Fan Reaction on Twitter Following the Announcement of AHL Teams Relocating

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Fan Reaction on Twitter Following the Announcement of AHL Teams Relocating

Abstract
Franchise relocation has been occurring in professional sports for years. The Hartford Whalers experienced one in 1997. Almost 20 years later, the American Hockey League (AHL) experienced a historic franchise relocation process. However, little research has been done that included more recent research about fan identity, affiliation, and actions. This study is a content analysis of fan Twitter posts a week prior when the rumors start to spread that both the Manchester Monarchs and the Norfolk Admirals will be relocating to California for the 2015-2016 hockey season and the week following the official announcement. A total of 43 tweets were collected coded accordingly based on the content of the tweet. The data was used to run correlations of the most frequent variables present in fan tweets along with a chi square analysis of those variables. The lack of access to all twitter fan tweets was an implication to this study.

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Pat Sofia

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Franchise relocation has been occurring in professional sports for years. The Hartford Whalers experienced one in 1997. Almost 20 years later, the American Hockey League (AHL) experienced a historic franchise relocation process. However, little research has been done that included more recent research about fan identity, affiliation, and actions. This study is a content analysis of fan Twitter posts a week prior when the rumors start to spread that both the Manchester Monarchs and the Norfolk Admirals will be relocating to California for the 2015-2016 hockey season and the week following the official announcement. A total of 43 tweets were collected coded accordingly based on the content of the tweet. The data was used to run correlations of the most frequent variables present in fan tweets along with a chi square analysis of those variables. The lack of access to all twitter fan tweets was an implication to this study.
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Fan Reaction on Twitter Following the Announcement of AHL Teams Relocating

Franchise relocation is not uncommon in North American professional sport. Owners have an impactful decision when relocating their franchise. The decision not only impacts the city itself, but the fans that make up that city as well. The American Hockey League (AHL) experienced a relocation of five teams to California for the 2015-2016 season. This has a large impact on hockey in the state of California even though they currently have 3 NHL organizations that consider it to be “home”. President and CEO of the AHL, David Andrews, said “the Western-based NHL clubs have been in dialogue with our league for almost three years, and today’s announcement launches a new era for the American Hockey League and for professional hockey in California” (American Hockey League [AHL], 2015, para. 2). When an announcement like such happens in today’s society, it’s expected that fans will voice their opinions on social media outlets.

This study focused on the relocation of two teams that relocated to new cities in California. Norfolk, Virginia and Manchester, New Hampshire both dropped from the AHL to a lower level of professional hockey, the East Coast Hockey League (ECHL). The Norfolk Admirals became the San Diego Gulls and the Manchester Monarchs became the Ontario Reign. Scholars have studied franchise relocation from legal/political and economic perspectives (Hyatt, 2007), but there has not been much previous research on how fans react on social media following the announcement of a team relocation. The Public Relations department of each organization could take advantage of what fans posted by replying back and acknowledging the potential concerns of the fan. Continuing or building a relationship with fans on a personal level like acknowledging them on social media, can have a positive impact on the image of an organization.
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Literature Review

History of Relocations

The fans of the Hartford Whalers of the National Hockey League (NHL) dealt with losing their NHL organization. In March of 1997, the Hartford Whalers’ hockey club announced that it would no longer be affiliated with the City of Hartford upon completion of the 1996-1997 NHL season (Mitrano, 1999). The team relocated to North Carolina and renamed themselves “Hurricanes”. In many postings that followed the announcement of the decision to relocate, no other metaphor was used widely as that of death. Some viewed what happened as a “natural death” or “death by natural causes” due to the fact that the Whalers were located in the small market of Hartford. There were some who believed the loss of the Whalers was a “sudden death,” particularly tragic for the fans, as they had insufficient time to prepare for the loss (Mitrano, 1999). Craig Hyatt conducted a case study on Hartford Whalers fans after their relocation. Of the 23 fans interviewed, three equate the Carolina Hurricanes to the Hartford Whalers, and thus actively root for the Hurricanes. Of the 23 Whalers fans, only one fan follows an NHL team with levels of behavior and attitude similar to those experienced with the Whalers. Four others follow other NHL teams, but say the experience is less intense than with the Whalers (Hyatt, 2007). Both case studies on Hartford Whalers fans experienced nostalgia which impacted their responses about the Hurricanes.

Nostalgia is defined as a yearning for the past (Fairley, 2003). In discussing the nostalgia of NHL hockey fans, the attachment to the actual ice hockey players, the ice hockey teams, other fans, and the sport arenas/stadiums, may contribute to nostalgia regarding the lost team (Kulczycki & Hyatt, 2004). Kulczycki and Hyatt (2004) interviewed 22 Hartford Whaler fans following their relocation to North Carolina and every interviewed fan expressed nostalgia. All
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said that they preferred their lives as sport fans when the team was in Hartford over their lives as sport fans in the years since the team relocated to North Carolina. Most of the 22 interviewed fans insist that the Hurricanes and Whalers are two separate entities, and thus refuse to cheer for the Hurricanes while considering themselves forever loyal to the Whalers (Kulczycki & Hyatt, 2004). Since this relocation was recent, this study wasn’t expected to find themes of nostalgia. Loyalty of the fans whose teams relocated to a new city this year was looked at.

Advocates of franchise relocation contend that the threat of departure by a team causes improvements in stadium facilities and may induce league expansion so that greater numbers of fans nationally can enjoy live professional team sports (Staudohar, 1985). Opponents of franchise relocation feel that franchise movement creates a large element of instability to leagues, team recognition, and players who would like to be settled with their families in an area. Cities are deprived of an important part of their economic base when teams leave. Opponents also express cynicism over the unfairness of relocation because it deprives loyal fans of their teams (Staudohar, 1985). In sport team settings, loyalty has been defined as the commitment to a team that persists, resists to changes and has an impact on cognitive thoughts and behavior (Funk & James, 2006). A recent model created by Humphreys and Zhou in 2015 studied loss aversion in the context of fans experiencing a larger loss if a beloved local team relocates to another city rather than the benefit generated by a new team moving to a city. The model concluded that when fans have loss aversion, leagues and teams can extract larger subsidies by following a policy of first moving a team out of a city and then placing a new expansion franchise in that city, an increasingly popular strategy followed by leagues.

As mentioned before, of the five cities that had their AHL team relocated to California, three cities brought in a lower level professional hockey league and two cities no longer have a
team. The generation of new viable markets creates opportunities for leagues to increase their profits, either through expanding the league by placing a new team in a city that currently has no team, or by relocating an existing team from a relatively small city to a larger city without a team. While many instances of franchise relocation and league expansion take place in isolation, past franchise relocation and league expansion decisions also reveals a common pattern where a team relocates from one city to another and then the league subsequently places an expansion team in the vacated city (Humphreys & Zhou, 2015). Table 2 from Humphreys and Zhou, 2015, shows that the Houston Oilers relocated from Houston to Tennessee in 1996. Six years later in 2002, the National Football League (NFL) expanded a franchise back in Houston. When left-behind fans have been examined, the focus has been on the metaphors they use to make sense of the loss, the effect of the relocation on the fans’ local, and whether or not the left-behind fans choose to follow their former team in its new post-relocation home or not (Kulczycki & Hyatt, 2005).

**Fan Engagement**

Sport fans are defined as “individuals who are interested in and follow a sport, team and/or athlete” (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001, p. 2). To explain fans’ commitment to sport teams, many useful constructs have been developed in the sport management literature, including team identification, team identity, fan loyalty, psychological commitment to team, psychological connection to team, team attachment, spectator-based brand equity, and consumer-team relationship quality (Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, & Biscaia, 2014). Sport fans can be motivated by a number of different factors. Researchers and theorists have found that eight motives are quite common: eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic, group affiliation, and family needs (Wann, Royalty, & Rochelle, 2002). Wann, Schrader, and Wilson conducted two studies based on the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) in 1989 that
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focused on motivational differences for fans preferring different types of sports. Hockey is an aggressive team sport. In their findings, fans scored aggressive team sports high for eustress, self-esteem, escape, and entertainment motivational factors. Eustress is a positive form of stress that stimulates and energizes an individual (Wann, et al., 1999). When a fan’s team is successful, he or she gains a feeling of achievement and accomplishment, which enhances that individual’s self-esteem (Wann, et al., 1999). Escape relates to fans that use sports to temporarily get away and forget about the troubles in their lives. (Wann, et. al, 1999). The motivation to escape from the boredom or stress of daily life is also clearly a major factor driving the attachment to sport. Pleasure and anxiety are common to the sport fan experience as fans respond emotionally to other fans, players, situations and actions (Constantino, Meng, Westberg, Farrelly, 2014). Some sports fans view sports as entertainment, like watching tv or listening to music (Wann, et al., 1989). Entertainment is broadly associated with the arousal of the senses in a host of different ways such as through sights, sounds, smells, and unique colors and through experiencing feelings of anticipation, hope, fear, loss, triumph and group solidarity (Constantino, et al., 2014). This study looked for the presence of these four motivation factors following the departure of their home town team. Not being able to have their team to escape to or not having the same entertainment as before can be a reason for a fan’s tweet.

Professional sport fans are left in a predicament when they lose their home town team. Some authors note cases where left-behind fans continued to follow the team in its new home (Hyatt, 2007). Others suggest that it remains unknown whether fans would cheer for the relocated team, if they would continue to support the league that allowed their favorite team to relocate, and if the sport that team played would continue to have a prominent place in their lives (Hyatt, 2007). Engaged consumers’ behavioral manifestations include numerous
nontransactional behaviors such as word-of-mouth activity, recommendations, consumer-to-consumer interactions, blogging, and writing reviews (Yoshida, et al., 2014). There has not been much research done of two nontransactional behaviors, basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) and cutting off reflected failure (CORFing) following the announcement of a team’s relocation. The BIRG effect refers to an individual’s inclination to share in the glory of a successful other with whom they are in some way associated. In the case of BIRGing, team success is positive and fan associations are also positive. Fans tend to associate themselves positive light with a successful team (Campbell, Aiken, & Kent, 2004). In the case of CORFing, the team is unsuccessful and fan associations are correspondingly negative. That is, as an indirect method of image management, fans will tend to dissociate themselves from an unsuccessful team (Campbell, et. al, 2004). BIRGing and CORFing behaviors are self-oriented to increase one’s self-esteem and public image (Yoshida, et al., 2014). High levels of team identification have been positively associated with measures of BIRGing behaviors (Spinda, 2011). Some existing research suggests that highly identified sport fans are unable to CORF because their fandom is considered an important aspect of their self-identify (Spinda, 2011). Both of these behaviors are relevant to the fans that lost their AHL team in the California relocation because there were both successful and unsuccessful teams that relocated. This study looked to see if these behaviors appear in fan responses on social media following the announcement of their team’s relocation.

Professional sport fans identify themselves with their favorite teams. Fan identification is one of the most important aspects for a team to foster. Fans with high levels of identification behave differently than those with lower levels because highly identified fans are more likely to have a strong sense of attachment and belonging to the team (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002). Fans who are high in identification, as opposed to those low in identification, also respond with
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greater physiological arousal during exposure to a competition where that identity is implicated, regardless of whether their group ultimately wins or loses (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). One path to identification occurs through affinity. Affinity occurs when individuals find that they are associating and identifying with an organization because it is similar to the individual in a particular way. This can still occur even after a team relocates. The other path toward identification is emulation. In Hyatt’s research in 2007, some Hartford Whalers fans still found themselves being a fan of the Carolina Hurricanes. Emulation occurs when individuals incorporate the ideas and the values of the organization into their identity (Foster & Hyatt, 2007). Researchers have noted the more consumers feel like they are part of the organization the more identified they become and the more likely they are to form a lasting relationship with the organization. This lasting relationship could occur through relocation. Relationship building through identity is not, however, immediate. Identification is formed over time, subjectively, though repeated engagement with a team and other fans of the team (Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker, 2012). Fan identification can be effected once a team relocates to a new city.

In making use of advanced technology, it is easier for fans to follow any team they choose, without necessarily having any connection to the city that team represents. Fans are now less likely to support a team on the basis of a shared geographical connection (Lewis, 2011). In addition, fans are less likely to see sports teams as collective representations of the city they live in, and instead are more likely to view the team as representation of some aspect of their individual uniqueness (Lewis, 2011). For fans that root for the team because it is a local team, relocation calls into question the very basis of their allegiance. For fans whose allegiance to the team is not based on where that team plays, franchise relocation is not nearly as difficult an experience. Instead, their individual identity is called in question only if/when that team’s mascot
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or logo is changed. For these fans, this logo, rather than the city the team plays in, is the symbol that defines the core of their identity (Lewis, 2001). Lewis discovered two types of allegiance: civic and symbolic. Civic allegiance is the loyalty demonstrated by fans when they believe the franchise is a key civic asset. These fans severed their connection with the team after relocation because they felt it no longer helped the city create and maintain a unique identity (Foster & Hyatt, 2007). In other words, when the team relocated, the fans who demonstrated civic allegiance remained loyal to the city and not the team. Symbolic allegiance is the loyalty demonstrated by people who are more connected to the team itself than the city it represents. These individuals had a specific connection to the franchise and remained loyal to the relocated team as long as it kept the same name and logo (Foster & Hyatt, 2007). Sports fans vary in their allegiance or psychological attachment to a team. Degree of identification with a team may be an important moderator of BIRGing and CORFing processes (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Both types of allegiance can be found in what fans say on social media.

Social Media

Fanship involves an emotional connection to a team or athlete. Fanship is active, participatory, and empowering with the passion and pleasure it generates (Witkemper, Lin, & Waldburger, 2012). Connected fans are defined as those who use the Internet at least once daily to follow their favorite players and teams. Connected fans are not necessarily more passionate fans, as both types could be loyal to their teams and players, but connected fan use social media both as an information source and as a vehicle to interact (Hull & Lewis, 2014). This study will look to see connected fans of AHL teams that relocated interacted on Twitter.

A recent study revealed a number of themes emanating from the actions of individuals as they utilize Facebook to interact with their team and the broader fan community (Constantino, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014). Data indicated that fans exercise four key motives as they
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draw value from the social media enabled connection to the team – passion, hope, esteem and camaraderie. These themes advanced understanding of fan motives for interacting with sport, particularly in the context of social media (Constantino et al., 2014). In the study done by Constantino, et al., (2014), they categorized passion as an emotional demonstration of affection for the team. A second highly emotive category exuded yearning, ambition and anticipation and was categorized as an expression of hope. A third category that emerged was highly reflective of the esteem needs of fans. Comments in this category involved fans interacting with both the team and fan community by demonstrating their specialist knowledge, expertise and insight. A final category of motivation constitutes camaraderie and was primarily directed at the fan community (Constantino et al., 2014). This form of interaction included affirming and defending the team (and self), seeking assistance from fellow fans, and more general social interaction. This study expanded on these four motives of fans looking at their responses on Twitter.

There are several forms of social media currently being utilized by sport organizations. Facebook is used to provide information, post pictures and videos, and promote upcoming events. YouTube has been used to share videos with fans about the team or organization. Each of these options may require more time and effort than a fan has to offer, whereas Twitter is a quick source of information that does not require much effort from an individual (Witkemper, et al., 2012). Twitter has a length restriction of 140 characters. The length restriction and the need to abbreviate and omit elements of the messages mean that the tweeter has to depend on their readers to be able to reconstruct the full intended message from the non-standard, abbreviated forms (Scott, 2014). The character limit of 140 characters on Twitter compared to no character limits on Facebook could be a justification as to why sport fans lash out on Twitter because they are limited to how much they can say.
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Twitter has become the most popular social-media form in the sport industry (Witkemper et al., 2012). Twitter use, like all conversations, helps fulfill emotional, cognitive, and behavioral motivations for consumption. The transactional model of communication is not new. The conversation happens along a feedback loop among participants who both transmit and receive information, ultimately influencing one another. Different possible relationship dynamics include media and fans, media and athletes, athletes and fans, fans and fans, and athletes and athletes (Smith & Smith, 2012). The interactivity of Twitter allows the public to communicate directly with the person delivering the message. This interactivity has become an important news value for the viewer (Hull & Lewis, 2014). Fans are turning to Twitter for interactivity because traditional, one-to-many, news media outlets cannot offer two-way interactions. In the process of delivering interactivity, Twitter has become a primary way for some people to get news either directly from the broadcasters or from the newsmakers themselves (Hull & Lewis, 2014).

The hashtag is used by Twitter users to create and follow a thread of discussion by prefixing a word with a '#' character. Using hashtags gives insight into the meaning of the individual post or some larger context as it relates to a larger topic (Smith & Smith, 2012). The interface was developed so that any string of characters which is preceded by a hash symbol becomes a hyperlink, allowing users to search for any content that includes the same tag. If a large number of people post tweets containing the same hashtag within a short space of time, that hashtag will be said to be trending (Scott, 2014).

**Purpose**

Previous research has been done on fan engagement with a professional sports team but there has been little to no research done on these fans’ reactions on social media once it has been announced that their team is being relocated. This study answered the question what is fan
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reaction on Twitter following the announcement of a team’s relocation? This knowledge is significant for both the franchise itself and the league. Both can use this information when considering future relocation decisions, as they will have a better understanding of what to expect out of their fans. The Public Relations department of each organization, whether it be of the team relocating or the team gaining a new franchise, could take advantage of what fans posted by replying back and acknowledging them.

Method

Sample
The research question of this study is what is fan reaction on Twitter following the announcement of a team’s relocation? This study is a content analysis of two AHL organizations, the Norfolk Admirals and the Manchester Monarchs. The Admirals have played as an AHL team for the last 15 years and the Monarchs have been an AHL team for the last 14 years (HockeyDB, 2015). The announcement came January 29, 2015 (American Hockey League [AHL], 2015) that five teams will be relocating to California, including both Manchester and Norfolk. This study contains secondary data found on Twitter looking at tweets sent out by fans of both teams. The tweets were found with the same keyword searches for both teams. This study looked at fan tweets a week prior to the tweet announcing the relocation on the AHL’s official twitter page and the week after. It is believed that rumors must have started to spread as to the relocation since fans were tweeting a week before the actual announcement.

Variables
There are many variables included in this study. The team is the first variable. Tweets are in reference to either the Manchester Monarchs or the Norfolk Admirals. The next two variables are affinity and emulation. Affinity occurs when individuals find that they are associating and identifying with an organization because it is similar to the individual in a particular way.
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Emulation occurs when individuals incorporate the ideas and the values of the organization into their identity (Foster & Hyatt, 2007). The next set of variables is BIRGing and CORFing. When BIRGing occurs, team success is positive and fan associations are also positive. CORFing occurs when the team is unsuccessful and fan associations are correspondingly negative. The next two variables are civic and symbolic allegiance. Civic allegiance is the loyalty demonstrated by fans when they believe the franchise is a key civic asset. Symbolic allegiance is the loyalty demonstrated by people who are more connected to the team itself than the city it represents.

Eustress is a positive form of stress that stimulates and energizes an individual (Wann, et al., 1999). Self-esteem, escape, and entertainment are the next three variables. Self-esteem relates to how the team reflects the fans emotions. If the team is successful, the fan feels a sense of achievement. Escape relates to fans that use sports to temporarily get away and forget about the troubles in their lives (Wann, et. al., 1999). Entertainment relates to the attractiveness and pleasure a fan gets from watching a sport being played. The variable vulgarity is considered to be the use of swear words in fans expressing their emotions. This study incorporated emojis as a variable because it is another way fans can express their emotions through the use of facial expressions. Likes and retweets are two variables that draw agreement with what someone has said and a form of repeating what was said. The last two variables are tone and whether the tweet was before or after the official announcement. All of the variables besides the number of likes and retweets used a nominal measure of scale with categorizing them as present or not present. Likes and retweets were scale data since the numbers had significance.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected through consistent Twitter searches for both teams in order to provide accurate results. The first search conducted was the existing team name followed by the
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ew team name. For example, the Manchester search looked like this; “Manchester Monarchs Ontario Reign.” This search resulted in tweets that mention any of those keywords. The next three searches were the existing team name followed by keywords “relocating”, “moving”, and “leaving”. An example of what one of those searches would look like this; “Manchester Monarchs relocating”. These four searches will provide data that can be measured.

This study used both words and numbers to measure the data. This mixed-method data type was coded accordingly based on the context of the responses. Each motivational factor was coded separately. Signs of BIRGing in the tweet will be coded as “BIRG” and signs of CORFing will be coded as “CORF”. An example of this would be if the tweeter mentions how he/she is going to be a fan of the Ontario Reign because Manchester won the Calder Cup last year, that tweet will be coded as BIRGing. If a fan of the Norfolk Admirals tweets that he/she is not going to be a fan of the San Diego Gulls because Norfolk didn’t have a good year last year, then that tweet was coded as CORFing. A tweet was coded as affinity if the tweeter mentions how he/she can no longer associate or identify himself/herself with the team. Another example would be if the tweeter mentions that he/she is still going to associate or identify himself/herself, no matter the distance away the new location is. Tweets were coded if the fan that sent out the tweet showed levels of identification through affinity and/or emulation. If the tweet possessed affinity, it was coded with a capital letter “A”. If the tweet possessed emulation, it was coded with the capital letter “E”. Tweets were coded if the fan is showing allegiance in his/her tweet in relation to the team relocating. If a tweet mentions the impact of having the team play in that city, such as economically reasons, that tweeter is demonstrating civic allegiance towards the relocation. The code used for a tweet with context in reference to civic allegiance was coded as “civic” and the
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code used for a tweet with context in reference to symbolic allegiance as “symbolic”. Tweets that use vulgarity in the message were coded as a “V”.

Tweets were coded accordingly if the purpose of the fans tweet was directed towards the loss of one of the motivational factors. If the fan tweets about how he/she lost or gained stress due to the relocation of the team, they exemplified eustress, and was coded as “Eus”. If the tweet mentions the loss of the feeling of achievement or accomplishment, the tweet was coded as self-esteem, “S-E”. If the tweet mentions how he/she will no longer have going to a game as an escape factor, it was coded as “Esc”. If the tweet mentions the difference in level of hockey, it is considered an entertainment factor and coded as “Ent”. If an emoji is present, it was recorded as either happy or sad based on the facial expression. The number of likes and retweets were collected as quantitative data. The tone of the tweet was considered to be either positive or negative based on the context and coded accordingly. Lastly, the date of the tweet was coded “pre” or “post”.

Data Collection Instrument

This study used a content analysis recording sheet to organize the data. The data table consisted of thirteen columns, as seen in Appendix A. The first column was what team the tweet is directed towards. The next two columns are emulation and affinity. The next six columns are the motivation factors in which the context of the tweet was written. The tenth column is if vulgarity was present in the tweet. The eleventh column is if an emoji is used. The twelfth and thirteenth columns are the total number or likes and retweets the tweet received. The fourteenth column represents the tone of the tweet; positive or negative. Finally, the last column indicates whether the tweet was sent before the official announcement or after.
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The data was collected through the phone application of Twitter. Twitter can be used by people of any age. Depending on privacy settings, most tweets can be seen to any user of Twitter by a simple search. From the four generated search results, screenshots were taken of tweets that emphasize feelings on Manchester and Norfolk relocating.

Data Analysis Plan

Once the data was collected, the variables were transferred to a table in SPSS to compare the results. Both quantitative and qualitative data was used in the findings. The study used descriptive statistics to find which variable was the mode of the tweets and also the frequency of each variable. The study ran correlations between the motivational factor that represents the mode and the tone as well as the date of the tweet. This correlation could have significance as to why fans’ self-esteem is affected once an announcement is made that their team will be relocating. Chi-square tests were also included in this study to test if there is a significant difference in the top four factors and identities between Manchester tweets and Norfolk tweets.

Results and Discussion

The research question of this study is what is fan reaction on Twitter following the announcement of a team’s relocation? The study concluded with the finding of 43 tweets total between Manchester and Norfolk fans. Self-esteem, allegiance, eustress, and entertainment were the top four variables most frequently found in fan tweets pre before and after the announcement that Manchester and Norfolk would be relocating to California. The mode variable for fan reaction was self-esteem. The results supported Wann, Schrader, and Wilsons’ 1999 study previously mentioned on how fans scored highest for eustress, self-esteem, and entertainment for motivational factors for aggressive team sports.
This study examined multiple correlations between the four most frequent variables and the tone as well as the date of the tweets that were sent for both teams. The results can be found in table 2 of appendix B. There was a significantly weak negative relationship between self-esteem and the date, pre or post announcement, of when the tweet was sent ($r = -.356$, $p<.05$). There was however no relationship and no significance between self-esteem and the tone, positive or negative, in which the tweet was sent ($r=.058$, $p>.05$). There was a not a significant relationship between allegiance and the tone of the tweet ($r= -.099$, $p>.05$) as well as the date ($r=.191$, $p>.05$). There was not a significant relationship between eustress and the tone of the tweet ($r=.005$, $p>.05$) as well as the date ($r=.005$, $p>.05$). There was not a significant relationship between entertainment and the tone of the tweet ($r= -.249$, $p>.05$) as well as the date of the tweet ($r=.005$, $p>.05$).

With these four variables being the most frequent in fan tweets, Chi-square analysis was used to compare the different variables to the team the tweet mentioned. The results can be seen in table 3 of appendix B. Chi-square analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between self-esteem and the team the tweet mentioned $x^2 =1.674$, $p>.05$. Chi-square analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between allegiance and the team the tweet mentioned $x^2=3.530$, $p>.05$. Chi-square analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between eustress and the team the tweet mentioned $x^2=2.867$, $p>.05$. Chi-square analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between entertainment and the team the tweet mentioned $x^2=.716$, $p>.05$.

Limitations

This study was limited to 43 tweets for data measurements. 43 tweets do not justify the total fan population of both teams. The search results were limited to the specific keyword
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searches used for the purpose of this study. With twitter accounts having the option of being private, other potential tweets related to the relocation process may have gone unseen. When coding the data as to what specific variables were present, researcher error may have occurred. This study did not look at an organization located in a city that was left without hockey as a result of the relocation. Hockey being retained in both Manchester and Norfolk could have impacted the number of tweets found that were directed towards both organizations.

Future Research

For future research, it would be suggested when coding the data to have the tweet only be labeled as one variable, not multiple. This will generate more accurate results amongst the variables. It is recommended to find the fan reaction from a team that lost hockey completely compared to a team that retained hockey. This gives an opportunity to run more descriptive statistics, correlations, and chi square analysis. This study did not look at fan replies amongst each other, which is a new variable that could be looked at in future research.

Conclusion

Fans have a way of voicing their opinion with the emergence of Twitter. This study is beneficial to Public Relations departments for professional sport teams. Building a relationship with fans is important to organizations. Teams can take advantage in personally reaching out to fans and replying back. Whether it is the team who is potentially losing a fan or the team who is potentially gaining a new one, the organization can act on what these fans are saying.
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References


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**Appendix A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Affinity</th>
<th>Emulation</th>
<th>BIRG/CORF</th>
<th>Civic/Symbolic</th>
<th>Eustress</th>
<th>Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Escape</th>
<th>Entertain.</th>
<th>Vulgarity</th>
<th>Emoji</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Retweets</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Pre/Post/Day</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
FANS ON TWITTER FOLLOWING RELOCATION

Appendix B

Table 1- Descriptive Statistics

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Monarchs (n)</th>
<th>Norfolk (n)</th>
<th>x²</th>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>1.674</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allegiance</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>3.530</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>2.867</td>
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<td>Entertainment</td>
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Table 2- Correlations

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<td>.058</td>
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<td>Allegiance</td>
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<td>Eustress</td>
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<td>.005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
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<td>-.249</td>
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Note: Table values indicate Spearman correlations, *p<.05