mid-American Conference (MAC). Its football program was the first established team in 1924 but the men’s basketball team is the more decorated program, garnering majority of the attention from students and fans. In the more recent years, Ball State has seen success in baseball, softball, soccer, women’s basketball, and men’s and women’s tennis, with those programs earning NCAA tournament bids through MAC Conference titles.

- As it pertains to content, what is the department’s current state?
  - Ball State has recently relaunched the website www(ballstatesports.com in November 2016.
    - The update included more interactive features with videos and social media news being a focal point. A banner at the top of the website lists the weekly schedule for all team’s competing are
pasted across with times and locations. There are now eight headline stories that circle through as you stay on the home page. The text now has a bolder, more captivating appeal and overall the feel is more sleek and professional.

- Each team’s page includes their six most recent headlines and their upcoming schedule is also featured at the top of the site just like the homepage. There is now a media wall banner underneath the stories that take a user directly to the team’s archived stories, Twitter account, Instagram, and any photo albums.

- The department’s main Twitter and Instagram accounts are @BallStateSports and @bsusportslink. All 18 teams have their own handles run by a member of the coaching staff or a sports information director. The amount of content varies from team to team with football, men’s and women’s basketball, baseball, and men’s and women’s volleyball having the strongest presence on social media platforms. Strongest meaning following base and regularity of posting or being promoted by the athletic departments two main accounts.

- Ball State Sports Link is a separate entity of the athletic department in charge of storytelling, videos, and behind the scenes coverage of teams. The school is partnered with ESPN3 and travel primarily to football, men’s and women’s basketball, men’s and women’s volleyball, baseball, and softball games. Sports Link is the winningest college sports media program receiving over 70 state or national awards for their work in sports media. These awards include 11 Emmy Awards and seven Best in College Sports Media Awards presented by the Sports Video Group. The group is also affiliated with the NCAA and PGA. More information about them can be found on www.chirpcitybsu.com

- What positions are filled and how have they kept up with the increasing digitalization of college sports over the past decade?

  - Inside athletics, its sports information and marketing departments have numerous positions for all teams. One person oversees all sports
Information and strategic communications for Football and four people are assigned three teams each, one of those people being an intern. Marketing has one director that oversees all the sports and two interns that assistant him. In the past five years, the department has added a graphic designer and expanded the broadcasting.

- **Strategy Statement**

  - **Vision -** What do you want to do with this content?
    - The vision for Ball State athletics is to provide engaging and cutting edge content to fans, followers, and students. It should encourage them to continuously follow along and attend sporting events as well as share the content on social media. Ball State athletics also envisions a large community outside of Muncie with people that strongly identify with each team. The content should create a strong sense of pride when followers share it.

  - **Mission -** How do you want to achieve that?
    - Ball State athletic departments mission is to expand its audience constantly. Actively monitoring trends in digital media to keep the content relevant and up to date will help achieve this vision. Revamping old content that was not as well received by followers is just as important as creating new content or implementing a new marketing plan.

  - **Goals -** Measureable statements on what you want to achieve.
    - Goals will vary across teams and the higher revenue the team, the higher the goals. Ball State teams should aim for monthly goals on social media sites to be increasing following by twenty plus followers. Another monthly goal should be to increase overall traffic through more retweets, likes, and shares. Teams should be keeping track of attendance records on match or game day. Overall, a team should look to increase engagement through social media, events, and game day by 25% each season.

  - **Strategies -** Steps needed to achieve your goals.
    - Marketing strategies for each Ball State program should begin with creating content calendars for social media and events. Things such as
giveaways, videos, engaging events such as meet and greets or poster signings are some examples of content that can be promoted on social media to increase followers. Attendance records should be analyzed to help marketing and communications teams implement strategies. Maybe one event did not have a strong turn out and another one did or a lot of fans showed up when there was free food but not when there were free coupons. Details like that should receive attention to continue to strategize and make any updates to increase attendance. The department should keep current fans engaged and gain new fans through these strategies.

- Tactics- Activities for each strategy.
  - To keep current fans engaged and get new fans, Ball State must organize activities to appeal to both audiences. Game day should always include prizes and giveaways to encourage attendance. Free food, t-shirts, meet and greets, and anything that will attract fans wanting to come. At the games, social media can be implemented by having fans who attend use specific hashtags. For example, at a basketball game the trending hashtag was #bALLIN and people who posted with that hashtag could see their posts on the big screen of the arena. The athletic department also has a weekly hashtag #ChirpChirpFriday that encourages fans to post wearing their school paraphernalia. Events can also have a theme to garner even more attention- kids’ day, military day, social media night, pink day. During an event, Ball State also has challenges and fun games for fans to participate in that result in prizes for the winners.

- Affordances + Uses and Gratifications
  - What do you want the audiences to do with your content?
    - Audiences should engage with content and feel encouraged to attend athletic events. The content should intrigue viewers to follow along regularly and share it with people they interact with. Sharing the content should create a community and identity with Ball State’s athletic programs.
Make sure you have your content aligned with what you expect your audience to do.

- With these expectations from the audience, the content on Ball State’s website and social media sites should promote each team. Behind the scenes videos, personal interviews or stories about a program or a player, giveaways (food, shirts, coupons) are what Ball State is currently doing to make the experience personable for its audience. Match and game days have also started to engage the audience more with Black out days and social media nights. On black out day, everyone in attendance is given a shirt that is black to make the stands all one color. Social media night encourages all followers on social media to tweet or post about the game.

**Value**

- What is the value of your content strategy to the customer?
  - The value of Ball State’s content to the audience is for them to be able to identify and connect in ways that are changing their daily lives. The content should reach the audience and get them to understand the university and the program through storytelling and exposure to what happens behind the scenes. It should be valuable for their attention at all times of the day and would hopefully encourage continuous following as well as attendance to events.

- What is the value of your content of the customer?
  - The value of Ball State’s content of the customer would be found in a regular attendance to sporting events and be a star customer. Sharing the content consistently and encouraging the customer’s followers to be a part of Ball State’s community will increase the value of this content.

- How do you monetize the value?
  - Revenue sports such as football, basketball, and baseball would have the largest economic value with ticket sales and merchandise. Other Olympic sports wouldn’t monetize value from content in forms of income but by increasing a fan base and community around Muncie as well as across the country. Each program has its own Cardinal Varsity Club account which is
specifically for fundraising and donations. How a team fundraises is up to the program, but most reach out to former alumnus or current team members reach out to family members and friends for money. Ball State’s corporate partners are featured on the website and at most sporting events on a scoreboard or poster. The biggest sponsors are Nike, Pepsi, Xfinity, Stoops Automotive Group, and MutualBank. Every program’s content needs to have short term and long term goals specific to these values. Monitoring it regularly should allow for content creators to update the content with each program’s schedule.

- **Personae**
  - Influencer: Customer who is very loyal through continuous purchasing of your product and sharing content to other customers.
    - An influencer of Ball State sports’ content attends all sporting events and regularly shares content distributed on social media platforms. This person could be a student on campus or a local person in the community living in Muncie. Their age could vary from 18-50 years old. Influencers live and breathe Ball State University. They embody the schools’ pride and let others around them know it.
  - Amplifier: Customer who is an advocate for your company and will sell your product to others in the community through promotion or product reviews.
    - An amplifier of Ball State Sports’ content is the programs biggest fan. He or she constantly retweets, shares, and likes social media and is very vocal about the school. An alumnus would be an example of an amplifier that exudes pride in his or her alma mater. They are regularly advocating for people to attend events and following along with each team. Some amplifiers may not live in or near Muncie, but still has school pride by promoting the school regularly on a social media platform or in a work place by wearing paraphernalia.
  - Seeker: Customer who comes to your website or content platforms for something very specific and wants immediate gratification.
A seeker of Ball State Sports’ content views it with something very specific in mind. It could someone with no relation to Ball State but wants information about a game or match because they are supporting the opponent. A seeker could also be someone who attends an event because of the prize or promotion that day and does not engage in any content after that. This type of personae is not ideal for any athletic department and is not who the content is directed at.

- **Competitors**
  - Who are your main competitors?
    - Analyzing the competition will help enhance the content and use those athletic departments’ content as a guideline for successes and failures. Understanding who the biggest rivals and matchups are will also allow for a larger emphasis on marketing those games or matches. Competitors can be anyone in the same conference, long-time rivals, and in-state rivals. They may also vary from sport to sport due to some athletic departments not having all the same sports teams. Competitors can also provide a chance to create events and attract fans through emphasizing those game days. Even if an athletic department is not considered a competitor, looking across the nation at sports’ teams content can be very beneficial too. What are they doing on social media? How are they promoting game day or engaging audiences during an off season?
  - Ball State University’s main competitors are the eleven other schools in the Mid-American Conference: Akron, Bowling Green, Buffalo, Central Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Kent State, Miami of Ohio, Northern Illinois, Ohio University, Toledo, and Western Michigan. Across sports, not every school has all eighteen programs that Ball State does. In-state rivals include Notre Dame, IUPUI, IPFW, Butler, Valparaiso, Indiana State, Indiana, and Purdue. Rivals in surrounding states are Cincinnati, Xavier, Dayton, Louisville, Kentucky, Northwestern, Southern Illinois, Illinois-Chicago, Detroit-Mercy, Michigan, and Michigan State.
  - How are they similar/different?
• Each of these athletic department differs in size and national following. As stated above, they all also differ in number of programs in each athletic department. Schools from the power five conferences would most likely have a larger following as well as larger budget. This includes the Big Ten, SEC, and ACC.

  o How are you going to stand out from them?

  • Standing out from all these competitors is a large task but content is a helpful source to reach out to fans and followers across the nation. Ball State relies on Muncie and the surrounding towns for their community base and constantly putting athletic teams in a position to go toe-to-toe with some of those big-name competitors.

  o Why does your target audience choose you and not another?

  • Due to Ball State’s small university appeal and intimate community created from content or in-person attendance of sporting events, the audience and viewers choose the Cardinals over those competitors. Encouraging an engaging identity through content should attract more audience members and hopefully get them to stray from the “norm” of supporting Notre Dame, Purdue, or Indiana.

• **Workflow and Governance**

  o What positions do you need to create to execute your content strategy? Provide job descriptions.

  • Director for Marketing and Fan Engagement

    • Reports to the Athletic Director about planning, coordinating, and implementing game day activities and promotions for all teams.

    Oversees and develops short-term and long-term programs that will engage new and existing fans and students. Actively monitors emerging trends in media and public relations, including social media and other developments that will keep the department in a leadership role in communications. Direct marketing and community relations campaigns using athletics as a point to promote the university, raise visibility, and expand sponsorship
and other fundraising efforts. Oversees game day marketing and promotions operations, supervising student staff, collaborating with campus and community organizations to increase attendance, and school spirit. Liaison to band, cheer, and dance team for events.

- **Assistant Director of Marketing**
  - Assists the director with the planning, coordination, and implementation of game day activities and promotions for assigned teams. Identifies new and innovative programs that will engage new and existing fans and students, resulting in the best fan experience. Involved in social media campaigns, conceptual developments, activation, measurement, and evaluation for all marketing of teams. Actively monitors emerging trends in media and public relations, including social media and other developments that will keep the department in a leadership role in communications. Ability to efficiently operate some Adobe Cloud applications.

- **Director for Strategic Communications**
  - Reports to the Athletic Director about developing, promoting, and supporting communications and brand management of the athletic department. Develops and oversees implementation of comprehensive long-term and annual strategic communications and marketing plans. Develops social media protocols for the athletic department and use the medium to engage key stakeholders, fans, and students. Actively monitors emerging trends in media and public relations, including social media and other developments that will keep the department in a leadership role in communications. Works collaboratively with media relations, marketing, and broadcasting departments. Must be able to work in a high paced and complex environment.
- Assistant Director of Media Relations (number depends on number of sports)
  - Serves as primary contact for assigned sport’s teams. Serves as a representative or liaison for designated sports and maintain daily contact with media. Serves as liaison for coaches and student-athletes with media and conference, NCAA, and departmental contacts. Writes, edits, and designs assigned sports media fact books. Coordinates media relations efforts for home events: distribution of media credentials, provide appropriate information to media, coordinate post-game interviews and releases. Assists the supervision of student assistants. Actively monitors emerging trends in media and public relations, including social media and other developments that will keep the department in a leadership role in communications.

- Graphic Designer
  - Creates beautiful/funny/relevant/authentic content for across all social media platforms; anything from website content, print ads, digital campaigns to in-story collateral. Designs poster templates for each team that are cohesive and combative to be handed out at events. Ensures brand consistency and infirmity regarding logo and color usage. Delivers cutting edge design visuals for use in print, online marketing, and other collateral. Illustrates concepts through designs regarding arrangement, size, type, style, and related aesthetic concepts. Plans, manages, and coordinates concepts for teams that best brand the department from studying information, photography, and materials. Must have extraordinary graphic design and art direction skills and be an expert in visual language.

- Director of Broadcasting/New Media
  - Oversees all facets of video production and game day video. Creates video content for scoreboard, marketing, advertising, and broadcasting. Actively monitors emerging trends in media and


public relations, including social media and other developments that will keep the department in a leadership role in communications. Leads production of multimedia content that serves recruiting goals, enhances revenue streams, strategizes to promote brand awareness. Oversees and schedules the streaming of all home athletic events, maintains all video equipment, and coordinates video archives for each sport. Must be willing to travel for game days on weekends and weekdays.

- **Manager of Ticket Sales and Fan Development**
  - Trains and hires sales team members. Develops new business for the athletic department through prospecting new fans, generating referrals and leads, cold calling, and face to face appointments. Works in conjunction with other units of department to create, develop, and implement renewal and sales campaigns for season tickets, mini-packs, and group tickets. Meet and exceed sales and retention goals. Manages game day service and sale initiatives at home athletic events. Experience utilizing ticketing systems and CRM platforms.

- **Content Inventory**
  - What kind of content is already available?
    - The content already available for Ball State’s athletics varies between teams. The revenue sports dominate most of the content because of their regularity in coverage. This includes previews of games, interviews with players and coaches, full video coverage on the day of the game, and behind the scenes during practices. Also, with a larger budget and larger staff these teams have the ability for this constant coverage. The other program’s content varies due to a smaller staff. Some team’s rarely update social media while others try to keep up with the larger programs creating content on their own time. Below are some examples of content from women’s tennis

  - Graphics
- Where and when to post graphics are open ended for a team to decide for their own. These graphics below are examples of what women’s tennis has posted in the past on their Twitter and Instagram. It is also encouraged to tag the athletic departments main accounts on the posts in hopes they will share them and the followers of those accounts will see it and in turn follow your account. The following graphics can be found in appendix one.

- A birthday graphic is a very simple way to connect players with followers. It should include the athlete’s name and pictures of he or she (See appendix, image 1.)

- Women’s tennis did a segment called Meet the Cards Monday where every Monday leading up to the start of their season they introduced one of their players. The graphic featured an image of the player and fun facts about her such as her favorite pre-match song or her favorite professional tennis player. It was posted to Twitter and Instagram (See appendix, image 2.)

- Sometimes followers are only following you on one of your accounts and a graphic can be made to reinforce followers to be connected on all platforms. The graphic should include the team’s account names and all the social media platforms they are active on. (See appendix, image 3.)

- While the team’s schedule can be found on the website, a schedule graphic can remind followers of upcoming matches. It is also very easy to read and just tells followers what they need to know. It skips the steps of searching for the schedule on the website. One schedule can be made for the off-season and one for in-season. If a team plays a lot of matches or games, two separate graphics can be made for home and away. (See appendix, image 4 and 5.)

- Match day graphics present followers with all the information they need to know on the day of a match. It should include the location, start time, opponent, and social media handles for them to follow along. (See appendix, image 6 and 7.)
- Countdowns are always a great way to implement graphics and remind followers of upcoming events. A team can do a countdown to the first day of practice, the first match of the season, the conference tournaments, or maybe a big match against a rival. It should include a picture of the team or one player along with a big and bold number to represent the amount of days before that specific event. (See appendix, image 8.)

- Social Media

  - The easiest way to reach fans and the community is through social media. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat all provide platforms for interactive and personable content to be distributed. The content can vary from pictures of work outs or practices to short videos during matches. It should be friendly and capture the attention of followers to want to consistently follow along with the team. Content can overlap across each platform. For example, graphics can be tweeted, instagrammed, and posted on Facebook. The screen shots for the descriptions below can be found in appendix one.

  - Twitter-

    - Twitter accounts should be the most actively used platform with daily updates. Follow other teams at the school and tweet at them when they do well or wishing them good luck before a game or match. That shows unity between programs and it represents support throughout a department. Follow important accounts for the respective sport. Tennis has a College Tennis account and an Intercollegiate Tennis Association account that posts anything relevant to the sport. Create an easy, recognizable hashtag and include regular one’s the main account uses. For example, Ball State’s common hashtags are #ChirpChirp #GoCards. Women’s tennis uses #BSUWTNS. Retweet anything related to the team, such as articles written by newspapers or the athletic department, information on the sport within all of college athletics, or updates on the whole university.
• Incorporating emojis into tweets can replace a graphic but get information out to followers in a fun way. Tweeting out the competition day information a few days before a match can give followers a heads up and avoid redundancy with multiple graphics in a row for the same match. (See appendix, image 9.)

• Updates during a match will allow for followers to follow along if they cannot attend. Using emojis in those tweets is a great way to change up the tweet and make it visually appealing. (See appendix, image 10.)

• Pictures are encouraged on Twitter and a picture of the team warming up will show followers it is getting closer to start time of the match or game. Pictures of a practice the day before a match would also work. (See appendix, image 11.)

• Signing day is an important day for any team and tweeting about the incoming recruits is important to show followers who isjoining the team. (See appendix, image 12.)

• Instagram

• Instagram accounts should use images and videos to engage followers with less words than Twitter. Posts can be made daily but to avoid overkill more than once a day is not encouraged. Save the writing for Twitter and post visually appealing information to Instagram. The following screenshots can be found in appendix one.

• Group pictures of the team before traveling or after a win take followers on the journey. Many of the followers are also family members and enjoy the pictures of the players especially if they cannot attend the match. (See appendix, image 13 and 14.)

• Pictures can also be posted of a work out or practice but should be playful and less mundane than just “the girls practicing or the girls running.” (See appendix, image 15.)

○ Videos
• Social media platforms have continued to enhance the video features allowing for longer videos and easy inclusion to posts. Videos still should not be very long unless it is necessary. A match preview or recap would most likely be longer than one minute. Instagram videos can now be as long as 1 minute and Twitter videos can be longer without taking up as many characters.
• Videos can replace graphics. Instead of the graphic above introducing players, a video can be created with clips of the athlete playing the sport and opening with an introduction.
• Boomerang is a great application to use on Instagram that replays a five second clip of an action.
• Attached are two videos from women’s tennis
  • This first video is great for the off season and to remind fans what is currently going on even if the team is not competing as much. It should be high energy and get followers excited about following along with the team.
  • The second video is another way to introduce the athletes to the followers and make it more personal. Each week a video can be posted of an athlete practicing and working out and introduce themselves on the video. The caption can include some more details about the athlete such as previous accomplishments or rankings that wouldn’t be shown in the video.
• Takeovers
  • Takeovers allow for the athletes to give followers and fans a behind the scene look on their daily life. It is suggested to do a takeover on the day of a match or game but it can also take place during a regular day including practice and work outs.
• Content Life Cycle
  • Strategize- What type of content? Who is it for? What reason?
    • Women’s tennis needs content created for its upcoming 2017 Spring season. They are the defending MAC Champions, which was the
program’s first ever title in 39 years. Due to the title, the team will also be hosting the 2017 MAC Conference Tournament. This will be a large event for the program and if the team makes the tournament, the content can help gain attention from Muncie locals to support the team that weekend. The content will be for the teams’ social media platforms- Twitter and Instagram- and hopes to gain the attention of new followers around the world as well as continue to be attractive to current followers. With the program’s recent success, the content should really reach out to new fans to want to follow along with the upcoming season. These new fans can also be reached with current fans continuing to share the content and exude the strong Ball State identity we want them to feel. The social media platforms should act as word of mouth for people. They will follow along with matches or feel a part of a road trip when they cannot attend matches. The players of the team should be featured constantly so fans get to know the faces of the program. In-person videos of the players are encouraged. In addition to the social media content, the department will be trying out live broadcasting of a match, as well as live scoring. Many programs across the country have incorporated this regularly into the matches with live streaming on every court and a link that provides followers with the scores aside from social media. Due to the expenses and short staff, Ball State has not had these features in the past. The strategy is to create content that embodies the community and identity of fans and followers of Ball State women’s tennis.

- Plan- Assign roles, responsibilities, and processes.
  - Planning this content creation must begin with calendars for each month beginning in November 2016 and all the way to the end of the Spring season in May 2017 to detail the posts before and during season. Each month should have a goal for engagement with conference play (March and April) having higher numbers because that is when people outside of the realm might be attracted to following the team. November and December should be when the director and assistant of marketing plan
decide dates for specific events for the team. Pick one match a month in
out of conference play and minimum of two conference matches to market
intensely. Content creation should begin for the MAC tournament but
cannot be promoted quite as much until the team qualifies. Once the
matches have been decided, the marketing team must work with the
graphic designer for any graphics and visuals needed. December is also
the time when the poster should be out to print so it can be ready in time
for the beginning of January. This would also be the graphic designer’s
responsibility. The marketing team will also work with the director of
broadcasting to set up any interviews for the season. A season preview
video should be filmed early January and two matches out of conference
should feature a post-match interview as well as highlights of the match.
Once conference play begins, the director of broadcasting should be in
attendance to each home conference match to provide those. The assigned
assistant director of media relations for women’s tennis will be a pivotal
contact with the roles listed above and the coaching staff. This person
should also oversee either running the live stats for a match or training an
intern to do it. During the season, the media relations contact must write
an article after each match and schedule a photographer to attend a
minimum of two matches during the season.

- Create- create, approve, and publish the content.
  - The creation of the content must begin in December with the graphic
designer producing a template for match day. Once this template is
created, he or she can fill in the correct information for each match and
adjust pictures to include a variety of players. The poster will be ready to
be distributed by the first home match, January 29th, and there are enough
to be placed at every home match for the rest of the season for fans to
take. The graphics will be posted on the teams’ social media accounts and
the final results of each match will be posted in a short write up on
www.ballstatesports.com as well as tweeted out by the two main handles.
As the season continues and the team reaches at least five conference
wins, the marketing team must immediately begin to put out content about the tournament. Include the date, available hotels, sponsors, potential broadcasting, price of tickets, and any giveaways to make sure the team receives its home court advantage.

- Maintain- review, update, and delete the content.
  - As each month of the season passes, the marketing assistant and media relations contact must continue to monitor the content. Graphics will always be posted on match day regardless of prior interaction from fans, but there must be a close monitor on other content on those days such as videos and posts. Marketing should also keep close records of attendance to adjust ideas when few fans show up or when a larger crowd appears. When live stats were used, was there an influx in activity on the social media platforms or less? The second time it was used, did it show more fans following along?

- Audit/Optimize- Measure how the content is performing and make recommendations based on those measurements.
  - This process will be very crucial for Ball State University’s athletic department to constantly improve and edit content. New content and marketing strategies will always bring failures and successes, but it is more important that they provide ways to improve the content to reap the full benefits. Measure traffic on the content to see what is receiving the highest attention, who is viewing the content, how long are people viewing it for, where do they go after viewing the content, and what platform they are viewing the content. This information will provide insight on the audience and if those followers are engaging in the content as Ball State hopes- purchasing tickets, sharing the content, or following social media platforms. If none of these things are happening, the content needs to be changed to reach those audiences. The same for the marketing team and events put together. If an event has minimum turn out and a team sees no benefits from it, the next event must be adjusted and redesigned to be more enticing for fans and followers. Any consistent trend on social
media and in other athletic departments should be incorporated to help increase traffic and increase attendance at events. The audience for the content and events must be determined to fully understand its effectiveness. Auditing and optimizing will then be put into place as the traffic is analyzed.

- **Govern-** Ensure effective standards and inform future priorities.
  - As the program showed success in the prior season, content becomes even more crucial to spread the word to fans and followers for the upcoming season. Ball State women’s tennis needs to focus primarily on the latter half of the season to garner this attention and with the help from the marketing team the goals should be attainable. However, the stable foundation and unity can begin early in December by introducing the players and kicking the season off with interactive events and content.

- **Style Guide**
  - **Style Manual**
    - Throughout this content, the AP Style Guide is the manual of choice. This applies to the website, social media accounts, emails, events, and all the content presented. It is what all people in all departments within the company are expected to use for those things on a day to day basis.
    - Attached is a link to the overview of the [AP Style Guide](#).
  - **Dictionary**
    - As a point of reference, all employees are to turn to Merriam-Webster for spelling. Copies should be found at most offices, but our remote workers should have access online.
  - **Commonly Troublesome words**
    - Ball State and Cardinals are always capitalized
    - Cardinals can be abbreviated to Cards
    - MAC should be all capital letters
    - Women’s tennis always has an apostrophe
• Tennis
  o Tiebreaker is spelled without a hyphen
  o Double-fault has a hyphen
  o Tiebreakers are always written 7-6(with the score of the
tiebreak in the parenthesis

  o Style and tone
    ▪ Ball State wants fans and followers that are proud of the university and
wear the name on their clothing. The content wants people to feel as if
they belong to a community when he or she interacts with it or shares it.
Fans should feel encouraged to voice opinions and react with the team’s
success and losses.
    ▪ Fans should feel excitement for all of Ball State’s teams content.
Countdowns, videos, stories, and events really should capture the attention
of the fans and reel them in to following along all season.
    ▪ Fans and followers should feel encouraged to voice their opinions to
provide feedback on content and events for Ball State to continue to reach
these audiences.

  o Personas
    ▪ Students attending Ball State University
    ▪ Residents of Muncie, Indiana
    ▪ Parents of students who attend Ball State University
    ▪ Alumnus of Ball State University
    ▪ Young females and males aspiring to play college athletics
    ▪ Fans of college athletics
    ▪ Other fans who have minimum affiliation other than they choose to
support the school

  o Graphics and formatting
    ▪ Red, white, and black should be the dominant color scheme of graphics
with many of them have Ball State and the Cardinal head prominently
found on it
• Font should be Helvetica Neue and bold for majority of graphics to keep unity across all platforms
• Include social media handles and the applicable social media icons following it
  o Approved content
    • Approved content for Ball State athletics can be seen on their website and social media accounts.
  o Sourcing
    • Fans, followers, and other athletic departments are Ball State’s largest sources. Fans and followers allow for the content to be analyzed and adjusted accordingly with their response to it. Content that excelled will be constantly used and incorporated regularly to continue to engage the fans while hoping to attract new ones. On the other hand, content that received minimum attention must receive attention to reproduce something that garners attention from current and new fans. Other athletic departments provide insight on ideas for content and marketing as well as an opportunity to update it if mistakes or lack of response happened at the other school.

• Content Calendars
  o A content calendar will organize the content daily and monthly for the specific sport. It will vary between Fall, Winter, and Spring sports but for every sport there should an in season and off season calendar. The calendars should include as an outline: any team events outside of competition, all competition dates, signing period, professional drafts, and first day of practice/ welcome back week for each semester. The in-season calendars should be more detailed with promotion of games, meets, or matches taking precedent. However, off season calendars are just as important to begin spreading the word of the team. Attached in appendix two are calendars for July, October, December, and January.

• Game Day Guide
It is important to engage fans and gain new fans on competition days. This means getting fans out to the actual event and informing those who cannot be there of updates throughout the competition. Regardless of whether the sporting event is televised, it is still suggested to follow these steps for marketing and social media promotion on the day of competition.

- Ball State Women’s Tennis will begin has its first Mid-American Conference home match on March 31st, 2017 at 1 p.m. against Bowling Green University.
- Around 11 a.m., post on Instagram and Twitter the game day graphic that tells fans where, when, and who. This is very important because with a sport that can go indoors or outdoors, fans need to know the location if inclement weather were to occur. In these posts, tag BallStateSports and BSUSportsLink to have those accounts repost and spread the word to their followers.
- Aggressively post about free pizza and t-shirt giveaways using emojis and capital letters. Push fans to attend!
- 30 minutes before the match, tweet a picture of the team warming up and letting followers know it is close to match time.
- Tweet out the starting doubles lineup. If players do have twitter handles, use those in the lineup instead of names.
- Every ten minutes’ tweet score updates and tweet separately when a match has finished.
- Tweet the result of the doubles point- Cards win the doubles point and are up 1-0 or Cards lose the doubles point and are down 0-1 heading into singles.
- Tweet the singles lineup and again use players twitter handles when necessary.
- Singles scores should be updated on Twitter every 10-15 minutes.
- Separate tweets can be sent out when someone wins their first set or all the matches have completed the first sets- Cards win 4 out of the 6 first sets- just to mix it up.
• Tweet separately when a match finishes and include the overall score-
player wins on court 4 and makes it 2-0 Cards or the match is 1-1 with
player losing on court 4.
• Video tape as many of the match points as possible but only for matches
Ball State wins.
• As the match gets closer, tweet more often and include more details of the
match with specific point descriptions. Maybe a player hit an ace or a
high-level long point happened. These tweets should make followers feel
like they are at the match.
• Wrap the match up with a final tweet of the overall score. This can also
include the overall record or if there is a win streak.
• Instagram a picture from the match or a team picture alerting followers of
the result and the upcoming match information.

Summary

This project looked at the research of social identity and online communities as related to
sports to best provide mid-major athletic departments with social media and marketing content
strategies. It received positive feedback from two evaluators who hoped to use it immediately in
their current profession of media relations and marketing for Ball State athletics.

The content strategy hopes to evolve in the future by incorporating more outside research
from Power 5 athletic departments as well as the content being produced. Those athletic
departments are more likely to have a larger audience to examine the response to content, which
can in turn be created at a mid-major level to gain similar attention. It must be constantly updated
and governed with any addition of social media platforms or marketing trends that appear.
Outside Evaluations

1. Paula Haughn (Assistant Director of Media Relations at Ball State University)
   a. Sports information director for women’s basketball, men’s tennis, women’s tennis and secondary to men’s football. In charge of all articles for the Ball State website related to those sports. Liaison between all other sports information from opposing teams and media contact. Schedules interviews for coaching staff and players with Ball State Sports Link. In charge of all stats and post-match/game stats for media guide and articles. Appoints all credentials and media information prior game day. Entering fifteenth year in collegiate sports information and media relations.
   b. Tessa is someone I work with on a regular basis because she is the women’s tennis assistant coach. We regularly correspond about the team and information related to matches. She assists me in running social media for the team and creates content that I can post on the Ball State website. We work together when setting up interviews and videos with Sports Link. As the topic pertains to my job, social media is where I share the articles I write or any important information about my teams. Ball State Sports and Ball State Sports Link are the two handles that I have access to, which are the general information hub for our athletic department.
   c. Ball State’s athletic department continues to grow and try to keep up with big name schools that are fortunate enough to have a large budget and support staff. Its shortcomings are inevitable but I see my department do its best to compete with the best. The topic of Tessa’s project will be something I share with my coworkers as we focus on gaining fans and reaching a larger community has not changed since I’ve worked here. Its focus on smaller, low-profile sports is what I think will be most useful because we put a lot of time and energy into basketball and football. This year we had the lowest attendance in Division I football, so we need to start looking to other sports.
   d. Tessa began her approach with a strong compilation of information that allowed for myself as the reader to learn more about identity and online communities. The research presented was just as helpful as the project because it gave me a better
understand of how followers and fans would identify with our program. Her project’s structure flowed very well to show a reader that before content is created, take a step back. Learn about the university and what is currently going on in the athletic department.

e. The body of the project is very well done and full of informative work for mid-major athletic departments. It is clear how another school could use the structure and fill in the blanks as it pertains to their own programs. Tessa’s project covers a wide array of topics in marketing and social media. Her strongest section was the content life cycle because of the emphasis on goals and how an athletic department should hope to grow from using the project. The graphics are unique and would clearly engage followers.

f. Tessa’s project overall presented her knowledge of identity and online communities as they relate to college sports. I believe this will be easily implemented in any mid-major athletic department. Ball State will especially benefit because most of the project is based off the university. Marketing and social media have grown exponentially in the fifteen years I have been in college sports and her emphasis on those two topics make the project even more beneficial to the field.

2. Brad Caudill (Assistant Director of Media Relations and Coordinator of Multimedia)

a. Sports information director of women’s volleyball, softball, cross country, and track and field. Entering 17th year in college athletics and 16th at Ball State. I oversee all my teams’ social media and work with our graphic designer to create specific graphics and content to post on them. Coordinate all interviews and videos with media and our broadcasting department. Work closely with the marketing team to promote and hold events for my teams.

b. I do not work directly with Tessa but she has come to me multiple times to discuss potential graphics and social media content for her team. We have worked together to get content created and collaborate ideas from my experience. Social media and marketing are important to my profession and have continue to take a large precedent with my teams. My coordinator title was added in the last few years due to social media’s rise in college sports. Ball State has added more
positions in both fields as well and I oversee all our student interns and graduate assistants in the media relations department.

c. Tessa’s topic is very relevant and has been thoroughly elaborated on between her research and project. College athletics continues to gain so much national attention and fans are given more opportunities to interact with their favorite teams through social media. Therefore, a focus on marketing and social media is imperative to our profession. I am very aware of the larger opportunities Power 5 schools have with their budget and built-in fan base, so I also find Tessa’s project to fill in the holes at mid-major departments.

d. The research presented is necessary to understand how people identify with a sports team and how this is done through in the Internet. Tessa properly uses that as a starting base before taking readers through her step-by-step project. The two work cohesively and provided knowledge that I found useful immediately. I would advise people who read this project to really look at the research first and not go into the project thinking they know social media and marketing or they are experts in college sports, so it will all make sense. I have almost a decade of experience and I was still learning things from the research.

e. The body of Tessa’s project flowed smoothly and broke down the important things to consider before an athletic department should create content. Her persona section reminded me of many of the fans I deal with for our women’s volleyball team. The way they interact on social media is always considered when I am thinking of new content or events for the team. Her game day guide overlapped with my approach to softball and volleyball because of the length and time I spend with volleyball and softball’s twitter come game day.

f. I would really like to share the content life cycle with our marketing department because I want to have goals in our department for our social media platforms but also expanding our fan base. The content calendars should also be shared with marketing departments because it’s easy to see how it can be changed to a specific sport but it makes the people in marketing map out ahead of time what should be done. In sports, things change quickly with new coaches and some sports having almost thirty plus games. The calendars should help a department that lacks staff.
References


Witkemper, C., Hoon Lim, C., & Waldburger, A. (2012). Social media and sports marketing:

Appendix 1

- Image 1: Birthday Graphic

- Image 2: Meet the player graphic
• Image 3: Social media handle graphic

• Image 4: Fall schedule graphic
• Image 5: Spring schedule graphic

• Image 6: Match Day graphic version one
  - Created by Kelly Barock

• Image 7: Match day graphic version two
• Image 8: Countdown graphic

We are 🌼 this weekend!!!
📅 February 18th & 19th
🆚 Evansville & IUPUI
⏰ 5:15pm & 2pm
📍 Northwest YMCA
#ChirpChirpFriday

2/17/17, 1:03 PM

VIEW TWEET ACTIVITY

4 RETWEETS 12 LIKES

• Image 9: Match Day tweet
• Image 10: Score update tweet

BSU Women's Tennis
@BallStateWTNS

Singles scores:
1 4-6, 1-0
2 6-1, 3-2
3 6-2, 4-3
4 6-1, 6-1
5 6-3, 4-0
6 6-1, 3-5

#ChirpChirp

2/25/17, 3:14 PM

VIEW TWEET ACTIVITY

1 RETWEET 4 LIKES

• Image 11: Pre-match tweet

BSU Women's Tennis
@BallStateWTNS

30 mins till we start our match here in Cincinnati!! #ChirpChirp

2/12/17, 1:29 PM

VIEW TWEET ACTIVITY

• Image 11: Pre-match tweet
We are excited to announce the signing of Victoria Sec from @JMTANY to the Class of 2021!!!! @BallStateSports

Image 12: Recruiting week tweet

ballstatewtns

Next stop Chapel Hill!!! 48 hours till season!!! #BSUWTNS #ChirpChirp #CardsOnThree

View all 5 comments

carmencbg @criobueno dailee perra•

Image 13: Travel tweet
Image 14: Post-match tweet

Image 15: Practice tweet
### Appendix 2

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#### JULY 2016

- July 1st: One month till school resumes
- July 24th: Carmen’s Birthday
- July 26th: Fall schedule graphic

T = Twitter, IG = Instagram
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<td>October 20th, ITA Regionals</td>
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**IMPORTANT DATES:**

- October 1st: Ring ceremony
- October 7th: Purdue Invite
- October 14th: Cincinnati Invite
- October 20th: ITA Regionals

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**DECEMBER 2016:***

- 1st: Match day graphics templates due
- 16th: Fall Semester ends
- 20th: Team poster due
- 22nd: 1 month till first match

**T:** Twitter, **IG:** Instagram
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<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>SATURDAY</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Spring home schedule graphic (T, IG)</td>
<td>Meet the Cards Video (T, IG)</td>
<td>Practice day, tweet schedule for the weekend, 1 day IG</td>
<td>First Match! Tweet scores and results</td>
<td>Match day! Tweet scores, results, IG post</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recap matches (ICYMI tweet and article)</td>
<td>Meet the Cards Video (T, IG)</td>
<td>Travel day (T, IG)</td>
<td>Match details (T)</td>
<td>1 day until home opener graphic (T, IG)</td>
<td>First home match! Tweet scores, results, IG match day graphic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recap match (ICYMI tweet and article)</td>
<td>5 days until home opener graphic (T, IG)</td>
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**JANUARY 2017**

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**IMPORTANT DATES:**

- **January 9th:** First day of class and practice
- **January 14th:** One week till first match
- **January 21st:** First match @UNC-Chapel Hill
- **January 29th:** Home opener

T= Twitter, IG= Instagram