

Virginia Tech Women's Lacrosse Twitter Account Attendance Influence

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Abstract

Today many businesses rely on social media platforms as a marketing tool in order to promote their brand as well as gain customer loyalty. Twitter has increasingly become a popular marketing tool for many businesses of all kinds over the past several years. Sports organizations, such as college athletic teams, have quickly caught onto the popular trend by using Twitter in efforts to increase brand awareness, create relationships among the general public, and maintain fan loyalty. College athletic teams have relied on Twitter to increase their overall fan base, ultimately leading to an increase in attendance at the team's home games. The Virginia Tech Athletic Communication and Marketing department uses Twitter to persuade the general public to attend the various sports team's home games but are unsure whether or not the social media platform actually influences attendance positively and if it should be a top priority when it comes to marketing tactics. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of the Virginia Tech Women's Lacrosse Twitter account and the influence of attendance at Women's Lacrosse games that are located at Virginia Tech. After the conclusion of this study both departments had information to help them enhance the Twitter account. At the last VT Women's Lacrosse home game, participants over the age of 18 voluntarily filled out a five closed-ended question questionnaire regarding the Women's Lacrosse Twitter account. Data from the questionnaire was imported into an excel spreadsheet and inputted into a sum formula. The results revealed that the Women's Lacrosse Twitter account did positively influence attendance and encouraged more individuals to come out and support the team at home games.

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Introduction

Our society today constantly has their noses stuck in social media platforms. Some of the most commonly used social media platforms include Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. A research study done by Pew Research Center found that 70 percent of adults are actively engaged in various social media platforms, while 90 percent of young adults are actively engaged in such platforms as well (Perrin, 2015). Perrin (2015) went on to find that within these social media platforms Twitter is one of the top three most commonly used platforms. A study done by Bulearca and Bulearca (2010) found that many users of social media come to Twitter in order to seek out information, which essentially gives the app a leg up compared to its competitors. Professionals in the industry have labeled Twitter as “An Information Company” (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010, p. 297).

In the marketing world, Twitter can be a valuable tool for businesses of all kinds when it comes to brand awareness. Research done by Michael Stelzner (2018) found that 90 percent of businesses increased their overall exposure of their company from engaging in Twitter marketing campaigns. Within the past year many organizations have turned to Twitter to help increase the exposure of their businesses within the general public. Forty-four percent of organizations plan on making Twitter their top priority as a marketing tool (Stelzner, 2018). The reason being is because Twitter stands out to companies due to the unique characteristics the app offers. “The specificity of Twitter lies in its messages – tweets – that can have maximum 140 characters, with the default setting public, which means that the essence of events can be transmitted on a large scale across the network, instantaneously” (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009, p. 2172). Essentially, businesses are able to use this platform to craft unique messages that are sent out to the general public. Once they send out information, the general public is able to create

conversation off of it or share it with others. Twitter allows for individuals to pass along information by word of mouth, which can be a crucial piece to the marketing puzzle. By doing so businesses are able to increase their overall brand exposure while also gaining a valuable fan base at the same time. “Using social media and especially Twitter for marketing purposes is only a recent phenomenon, as it is mainly since 2008 that social networking sites exploded in user numbers and marketing applications” (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010, p. 5). Although this application has been around for almost a decade now, many businesses are just now starting to hop on the Twitter train as a “go-to” for marketing purposes.

Sports organizations everywhere have started to realize the impact that the social media platform can have when it comes to increasing awareness of an organization’s brand. The term brand can be referred to as the personality of a business or a business’s competitive identity (Anholt, 2007). A business’s brand is built over time and should reflect the vision or mission of the organization as well. Twitter has become an important platform for sports organizations of all levels to market their team, players, and organization in general. Research has shown that the social media platform owes most of its growth to athletes that have persuaded the public to join the platform to engage with them (Hambrick, 2012). Twitter allows not only for informational and promotional messages to be sent out but provides fans a place to interact with the organization. “As Twitter continues to evolve, many sports organizations are adopting Twitter accounts within their marketing strategies to interact with their fans.” (Witkemper, Hoon Lim, & Waldburger, 2012, p. 171). By sports organizations being able to interact with their fans they are ultimately creating a foundation based on trust. Many sports organizations found that through the use of Twitter they were able to increase their fan base and ultimately enhance their relationships further with the general public (Stelzner, 2018). When an organization is able to increase their

brand awareness and fan loyalty, they are essentially increasing the support from the general public of that organization as well. When an individual is supportive of a team this typically translates into them attending the organization's events. Just through enhancing a sports organization's Twitter they are able to use the outcomes to help aid in increasing game event attendance and bring in revenue without having to consider the costs. (Newssock,2017) . Sports organizations will only benefit from using Twitter as a marketing platform though if they are using it efficiently.

Virginia Tech is a well-known academic university located in the mountains of Blacksburg, Virginia. The university currently has 19 Division I sports teams that is made up of ten male teams and nine female teams. Within the nine female teams, one of the most respected teams is the Women's Lacrosse team. The Women's Lacrosse team was founded in 1995 and has been in the ACC since. Thompson Field has served as the home to the team since 2003 and allows for 2,000 fans to sit comfortably during games (Virginia Tech Athletics). The VT Athletic Communications and Marketing department are in charge of marketing the team's home games. The departments currently use marketing tactics such as schedule cards, posters, word of mouth at other sporting events, and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account has been up and running since January 2011 via Twitter.com. The departments put a majority of their focus on marketing the team through this social media platform. The overarching goal of both departments is to spread awareness about the team's home games in efforts to increase attendance.

Statement of the Problem

The VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account is run by the VT Department of Athletic Communications, with the assistance of the VT Department of Athletic Marketing. The goal of both departments when using the Twitter platform is to provide content that will not only inform the public about the Women's Lacrosse team but also persuade them to support the team. Both departments hope that an increase in team support will translate to an increase in attendance. One of the main areas of focus for the departments when publishing posts for Twitter, is to consider how the postings can influence individuals to come support the Women's Lacrosse team at home games. While the departments try to take advantage of Twitter as a marketing platform, they do not have the detailed information of how beneficial the platform can be when it comes to trying to increase attendance at home games. This study will provide both departments with sufficient information that will enable them to further enhance the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account in efforts to influence home game attendance.

Purpose Statement

The questions guiding this research are:

- What percent of Lacrosse Attendees have active Twitter accounts?
- How are the Lacrosse Attendees hearing about the game?
- What type of Twitter post influenced Lacrosse attendees to come to the game?
- How frequently are those with active Twitter accounts seeing posts published on the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account?

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account and the influence of attendance at Women's Lacrosse games that are located at VT. Exploring these two topics will allow the VT Marketing and Communications department to determine if the use of Twitter influences participation for home game attendance. This study will:

- Provide the Virginia Tech Athletic Communications and Marketing department information in order to enhance the Women's Lacrosse Twitter account.
- Investigate the best way that the Virginia Tech Athletic Communication and Marketing department can reach the general public through the Women's Lacrosse Twitter account.
- Determine if Twitter should be a top priority when it comes to home game marketing tactics.

The overall hypothesis for this research study was that the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account would have a positive impact on the attendance at the home game. Regarding the hypothesis for each research question, the researcher hypothesized for research question number one that 70% of lacrosse attendees would have Twitter accounts. For research question number

two the researcher hypothesized that lacrosse attendees would hear about the game through Twitter. For research question three and four, the researcher hypothesized that lacrosse attendees would be influenced through game day graphics and would see VT Women's Lacrosse tweets every time they were active on Twitter.

Theoretical Perspective

This study was guided by the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). The UGT was first published in 1944 and has since been built off of by various communication research theories. UGT seeks to understand more in-depth about what people do with media, instead of what media does to people. The theory explores how individuals seek out specific types of media to gratify their needs (David, 2016). UGT can help marketing professionals better understand their audience through various measurements and scales (Whiting & Williams, 2013). “The basic premise of uses and gratifications theory is that individuals will seek out media among competitors that fulfills their needs and leads to ultimate gratifications” (Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011, p. 362). Our society today relies heavily on social media to fulfill their media needs. This is because social media is at our hands every day due to its location on our mobile devices and laptops.

David Williams found that there were four common themes as to what individuals are trying to gratify while using social media platforms. The four themes include 1) social interaction, 2) information seeking, 3) passing time, and 4) entertainment (Whiting & Williams, 2013). All four of these themes can be found on the Twitter platform. Twitter has become a platform that satisfies the needs of countless individuals, which leads them to come back to the platform over and over again. Twitter allows people to build relationships through sending out tweets, direct messaging, retweeting, liking, and most importantly following each other (Chen, 2011). Twitter gives people a sense that they belong somewhere and can connect easily with other people. This platform is also very well known for giving out daily information on the theme of the account. Many people rely on Twitter to give them the news stories that they are seeking out. The platform can cause individuals to spend countless hours on it due to the fact of

how entertaining it can be. Individuals generally seek to gratify their needs within their own personal interests on social media. Those who have a sports interest, lacrosse interest, VT interest, and female sports interest will be able to gratify their needs through the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account and the influence of attendance at Women's Lacrosse games that are located at Virginia Tech. UGT theory states that each individual has a motive in which they are trying to satisfy through social media. Each fan goes onto the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account to satisfy their motive for connecting with others about the team and staying up to date with information on the team. When the Women's Lacrosse Twitter account sends out a tweet about an upcoming game it is essentially creating a platform for fans to fulfill the need of connecting with other. Fans connect with others through retweets, likes, and replies. This means that fans are creating conversation through the Women's Lacrosse Twitter, which increases the overall popularity of the Twitter account. The more individuals engaging in the Twitter account the more exposure the account is getting, thus the more exposure the team will get. The account also relies heavily on entertainment tweets in order to increase fan engagement. Through this aspect, fans will turn to the account to satisfy their entertainment needs, which will lead them to become more invested in the team. The account also sends out tweets to keep fans and followers informed about upcoming home games. All of these aspects of the account allow for an increase in attendance at home games.

During the study the targeted audience was assessed through a five-question questionnaire that was provided to participants at the VT Women's Lacrosse teams last 2019 spring home game. Within the questionnaire, closed-ended questions asked how the Lacrosse

Twitter account is beneficial to them in general and how it is beneficial towards home game attendance. Closed-ended questions can be described as specific responses participants can choose from that are set by the researcher (Sofaer, 1999). All of the possible answer choices for the question regarding Twitter content involved information on the four basic UGT theme needs. By examining which response the audience chose allows for the determination of what tweets were more beneficial towards our audience and which ones were not in order to strengthen the Lacrosse Twitter account. The questionnaire allowed our audience to confirm that the UGT theory is intertwined with Twitter; by confirming that the audiences chose either an answer related to informational, social interaction, entertainment, or passing time tweet. From the data information provided by this theory we identified which type of need our audience is pushing towards the most. Furthermore, in order to grab people's attention towards each Women's Lacrosse tweet, the tweet must be considered popular. Popular tweets show up on everyone's news feed whether it is in their interest or not. To ensure that tweets become popular, the account must publish tweets frequently in order to keep people engaged. Within the questionnaire, there was a question relating to how frequently current active Twitter users see tweets published from the Women's lacrosse account. By asking this question the researcher was able to determine how often Twitter users were seeing the content published. The UGT theory states that individuals go onto social media platforms to satisfy their needs, therefore we were able to relate both the outcome of the content question and the frequency question to this theory in efforts to get a better gauge on how often the account should be posting and how often each type of content should be posted as well.

The UGT theory, in summary, helped identify how satisfied the audience was with the content and frequency of the posts that are published on the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter

account. This also allowed the VT Athletic Communication and Marketing department to understand what content they should be publishing more or less of in order to bring the audience back to the account again and again.

Review of Literature

To find literature for this study the researcher used google scholar to ensure results of high-quality studies. The researcher chose several key words to enter into the google scholar search bar in order to narrow down the results. Key words included social media, social media marketing, college athletics, college athletic attendance, Twitter, and Twitter Marketing. Google scholar was able to uncover an abundance of peer-reviewed articles.

Twitter and Social Media

Social media has become increasingly popular over the years for individuals of all different ages. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (p. 61). Social media has various platforms in which individuals can find themselves getting lost in content whether it is informational or just for pure entertainment. Twitter has become one of the most used platforms in order to connect with users and push out marketing content (Wang, 2014). Additionally, Wang states “the development of new media has significantly strengthened organizations’ abilities to communicate with clients, stakeholders, media, and the general public” (p.13).

Twitter is considered as a microblogging tool that allows individuals to publish their thoughts and ideas into 140-character written platform. Additionally, Twitter users are able to follow each other in order to receive and review their tweets (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). Twitter allows individuals to come together to connect with one another based on the topics of common likings. This application allows users to follow accounts where they will be alerted when the account sends out a message. Accounts are able to send out content to users that can

provide them with entertainment, information, or connectivity. One of the main goals of Twitter is to allow accounts to create relationships with each other in hopes to promote a brand or individual. This social media platform aids in keeping existing and potential consumers engaged, informed, and entertained (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014).

The platform offers a variety of content that can be posted to the general public. The content the platform offers includes photos, videos, conversations, and status posts (Dann, 2010). Photo and video postings allow for individuals to send out pictures or videos based on their interest or personal thoughts. Conversational posts provide a foundation for social interaction in which individuals can chat with each another on topics of their likings. A status post provides individuals with an opportunity to post their own current personal thoughts or actions (Dann, 2010). Twitter allows for individuals or organizations to provide the general public with unique and creative content.

Importance of Twitter for Marketing in Organizations

For many organizations, Twitter has become a heavily relied on tool for marketing purposes.

“Twitter users may follow certain business accounts or brand communities and eventually subscribe to company tweets. When a user becomes a follower, all subsequent tweets appear in his or her timeline. Marketers also can follow their users to observe their conversations and even induce two-way communication flows to send direct messages to customers.” (Swani, 2014).

Marketing organizations are able to reach individuals of various ages through this social media channel. The typical age range for a Twitter user has been identified as 18-34 years old in the

United States. This age range has also been identified as the highly pursued age range by marketing and sports marketing organizations (Witkemper & Hoon Lim & Waldburger, 2012).

Organizations created Twitter accounts in 2008 when the social media platform gained numerous users and provided organizations with beneficial marketing tactics (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). Twitter has been found to be a very beneficial application when it comes to increasing brand awareness (Swani, 2014). The platform allows organizations to interact with users and also create relationships with them in order to influence them to purchase or try out their products. Through creating relationships with users, organizations are ultimately building a foundation with trust so that users will want to support their organization and remain loyal customers. It is important for all organizations to understand their audience to allow them to know how they can continue to foster relationships with them. Through social media applications, such as Twitter, organizations are able to determine what content allows for customers to feel connected to the brand and what content does not (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014). Twitter allows marketers to engage with customers that have an interest in their brand. Twitter can contribute tremendously in helping an organization build a positive brand image (Swani, 2014). Through the application, organizations are able to post thoughts and images to the general public in hopes to create a connection with them. A main goal for every organization is to develop a connection with the general public in order for them to feel engaged with their brand. By engaging these individuals, they will most likely become intrigued by the brand and want to support it.

Twitter encourages individuals to come together to interact with one another by engaging in on-going conversations. Social networking services, such as Twitter, are tools that have been found successful for companies looking to revamp their marketing efforts (Ahn, Han, Kwak,

Moon, & Jeong, 2007). This provides individuals a platform to find others who share similar interests and create discussion posts regarding these interests. The relationships that social networking services can create between individuals represent authentic relationships as compared to other tools. For organizations, successful marketing tactics entails creating relationships with the general public in order to build and gain their respect. Additionally, with the help of social networking services organizations will be able to increase their brand awareness more aggressively through shared posts and discussion boards created by the general public. These conversations created by the general public have been shown to play a vital role when it comes to the spread of information and influence among others. Sometimes a conversation is all it takes to create a widespread adoption of a product or organization within the general public (Kempe, Kleinberg, & Tardos, 2015).

Importance of Twitter for Marketing in College Athletics

For college athletics, Twitter can be used as a way to influence individuals to attend sporting events for non-ticketing sporting events, such as Women's Lacrosse. Through the use of social media college athletics communications and marketing departments are able to use engagement in efforts to create relationships with fans. "Twitter has demonstrated that sports organizations tend to use social media to develop professional relationships with fans via sharing information and promoting products" (Wang, 2014, p. 2). By creating a healthy and engaging relationship between a college sports team and its fan base, fans can become more interested in attending the games of that team. The outcome of a collegiate sporting events attendance all comes down to the college athletics marketing tactics.

The general public spends a majority of their time on various social media platforms due to the number of benefits they provide. Some of these benefits include convenience, useful information, and social interaction (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). By college athletics taking advantage of today's social media platforms, such as Twitter, they will ultimately be creating a new form of communication-based marketing in efforts to increase attendance at free admission sports (Watanabe, Yan, & Soebbing, 2015). "Twitter's value to organizations, including sports teams, has been furthered through its advertising vehicles: promoted tweets, promoted trends, and promoted accounts" (Williams & Chinn, 2014, p. 37). Fans use Twitter as a way to connect with their favorite sports teams in which translates to them becoming more invested in the team. "As sports organizations themselves started to use Twitter, they found an avenue for game promotion and fan involvement before, during and after sporting events" (Chinn & Williams, 2014, p. 1).

Fan involvement and loyalty are considered to be a top priority for all college sports organizations (McEvoy, Popp, & Watanabe, 2017). Relationship marketing is a concept that can be done through social media in order to help sports organizations create fan loyalty, increase attendance, and enhance fan relationships (Bee & Kahle, 2006). "Social networks provide fans with a range of features that are built around opportunities for engagement and allow the team to boost fan loyalty, a key relationship-marketing goal" (Williams & Chinn, 2010, p. 433). Relationship marketing can be described as managing a relationship between the stakeholder and the consumer. These marketing efforts seek to put value and commitment to consumers at the top of their list in order to enhance and maintain long term customer loyalty (Ravald & Gronroos, 2014). Relationship management within the sports industry can help build relationships with

their fan base to aid in repeat attendance for that teams events. Increasing fan interaction opportunities will also promote increased loyalty to the team (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Importance of Twitter for Increasing College Athletic Sports Attendance

Although most college athletic programs have implemented some sort of social media platform into their game day promotion tactics, many college athletic programs still lag behind. A study done showed that social media was driving up attendance for sporting events, but most organizations were not taking full advantage of the utilization of social media platforms (Warren, 2016). The ticket salespeople within these organizations incorporated social media into their marketing tactics but failed to incorporate it consistently into their selling activities (Warren, 2016). If ticketing salespeople were to get behind on the trend of social media marketing, then those who are in charge of attendance for non-ticketing sporting events must be far behind. In order to show all departments of college athletics the importance of social media marketing more studies must be done on this topic. Being able to show these departments all of the characteristics that go into increasing attendance at games will allow them to see clearly what should be prioritized the most.

Shackelford and Greenwell (2005) were able to reveal the relationship between specific factors and the attendance at selected NCAA Division I Women's sporting events. The specific factors included aspects such as city population, student enrollment, and prior winning percentage. While this study was done on NCAA Division I Women's sporting events, it can really apply to all collegiate sports. Characteristics such as winning percentage can be a major influence in regards to attendance, but should not be to blame when attendance levels are low. Game day promotion through social media platforms should be considered the top priority when

it comes to characteristics to consider regarding attendance rates. As long as fans are connecting with the collegiate team they are not going to stop coming to games just because their team is on a losing streak or the location is in the middle of nowhere. “In addition, promotion has been found to be a strong predictor of attendance in major league sports, but little is known about the different promotional strategies used by universities when marketing women’s sports” (Shackelford & Greenwell, 2005, p. 146).

While there is very little research done regarding the topic of social media marketing in college athletics, research has shown that college athletic teams who chose to use social media in promotion efforts to increase attendance had more success than those who did not (Clavio & Walsh, 2013). Around 60% of the general public have Twitter accounts in order to follow their favorite sports teams to read information and have notifications for upcoming games (Clavio & Walsh, 2013). The fans that follow social media accounts are constantly getting notifications and reminders of upcoming events. Game day promotions not only remind the public about the upcoming event but will also allow other individuals to see that others are attending the event as well. Sending out information repetitively encourages individuals to check out the sports team and even eventually commit to becoming a loyal fan (McEvoy, Popp, & Watanabe, 2017). Twitter has provided sports organizations a way to break away from the traditional game day marketing tactics and has opened a variety of opportunities to spread awareness of events in efforts to increase attendance (Watanabe, Yan, & Soebbing, 2015).

Methodology and Design

Methodology

The researcher chose to do a quantitative study to learn more in-depth about the positive influence the Women's Lacrosse Twitter account has on the number of individuals who attend home games. A quantitative study is used to interpret numerical data provided from participants in order to come to a conclusion, while a qualitative study involves the researcher interpreting the verbal description of the topic provided by the participant (Arghode, 2012). For this study, quantitative research provided numerical data that confirmed or denied the hypotheses set earlier in this study by the researcher.

The research instrument chosen was a questionnaire in order to retrieve this numerical data from the individuals who chose to participate. The questionnaire allowed the researcher to measure the concepts relevant to the research question in a respectable manner (Hagan, 2014). The study will provide not only the researcher but also the VT Athletic Marketing and Communications department's feedback that will help them to better understand the Twitter platform dynamics while also helping them dig deeper in regard to what content is effective in order to increase attendance versus what content is not.

Participants and Convenience Sampling

The participants of this study included the audience of the Women's Lacrosse game located at Thompson Field in Blacksburg, Virginia and were identified by an age range that was set by the researcher. Due to time constraints and easy accessibility, the researcher chose to use a convenience sample of the present population. A convenience sample is defined as a type of

nonrandom sampling where the researcher uses the subjects of the present population that are easily accessible (Ilker, Sulaiman, & Rukayya, 2016). Convenience samples have also been referred to as accidental samples due to participants being selected because they just happen to be in or around the area where the researcher is collecting data (Ilker, Sulaiman, & Rukayya, 2016). Additionally, this type of sampling includes participants who choose to provide their information willingly to the researcher. Researchers commonly use this form of sampling in areas that are known for the density to be high, such as parking lots or the center of a college campus (Price, 2013). Since the data was being collected at the entrance of Thompson field it made sense for the researcher to use this type of sampling due to the number of individuals within the area. Participants included individuals that were among the first 100 individuals to enter Thompson Field willing to participate and above the age of 18.

Design

The research questionnaire was designed by the researcher in collaboration with faculty members of the VT Athletic Communications and Marketing department. April Goode is the Director of Engagement and Analytics of the VT Athletic Communications Department and works heavily with various social media platforms. She has actively worked with the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account for five years now. Bob Gavagan is a member of the VT Athletic Marketing Department where he is responsible for sending out frequent athletic-related surveys to VT fans. Gavagan has been in this role for four years now and has an abundance of knowledge when it comes to creating questionnaires concerning research. To help create the questionnaire questions the researcher met with Goode and Gavagan to discuss potential questions. The questionnaire was designed to build on the knowledge of how Twitter can influence sports attendance, while

also highlighting if the content on Twitter did have a positive influence on the attendance at the last home Women's Lacrosse game of the season. Additionally, the questionnaire asked participants to indicate their age by choosing the age range that best described them. The age range choices were created by the researcher.

The researcher chose five questions to keep participants engaged while also accommodating their time. Response latency was heavily taken into context when designing the research questionnaire. The term response latency can be defined as the measurement of the respondent's attitude when he or she is presented with a survey question (Mulligan, Grant, Mockabee, & Monson, 2003). If survey questions seem to take too long to respond to participants will develop a distasteful attitude towards the survey, ultimately causing them to become agitated and not want to complete the survey (Mulligan, Grant, Mockabee, & Monson, 2003). The questions in the research questionnaire included:

1. How did you learn about today's game?
2. Are you an active user of Twitter?
3. What type of Twitter post influenced your decision to come to the game?
4. While using the Twitter platform, how often do you see tweets regarding the Women's Lacrosse games?
5. What is your age?

The three research questions guiding this study were also taken into consideration when selecting the questions. Questionnaire question number one will answer research question number one, Questionnaire question number two will answer research question number two, Questionnaire

question three will answer research question three, and Questionnaire question four will answer research question four.

Data Collection

Data was collected by the use of a Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved questionnaire containing five close-ended questions. The following study was completed at the last home game of the 2019 VT Women's Lacrosse season, located in a college town in Blacksburg, Virginia. The Women's Lacrosse team uses Thompson field to host games. The average attendance of each Women's Lacrosse game is around 500, with the last home game always having record-breaking attendance due to senior day taking place.

Participants were given verbal instructions of "This survey is being conducted in order to obtain information regarding the influence of the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account has on game attendance at Virginia Tech." The survey included five total questions. Each question that was asked contained four multiple-choice answers where the participants would circle one as their answer. All five questions were related to the VT's Women's Lacrosse Twitter account in general and the content that is published through the account. The survey was presented at the marketing table located at the entrance of the event and was given to the first one hundred people to walk into Thompson Field who were above the age of 18. Goode was in charge of handing out and collecting each survey that was taken and made sure that no one under the age of 18 participated. Each survey was done anonymously and was put into a basket by Goode once completed. No names or other personal identifiers were collected. Once the game was completed the surveys were taken up and analyzed one by one. Since the questionnaire contained closed-ended questions, the answer to each question was put in a total tally box.

Data Analysis

After the completion of the data collection process, each questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher carefully to ensure accurate data input and to avoid any errors. The results from each questionnaire were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet by the researcher one by one individually. Within the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, the researcher created a row for each participant along with columns that represented each of the five questions asked. Participant's results from each survey question asked were recorded under the corresponding column. The researcher was able to analyze the data by inputting a sum formula into excel and creating a pivot table for each question that would provide the researcher with an abundance of descriptive statistics. The researcher chose to look at the percentages of the results of each question.

Results

Overview

A total of 100 individuals chose to participate in this research resulting in a 100% response rate. Approximately 68% of the respondents indicated that they currently have an active Twitter account. Of those with active Twitter accounts, 44% of them indicated that they became aware of today's Women's Lacrosse home game from the marketing promotions published on the VT Lacrosse Women's Twitter account. Twenty-six percent of active Twitter users stated that the type of tweet that encouraged them to come to the game was the game day promotion tweets. Thirty-five percent of the participants who have an active Twitter account indicated that they see tweets regarding a VT Women's Lacrosse game every now and then. The age range of 18-22 received the highest response rate with 37% of respondents indicating that they were within the stated age range.

Twitter Usage

More than half of the participants indicated that they currently had an active Twitter account. Approximately 68% of participants selected this option, while 32% of participants selected that option stating that they do not currently have an active Twitter account. Table 1-0 shows the results of the participants broken down into percentage form.

Table 1-0
Are you an active user of Twitter?

Twitter Usage	% Identified by Participants
Yes	68.0
No	32.0

Attendance Influence

When participants who are currently active Twitter users were asked how they heard about the game today, almost half indicated that they heard about today's Women's Lacrosse home game through the Twitter platform of those who currently have an active Twitter account. This selection was the highest selected choice with 44% of participants choosing Twitter. Within this option, the data revealed that Twitter was most popular among the age ranges of 18-22 and 23-32. Thirty-four percent of participants indicated that they heard about the game through word of mouth and was the most selected option by the age range of 45-above. The lowest selected choices by participants included Facebook and schedule cards. Seventeen percent of participants indicated that they heard about the game through schedule cards that are handed out to community members and placed in various community shops, restaurants, etc., while 5% of participants indicated that they heard about the game through publications on Facebook. Table 2-0 shows the results of the participants broken down into percentage form.

Table 2-0
How did you learn about today's game?

<u>Attendance Influence</u>	<u>% Identified by Participants</u>
Facebook	5.0
Schedule Card	17.0
Twitter	44.0
Word of Mouth	34.0

Twitter Content

The most popular form of Women's Lacrosse Twitter content indicated by the participants who are currently active Twitter users was the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter game day promotion tweets. Twenty-six percent of participants indicated that this type of Twitter content influenced them to come to today's home game. These game day promotions tweets are

published on the Twitter platform every day leading up to the day of at home games and information about the game as well as fun facts. Twenty-two percent of participants indicated that they came across Twitter conversations regarding the home game while scrolling through Twitter which influenced them to come support the team at their last home game. Twenty percent of participants indicated that they were influenced by team graphics published on Twitter. These graphics included information about the game as well as information about specific players. Table 3-0 shows the results of the participants broken down into percentage form.

Table 3-0

What type of Twitter post influenced your decision to come to the game?

Twitter Content	% Identified by Participants
Team Graphics	20.0
Game Day Promotion Tweets	26.0
Tweets Conversation regarding the Women's Lacrosse Game	22.0

Twitter Post Frequency

When asked how often participants saw tweets regarding VT Women's Lacrosse games the data showed that 35% of participants who are currently active Twitter users were seeing tweets every now and then. Thirty-three percent of participants were seeing them every time they were on the social media platform. Table 4-0 shows the results of the participants broken down into percentage form.

Table 4-0

While using the Twitter platform, how often do you see tweets regarding the Women's Lacrosse games?

Twitter Post Frequency	% Identified by Participants
Every time I am on Twitter	33.0
Every Now and Then	35.0

Age of Participants

The last question of the survey asked participants to select the age range in which they belonged. The age range options were created by the researcher. Thirty-seven percent of participants indicated that they were between the ages of 18-22 while 16% of participants indicated they were between the ages of 23-32. 22% of participants were within the age range of 33-45, while 25% of participants indicated they fall within the age range of 45 and up. Table 5-0 shows the results of the participants broken down into percentage form.

Table 5-0
What is your age?

Age Range	% Identified by Participants
18-22	37.0
23-32	16.0
33-45	22.0
45-above	25.0

Summary of Outcomes, Discussions and Recommendations

After reviewing the data of this study, the outcomes were what the researcher had anticipated. Overall the data revealed that the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account did positively influence attendance at home games. Research question number one asked, "What percent of lacrosse attendees have active Twitter accounts?". The data revealed that out of the 100 participants, more than half indicated that they currently have active Twitter accounts. The literature provided earlier in this study stated that around 60% of the general public are current active Twitter users as compared to 68% in this study (Clavio & Walsh, 2013). When the researcher broke this result down by age the two highest age ranges who stated they currently have an active Twitter account included those between the ages of 18-22 and 33-45. The data showed that out of the 68% of participants who indicated that they currently have an active Twitter account 31% of the participants were in the age range of 18-22. The literature provided also stated that the typical age range for a Twitter user has been identified as 18-34 years old in the United States (Witkemper & Hoon Lim & Waldburger, 2012). This statement also supports the findings of this study regarding age. The researcher recommends that the VT Athletic Communications and Marketing department continues to reach the ages of 18-22, but looks to reach ages 23-32 through the use of this social media platform.

Table 6-0
Are you an active Twitter user?

Twitter Usage	% Identified by Participants			
	18-22	23-32	33-45	45-above
Yes	31.0	13.0	14.0	10.0
No	6.0	3.0	8.0	15.0

When reviewing the age demographics of those who stated that they do not have active Twitter accounts, it was no surprise that the most common age range was 45-above. Out of the 32% of participants who indicated that they currently did not have an active Twitter account, 15% of the participants were in the age range of 45-above. Table 6.0 above shows the results from this question broken down by age range. From the results of the data, the researcher recommends that the VT Athletic Communication and Marketing reach this age group through a different marketing channel. The age range of 45-above is also commonly referred to as the Baby Boomer generation (Williams & Page, 2011). For individuals that fall in this age range their commonly used marketing channels include social events, email, mail, newspaper, and television (Williams & Page, 2011). The VT Athletic Communications and Marketing department could reach this generation by mailing schedule cards or posters listing the dates of home games. Additionally, both departments should continue to market the Women's Lacrosse games at social events such as VT football in order to keep reaching out to this generation. Further research could be done on this topic concerning to what channel is the most efficient way to reach this age group when it comes to sports marketing.

Research question number two asked, "How are the lacrosse attendees hearing about the game?". The data revealed that schedule cards were most popular among the age range of 33-45, while Facebook was most popular among the age range of 23-32. Word of mouth was most popular among age ranges of 33-45 and 45-above. Table 7.0 shows the results broken down by age.

Table 7-0
How did you learn about today's game?

Attendance Influence	% Identified by Participants			
	18-22	23-32	33-45	45-above

Facebook	0.0	3.0	0.0	2.0
Schedule Card	4.0	1.0	6.0	6.0
Twitter	23.0	10.0	7.0	4.0
Word of Mouth	10.0	2.0	9.0	13.0

The data provided both departments with information regarding what marketing channels were also popular. The results showed that the most common answer was Twitter with this channel being most popular with the age range of 18-22. This information allows for the VT Athletic Communication and Marketing department to know that Twitter should be a top marketing priority when it comes to the various marketing channels they use. The data revealed that the social media platform Facebook was the least chosen answer choice, which allows both departments to know that this marketing channel should either be enhanced or not a priority. It was not anticipated that the second most common answer was word of mouth. This finding is sure to be a surprise to both departments but will also allow them to understand that the more they market VT Women's Lacrosse games throughout the community the more word will get passed.

The VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account was able to make a positive influence on the attendance at the last home game due to the frequency of Twitter postings and the type of content that was published. Research question number three asked, "What type of Twitter post influenced lacrosse attendees to come to the game today?". The data showed that the content of game day promotion tweets was popular among participants when asked what form of Twitter content encouraged them to go. This supports the Uses and Gratification Theory stated earlier in this study because the general public uses the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account in efforts to gratify their unique needs for information and entertainment through the viewing of the game

day promotional tweets. Per the findings, the researcher recommends that the VT Athletic Communication and Marketing departments post more entertainment and information tweets to retain and increase the following to satisfy the audience's needs. Additionally, the data also revealed that participants do seek out connectivity when it comes to Twitter the content published on the Women's Lacrosse account website. Another commonly selected answer choice was tweet conversations regarding the Women's Lacrosse game. This finding also supports the Uses and Gratification theory (David, 2016) due to participants stating that they go onto the Twitter page in order to feel connected to others. This shows that building a relationship with the general public through Twitter allows them to feel more connected to the team; therefore also influencing them to come out and support the team at home games. The Twitter account can be a reliable tool for providing VT Lacrosse fans and VT fans media that will gratify their needs.

Regarding how often participants were seeing the Twitter postings, the results were not what the researcher had anticipated. Research question number four asked "How frequently are those with active Twitter accounts seeing posts published on the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account?". The data indicated that those with active Twitter accounts were seeing tweets from the VT Women's Lacrosse account only every now and then. In order for more individuals to be influenced to attend home games the VT Women's Lacrosse account must post more frequently. The more frequently the Twitter account is publishing tweets the more connected the general public will feel to the team, therefore the more likely these individuals are to come to a game. It is the researcher's recommendation that every time an individual log onto the Twitter platform they should see at least one or two posts from the VT Women's Lacrosse account. This information also allows the VT Athletic Communications and Marketing department to have a better understanding of how often they should post to attract more individuals.

The feedback from participants will provide the VT Athletic Communication and Marketing department a deeper understanding of how to enhance the Twitter account. The information provided by this study can not only help other VT Athletic teams but potentially help other Universities Athletic teams as well. Other teams might be able to understand the impact that Twitter can have when it comes to game day marketing tactics. Furthermore, they will be able to better understand the specific content that can influence their fan base to come out to games. Future research on this topic could be done on other social media platforms, such as Instagram, and how they might have an impact also on home game attendance. The more channels that the VT Athletic Communication and Marketing departments are able to utilize, the more positive attendance can be at home games for VT sporting events. Research has found that the other commonly used social media platform used for marketing purposes is Instagram. Additionally, research should also look into the different sports marketing channels for the different age groups as stated above. This research would be able to help College Athletic Communication and Marketing departments be more efficient when it comes to their marketing tactics. Per research done by Chaney, Touzani, and Slimane (2017) each generation has their own unique experiences and lifestyle that affect their consumer behavior. For young adults, social media channels would still be a great way to target them, but for adults above the age of 45 this channel might not be so effective.

This study has provided an abundance of information regarding Twitter as a marketing tool. Other research professionals studying this field will be able to use it help build on their own studies or even to build off of it. As stated above research could also be done regarding other social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook. Research professionals can use this study to even compare it to their own research of other social media platforms. Furthermore, research

professionals studying social media marketing in other organizations apart from college athletics can also use the information from this study to help aid in their research.

Conclusion

The data revealed from this study indicated that the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account does make a positive influence on attendance at home games, as hypothesized by the researcher. This study provided the VT Athletic Communications and Marketing departments information regarding how they can enhance the Twitter account to the general public's liking to influence more individuals to come out and support the team at home games.

More than half of the participants indicated that they are currently active on Twitter but was less than what the researcher had anticipated. The researcher hypothesized that 70% of lacrosse attendees would have active Twitter accounts since the majority of lacrosse attendees fall within the age range of a typical Twitter user. The study revealed that Twitter was a beneficial channel to use when it comes to marketing the home games, which was what the researcher had hypothesized. It can be concluded that the content published on the Twitter platform plays a crucial role when it comes to influencing the general public. The researcher had hypothesized that lacrosse attendees would choose game day graphics, but the study revealed that Twitter game day promotion tweets and tweet conversations were found to be the best way to reach the general public due to the entertainment, information, and connectivity these forms of content provided.

In regard to Twitter frequency, the researcher had hypothesized that those with active Twitter accounts would see a VT Lacrosse tweet every time they were on Twitter, but the study revealed that they were only seeing tweets every now and then. The frequency of Twitter postings plays a crucial role in the Twitter marketing tactic and should always be considered when sending out marketing tweets. The more often the account posts the more individuals it can reach thus the more positive attendance rate at home games can be.

The UGT theory was able to help guide this study and highlight information regarding Twitter content and frequency. This theory allowed for the researcher to better understand what the participants were searching for on the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter page in order to satisfy their social media needs. This information will be extremely beneficial not only to the Virginia Tech Athletic Communications and Marketing Department, but other universities athletic communication and marketing departments as well. Understanding the participants needs will allow for both departments to know what content keeps Twitter users coming back to the account and what content does not. This will allow them to be more efficient and effective when posting on the account. Without knowing this information, it can be hard to increase the overall trafficking of the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account. Additionally, this theory also helped provide information that allowed the researcher to understand if the frequency of the Twitter postings were satisfying the social media needs of the participants. The information of Twitter content and Twitter post frequency can provide other social media research professionals some insight on social media sports marketing.

The information provided by this study allowed for the researcher to confirm that the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account does play a significant role in the influence of attendances at home games. This study will allow for both departments to know not only that the account should be a top priority among other marketing channels, but also what channels work for specific age groups. Additionally, both departments will be able to use the information in this study to enhance the VT Women's Lacrosse Twitter account in efforts to keep attendance positive at home games.

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Appendices

Research Questionnaire Cover Page



Virginia Tech women's lacrosse Twitter Questionnaire

Hello! My name is Emma Harden and I am number 20 on the women's lacrosse team. As a part of my Virginia Tech Master's Degree research project I will be collecting feedback on the Virginia Tech Women's Lacrosse teams Twitter account. This feedback will not only help guide my research project, but will also allow for the Virginia Tech Athletic Communications and Marketing departments to enhance the twitter platform in order to increase attendance at women's lacrosse games. Please answer the following question below to the best of your abilities by putting a check mark next to the answer that you feel most accurately represents your thoughts.

VIRGINIA TECH[®]
LACROSSE

Research Questionnaire Question Page

1. How did you learn about today's game?
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Schedule card
 - Word of mouth
2. Are you an active user of Twitter?
 - Yes
 - No
3. What type of Twitter post influenced your decision to come to the game?
 - Team Graphics
 - Game Day Promotion Tweets
 - Tweet Conversations regarding the Women's Lacrosse Game
 - I do not have an active Twitter account
4. While using the Twitter platform, how often do you see tweets regarding the women's lacrosse games?
 - Every time I am on Twitter
 - Every now and then
 - Never
5. What is your age?
 - 18-22
 - 23-32
 - 33-45
 - 45-above

Verbal Script for Recruitment:

Hello, Number 20, Emma Harden, is currently working towards the completion of her degree by conducting a research project on the influence that the VT Women's lacrosse twitter account has on home game attendance. Part of her research study includes participants filling out five quick multiple choice questionnaire that should take no longer than five minutes. For this study we are seeking participants 18 and older do you qualify? If you are above the age of 18, would you like to help Emma Harden by filling out a questionnaire? The survey is filled out anonymously and participation is completely voluntary.

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



**Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance**

Institutional Review Board
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 23, 2019
TO: Richard James Rateau, Tiffany A Drape, Donna Wertalik, April Goode
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Increasing Virginia Tech Women's Lacrosse Game Day Attendance Through the Use of Twitter
IRB NUMBER: 19-064

The Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB), acknowledges the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This acknowledgement recognizes the item(s) identified in the Special Instructions section.

NOTE: Amendments that must be submitted to WIRB for review and approval include changes to funding, conflict of interest, ANY and ALL changes to study procedures and study documents. If your study received a Determination letter (qualified for Not Human Subjects or for an Exemption) please review the information at the end of your Determination Letter. If your study was approved by a Panel, WIRB provides guidance on making changes in their Guide for Researchers. Please refer to the section titled, Changes to Research / Additional Document Submissions in the following document:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/wirb-guide-for-researchers.pdf>