

SPORT FAN SATISFACTION WITH THE KANSAS STATE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT'S  
SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

by

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## **Abstract**

The college sports industry is seeing a change in its marketing strategies with the rise of the popularity of social media. Facebook and Twitter are the two most common social networking sites used by intercollegiate athletic departments. Not only are these outlets used to foster two-way communication with fans, but they are also used as advertising and public relations tools.

The purpose of this study is to compare the Kansas State University of Intercollegiate Athletics' social media objectives and content with the level of satisfaction among representatives of the K-State fan base. Is the athletic department producing the social media content that their fans want to see? In order to gain a better understanding of the nature of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with various staff members in the K-State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics to determine the social media objectives and to gather their opinions on the content. From there, two focus groups were conducted to ascertain the level of satisfaction among K-State fans with the current content. One group consisted of students while the other group contained K-State alumni. Findings showed that fans were pleased with certain aspects (i.e. score updates on @kstategameday, conciseness of Twitter, videos, etc.) but wanted to see more of other items such as K-State trivia, behind the scenes footage and more on student-athletes.

The information gathered was then used to provide suggestions for future social media strategies within the K-State Athletics Department. The recommendations will help to enhance communication with fans and satisfy their social media needs as they relate to K-State Sports.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Since August of 2010, I have been interning with the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics at Kansas State University in the Fan Experience and Sales department. This internship has provided me with the necessary experience I need to obtain a career in sports. I spend a lot of my time at the athletic offices in Bramlage Coliseum and at various on-campus athletic facilities when I work on K-State gamedays.

I do not directly use social media with the tasks that I perform for Fan Experience and Sales but I turn to Facebook and Twitter when I need to promote a project I am working on. I work directly with our undergraduate assistant who handles the social media accounts for K-State Sports while my boss is one of the individuals in charge of planning and implementing the department's social media strategies.

Because of my strong dedication to K-State Sports, my dream to obtain a career in sports and my interest in social media, I decided to do my masters report on the uses of social media in the world of college sports. More specifically, I wanted to see what K-State fans thought of the social media content being produced by the department and why they utilized outlets like Facebook and Twitter as it relates to their sports needs. What kinds of content do K-State Sports' fans respond to and interact with? What would they like to see more of?

The idea for this project was based around the uses and gratifications theory. Why do people use Facebook and Twitter to obtain information on their favorite sports teams? What gratifications or rewards do they hope to obtain from such use? I was curious to know the answers to these questions and to learn more about the nature of social media as it is becoming a popular and unique form of communication.

This internship has done so much for me and I wanted to give something back to the department that I hope will be beneficial. I want this report to provide them with an insight into the mindset of a representative sample of their K-State fan base and provide them with options for future social media strategies.

I would like to first and foremost thank my major professor, Dr. Steven Smethers, for helping me every step of the way with my master's report. I could not have done this without him. Next, I would like to thank the rest of the members of my committee, Dr. Esther Swilley and Dr. Samuel Mwangi for their continued support along the way. Special thanks to the staff members in the K-State Athletics Department for letting me interview them; John Currie, Kenny Lannou, Scott Garrett, Joni Smoller and Emily Chartrand. Lastly, I would like to thank all those involved in the focus groups.

## **Chapter 1 - Background on Social Media**

Social media can be defined as the tools, platforms, and applications that enable consumers to connect, communicate and collaborate with others (Williams & Chinn, 2010). They are Internet-based technologies that facilitate conversations (Parent, Planngger & Bal, 2011). Examples of such outlets include Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare and Pinterest. These differ from more traditional Web applications by offering users a platform for content creation, content upload, networking, conversing, media sharing, and bookmarking (Parent, Plangger & Bal, 2011). Each outlet has its own set of features that help to foster two-way communication between consumers and organizations. Social media can also affect connections with customers and provide new directions and benefits in relationship marketing (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Within the communication process, consumers can take a more active role due to the features of social media, enabling their needs to be better met.

Twitter is a Web-based social network system first made available for public use in August 2006 (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). Referred to as a “status updates service,” Twitter enables people to post tweets, which are brief statements about what they are doing, and to read the postings of others (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). A user can post a tweet of a 140 characters on their profile page that can include pictures and links for their followers to see. Users can also start or partake in trends by creating a “hashtag.” A hashtag is designated by a # symbol and is used to mark keywords or topics in a tweet (Twitter, 2011). It was originally used as a way to categorize tweets (Twitter, 2011).

Facebook is one of the many social-media outlets enabling consumers to interact with brands as an extension of face-to-face interaction through an online media network (Kujath,

2011). Facebook profiles are carefully constructed tokens of identity (Casteleyn, Mottart & Rutten, 2009). Users can upload pictures, videos and links to their profile page to share with others. They can also create status updates to let their friends know what they are doing or how they are feeling. Friends may interact by posting directly on a page's wall or by commenting using the like button on the content item (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011). Facebook is a way for people to share content with one another and to stay connected with each other, regardless of the distance.

Foursquare is a location-based application created by Dennis Crowley and Naveen Selvadurai (Gazzard, 2011). Through Foursquare, a company or brand can target potential customers by region. Users of the application have to create a profile online, much like other social networking sites, and then have access to a GPS-enabled phone to use the service (Gazzard, 2011). Using a mobile phone app, visitors can "check in" at different venues and be rewarded with badges, points and mayorships according to a 2011 article by *Targeted News Service*. The article further states that it helps users find where friends are hanging out and offers tips from other users on what to do there. When a company sees that an individual has checked in at a location, the consumer can be informed about sales or other promotions in area stores. As with Facebook and Twitter, there is a viral interaction between consumer and company.

Pinterest is one of the latest social networking sites, having been launched in March of 2010. It is described as a "virtual pinboard." Pinterest is a pinboard-style social photo sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, hobbies and more according to the source *Mashable*. *Mashable* states that users can browse other pinboards for inspiration, 're-pin' images to their own collections or 'like' photos. Pinterest enables consumers to find and share items that they find interesting. Consumers can



create their own “pinboards” and place items on there that they like such as clothes, recipes, decorations, etc. Pinterest connects people all over the world based on shared tastes and interests.

With the growing popularity of new media applications in popular culture, there is a growing need to understand the way that technology is used to interact with consumers in sport settings (Cooper, 2010). Today’s sport marketers operate in an environment where consumers of all demographic groups are increasingly literate with social media and have significant advancements in technology at their fingertips (Williams & Chinn, 2010). This situation presents opportunities and challenges for marketers who must adopt new approaches and take advantage of social media such as blogs, social networks, content communities, forums and bulletin boards and content aggregators (Williams & Chinn, 2010). With the role of successful communication in building brand equity with consumers, it is extremely important that NCAA athletic departments effectively use new media when interacting with consumers (Cooper, 2010). The effective use of new media provides athletic departments with a channel to communicate messages that build credibility with consumers who they are targeting (Cooper, 2010).

While marketing with traditional media like newspapers, television and news websites was about delivering a message to a consumer, marketing with social media is about building a relationship and conversation with one’s audience (Drury, 2008). Relationships can exist through social networking sites even though they do not entail face-to-face communication. Wright, Khanfar, Harrington and Kizer (2010) argue that effective social media use must not appear as an advertisement to the customer but rather appear as an attempt to build a relationship and establish trust (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011). Many sport organizations have embraced relationship-marketing approaches and recognized that their consumers are highly involved with

a desire for long-term association with a team sport (Williams & Chinn, 2010). The potential value and benefits of using social media to meet relationship marketing goals is significant, and in an environment such as sport it may be particularly relevant in supporting consumers as they become active contributors (Williams and Chinn, 2010). This form of relationship building through social media can help foster fan loyalty and fan appreciation, which can help to increase revenue. Loyal fan bases provide a consistent and predictable revenue stream for athletic departments (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011). As sports organizations rely on repeat purchases of tickets and promotional merchandise and seek to retain loyal consumers, strategic relationship-marketing practices that strengthen these behaviors may have the potential to provide significant competitive advantages (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are drastically reconfiguring sports media and the sports world (Sanderson, 2010). More recently, they have become a point of emphasis in the world of sport, with sport organizations (and their athletes), sponsors, and media outlets turning to these new technologies for communicating with sport consumers (Mahan, 2011). Unlike other online media sites, Facebook and Twitter represent a direct two-way communication venue linking fans to the brand while simultaneously broadcasting these interactions to fans' centralized networks and the brand's network (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011). Twitter is, in effect, being used for many purposes, including building and promoting the image of athletes, enabling direct and instantaneous communication with fans, and attempting to control or at least influence the sports news agenda (Hutchins, 2010). As Facebook provides unique features to express fan involvement, this user-generated content not only represents a platform for other identified fans to interact with the brand and each other but also creates an environment in a social context (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011).

Social networking sites are dominating consumer activity. Consumers of different ages are engaging in social media. Facebook, the world's largest social networking site, has over 900 million members as of April 2012 (Wasserman, 2012). The network receives 3.2 billion comments per day and 300 million new photos daily (Wasserman, 2012). According to Forrester Research as cited in Ghelfi, 2010, nearly three-quarters (71%) of Internet users under the age of 21 are creating content on the Web such as websites, blogs and videos. Seventy percent of this group has joined and are using social networking sites; and over half (61%) actively comment on others' content (Parent, Plangger & Bal, 2011). Nearly 60% of adults maintain profiles on social networking sites and/or visit these sites regularly (Parent, Plangger & Bal 2011). It appears that the use of social media is increasing among teens, young adults and adults in society.

The Nielsen Company produced: "The State of Social Media: The Social Media Report" in 2011. A number of social media-related facts were highlighted in this report. It found that social networks and blogs account for 23% of Americans' time spent online. Most females and 18-34 year olds are among the most active social networkers. It found that Facebook has become synonymous not only with social media, but with Web use more generally, as Americans spend more time on Facebook than on any other site (Nielsen, 2011). In May of 2011, over 31 million people in the U.S. watched video content on social networks and blogs, viewing nearly 157 million video streams (Nielsen, 2011). More women viewed this video content on social network sites but men watched longer. Lastly it was found that active social media users are more influential offline. Forty-five percent were more likely to go on a date, 19% were more likely to attend a sporting event and 18% were more likely to work out at a gym or health club. Online activities can foster offline ones.

The goal of this research is to establish effective social media strategies for the Kansas State University Department of Intercollegiate Athletics (K-State Sports) in order to improve two-way communication between K-State fans and the K-State Sports brand and to produce the necessary social media content to satisfy fans. All of these efforts combined will help to maintain or foster fan loyalty through the use of social media.

Kansas State University is an NCAA Division 1 athletics school located in Manhattan, KS and has been a member of the Big 12 Conference since 1996. K-State competes with sixteen sports teams at the varsity level. As of March 2012, it was one of only eleven Division 1 schools in the country to have both men's and women's basketball teams in the NCAA tournament, its football team in a bowl game and its volleyball team in the sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament.

The athletics department officially adopted Facebook and Twitter in 2010. With the rise of the use of social media in today's society, it is important for sports teams to adopt social media outlets in order to reach and communicate with their fans. First, the department must gather "likes" on Facebook and "followers" on Twitter in order to establish a fan base in the social media realm of K-State Sports. The department was successful in obtaining people and in increasing their numbers within the span of eight months from July 2011 to March 2012. The number of Facebook "likes" increased by 59% and the number of Twitter followers increased by 31%.

Now, with an established fan base on its social media outlets, the department has to provide the necessary content to satisfy its fans. This will ensure fan loyalty, fan interaction and potential increases in revenue through ticket sale promotions. Social media is becoming a way of the times and it is important to establish a presence on these outlets. K-State Sports is still in

the early stages of its social media use so it must create unique strategies to stay up to date and to have a competitive edge over other schools.

Two different types of fans have been targeted for this project in order to gather opinions on the social media content of K-State Sports, more specifically on the content that is present on their Facebook and Twitter pages. The first group was current K-State students who utilize these outlets and follow the brand's social media accounts. The second group was K-State alumni who utilize and follow the brand's social media outlets as well. Prior to talking with fans, in-depth interviews were given to various staff members within the K-State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics to gain background information on their reasons for social media adoption, their use of social media and to gather their thoughts on the topic. From these results, recommendations were provided to the department on future social media strategies.

## Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework

Uses and gratifications theory is a psychological communication perspective that focuses on individual media use and choice by asserting that different people can use the same mass medium for very different purposes (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005). It represents an attempt to explain something of the way in which individuals use communications, among other resources in their environment, to satisfy their needs and to achieve their goals, and to do so by simply asking them (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). The main objective of uses and gratifications theory is to explain the psychological needs that shape why people use the media and that motivate them to engage in certain media-use behaviors for gratifications to fulfill those intrinsic needs (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005).

There are four common types of uses and gratifications. Behind each of these lies the idea that the media can help to satisfy these feelings. The types include diversion (including escape from the constraints of routine and the burdens of problems and emotional release), personal relationship (including substitute companionship as well as social utility), personal identity (including personal reference, reality exploration and value reinforcement) and surveillance (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). Surveillance deals with an awareness of one's surroundings. Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) have this central notion that mass communication is used by individuals to connect (or sometimes to disconnect) themselves with different kinds of others (self, family, friends, nation, etc.) (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). The scheme attempts to comprehend the whole range of individual gratifications of the many facets of the need "to be connected" (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974).

The uses and gratifications theory has five assumptions. The first assumption is that the audience is conceived of as active and its media use is goal-oriented (Baran & Davis, 2009). In

other words, people choose which forms of media they want to use in order to satisfy their needs and wants. The second assumption is that in the communication process much initiative in linking need gratification and media choice lies with the audience member (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). The gratification ultimately makes them feel good so they will continue to use that form of media. The third assumption is that the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction (Baran & Davis, 2009). The needs served by mass communication constitute but a segment of the wider range of human needs, and the degree to which they can be adequately met through mass media consumption certainly varies (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974).

The fourth assumption of the uses and gratifications theory is that people are aware enough to be able to report their own media use, interests and motives in particular cases to researchers (Baran & Davis, 2009). This is beneficial for researchers who are studying media effects, media use and media gratifications. Having an awareness of these things makes it easier to study peoples' behaviors with different media outlets. Researchers can then form inferences or conclusions based upon what they have studied in terms of media uses and gratifications. The last assumption is that value judgments about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). There is no single form of media that is best for all. It depends on the individual. Everyone is different and everyone uses different types of media to satisfy different needs and wants.

Baran and Davis (2009) assess the strengths and weaknesses of the uses and gratifications theory. The strengths of this theory are that it provides useful insight into adoption of new media, it studies the use of media as a part of everyday social interaction, differentiates active uses of media from more passive uses, provides insightful analyses of how people experience

media content and it focuses attention on individuals in the mass communication process (Baran & Davis, 2009). The weaknesses of the theory are that it relies on functional analysis which can create a bias toward the status quo, it cannot easily address the presence or absence of effects, many of its key concepts are criticized as not being measurable and it is too oriented toward the micro-level (Baran & Davis, 2009).



## Chapter 3 - Literature Review

The relative newness of social media has meant that little research has been done to determine how organizations are using outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare and Pinterest. Reports of how these technologies have been used are largely anecdotal, and studies that focus on the consumer uses and dependencies on social media- the variables that are under study here- are rare. Moreover, research focusing on consumer use of social media in specific applications, such as this study's focus on information from a specific athletic organization's flow of information aimed at building new relationships with consumers, is almost non-existent. However, two studies do provide some guidance for the aims of this research.

In 2011, Mahan conducted a study to see how effective social media is in sports marketing by examining fan response to such outlets. There were two different samples: one group of undergraduate students and one group of adults. An online survey that dealt with Internet and sport behaviors was distributed to each sample for a two-week period. Mahan found that both convenience and, to a lesser degree, personal relevance of the technology (i.e., involvement) had influence on consumer motivations to use digital social media in a sport context. The convenience aspect of digital social media – that is, the availability of constant updates that can be accessed through a variety of modes (e.g., computer, wireless device, etc.) – appeared to be an underlying factor in an individual's feelings toward, and use of, these technological innovations. Given the nature of the 24/7 sport news cycle and the resulting 'I need it now' demands of sport consumers, the ability to offer up-to-the-second news and information (i.e., via digital social media) might provide an advantage for sport organizations over using other digital or traditional methods such as website and press release (Mahan, 2011). But, coupled with the involvement

aspect of social media, Mahan believes that these outlets are only benefiting those who use them and are not reaching a wider audience. Because of this, he suggests that marketers should consider integrating digital social media into marketing initiatives along with other modes of communication.

Enjoyment of digital social media appeared to clearly drive a positive response to sport organizations using such applications (Mahan, 2011). Social media applications allow consumers to become completely immersed in the communication process through such activities as ‘retweeting’ or posting a message or link on a personal Facebook wall. These forms of interaction enable consumers to become more involved with the features of social media outlets and add to its’ enjoyment value. Moreover, this amount of control afforded to the consumer by such technological advances also corroborates the notion of a shift in power away from the producers (i.e., sport organizations) in the digital age .

Mahan (2011) also discovered that the way in which older adults (non-students) view the ease of use of technology or social media will influence their attitude towards social media. For certain adults positive response toward digital social media is influenced by their perception that the technology is not difficult to comprehend. Because younger consumers have grown up with technology, they find social networking sites easy to use and barely have to put forth any effort into searching for information. Despite the recent upward trend of Twitter/Facebook/etc. use by ‘older’ adults, acceptance of these applications still lags behind that of younger individuals. Mahan suggests that in order to reach the non-student segment of the population, sport marketers ought to first understand why and how this group uses technology.

In 2011, Wallace, Wilson and Miloch performed a content analysis of the branding, marketing and management strategies provided on NCAA Facebook pages and NCAA Big 12

athletic department Facebook pages. Basically the purpose of this study was to examine the use of social media as a brand-management tool in college athletics. For one week in each of the spring, summer and fall 2010 semesters and the 2011 winter semester, a total of 22 Facebook pages were studied. The authors took a screenshot of the content items, numbered each of them then recorded reoccurring themes. These included communication tools (link, status, picture, video, notes), sport, brand attributes, brand associations (team success, rivalry, socialization, brand mark, stadium, commitment and organizational attributes) marketing strategy, information coverage and type of fan interaction.

The authors found that the most frequently used communication tool on Facebook for both the NCAA and the Big 12 was content being uploaded via links. In addition, the Big 12 athletic departments uploaded a proportionally larger amount of pictures and status updates than the NCAA (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch 2011). The type of communication tools used shapes the way Facebook users can view information and potentially influences the type of their interactions with the content. When links are provided on Facebook pages, they usually take the consumer to another source or website. This management behavior is particularly important because it reveals that Facebook users are encouraged to navigate away from the Facebook page to interact with external website content rather than interacting with the Facebook content.

The Facebook sport experience is shaped by not only the communication tools and the management of these tools but also the content expressed in these formats (Wallace, Wilson and Miloch, 2011). The researchers believe that both the NCAA and the Big 12 did not utilize enough of the different types of communication tools. They believe that pictures and videos should have been used more. According to Wallace, Wilson and Miloch, pictures and video could potentially generate fan involvement and interaction in a way that is uniquely different

than other communication tools (Wallace, Wilson and Miloch, 2011).

When it came to raising brand awareness and managing brand perceptions, both the NCAA and the Big 12 used certain brand associations to accomplish this. The NCAA organizational pages used team success, socialization, rivalry, organizational attributes and commitment the most while the Big 12 used rivalry, brand mark, team success, stadium community and socialization the most (Wallace, Wilson and Miloch, 2011). The results suggest that certain brand associations may be more clearly and easily communicated in this media format (Wallace, Wilson and Miloch, 2011). According to Wallace, Wilson and Miloch, the brand associations used the most by the NCAA (commitment and organization attributes) were in line with its' overall brand mission and helped to enhance the brand image of student-athletes. The ones used more frequently by the Big 12 (brand-mark and stadium) were unique to the college athletic department's brand and future revenue opportunities (Wallace, Wilson and Miloch, 2011). The actual stadium provides fans with the gameday atmosphere and exclusivity to the sports brand.

The authors also dealt with how Facebook users are interacting with the content on Facebook. It was found that the average number of fans for the NCAA pages was generally lower than that of the Big 12 pages (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011). In addition, the number of likes received more interactions than the number of comments for each organization. According to Wallace, Wilson and Miloch, these results suggest that the audiences for the two groups are different but their management techniques are similar. The significantly different fan interaction between the two groups reinforces the idea of managing content and online consumer activity. Sports consumers reported using social media as a tool not only for aspects of fandom and information seeking but also to directly communicate in an interactive manner. Wallace, Wilson and Miloch (2011) conclude that social media content can have on fan behavior and

management techniques of sports organizations. Essentially, the findings suggest that the management of communication techniques and the content posted to these sites can potentially increase brand exposure and, as a result, facilitate two-way interaction.

While insightful, Wallace Wilson and Miloch (2011) provide a macro-focus on behaviors of sports fans using Facebook, and while such generalizability is desirable, it is also important to look at social media use inside individual organizations, since fan bases and their expectations for social media content are not necessarily the same. Moreover, given the timing of this study, previous studies have not considered organizational use of new technologies such as Foursquare or Pinterest.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics' social media strategy and to test the level of fan satisfaction with the social media content, it is important to understand why and how both entities uses certain outlets and for what reasons. All fans are different and have different uses and reasons for use when it comes to utilizing social media. In order to effectively communicate with different age segments, the department must know the social media habits of their fans. The researcher must obtain fan opinions about such social media content in order to understand why they choose to use Facebook and Twitter and for what reasons. The researcher must also obtain viewpoints about social media use from various members of the athletics staff to comprehend their management techniques. If a better understanding of the gratifications behind such uses is obtained, the information can then help the department satisfy the social media needs of their fans and produce effective social media strategies.

Social media is still considered a new phenomenon that most people do not comprehend. Peoples' behaviors with it vary as most have different needs and uses of it. More specifically,

little research has been done on social media at a college sports level. With the studies provided in the literature review coupled with the uses and gratifications theory to aid in analyzing and understanding new media, this report can contribute to this area of research in order to produce college sports fans satisfaction with a new technological phenomenon by answering the following questions.

**RQ1:** Is the social media content produced by the K-State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics satisfying fans' social media needs?

**RQ2:** Is there a difference among different ages of K-State Sports fans in terms of how they use the social media pages of K-State Sports and for what purposes?

**RQ3:** Do K-State Sports fans of different ages prefer the same social media content contained on the K-State Sports pages?

## Chapter 4 - Methodology

Qualitative measures were utilized to collect data. In-depth interviews and focus groups were used to achieve a deeper understanding of the use of social media in the college sports industry, more specifically within the K-State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics. In-depth interviews were used due to the fact that the researcher was able to obtain information from experts (staff members in the athletics department) who know about the target audience (K-State fans). The researcher was able to conduct the interviews in a confidential environment where respondents can share information. In-depth interviews also help to shape future questions on the topic and they can provide more truthful answers from respondents since others are not influencing these individuals.

Focus groups serve to bring individuals together to solicit opinions and beliefs about a certain topic and to provide members, as well as the researcher, with diverse viewpoints (Beyea & Nicoll, 2000). They are used to gather information from members of a certain target audience, to determine consumer satisfaction, aid in product or service improvements, gain a better insight into how the target audience feels about the topic and get a better understanding of their behaviors with the product or service.

In-depth interviews and focus groups together enable the researcher to explain the nature of the study in person, judge the quality of the response and allow for adaptability on the spot. Both qualitative measures were between a semi-structured and structured format. Questions for each method were pre-planned in order to help the researcher explain and understand the topic but they did allow for spontaneity if the opportunity arose. The in-depth interviews were comprised of seven questions and each participant was asked the same question with the exception of the athletic director. Each focus group contained ten questions and a small form to

fill out beforehand that asked for demographic information. (See appendix A for in-depth interview, background and focus group questions. Questions are also included with all transcriptions in appendix B.)

In-depth interviews were conducted with five staff members within the K-State Athletics Department. They included the undergraduate assistant for social media, the director of fan experience and sales, the assistant athletic director of communications, the assistant athletic director of ticketing and fan strategies and the athletic director. These individuals were chosen to participate in the study because they are either responsible for planning and implementing the social media strategies of K-State Sports, they are in charge of monitoring the social media content for the K-State Athletic Department or they use the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts of K-State Sports for their profession. Two of the five participants were female while the other three were male. Each had been employed with the athletics department for at least two years prior to the study. Both females are from Kansas and are graduates of K-State. The males are from other states and are graduates of other Division 1 schools (Baylor, Wake Forest and Illinois State).

For both focus groups, participants were chosen due to the fact that they currently utilize the K-State Sports' social media services (Facebook and Twitter) and they are identified as being a part of the K-State sports fan base. The first focus group contained ten current K-State students. Out of the 10, 60% were male and 40% were female. The ages ranged from 19-23, with 20.7 being the mean age of the group. Half of the group (50%) were sophomores, 20% were juniors and 30% were seniors. There were no freshmen involved in the study. Nine of the ten participants were from Kansas while one male was from another state (Colorado). In terms of social media, nine "like" K-State Sports on Facebook while eight follow it on Twitter. Only



one female did not “like” it on Facebook and only one male and one female (both seniors) did not follow it on Twitter. All of the others held accounts for both social media outlets. When it comes to being a fan of K-State sports, none of the participants said they were a fan of all K-State sports teams. They preferred certain K-State teams over others. Of the sixteen K-State sports teams, the only one that did not receive student fan support was tennis.

The second focus group consisted of six people with 67% being male and 33% being female. Five were K-State alumni while one male was still a junior at K-State. Most were recent graduates, although one participant graduated in 1987. All participants were from Kansas. Ages ranged from 21 to 45. The majority of the group was in their twenties with the mean age being 28.3. Five of the six respondents “like” K-State Sports on Facebook while five of the six follow it on Twitter. Only one male did not “like” it on Facebook and only one female (the 45 year old) did not follow it on Twitter. All the rest held accounts for both social media outlets. When it comes to being a fan of K-State Sports, all participants were fans of all sixteen K-State sports teams.

All five in-depth interviews were conducted at the end of February in 2012. Participants were contacted individually through email about two weeks prior to their interview dates. The athletic director was not contacted directly. All communication went through his executive assistant. Each email contained the purpose of the study, the methods to be used, the length of the study, any anticipated risks or discomforts, anticipated benefits, extent of confidentiality, the use of an audio recorder and why they were targeted as a subject in the study. If they were willing to participate, they were asked to respond to the email. From there a date, time and location were arranged to conduct each interview.

On the day of each interview, the participants were briefed again. They were told that they could opt out of the study at any point, that they did not have to answer any questions that went against their ethics or department rules, that the interview would be audio recorded, that all transcripts and recordings would be deleted at the end of the study and the benefits of the study were highlighted again. Once the participants were ready, the record button was pressed and the interviews began.

The respondents were asked a total of seven questions. They pertained to their reasons for adopting social media into the athletics department, their social media objectives for the 2011-2012 athletic season, the utilization of social media within the department, how they felt their social media strategy differs from other colleges and universities, how vital they believe social media to be in the world of college athletics, other forms of social media they would like to adopt and how effective they believe their social media content to be among their fans. The athletic director was asked some of the same questions as the other staff members but was also asked a few different ones as well. He was asked about the benefits he believes social media is bringing to the K-State Athletics Department, how he personally uses social media to represent K-State Sports, how the social media content can be improved and the direction the athletics department is heading with its current social media strategy. The interviews were held at Bramlage Coliseum within the offices of each staff member. Length of the interviews ranged from 10-20 minutes and they were given within a span of one week. After each interview was completed, they were transcribed and analyzed. The responses were then used to create focus group questions.

The first focus group was conducted at the end of March in 2012. A snowball sample of personal acquaintances was used. All male participants were individually contacted via

Facebook message two weeks prior to the focus group date. They were contacted due to their extreme passion for K-State sports (visible on gamedays for multiple sports in the K-State student section) and because of their interaction with K-State Sports' Facebook and/or Twitter pages. This interaction is in terms of retweeting a tweet made by @kstatesports, liking the content on the K-State Sports Facebook page, tagging themselves in photos on K-State Sports' Facebook albums and posting status' or tweeting about upcoming games. The Facebook messages briefly contained the same elements as the in-depth interview emails and stated that a free shirt would be given to them if they volunteered. If they chose to partake in the study they were required to respond to the Facebook message and bring one friend of the opposite sex to the discussion in order for the researcher to have a balance of male and female opinions. Date, time and location were then arranged.

On the day of the actual focus group, the participants were briefed with the same content as those who participated in the in-depth interviews regarding confidentiality, opting out of the study and the use of an audio recorder. Only four males were able to bring a friend of the opposite sex. Before the focus group was conducted, respondents were asked to fill out a small form containing questions about their background. These questions included first name, age, class year, gender, hometown, whether or not they "like" K-State Sports on Facebook or follow it on Twitter and what K-State Sports teams they are a fan of. Once the forms were completed, the record button was pressed and the group discussion began.

Respondents were asked questions regarding their general use of social media, what they use the K-State Sports social media pages for and why, their thoughts on the current social media content of K-State Sports (likes and dislikes), what they would like to see more of, other forms of social media they would like to see the athletics department use, their thoughts on the athletic

department's recent adoption of Pinterest, how they would feel if K-State Sports did not have a Facebook or Twitter page and if social media is enhancing their experience of being a K-State fan. Additional thoughts and comments could be provided on the topic as well. The discussion was held in the school of journalism and mass communications building on the campus of Kansas State University and lasted for about twenty minutes. Snacks were provided and a note taker was present. At the conclusion of the discussion, participants were given their free shirts. The focus group was then transcribed and analyzed a few days later.

The second focus group was conducted in a similar manner and used the same type of sampling method for some of the participants. This group consisted of K-State alumni with the exception of one current student. These individuals were targeted because of their interaction on the K-State Sports social media outlets. Prior to sending some a Facebook message, the researcher had utilized the K-State Sports Facebook page to see who was "liking" or commenting on the content. The names that were seen often were contacted through a Facebook message while the others were contacted personally by the researcher. The researcher knew that these individuals were K-State fans and used the social media pages of K-State Sports. All participants were briefed the same material as the other participants of the study and all were promised a free K-State prize pack for participating (included a shirt and sunglasses). If these individuals were willing to participate, they contacted the researcher via Facebook message or in person. Date, time and location were arranged.

The second focus group was conducted in April 2012. Participants were asked the same questions as those in the first focus group. The discussion was carried out at a baseball game since respondents were fans of K-State baseball and had planned on attending the upcoming game that was scheduled at the time. The discussion was transcribed and analyzed a few days

later. It was compared and contrasted to the responses of the student focus group. Both focus groups were also compared to some of the responses from the in-depth interviews in order to see if fan satisfaction matched department objectives and to grasp the overall opinion of fans as it relates to the social media content produced by the athletics department. (See appendix B for in-depth interview and focus group transcriptions.)

## **Chapter 5 - Findings**

### **In-depth Interviews**

Through a series of five in-depth interviews with various members of the K-State Athletics staff, information was obtained to better understand the client and how it operates with social media. The director of fan experience and sales and the assistant athletic director of communications both plan and implement social media strategies. The assistant director of ticketing and fan strategies is mainly responsible for monitoring the content being produced. The undergraduate assistant uses social media to post promotional materials and to interact with fans. The director of athletics oversees what everyone is doing in each of the other positions.

K-State Sports created Facebook and Twitter accounts in mid-2010. Their main reasons for adopting these outlets were to adapt to the latest form of communication, to interact with fans, to reach out to a lot of people, to create awareness about events, to answer fan inquiries and to advertise items such as ticket sales. It was not until attending a seminar that the athletics department realized that they really needed to implement social media into their marketing and communications strategies. When asked what the reasons were for adopting social media into the K-State Athletics Department, the assistant athletics director of communications said,

Well because as time evolves and technology evolves and communication styles and strategies evolve, you kind of have to go with the flow and keep up with the Jones' so to speak and really... you know we were probably one of the last schools in the Big 12 that made it a big focus and maybe part of that was that we weren't quite sure how long Twitter would hang around. The first thing that we needed to do was to figure out 'what

is our strategy?’ because we didn’t want to jump into something without knowing what we wanted to get out of it.

In relation to this question, the athletics director was asked what benefits he believes social media brings to the athletics department at K-State. He mentioned how it enhances communication and allows the department to “stay in touch with and reach different kinds of audiences.” But he also talked about the importance of successful management of social media. Basically he stated, “if you can’t manage it, don’t do it.” Without this resource, the department could be held accountable for situations and possibly lose communication with fans.

For the 2011-2012 athletic season, the objectives of K-State Sports were to increase the number of “likes” on its’ Facebook page and the number of followers on both Twitter accounts (@kstatesports and @kstategameday). In fact, their social media strategy specifically states the following:

Social media goals for the 2011-2012 season:

- Increase Facebook followers from 18,890 (as of July 16, 2011) to more than 50,000 (BSFS Capacity)
- Increase Twitter followers
  - kstatesports: from 6,142 (as of July 16, 2011) to more than 12,528 (Bramlage Capacity)
  - kstate\_gameday: from 732 (as of July 6, 2011) to more than 1,500 (K-State Athletics, 2011)

In addition, three out of the four staff members who were asked about the department’s social media objectives also emphasized the need to interact and connect with fans. To them, the numbers had meaning but it was more about engaging with their fan base of social media followers and regularly communicating with them. The undergraduate assistant for social media said,

Literally, for the most part, we started out at zero (in terms of social media followers) so this season was more about growing not only the number of followers and fans we have but also growing how we connect with them, learning how to better connect with our fans and doing more research on how to do that better.

Each of the five K-State Athletics staff members use social media within their jobs to represent the brand in different ways. The undergraduate assistant stated that she uses it to connect with K-State fans and post any promotional-related materials (photos, videos, events, etc.). The director of fan experience and sales uses it to upload post-game photos after a big win or handles anything that is time-sensitive. She mainly allows the undergraduate assistant to control the K-State Sports pages while overseeing what is posted. She also uses Twitter to “follow the conversation” about social media and learn from others of what to do and what not to do.

The assistant athletic director of communications oversees the sports information department. Unlike the marketing staff (fan experience and sales) who uses social media for promotional items, this office uses it to provide fans with any type of updates. These include stories, scores, press releases and statistics. The assistant director of ticketing and fan strategies does not use social media. His main role is to monitor the content being produced and to see what fans are saying on the pages especially if they have questions relating to fan experience and ticket sales. Lastly, the athletic director utilizes his own Twitter account to represent K-State Sports. He also periodically sends out “Letter from John Currie” emails to the K-State fan base and responds to questions regarding the content.



What separates K-State Sports from other colleges and universities is the establishment of a ‘one-voice policy.’ Unlike other schools, K-State Sports only has one Facebook account and one Twitter account to represent all of its’ 16 sports teams (@kstategameday is an additional Twitter outlet that provides fans in-game score updates). It does not have a separate Facebook page or Twitter handle for each sport. It operates under one name and that is K-State Sports. The director of fan experience and sales said,

I would say the biggest difference is the number of accounts. We’ve taken the approach that if you’re a K-State fan you’re a K-State fan, you’re not just a fan of (one sport)...so you get updates on all sports. I would say we’re really different when it comes to that.

In addition to its current use of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, K-State Sports created a Pinterest account early on in 2012. The department is still in its early stages of adoption but its’ main goal with the new outlet is to use it for sales purposes. K-State Sports will use Pinterest to “pin” K-State merchandise onto its board. The thought process behind this idea is to use it as an additional way to increase revenue and to provide gift and decoration suggestions to K-State fans. The undergraduate assistant said,

It (Pinterest) definitely has a greater trend. You see that there’s a lot of sports coming up on there, a lot of sporting teams, schools, that sort of thing, that are utilizing it in the right way. So now its just trying to figure out how to use it in the right way and not just to learn what Pinterest is all about and how to use it.

So far, Pinterest represents the only other form of social media that the department has taken a step towards adopting, although Google Plus and Foursquare are under consideration, but no actions have been taken to implement them for public use. In fact, the athletics director did not want the athletics department to adopt any other forms of social media. He wanted to maintain the outlets currently in use (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) and determine how they can have more “propelling stuff.”

The consensus of the interviewed athletics staff members was that their social media content is satisfying their fans even though they all recognized the need for improvement. The athletics director even commented that he was “very impressed” with the way the department utilizes social media. Staff members are pleased with the growth in numbers but know there is additional content that K-State fans want to see. The assistant director of ticketing and fan strategies said,

I’d like us to continue providing more pictures, links, video...all that kind of stuff. I think we can take to the next level to tell stories and show fans what’s happening behind the scenes...that’s my emphasis. I think we’re doing all right. I’m satisfied with our presence but I’d like to continue to have more content.

K-State Sports’ staff members believe that social media is important, maybe not necessarily vital, but an important communication to have in order to keep with the times and interact with fans. Some mentioned that the department would be okay if it did not have a social media presence but stated that it would be missing out on a whole lot if it was not part of the “conversation.”

It provides opportunities that don't exist without it from a connections standpoint with fans (athletics director).

The athletics director believes that K-State Sports is heading in a forward direction with its current use of social media.

We're going to have to continue to build a communication and increase in communication and assist in like business and relationship. Relationship is the most important word. Period. Relationship. Communication is very important but relationship is the most important word. At the end of the day we have to have passion but we've got to translate passion into participation.

## Student Focus Group

Focus group one consisted of ten K-State students. When asked how often they use social media in general and what outlets they use the most, the consensus was that they use it daily with a heavy emphasis on Twitter. One male student (Scott) explained how often he uses Twitter:

Every single second of a lecture class, probably a good forty-five minutes before bed every night and the first fifteen minutes when I wake up.

The other participants agreed with this usage.

Participants go on the K-State Sports Facebook and Twitter pages often. They described how the @kstatesports tweets are always present on their Twitter feed since they are followers of the brand. Two male students talked about how useful the social media outlets are when they are not by a television to watch a game. One male student (Patrick) said,

Its kind of one of those things, especially if I'm not near a TV or something, I can always access Twitter or Facebook. That's a little easier than trying to get on the Internet on my phone or something. You can just get the instant updates but if something important is going on its probably on one of those two (Twitter and Facebook).

The male students use the K-State Sports Facebook and Twitter pages for a variety of reasons. One male uses the outlets to look at pictures posted on Facebook, while another male uses it for the "Twitter Tours" which are 'twitpics' of different K-State athletic settings such as

the offices of head coaches, student-athlete locker rooms, etc. One male uses them to watch videos that the athletics department posts while another male uses these outlets to get score updates; especially for the lesser publicized sports such as baseball, golf or cross country. A lot of the males agreed that they use Facebook and Twitter to obtain scores for different K-State sports teams. The @kstategameday Twitter account enables these fast, up-to-date scores. One male talked about something different that the other males did not mention. He said he uses the social media outlets to look at pre-game material in order to get to know the opposing team a little bit better. He also uses it to read the season recaps as well.

When asked their opinions about the current social media content on K-State Sports' Facebook and Twitter pages, this was in terms of likes and dislikes. Many of the items that the participants liked were the reasons why they used these social media outlets; to look at pictures, videos and receive score updates. One female mentioned how she likes the material on Twitter because it is concise or to the point. One male likes the post-gameday photos on the K-State Sports Facebook page that get taken after football, men's basketball and women's basketball games.

Two males had some negative comments in regards to the social media content. One male (Tim) said,

I think its informative but only in a public relations sense. You have to check the Collegian (Kansas State University student newspaper), the Kansas City Star or the Wichita Eagle if you want a news approach.

Another male (Patrick) said,

Some of the information...there hasn't been a whole lot of K-State Sports...official...anything about what's going on right now like with Frank (Martin). I mean obviously there's not a lot that they (athletics department) know about it either but at least you can kind of post something about how there's talk about this...or rumors.

Participants were asked what they would like to see more of on the K-State Sports Facebook and Twitter pages. The males said they would like to see more behind the scenes footage, similar to the Twitter Tours, but in video format. They also want to know interesting facts about K-State student-athletes. One male talked about how the athletics department did a feature on a former K-State Men's Basketball player and his shoes. He (Patrick) said,

Obviously I don't actually know him but its kind of interesting to know about him especially because he's representing our school and everything.

A few males talked about how they liked it when the athletics department posted a video of the men's basketball team reading to an elementary school. One male (Chris) even stated,

That was cool getting to see them interact and just promote a better image for K-State overall.

Lastly, one male said he would like to see more unbiased news information.

When asked what other forms of social media they would like to see the K-State Athletics Department adopt, participant views were split. Some were fine with just having a

Facebook and Twitter page while others expressed interest in other outlets. One female (Taylor) exclaimed,

I use Pinterest but I don't know how K-State Sports could use it.

Two males showed interest in Foursquare. One male wanted to see K-State sports teams use Foursquare to check in at places when they are playing on the road. Another male wanted to use it to receive some sort of reward or discount for checking in at home games.

At the time, K-State Sports was in the process of considering a Pinterest account. Participants were asked what they thought of the recent adoption and if they would sign up for it if K-State Sports had one. Most agreed that Pinterest is a "girl thing" and that it would only reach or be of interest to females. One male talked about how it could be a new marketing approach to target female K-State Sports fans. He (Chris) said,

I feel like Pinterest is really creative and what not so you could have all the dresses that the girls make (the ones they wear on gamedays) on there and sell those types of things.

The group did not think it was a bad idea to have a Pinterest account but they would not get one just because K-State Sports has one nor did they believe other fans would do the same.

Participants were asked how they would feel if K-State Sports did not have a social media presence and where they would go to get information about K-State sports. One male said that nothing would change, that the information provided on Facebook and Twitter is just supplementary material. He did feel that it would hurt his knowledge of the lesser-publicized

sports teams at K-State since he does not actively seek out information regarding those teams. Another male (Tim) said it would be inconvenient but believes,

The Big 12 conference has a strong social media presence, so does the Collegian, so it would be just as easy to obtain scores and insider information from those sources.

As “likers” or “followers” of K-State Sports on Facebook and Twitter, participants were asked if they felt that they were interacting with the K-State Sports brand because of this and if these social media outlets add to their experience of being a K-State fan. One male and one female felt social media is good for alumni. The two mentioned that since alumni are no longer on campus they are not aware of what is going on but social media can help them stay connected. Another male (Tim) responded to the question with,

Yes and no. I really feel like K-State has a strong social media presence and I like that, but I think it is more of a one-way conversation. That’s not how social media is intended to be.

Lastly, participants were able to provide any additional comments or thoughts on the topic. A handful of the participants stated that they wanted to see more pictures whether they are on Facebook or Twitter. Another male said that he would like to know what former student-athletes are doing in their pros or what they are doing after college. A lot of the other respondents agreed with this suggestion. The last comment of the discussion was made by a male (Tim) who said,



Overall I really like what K-State Sports has done with their use of social media, but I would like to see them allow for more conversation and less PR.

## **Alumni Focus Group**

The second focus group consisted of six participants; five were K-State alumni and one was a junior at K-State. The first question asked them how often they use social media in general and what outlets they use the most. All participants use it daily and mainly access it through their cell phones or computers. One male alum explained how his job entails him to sit at a computer desk all day. He keeps tabs on his Internet Explorer open all day for Facebook and Twitter. Each day, he'll take a two-minute break to check what is going on in the social media world. Five out of the six participants use Twitter the most. One male alum (Brett) summed up Twitter in his response,

Its one of those things that's so readily acceptable/accessible and one of those things that you can always check...but I think that's kind of the benefit of having it.

Only one female, the oldest respondent, did not have a Twitter account. She stated that she only uses Facebook.

The next question asked participants how often they go on the K-State Sports Facebook and Twitter pages. The consensus of the group was that they only go on Facebook when they see something that interests them, such as an article or press release. The older female alum explained that once she sees the article on Facebook, she goes straight to the athletic website to actually read it. The males utilize Twitter more due to its timeline feature that operates 'in-the-moment.' They said they follow K-State Sports mainly on Twitter as opposed to on Facebook.

The males that follow K-State Sports on Twitter use it to see what is going on in real time. Two males and one female use it to obtain score updates or media releases while another

male uses it more for his profession as a news reporter in order to find things out. The oldest alum uses Facebook to find articles that interest her.

In terms of their thoughts on the current social media content of K-State Sports (what they like and dislike), one female alum (Hannah) said,

I think that it is extremely useful and helps all who follow it on a regular basis. I enjoy game updates the most.

One male alum was pleased with the recap that it provides in terms of sporting events. Another male (Andrew) believes that,

Both Facebook and Twitter achieve a good balance of content between what are viewed as the ‘primary sports’ (football and men’s basketball) and other athletic teams.

This same male also likes that the content is “engaging and easy to digest.”

There was also a disagreement between members about the two Twitter accounts (@kstatesports and @kstategameday) that K-State Sports operates under. Two males find the @kstategameday account to be beneficial as it provides score updates as the game is taking place. One male and the older female believe there should just be one Twitter account for K-State Sports, like a ‘one-stop shop’ to get all of your information instead of having to follow more than one account. The male student (Jake) of the group responded with,

But I think having two gives you a choice of ‘yeah you don’t have to follow @kstategameday and get the 30-40 tweets a day.’ It gives you a choice of what you want to do.

The group of K-State alumni would like to see more of the content that is already produced on the K-State Sports social media pages. Specifically, one male said he wants to see more trivia, another male said he wants to see more stats (past history, odds) and the older female said she would like more behind the scenes material. One male wants to know more about the student-athletes and who they are as individuals especially since he likes to read interviews. One male (Brett) believes that,

It all has to do with time and who’s running it. If one person controls it one day they could be more inclined or more knowledgeable to do one thing or to post something that’s a little odd or unique, kind of like a random stat or random fact. But someone that’s new to the system may not know everything.

When asked about Pinterest, the answers were the same as the student group. This group thought that the outlet was geared more towards females but did not think that was a reason for the athletics department to not adopt it. Only one female in the group had a Pinterest account. She said that she does not have a separate board used to pin her K-State products. The older female said she would get a Pinterest if that was the only way she could purchase K-State products, otherwise, she would just go to local stores in Manhattan, KS to buy K-State merchandise. She did mention that she has a sister in Oregon who is addicted to Pinterest. She

said it would make it easier for her sister, who is a K-State fan, to buy a K-State shirt if K-State Sports adopted the outlet.

One male (Brett) said,

Pinterest is almost like a luxury, just like having a Facebook or a Twitter. You add it for your own benefit; you follow what you want to follow, you talk to who you want to talk to. As far as adopting it, I think it would be beneficial just because its kind of like a trend. Pinterest is just like any other fad that jean shorts were in the 80's. Its one of those things right now where its not a requirement but its almost heavily encouraged. By diving into that aspect of it and having that, it would just allow more people to be more interactive with their social media and also to allow them to be more interactive with K-State in general.

The male K-State student had never heard of Pinterest.

When asked if they would like to see the athletics department adopt any other forms of social media, the group was content with Facebook and Twitter but they did start a discussion about Foursquare. Participants thought it would be interesting to have fans check in at Bramlage Coliseum (Basketball) or Bill Snyder Family Stadium (Football) but did not think that many would do so, especially to have enough that would equal the capacity of each athletic facility (50,000 for football and 12,528 for basketball). They mentioned that not everyone may have the app for it on their cell phones, that they may not have a smart phone and the fact that cell phones rarely work on gamedays anyways. The older female brought up the issue of who the target

audience would be for Foursquare. She believes people her age would not participate but that college students will.

Participants were asked how they would feel if K-State Sports did not have a social media presence and where they would obtain their information about K-State Sports. The oldest respondents said the athletic website while the male student mentioned ESPN. These individuals agreed that they would be obtaining information the hard or the long way by using these sources. Another female brought up K-State alumni and how they use these social media outlets to stay connected even if they reside outside of Kansas or the United States.

In terms of interacting with the K-State Sports brand on social media and having it add or not add to their experience of being a K-State fan, three respondents said the following:

Gavin: Its like THE authentic source. Its not like GoPowercat or anything like that, it's the K-State Athletic Department. I think there's some value to that.

Brett: You definitely relate to it. K-State prides itself on a whole family atmosphere and being in a smaller community and living in a smaller community you kind of dwell on that and having that authentic source or that genuine source...it kind of brings something to you that you wouldn't get otherwise. There's certainly something that would be missing if there wasn't a Twitter or a Facebook because let's face, everyone in that 18-24 age demographic...you're going on an 80% cliff that someone has 1 of the 2; its not higher than that.

Hannah: I would say that using K-State Sports has changed my fan experience and had a

direct influence on it because of the many informational opportunities that are right at your fingertips.

As far as additional thought or comments, here is what two respondents had to say:

Angela: I personally think it's really nice, cool, interesting, that both President Schultz and the Athletic Director participate in it. They are fairly active on those accounts and I think that's really nice too. I think that kind of brings in that family tie too. You feel like you are apart of the family when you're hearing it from them also."

Brett: "Having that medium is a luxury. You don't have to be there to know what's going on which is completely different from what it was back in the day. Go back to the 60's, 70's, 80's and even to the 90's, you kind of had to be there to experience it or wait for the 10pm news or listen to it on the radio or just do something that was completely different. Now this, its just created its own monster because of the demand. K-State certainly meets that demand right now and there's just always going to be a growing demand. Its going to be interesting to see how it all evolves and goes from there."

A discussion also began about the athletic director doing a live chat via Twitter. One male (Gavin) thought it would be a cool idea for him to participate in and said,

I think it would attract a younger demographic. I know they (the athletics department) are always looking to get that next wave of donors and K-Staters.

They mentioned how someone in PR could screen the tweets beforehand so he would know which ones he should answer. Some of the participants in the group said they would participate if it was made available to them.



## Chapter 6 - Discussion

It was found that all focus group participants use social media daily, especially Twitter. This might be due to the fact that most people own smart phones, allowing them to download social media apps onto their mobile devices. These apps and the use of smart phones make it easier for fans to access their Facebook or Twitter pages instead of having to go on a computer or laptop to check them. Fans also have this need to be connected and have to know what is going on at all times with their college team. The timeline feature on Twitter operates in real time and provides followers with in-the-moment updates. A majority of the respondents favored the @kstategameday Twitter account because it gives them score updates as the game is taking place.

K-State alumni and students use the K-State Sports Facebook and Twitter pages for different reasons. Many of the items that the students like on the social media pages parallel the reasons as to why they use the outlets. One student likes the pictures the department posts so he uses social media to access those athletic pictures. Another student likes the “Twitter Tours” so he uses Twitter to view them. A majority of the students like and use K-State Sports’ social media pages for pictures, videos and score updates. These items provide more of an entertainment aspect when utilizing social media.

The alumni group does enjoy the photos and videos but are more interested in the reading materials provided by the athletics department. These individuals are more inclined to read the articles, press releases and media releases posted on the social media outlets than the students are. This information is more interesting to them. Students are more likely to hear this kind of information through others on campus or through friends. Alumni are no longer on campus and do not have access to such information through word of mouth. They rely on social media to

help them stay connected to their K-State Sports community. This use of social media helps to enhance their experience as a K-State fan. Many of the alumni responded positively to that question whereas students did not provide answers to it. A few of the students talked about social media benefiting alumni in terms of how it keeps them connected to K-State Sports since they are no longer physically on campus. But like the students, the alumni also use Facebook and Twitter for score updates.

Age did not have an effect on the social media content in terms of satisfaction and what each participant would like to see more of. All respondents wanted to see the same materials. They were pleased with the content that the athletics department is providing but they want to see more of it. They want to see more behind the scenes footage, more information on student-athletes and more video content. K-State Sports is providing a good balance of content that is satisfying the interests of different types of fans. Fans are in control of their own social media use and can choose what they want to look at. If an item does not interest them, they have the option to ignore it. The age of the participants did not have anything to do with the level of satisfaction of what type of content fans wanted to see.

When it came to discussing other forms of social media, both groups talked about the use of Foursquare. Students seemed to be favor the technology while alumni were against it. Students wanted to see K-State sports teams utilize it when they are on the road (check in at a location) or they want to receive premiums if they use it to check in at a home game. Some would only use it if an incentive was available. The alumni did not think the outlet was practical. They believe it is impossible to get 50,000 people, especially older fans, to check in at Bill Snyder Family Stadium. Almost every student owns a cell phone, and most use smart phones, which would allow them to access the Foursquare app. The older fans may not own a smart

phone, therefore, they do not have access to the social media outlet.

In addition it was interesting to hear K-State fans' opinions on the recent adoption of Pinterest. No one was against using Pinterest, not even the males who dominated the discussions. Participants were all in agreement that Pinterest was geared more towards females but they believed that was not a reason to not use Pinterest. Respondents may believe that this is another way to interact with the K-State Sports brand and satisfy the online shopping needs of females in a unique way. In fact, the Nielsen Report (2011) stated that most females and 18-34 year olds are among the most active social networkers. With this high use of social media by females, Pinterest may prove to be successful in terms of reach and satisfaction for K-State sports fans. Fans might create their own demand for this, similar to the way in which they do with the K-State Sports Facebook and Twitter pages.

## Chapter 7 - Conclusion

Based on feedback from the K-State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics and on fan responses, four themes emerged as to why social media is used in the world of college athletics. (See Figure 1.1)

**Figure 1.1: Uses of Social Media Model**



These four themes can be grouped into a “Uses of Social Media” model to guide the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics’ social media strategy. This model is based on comments from department officials and fans, which indicated that social media use generally fell into four areas: news, community, entertainment and marketing/branding. For example, news uses cited in the study included press releases, media releases, schedule announcements,

pregame material, season recaps, score updates and information on student-athletes. Community is characterized by features that help build a sense of kinship among the K-State fan base, including footage or photos of K-State student-athletes and/or teams out in the local Manhattan area. Entertainment uses include photos, videos, trivia, statistics, interesting facts about student-athletes, behind the scenes material and live Twitter chats. The marketing/branding component is only a function of the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics who use social media for certain purposes. They include advertising, raising brand awareness, promotions, enhancing the brand image, positive brand associations, public relations, gaining competitive advantages over other schools, reach, communicating and interacting with fans, building relationships with fans and adopting the latest technology to stay with the times.

This model helps to illustrate the uses and gratifications theory by showing how different people (K-State Athletics Department and K-State fans) utilize the K-State Sports Facebook and Twitter pages for different purposes. The diverse population of K-State fans uses the different social media outlets to satisfy different needs as they relate to K-State Sports. In general, it was found that students use social media more so for entertainment purposes such as viewing photos and videos while alumni use it more for news purposes, such as reading press releases and articles of interest.

The fact that fans use Facebook and Twitter to obtain K-State Sports information and entertainment shows that the audience is active and chooses which forms of media they want to use to satisfy their needs. Regular use of the two outlets indicates that fans will repeatedly use these forms. The gratification behind this use is linked to the media choice since fans provided feedback on their social media habits and preferences, illustrating that they are aware of how they behave with social media and what they are seeking through its use. Lastly, even though

the majority of the participants in this study were satisfied with the content, it cannot be assumed that there is one form of communication that is the best delivery since not all K-State Sports fans use social media. As discovered here, students and alumni cannot be grouped together, they must be analyzed separately even though they are part of the K-State fan base as a whole. Everyone is different and uses different types of media to meet different needs and expectations.

The uses and gratifications theory offers several explanations for individual media use (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). The self-reported functions by the athletic department officials and the fans cited in this study provide abundant illustrations as well. First, the fact that fans go on the social media outlets of K-State Sports daily signifies that the department is retaining their fans' attention and creating content that makes them want to come back for more. It also signifies the idea that fans use social media as a type of diversion. Both students and alumni may use Facebook and Twitter as a release from everyday life situations, especially since alumni use them while at work and students use them during class.

Other types of uses in the uses and gratifications theory are personal identity, personal relationship and surveillance. The fact that fans choose to use the Facebook and Twitter pages of K-State Sports characterizes them as social media users of the latest technology and that they are able to create a personal identity through Facebook and Twitter use. Some fans may even find companionship and build new friendships through their interaction with others on Facebook and Twitter. And certainly, social media allows fans to fulfill their surveillance needs in keeping up with personal information provided about athletes by the athletics department, not to mention the private Twitter and Facebook accounts maintained by the athletes and coaches themselves. The athletics department also uses surveillance in order to observe the behaviors and activities of fans on its social media pages. The department has to be aware of what is going on with the

representation of the K-State Sports brand to maintain a positive image, to satisfy fans and to monitor the negative comments.

For the in-depth interviews, the undergraduate assistant for social media, the director of fan experience and sales, the assistant athletic director of communications and the assistant athletic director of ticketing and fan strategies were asked what their social media objectives were for the 2011-2012 athletic season. All were in agreement that the goals were to increase the number of “likes” and followers on the K-State Sports’ pages and to increase interaction with fans. These objectives did not coincide with the focus groups’ responses nor were they necessarily a determinant of fan satisfaction. Consumer feedback from this study showed that the department is satisfying the social media needs of their fans. Even though there are items that fans would like to see more of, the department is still producing content that their fans want to see. In terms of interaction, these fans are “liking” materials posted on the Facebook page, retweeting tweets made by the department and actually clicking and viewing the content. Respondents stated that they were pleased with what they saw and wanted to see more of it in addition to new things.

Alumni are especially pleased with the content. The five alums who participated said they were fans of all K-State sports teams. The director of fan experience and sales, the assistant athletic director of communications and the assistant athletic director of ticketing and fan strategies all stated that their “one-voice policy” was their competitive advantage over other schools, meaning that the department only has one account to represent all K-State sports teams instead of having different ones for different sports. This helps to satisfy the needs of K-State alumni since all of five of them involved in the study said that they were fans of all K-State teams.

## **Chapter 8 - Suggestions for Future Social Media Strategies**

### **Recommendation Number One**

Based on research findings from this study, which include fan focus group responses, athletic staff member in-depth interview responses and the groupings of findings as cited in the “Uses of Social Media” model, the following recommendations are provided to the K-State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics for use in future social media strategies. The first recommendation is to continue to utilize Facebook and Twitter and enhance the two outlets for fans. One reason for this lies with the department’s social media objectives for the 2011-2012 athletic season. Four members of the K-State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics staff stated that the goal was to increase the number of “like” on the K-State Sports Facebook page and to increase the number of followers for both Twitter accounts (@kstatesports and @kstategameday). As of July 2011, the K-State Athletics Department had the following numbers:

- Facebook Likes: 18,302
- Twitter Followers (@kstatesports): 5,912
- Twitter Gameday Followers (@kstategameday): 704

As of March 21, 2012 the numbers have grown significantly:

- Facebook Likes: 31,082
- Twitter Followers: 19,193
- Twitter Gameday Followers: 3,397

The number of Facebook likes increased by 59%, the number of Twitter followers increased by 31% and the number of Twitter gameday followers increased by 21%; all within the span of



eight months. From these numbers, it is evident that the two outlets are growing and have potential to grow even more. In an effort to increase Facebook “likes” and Twitter followers, the department can target local high schoolers. This segment uses social media just as frequently as college students and will most likely interact with the content. If these individuals are targeted effectively, they will become members of the social media fan base of K-State Sports and may choose to attend K-State for college if they are impressed with the Athletics Department and how it is represented on social media.

Another reason to continue the use of Facebook and Twitter is that a majority of participants stated that they use social media daily and utilize Facebook and Twitter the most. When it comes to Facebook, 87% of the participants “like” the K-State Sports page while 80% follow it on Twitter. Fans use these outlets to obtain information and entertainment about K-State Sports. In order to reach them, the department needs to continue to communicate via the channels that they utilize the most. As the department reaches them and provides them with the materials that they want to see, they achieve a level of satisfaction.

The last reason, again, is based on feedback from fans. When participants were asked what other social media outlets they would like to see the athletics department adopt, the consensus was that they were fine with the current use of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. For most of them, the only social media outlets that they use are Facebook and Twitter. The idea of Foursquare came up in discussion but none of the respondents seemed to truly advocate for it. In addition, even the athletics director, when asked that same question, said, “No I just think continuing to figure out how we can have propelling stuff. At the end of the day we have to have passion but we’ve got to translate passion into participation.”

## Recommendation Number Two

The second recommendation is to provide the social media content suggested by fans in this study as long as they are in accordance with the compliance department and other legalities (i.e. video content laws, photo laws, etc.). These include:

- Behind the scenes footage (in video format)
- Information on what former student-athletes are doing in their pros or where they are post-college life
- Interesting facts about current student-athletes in order to get to know them better as a person
- “Football Player Cribbs” (videos of the homes of current K-State football players; similar to the MTV show, *Cribbs*)
- Footage of student-athletes in the community
- Live chats via Twitter with John Currie (or other members of the athletics environment)
- Statistics (odds and past history)
- More trivia
- More photos

In order to satisfy the social media needs of a diverse population of K-State fans, provide them with the content that they would like to see. This will help to maintain followers on Twitter and “likers” on Facebook and may even help to capture the attention of those who do not interact with K-State Sports’ social media outlets. Even though the participants only represent a small portion of the K-State fan base, other fans will respond positively to the suggestions provided by this sample.

Since participants involved in the study responded well to photos and videos, the researcher has thought of unique ideas to enhance these types of content. During the K-State football, men's basketball and women's basketball seasons, the department takes fan photos on gamedays and posts albums to the K-State Sports Facebook page. These are well received based on the fact that fans "like" the albums on Facebook and tag themselves in photos. The department should do this for all sports, including the Olympic ones (tennis, equestrian, men's and women's golf, track and field and rowing). This will provide fans with an image of what it is like to attend a sport that they normally do not go to. It may show them what they are missing out on by not being in attendance and may cause them to go to a sporting event that they have never experienced. It may help to increase attendance for certain sports. This will also contribute to the department's "one-voice" policy where they represent all K-State Sports' teams.

Another idea lies with post-game fan emotions. After a win, mainly for K-State football and men's basketball, the department posts a 'Cats Win' image onto the K-State Sports Facebook page where it receives a high volume of "likes" and comments within a matter of minutes. Morale is always high after a win. In order to keep fan morale at a high level after games (for any sport), even after a loss, the department should post a video or image of player highlights. If the quarterback threw a 30-yard pass to his receiver for a touchdown, it should be shown. If the baseball team completed a triple play, it should be shown. This will help fans to focus on the positives of the game and not on the loss. They want to remember those moments that enhanced their gameday experience and made them proud to be a K-State fan. It will also add to the two-way communication between fans and the K-State Sports brand, aid in boosting fan morale and satisfy the social media needs of K-State fans.

Another reason to provide the content is the fact that these fan suggestions may give the athletics department an edge over competitors in the Big 12 conference as well as other colleges and universities. Some of these ideas are new and different and may not have been implemented before. If they have, the athletics department can put their own spin on them and make them different from other schools. This new content may also provide a better image for the K-State Sports brand and foster more two-way communication between the brand and its' fans.

### **Recommendation Number Three**

The third recommendation is that there has to be more of an emphasis on two-way communication between the K-State Sports' brand and its fans. Through observation of the current social media content on K-State Sports' pages, it seems that the department uses it quite often for advertising purposes and as a way to raise money by promoting ticket sales. That is not a bad idea but there needs to be an emphasis on interaction and dialogue. Social media is intended for interaction purposes. The athletics department should post items that push fans to respond or comment on such as trivia questions or any type of question in general. Fan interaction can be classified as "liking" something on Facebook or "retweeting" a tweet but the main focus should be on consumer comments. What do they really think? How do they really feel? (One fan believes that the content is not interactive enough.)

Another reason for two-way communication is that it helps to show that there is a person, so to speak, behind the brand; a figure that fans can talk to when it comes their college team. The athletic department should respond to questions and comments and participate in the dialogue, especially in times of a crisis. (One fan did mention the Frank Martin situation and how he wished K-State Sports would comment on the issue even if it was just, "more details to

come.” No response makes fans believe that the rumors are true and adds to their anger.) For fans, this shows them that the department cares and is taking the time to communicate with them. This in turn helps to promote a better brand image for K-State Sports.

The last reason for this recommendation is that the athletics department can gain a better understanding of the needs and wants of their fans if they engage in two-way communication. This comprehension will lead to fan satisfaction, effective communication between brand and consumer and will foster repeat use of the social media outlets. It will also benefit alumni who use these outlets as a way to stay connected to the K-State Sports community.

### **Recommendation Number Four**

The last recommendation is for the athletics department to implement the proper training on social media use to its staff members that utilize it. This will be beneficial for the multiple departments and the undergraduate assistant that use the K-State Sports Facebook and Twitter outlets to represent the brand. In addition, training will benefit those that monitor the content. Proper training will help the department learn the features of the different social media outlets, the purpose of each, how to monitor content, crisis management techniques and how to satisfy fans in terms of content production. With the appropriate training, the K-State Department of Intercollegiate Athletics will be able to implement an effective social media strategy that pleases all of its fans and stands out amongst other colleges and universities.

## Chapter 9 - Limitations

One issue with the study lies with external validity. The results cannot be generalized to an entire population. That is, the sample size used does not represent the thoughts and opinions of the K-State fan base as a whole. It only represents the viewpoints of the participants involved in the study. Their responses can be used to make inferences but cannot prove anything about the nature of K-State sports fans and their social media habits.

A second issue lies with the sample size and response rate. In order to measure fan satisfaction, only two focus groups were conducted that, when combined, accounted for a total of fifteen participants. More focus groups should have been conducted or one-on-one interviews with K-State fans should have been done to gain a better representation of K-State sports fans. In addition, not every member of each focus group contributed to the discussion. This was true more so for the student group. The same handful of students repeatedly responded to the questions.

A third issue deals with an imbalance of male and female opinions on the topic of study. For both focus groups, thoughts and opinions on social media mainly came from a male perspective. With the alumni focus group, four males and two females were present. Since there were more males, more opinions were obtained from that gender. The two females did contribute but the males spoke more. With the student focus group, there were six males and four females. None of the females engaged in the conversation; two did for a few questions. Like the alumni group, the student one was mostly dominated by the males. The student females may have only participated because of the incentive offered or they may have felt outnumbered and self-conscious of any answers they would have provided in the focus group. It is important for the moderator to facilitate responses from all participants. According to Muti, the style of the

facilitator might impact the success of the focus group. The moderator might be an “interventionist”, raising topics directly, calling on specific participants, cutting off lines of discussion that seem to be less productive, or challenging some participants (Muti, 2010). Another style might be one that is less interventionist – allowing a more meandering discussion (Muti, 2010). The focus groups seemed to be conducted with the latter style.

A fourth issue dealt with a crisis that occurred at the time of the student focus group. Around the end of March of 2012, the K-State Men’s Basketball head coach left to go to another Division 1 university. Many K-State fans were angered by this and expressed their feelings on Facebook and Twitter. As the student discussion was taking place, many could not help but talk about the situation. They were angry and their emotions may have swayed their responses in a certain way. Had this event had not occurred at this time, some of the students may have responded differently.

The last issue lies with expert bias. For each of the in-depth interviews conducted, the participants were asked their opinions on the social media content of K-State Sports. Due to their involvement with social media and their employment within the K-State Athletics Department, they would say that they are pleased with the content. They did recognize areas that needed to be improved but ultimately they believe they are implementing the correct social media strategy to satisfy their fans.

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## **Appendix A - Questions**

### **In-depth Interviews**

- 1.) What were your reasons for adopting social media into the K-State Athletics Dept.? More specifically, why Facebook and Twitter?
- 2.) What were your social media objectives for the 2011-2012 athletic season?
- 3.) In what ways do you utilize social media and why?
- 4.) What do you feel separates your social media use/strategy from other colleges and universities?
- 5.) Do you feel that social media is vital in the world of college athletics? Why or why not?
- 6.) Would you consider using any other forms of social media in the near future? Why or why not?
- 7.) Do you feel your current social media content is satisfying your fans?/How effective do you feel your social media content is for your fans?

### ***In-depth Interview Questions for Athletics Director***

- 1.) Do you feel that social media is vital in the world of college athletics? Why or why not?
- 2.) What benefits do you feel it is bringing to the athletics dept. here at K-State?
- 3.) How do you personally use social media to represent K-State Athletics?
- 4.) What is your opinion on K-State Sports' current social media content? Do you feel that it is satisfying K-State fans?
- 5.) In what ways can the content be improved? What would you like to see done differently with K-State Sports' social media strategy?
- 6.) Are there any other forms of social media (besides Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) that you would like to see the department adopt?
- 7.) What direction do you think the athletics dept. is heading with its current use of social media?

**Background information form that participants filled out prior to focus groups**

First Name:

Age:

Gender:

Hometown:

Class Year (for students):

K-State Alumni? If yes, please provide the year:

Do you “like” K-State Sports on Facebook?

Do you follow K-State Sports on Twitter?

What K-State Sports teams are you a fan of?

**Focus Group Questions**

- 1.) How often do you use social media in general? What outlets do you use the most?
- 2.) How often do you go on K-State Sports’ Facebook and/or Twitter pages?
- 3.) What do you use K-State Sports’ Facebook and Twitter pages for? Why?
- 4.) What do you think of the current social media content on K-State Sports’ Facebook and Twitter pages?
- 5.) What do you like about the content? Dislike?
- 6.) What would you like to see more of?
- 7.) As a “liker” and/or “follower” of K-State Sports, do you feel that you are interacting with the brand? Does your interaction on these social media outlets add to your experience of being a K-State fan?
- 8.) K-State Sports is thinking about adopting Pinterest. Pinterest is a virtual pinboard. It lets you organize and share the things you find interesting on the Web. It connects people through similar tastes and interests. Some people use it to decorate homes, plan weddings, share recipes and more. What are your thoughts on this? Would you sign up for Pinterest if K-State Sports had an account?
- 9.) Are there other forms of social media that you would like to see K-State Sports use? Why?
- 10.) If K-State Sports did not have a Facebook or Twitter page how would you feel? Where would you obtain your information about K-State Sports?
- 11.) Any additional thoughts or comments?

## Appendix B - Transcriptions

### In-depth Interviews

**Emily Chartrand**  
**Undergraduate Assistant in Social Media**

1.) *What were your reasons for adopting social media into the K-State Athletics Department? More specifically, why Facebook and Twitter?*

Well I was told to basically but also just because it's a growing trend and all of marketing and PR. So obviously as a marketing department it was something we wanted to have out there and we wanted to be a part of in the social media world.

2.) *What were your social media objectives for the 2011-2012 athletic season?*

For this past season I would say it was definitely growing. Last season was really starting it all out. Literally for the most part we started out at zero so this season is more about growing not only the number of followers and fans we have but also growing how we connect with them, learning how to better connect with our fans and doing more research on how to do that better.

3.) *In what ways do you utilize social media for your job and why?*

For athletics we use it to connect with our fans and connect with people that want to either come to the games, watch the games whether they are K-State alumni, current students, their kids go here or if they are just in the community of Manhattan or Kansas... basically anyone who is interested in sports, primarily obviously K-State sports and people that are passionate about their school if they went here but anyone who is connected to the K-State family basically.

4.) *What do you feel separates your social media strategy from other colleges and universities?*

I definitely feel that we have, as with kind of everything that K-State has more of a small community feel. Definitely work on it on an individual basis. Its just me working on it along with some other people. Its not like we're a big company or have a huge budget for it so that's one of the big differences too is that we don't have a big a budget like a lot of other places do. And we're still learning there are people who are doing it better than us but we're definitely doing it very well as far as connecting with our fans and making sure

we are responding to them and also just giving them the info they want as opposed to just putting a bunch of info out there that doesn't really interest them.

5.) *Do you feel that social media is vital in the world of college athletics? Why or why not?*

I think so. I think its vital any more in any sort of most businesses not everything can use social media but a lot of it can especially something like this where I mean going to sporting events, watching sports I mean it just basically is a social event that if you can get onto the Internet its just kind of another step to connect to people that aren't in Manhattan or are at home watching the game. So its definitely vital. Its not the end all be all by any means but we've had to do other forms of marketing and PR but its definitely a great way to utilize our technology that we have.

6.) *Would you consider using any other forms of social media in the near future (i.e. 4Square, Google +)? Why or why not?*

Right now we just have Facebook, Twitter, Youtube. We have looked at other ones. Right now the most serious one we're looking at is Pinterest, which is kind of new for us and a lot of people. It definitely has a greater trend. You see that there's a lot of sports coming up on there, a lot of sporting teams, schools, that sort of thing, that are utilizing it in the right way. So now its just trying to figure out how to use it in the right way and not just...to learn what Pinterest is all about and how to use it. We've also started a Google Plus page. Right now its just there just kind of as a placeholder in case we ever want to use it. We just haven't had enough demand to use it. We also don't have the time or the labor for it quite yet but its there in case it starts becoming something that we feel is necessary to use. But I would say Pinterest is that thing and 4square has kind of come in and out of the picture and again its one of those where its there, we have the pages but we don't really do anything with it at the moment just because we haven't had a really high demand for it.

7.) *Do you feel your current social media content is satisfying your fans? How effective do you feel your social media content is for your fans?*

I feel its effective, its good. And we do give them a lot of info they want but there is definitely room for improvement of course. I think there's always room to become more social to increase the two-way communication and also just to make it more, I mean its social media its Facebook, its Twitter, to make it more personal, I mean more fun at the end of the day so we definitely try to figure out ways to engage fans while still remaining professional as we are a collegiate athletics dept but still not being so serious and taking it too seriously. So always trying to make it seem more personable and fun.

**Kenny Lannou**  
**Assistant Athletic Director/Communications**

1.) *What were your reasons for adopting social media into the K-State Athletics Department? More specifically, why Facebook and Twitter?*

Well because as time evolves and technology evolves and communication styles and strategies evolve, you kind of have to go with the flow and keep up with the Jones' so to speak and really you know we were probably one of the last schools in the Big 12 that made it a big focus and maybe part of that was that we weren't quite sure how long Twitter would hang around. You see so many of these different platforms evolve and maybe fade after not so long but once it became pretty consistent and pretty...it was going to hang around, it was going to be something that everybody was going to utilize and we felt that one, we certainly wanted to keep up with everybody else but two, we didn't want to start it not knowing what our goals were and a few of us went to a seminar and realized that the first thing that we need to do is to figure out what is our strategy because we don't want to jump into something without knowing what we want to get out of it. So those were kind of the two things, was one to make sure that we're utilizing the latest in everything that...of those platforms that everybody else is but two, that its another way that we are going to communicate with our fans and engage and help tell our stories so to speak.

2.) *What were your social media objectives for the 2011-2012 athletic season?*

We started out the year with a plan to try to really engage our fanbase and to get...you know Twitter and Facebook were the two that we decided to focus on. Facebook is one that has really stood the test of time the longest. Twitter is one where its so instantaneous that you could communicate with your people instantly and the fastest that everybody has immediate...you know it comes to them immediately so you know those were the two that we focused on and what we really wanted to do first was, again, we were kind of just getting started so we wanted to gage our fanbase. It may not be as big as Ohio State's or Texas' but we do know that we've got a very passionate group, a very supportive group. So the first goal was to where we increased those followers or friends, knowing that the ultimate goal was to not just get as many followers as we could, the goal was yeah we're going to increase it and we're still increasing it but just understand that if we have 40,000 Facebook followers and somebody else has 100,000, those 40,000 we want to make sure that we're interacting and communicating with. We'd rather do that than have 100,000 people and not be as engaging with them. So really its not about the total numbers. It was about to build that core base that we knew that we had and get to a point where we were regularly communicating and interacting with them and I think we've done that with Twitter. We have up to the 15,000 range and just over 33,000 on Facebook and we're still going up on both but really just to build up that core base and start engaging with them.

3.) *In what ways do you utilize social media for your job and why?*

Obviously in our area one of our main goals is to tell stories so any time that we have something come up or something written, something posted, we utilize that to help get the stories out from our area. I know certain areas between our communications staff and the fan experience staff we kind of have different goals and objectives but we all work together. So where Joni's staff might be more promotional-based or ticket-based, our goal is to provide our fans with as many updates as possible whether its related to events and schools or stories or things...you know if Frank's going to be on a last minute appearance on ESPN then that's a way to promote that and somebody writes a good story in a different newspaper its a way to forward it to them and also it's a way that we utilize it in asking our fans 'hey, who do you want to hear about? What kind of stories? Do you want to know about Collin Klein, do you want to know about this person? We kind of utilize it as best we can to provide information to our fans on updates but also to gather their thoughts and ideas on different areas.

4.) *What do you feel separates your social media strategy from other colleges and universities?*

I think what we've done here is, and again it is very different, is we've established what we like to call a 'one-voice policy.' So what we think that we've done here is that we have 16 sports but we don't have 16 Facebook pages and we don't have 16 Twitter accounts so what we've tried to do on that is distinguish ourselves a little bit different than anybody else and it might be a little bit harder if you have 25 or 30 sports like some different schools have. But so if I'm a follower of K-State Basketball or K-State Football, I'm also a follower of K-State Rowing and Equestrian so what it does is it really helps us promote all of our sports to all of our fans and that way you're not just separating those...so if a certain sport has 200 followers on their Facebook page but another sport has 5,000 then what we're doing is we're able to spread the message of that sport, normally of 200, to our entire thousands of people so I think that's the biggest thing that we've done. Same goes for Twitter outside of our head coaches who are in a public figure role and has that demand for an account we let them have their own but other than that we have our account for game updates and then we have our athletic dept account for everything else so I think that's what's probably different about us from anybody else.

5.) *Do you feel that social media is vital in the world of college athletics? Why or why not?*

I don't know if vital would be the right word but it certainly is the way of the times and it certainly is a way to distinguish yourself from other people and a way to communicate in a very timely manner because we're certainly on a 24 hour news cycle where things change by the minute. It helps in that way or if you want to say vital in that way but we haven't gone so far as to make announcements by social media or things in our dept or office that is kind of the old-school, vital way of operating but I guess on the counter-argument of that, if where we are now...if we didn't do it right now would we still operate? Yeah but we're missing out on a whole lot so if that's what you mean by vital

then maybe it is but its just the way of the times and its what people are doing now so if you want to compete with the best and be the best and communicate with everybody...with so many people on the iPhones and the iPads these days, its kind of just what you have to do.

- 6.) *Would you consider using any other forms of social media in the near future (i.e. 4Square, Google +)? Why or why not?*

Yeah. I think we've come along with....there's Foursquare and there's LinkedIn...and there's a new one...Pinterest. I guess its just so hard to tell just to kind of see how they've evolved but I certainly wouldn't rule it out. LinkedIn is a way that really hasn't caught on as much but its really a good way from a fundraising standpoint or a development standpoint where you can reach out to so many different people from that area but I know our focus right now is Facebook and Twitter but I certainly would never rule out that that's going to be the only two we're ever going to utilize or follow at all. So we'll see.

- 7.) *Do you feel your current social media content is satisfying your fans? How effective do you feel your social media content is for your fans?*

Yeah I think we've done a really good job with what we've done. We're about a year/year and a half in to what our strategy is and we're still getting there, we're still growing but I certainly think that what we've done has been beneficial for our fans. As I heard someone say in a meeting once, 'if I'm on Twitter and I get one fan's response or answer one fan's question or we get one new season ticket holder because of this tweet or because we're communicating with them, you know what that's one more than we had before so its certainly effective, its certainly something that just adds to what we're trying to do here in terms of supporting our student-athletes and then also our fans that come from so many different areas and levels. So yeah I think its certainly been the most successful part but again we've got some room to grow and clean some things up here and there.

**Joni Smoller**  
**Director of Fan Experience and Sales**

- 1.) *What were your reasons for adopting social media into the K-State Athletics Department? More specifically, why Facebook and Twitter?*

Well honestly when we first started doing it, it was doing it to do it, which is the wrong approach. And then once it was up and running we decided we needed a better strategy: 'why are we doing this and what are we going to do to reinforce why we're doing it?' We wanted to be a voice out in the social media realm because obviously people were talking about us whether we had a page or Twitter feed or not so we wanted to be out there to be



able to answer questions for fans. And then obviously get information out to fans to be able to sell tickets and create awareness for events so that's probably the main reason why we really got involved is to communicate directly with fans and have that direct one-on-one access with them and obviously its free and that's great and just like email...it kind of is an advertising venue that doesn't cost anything.

2.) *What were your social media objectives for the 2011-2012 athletic season?*

The biggest ones we had were to increase followers and likes...but then to increase interaction with fans so instead of just telling them when that game is... asking them what are they most looking forward to or which game are they most looking forward to or what's their favorite part of gameday...so the objective was not only to increase followers but to increase interaction with them and use their feedback moving forward.

3.) *In what ways do you utilize social media for your job and why?*

I try to let Emily do most of it but if there is something pressing or if I'm lucky to go on a road trip and I am able to take a picture of the team after a big win then I will update that just due to timing because everything happens so fast...so if I'm there and its time sensitive then I'll go ahead and do it. More personally, I follow a lot of people on Twitter that are in my business. I don't tweet but they do and they tweet out a lot of good information and where social media is headed and I am able to learn a lot from those groups. I'm not as involved as other people in my position at other schools but I follow the conversation. And then again like anything I can do for K-State that's "of the moment" I try to do that.

4.) *What do you feel separates your social media strategy from other colleges and universities?*

I would say the biggest difference is the number of accounts. Our approach is one voice and that means one Facebook account. It doesn't mean a K-State Tennis Facebook or a K-State Cheerleading Facebook or K-State Facilities Facebook. It means there's one K-State Sports Facebook. I would say that we're really different compared to other schools especially when it comes to Twitter. We've got @kstatesports and @kstategameday but other schools, even in our conference, have Oklahoma State Wrestling gameday AND Oklahoma State Wrestling AND their head coach...that's great for their fans but we've taken the approach that if you're a K-State fan you're a K-State fan, you're not just a fan of (one sport)...so you get updates on all sports. I would say we're really different when it comes to that.

5.) *Do you feel that social media is vital in the world of college athletics? Why or why not?*

I would definitely say its important. I don't know if its vital...but I might lean that way. There's so much conversation that's happening regardless of whether you're in it or not so you kind of need to be part of that conversation. So when fans are upset about something they can tweet at you and you can answer them as opposed to them just being angry out in cyberspace and no one kind of addressing the issues and why we did things the way we did. So yeah I would say its really important especially for the immediate feedback and the conversation during games...you just don't get that with traditional forms of communication because even a newspaper is going to take a day to come out...and its just another way for us to communicate with fans so I would say its really important.

6.) *Would you consider using any other forms of social media in the near future (i.e. 4Square, Google +)? Why or why not?*

We've talked a lot about Pinterest in the last couple of weeks because some schools are adopting it for sales so pinning K-State apparel and so people can pin that if they...because I know people have boards for gift ideas or decoration ideas and that sort of thing and for fans to be able to pin those items through our Pinterest...but that way if people have a board that's about gift ideas for Christmas or whatever, they can start pinning K-State DVD's that we produce or K-State sweatshirts or tickets or season tickets...that way we are in the fore front of when they are looking through these gift ideas they say 'oh yeah I forgot about football tickets, I'll get those for grandpa or whatever.' So we're reaching out towards Pinterest. We've looked at Foursquare. A lot of our counterparts have started using this check-in type of accounts where if I check-in at BSFS I would get a coupon at the concession stand and I would go up and it's a digital coupon that they would scan on my phone... so I think that's where its headed so we obviously need to be researching it. We're not there yet but we need to stay in front of it so we're looking but right now its still Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

7.) *Do you feel your current social media content is satisfying your fans? How effective do you feel your social media content is for your fans?*

We can always provide more. I know some of the research that we have done says fans like to see behind the scenes stuff and we need to be providing more of that whether its photos or daily videos of practice or what its like to be a student-athlete. I think we need to be providing more content like that. I think we're getting there, we've gotten better over the past year especially with a strategy and an approach and why are we doing this and having both our office and the communications office working towards that. I think we've gotten a lot better but we can do a lot more especially when it comes to video and photos. But I would say as far as information, I would think definitely we're getting that information out. I know Halsey's Tennis event two Saturdays ago, I talked to two parents who said 'oh I just saw it on Facebook this morning and thought it was a great idea' so they wouldn't have known about that event if it hadn't been for Facebook. We're getting there but there's always more that we can provide.

**Scott Garrett**  
**Assistant Athletic Director, Ticketing and Fan Strategies**

- 1.) *What were your reasons for adopting social media into the K-State Athletics Department? More specifically, why Facebook and Twitter?*

I think it was important for us mainly because it's a free or an inexpensive way to reach out to a lot of people. The reach is obviously really strong and it's the next wave of marketing/communications so its important for us to have a presence to alert people of news and to just start finding other ways to communicate with our fans so that was really the main emphasis.

- 2.) *What were your social media objectives for the 2011-2012 athletic season?*

Our biggest objective to start was to just to grow numbers. The biggest focus that we've had is to just continue to make sure that we've got an effort at increasing our followers on Facebook or on Twitter and fans on Facebook. I think we've been successful at that. Its kind of transitioned more since then, away from just sheer numbers to how you engage with the people who are following you so telling behind the scenes stories, things that they wouldn't otherwise have access to so there's been more of a focus on that.

- 3.) *In what ways do you utilize social media for your job and why?*

I don't personally for the most part use it. My role is more of monitoring and just checking to see what our content is and what the feedback is. I do a lot of not actual posting but getting on and monitoring what other people are saying about K-State so not necessarily what we're posting on our Facebook page but what are people on Twitter saying about K-State Athletics and especially during key times like the Cotton Bowl and how the Big 12 Tournament is coming up...just seeing if our fans have questions about tickets or pricing or anything related to fan experience or ticket sales...seeing if they've got opinions that need to be looked at and commented on or responded to.

- 4.) *What do you feel separates your social media strategy from other colleges and universities?*

I think we've gotten involvement from a lot of people in the department, which is good. A lot of similar schools have full-time, social media managers who might control the whole thing themselves and that works for them but I think that's one thing that's good for us is that there are a lot of people involved and are paying attention to it so we can make sure that we all agree that the content is appropriate. The other part that I think is the big emphasis on our strategy is that we have a one voice approach where a lot of schools will have a different Twitter account or a different Facebook account for every single sport. Our emphasis is really to promote all the sports through one channel and we

think that our fans respond better to that and its better for our teams in terms of exposure to do it that way so those are the two big ones.

5.) *Do you feel that social media is vital in the world of college athletics? Why or why not?*

Yeah I think so. I think its important because people/fans are generally looking for information so its important to have a presence in terms of monetizing it. If we didn't have it would we be ok? Probably. But I think that at some point there will be a way to really capitalize on the people that are following us...and sell tickets and promote programs. I think its important and its vital for us to have a presence. I don't know what the next step is.

6.) *Would you consider using any other forms of social media in the near future (i.e. 4Square, Google +)? Why or why not?*

Yeah we certainly keep our eye open for other ones...Pinterest I think is now becoming a popular one that we probably should have a presence on...Google Plus I think we've kind of made a home and landscaped an account but its not active at this point. I think whatever the next trend is we'll certainly want to be involved in whatever that is if it gets to a level where the followers makes sense.

7.) *Do you feel your current social media content is satisfying your fans? How effective do you feel your social media content is for your fans?*

I think its effective. I think we could do more. I think there's some disconnect between where we're going and getting content for some sports or they're providing it for us. There's some sports that we don't have a huge presence because either we're not getting the information or there's a disconnect between what's happening at the sport level and what their sports information person can provide or what fan experience can provide for them so I'd like us to continue providing more pictures, links, video...all that kind of stuff I think we can take to the next level to tell stories and show fans what's happening behind the scenes...that's my emphasis. I think we're doing alright, I'm satisfied with our presence but I'd like to continue to have more content.

**John Currie**  
**Athletic Director**

1.) *Do you feel that social media is vital in the world of college athletics? Why or why not?*

Well vital means we can't live without it...so no I think we could live without social media in a second. Because social media exists, I think social media gives us some opportunities that don't exist without it from a connections standpoint with our fans. It

gives us some challenges that wouldn't exist without it but certainly it exists so its vital that we figure out how we're going to use it and manage it in our particular world.

2.) *What benefits do you feel it is bringing to the athletics department here at K-State?*

Well our use of social media... (him: so what do you define as social media? Me: in terms of Facebook, Twitter, Youtube... those are the ones we utilize the most... him: well I'm old enough that I would consider email to be social media and texting to be social media)... so what I would say is that those things do help us communicate with and stay in touch and reach different kinds of audiences. It enhances communication, now it also creates an expectation of communication that has to be managed and serviced just like anything else and because of the relative anonymity of the medium, it creates an accountability issue. I'm not on Facebook... like I signed up for Facebook about 2 weeks ago so I could play "Words with Friends" with my wife when I'm on the road and immediately I got some old fraternity brothers that asked to be my friend and immediately one of them posted something on my wall (whatever that is) that wasn't obscene or profane... it was just indirectly critical of another school... not in this conference... but I didn't want to be associated with it so I think I've shut it down. I can't manage it. If you can't manage it don't do it. I can't manage it so I'm not going to do it.

3.) *How do you personally use social media to represent K-State Athletics?*

Well the stuff that we post on the Internet and the emails we send to our fans we get extraordinary, shocking feedback from people and I have people coming up to me at games and stuff like that and at events and functions... all kinds of people, people in the suites and people in the cheap seats that say 'We love your letters. Thanks so much.' So there's really... you know its helped me connect and help people feel like they know kind of who I am and they know me rather than just being some functionary somewhere. Its been very helpful in building that relationship. Now, on the other hand, you know critical of an expectation of acceptability and I'm sure that there are people who when they send a note that says, 'we don't like the last play or we don't like coach such and such or are you going to give such and such a raise or are you going to fire coach such and such'... my response to things like that is... to emails... is 'Thanks for your passion for K-State. Have a nice day'... basically. So they may feel like I blew them off but I just don't owe everybody an answer to those questions... and they may feel like they deserve it so in some ways because they have the ability to answer that question and its so easy to ask the question... its different when you had to write a letter out on a piece of paper and fold it and put it in an envelope, find a stamp, find the address, write it out... you know so after the game on Saturday night by the time you actually got around to doing all those steps and put it in the mailbox on Monday morning... you know usually people are over it, the emotion is gone but because of the instantaneous translation of emotion to action, you got a lot of people just jumping off... you know trying to fire it off at you and managing into the emotion is raw... its not mitigated by time, time mitigates emotion... people calm down, right? So I've had to learn that not every email I get is rational and I appreciate

hearing from everybody but not every email that I get is rational and I do read most all of them. When they get abusive and stuff like that, I delete them. And if there's some that I get 30 of one issue...I usually at least scan a few at some point and I'll get at it pretty quick.

- 4.) *What is your opinion on K-State Sports' current social media content? Do you feel that it is satisfying K-State fans?*

I think it must be (satisfying fans) because of the growth of followers and the likers or whatever. I'm proud of (you) and Joni and Scott and everybody for kind of taking that mantle this year and really attacking that. President Schultz, he's an early adopter of a lot of things from a technology perspective...and so I watched him doing that stuff when I first got here...I watched him doing all that Twitter stuff and managing it and I really became a believer because of him and so then from a departmental standpoint where we've stepped it up ourselves...I'm impressed, very impressed with what we do.

- 5.) *In what ways can the content be improved? What would you like to see done differently with K-State Sports' social media strategy?*

Its like the insensationable monster, you can't ever satisfy it because...there's too many...just like in the Twitter thing. I think that the @kstatesports and @kstategameday...I think the @kstategameday score update stuff, I think that is tremendous. My only complaint is that the score updates don't come fast enough (laughs). But its so much easier. We tell people to go to Gametracker or whatever but that's a hassle. This one comes to me...so I think that's really good and then I think @kstatesports with the inside stuff and the pictures, interviews...and stuff like that...I think the new policy we have where we're trying to encourage people...trying to regulate who speaks on behalf of K-State, I think that's really good. I think we're on a great trajectory. We're in the de-mystification business in athletics because we're a mystery to most people. We talk in our own vernacular about comps and GA's and all this kind of stuff that we know what we're talking about but most people outside don't have any clue what we're talking about so the more we can do to use any medium we can to show our transparency and show people what's behind the curtain, so to speak.

- 6.) *Are there any other forms of social media (besides Facebook, Twitter and Youtube) that you would like to see the department adopt?*

No I just think continuing to figure out how we can have propelling stuff. At the end of the day we have to have passion but we've got to translate passion into participation...and we also want, at some point, investment...in some form of fashion. So investment can be buying a shirt; participation can be wearing the shirt around Kansas City or wherever. I believe at K-State just because the nature of our culture of...kind of a...we're kind of dorky. We're all willing to put on those shirts and do the wave and

dance and stuff, its fun and we're willing to be ourselves and enjoy each other's differences and it's a neat deal right? I think we've got a greater opportunity than some to utilize the connectivity to push activation. Can you get 200,000 people to all wear a purple shirt on the same day? We're only reaching what 19,000 on our account or something like that? That's a lot. You know those 19,000 people all wear a purple shirt everywhere they are in the world...you know... 'international K-State purple shirt day' or whatever...you know we could do things like that because of the culture of our people and kind of the characteristics of them...getting alumni...you know you may have experienced this year, I mean you graduated 2 years ago from college right? ME: yeah. Ok so people that go away to school... 'gosh if I'm not in Houston I would really like to go back to a game, I really miss going to those games but its hard for me to go because I don't know who's going to be there and then how am I going to know?' We've got to build a pattern where...like a... 'its just what we do...you know we go to the bowl game, its just what we do.' Well 'just what we do' is just go back to Manhattan every year for at least one game. 'Just what we do' is we wear our purple shirt on Fridays no matter where we are. And in terms of when we play games in Kansas City that's 'just what we do', we go to that game. So continuing to build that pattern and habit of behavior... 'it just wouldn't be a normal year if I didn't make it back to Manhattan for one ball game.' You know our challenge is that we have 50,000 seats in that stadium we've got to fill 7 times a year and there's 100,000 people in this community and they're not all coming...because some of them have to work. You've got to have people come outside to fill it up so we've got to continue our job/that drive.

7.) *What direction do you think the athletics department is heading with its current use of social media?*

Forward. We're going to have to continue to build a communication and increase in communication and assist in like business and relationship. Relationship is the most important word. Period. Relationship. Communication is very important but relationship is the most important word. Because what we have at the end of the day, to get people to get off their couch and come here...and they're going to do it because its exciting but really, the human relationship is what pulls people to go to events rather than watch it on TV; they want to be a part of it, be part of that event. Whatever we can do to continue to...you know like the 4square thing you know trying to bring K-Staters together whether its at games or whatever, make it easier to find stuff at our stadiums so their experience is better...you know there's just really a lot of opportunities there.

## Student Focus Group Responses

*1.) How often do you use social media in general? What outlets do you use the most?*

Chris: Twitter every time there's a meltdown about anybody leaving.

Scott: Twitter every single second of a lecture class...probably a good 45 minutes before bed every night, the first fifteen minutes when I wake up.

Chris: I second all that.

Ethan: I would agree.

Taylor: Yeah I Twitter.

Jarrett/Patrick: Yeah I'm with her actually, I'm kind of weird...maybe about 15-20 minutes a day.

Tim: Daily: Facebook, Twitter and Foursquare.

*2.) How often do you go on K-State Sports' Facebook and/or Twitter pages?*

Tim: I see K-State Sports on my Twitter feed fairly regularly, but the Facebook posts are less noticeable.

Scott: Normally only when I'm mad about something (laughs). Although they (@kstatesports) did retweet my tweet about me buying my ICAT pass.

Patrick: Its kind of one of those things...especially if I'm not near a TV or something I can always access Twitter or Facebook, that's a little easier than trying to get on the Internet on my phone or something...you can just get the instant updates but if something important is going on its probably on one of those two (Twitter and Facebook).

Chris: There's the K-State Twitter feed that talks about all the sports and they have the gameday for in-game that talks about all the scores and updates and that's really useful if you're not by a TV.

Ethan: I used that for all the (word) while I was over in Connecticut for spring break. That's how I stayed connected.

*3.) What do you use K-State Sports' Facebook and Twitter pages for? Why?*



Chris: I like the cool pictures that they put up.

Scott: Yeah the Twitter tours, I like those.

Patrick: I like the pre-game stuff, especially if its for a non-conference game...getting to know the other team a little bit... and they usually give season recaps which is nice.

Jarrett: For me the less publicized sports like baseball or golf or cross country, you can find out more about the scores since they don't post that on ESPN sometimes.

Tim: I like to be able to keep up with the scores from my iPhone via Twitter and I like the videos that K-State posts to their Facebook.

*4.) What do you think of the current social media content on K-State Sports' Facebook and Twitter pages? What do you like? Dislike?*

Tim: I think it's informative, but only in a PR sense. You have to check the Collegian, ESPN, the KC Star or the Wichita Eagle if you want a news approach. I love the videos and the score updates. I also really like the post gameday photos that sometimes make it onto the Facebook page.

Patrick: They're pretty good about giving you updates, especially about scores...that's usually correct information. Some of the information...there hasn't been a whole lot of K-State Sports...official...anything about what's going on right now like with Frank. I mean obviously there's not a lot that they know about it either but at least you can kind of post something about how there's talk about this...or rumors.

Emily: I like Twitter...the fact that its concise or to the point because there's so many characteristics. And on Facebook you kind of go on and on and on so no one really wants to read all that.

Ethan: Like with Baseball, its like Texas leads 4-2 in the top of the 5<sup>th</sup>, well, ok, we've got like 4 more innings let's go. I mean Texas has been beating us for the last 4 innings but now we're here so we don't care. I can just go back on Twitter and find it later.

*5.) What would you like to see more of?*

Tim: I wish I could see more unbiased news information on the pages.

Ethan: More behind the scenes stuff in video format.

Chris: Behind the tour scenes and what not...kind of like the Twitter tour. Its interesting to look at that.

Scott: I remember when Ron Prince was here they used to do the football player cribs. I remember they did that when he was here and they did a lot of behind the scenes stuff but I don't know how much of that is something you guys (athletics dept) do or how much coaches allow it but I remember that. I remember them going to Deon Murphy's house and having his 'newcomer of the week' trophy and like a brand of dog that they didn't know whose dog it was...and, I don't know, I thought that was kind of cool.

Patrick: One of the things I remember, there was a feature on Jacob Pullen and his shoes. Its kind of one of those interesting things that...obviously I don't actually know him but its kind of interesting to know about him especially because he's representing our school and everything.

Ethan: Interesting facts about players that you didn't know...as long as its appropriate and stuff.

Scott: Yeah I want to know what type of gum Thomas Gibson likes...Juicyfruit...Big Red.

Chris: It was also interesting when they (men's basketball team) went and read to that school.

Patrick: Yeah there was a video of them talking to a middle school or something...as they were playing Sandstorm (laughs).

Chris: Yeah but that was cool getting to see them interact and just promote a better image for K-State overall as well.

*6.) Are there any other forms of social media that you would like to see K-State Sports use? Why?*

Chris: I don't use any other forms besides Facebook and Twitter.

Taylor: I use Pinterest but I don't know how K-State Sports could use it. Except someone I know from KU who does the communication there uses it for merchandise stuff like jerseys.

Patrick: I mean I think Facebook and Twitter are the two big ones, they're the ones you're going to reach the most people whereas like Foursquare, Google Plus, Pinterest...I mean Pinterest is growing but like she said kind of difficult to use. But 4Square and Google Plus, its not like there's a huge following that its going to be like 'man I like K-State more because they're involved in Google Plus.'

Chris: I feel like for the Foursquare it would be interesting though if the teams checked in...like if the K-State Golf team checked in in Florida for a golf tournament.

Tim: Foursquare. I'd really like to see some kind of deal or reward for checking in at games. So many of my friends have started to use Foursquare and I think it's time K-State got with the program.

7.) *K-State Sports is thinking about adopting Pinterest. Pinterest is a virtual pinboard. It lets you organize and share the things you find interesting on the Web. It connects people through similar tastes and interests. Some people use it to decorate homes, plan weddings, share recipes and more. What are your thoughts on this? Would you sign up for Pinterest if K-State Sports had an account?*

Tim: Are they (athletics department) wanting to get young females interested in Bill Snyder or football? If so, go for it. It's kind of a gendered market that would really only reach young females.

Taylor: Its kind of girly.

Emily: Yeah its definitely more of a girl thing. I don't think that guys actually want to go on and pin things. All of my friends who are girls are pinning wedding things.

Scott: I would not get Pinterest just because K-State Sports got one.

Chris: I feel like people want to get it because of that (because K-State Sports has one) but they might follow it because its interesting.

Scott: I think the girls might.

Taylor: It would definitely be a targeted audience.

Ethan: I mean let's be honest, you could just be like, 'hey best girl friend, can you buy this for me on your Pinterest?'

Chris: I feel like Pinterest is really creative and what not so you could have all the dresses that the girls make (the ones they wear on gamedays) on there and sell those types of things as well for gamedays and what not so that could be a new marketing approach

Scott:...to reach the females.

*Do you guys think it's a good idea that they're using Pinterest? Because they are in the process of getting one.*

Taylor: Its getting bigger so yeah.

Scott: I mean as long as you guys (athletics dept) have the man/female hours to do it... as long as its not taking away from anything else. I don't feel like it could hurt.

8.) *If K-State Sports did not have a Facebook or Twitter page how would you feel? Where would you obtain your information about K-State Sports?*

Scott: It actually wouldn't change any information that I get just because you guys (athletic dept) have to wait until there's an official release. Everyone knows that Frank's gone but he won't reveal a thing until its official down in South Carolina...but everyone already knows. I feel through Twitter and Facebook...with the two biggest revenue sports, football and men's basketball, I'm not getting any information; its all supplementary stuff...its like 'oh here's a picture of Bill Snyder's elliptical machine that he watches game film on.' I think it would kind of hurt my knowledge of the women's tennis team and the men's golf team and the rowing team. I'm not going to actively search that out. I'd like to know that the women's tennis team almost beat Baylor.

Chris: Or beat KU.

Ethan: Yeah anytime we beat KU in anything you guys (athletics dept) should post it.

Tim: I think it would be inconvenient, but the Big 12 Conference has a strong social media presence, so does the Collegian so I think it would be just as easy to obtain scores and insider information from those sources.

*9.) As a "liker" and/or "follower" of K-State Sports, do you feel that you are interacting with the brand? Does your interaction on these social media outlets add to your experience of being a K-State fan?*

Tim: Yes and no. I really feel like K-State has a strong social media presence and I like that, but I think it is more of a one-way conversation. That's not how social media is intended to be.

Chris: I think so. I like the random pictures.

Scott: Take a random picture of something in one of the athletic offices and you have to guess. 'Oh that is the Pinstripe Bowl poster in Scott Garrett's office.' (laughter) Scott's my boy. Him and I get along. But, that would be cool. I mean they interact with me. Obviously if you tweet at them and use the correct words they know...they know you're there.

Emily: I also feel like its good because of the alumni. After they're gone they can connect faster.

Chris: Yeah they're not on campus.

Emily: K-State students obviously know what's going on because they're on campus.

*(Someone brought up the idea of a live chat on Twitter with someone like John Currie. Asked the group what they thought about that.)*

*(Group erupts: "Wow." "I like it.")*

Scott: I feel it would be great. To be honest with you, you would need someone to be able to...well I guess you can always...they choose what you respond to so I guess that would be all right. I think that would be great. Use the hashtag, #AskJohnnyC.

*10.) Any additional thoughts or comments?*

Scott: More pictures. I like pictures. I don't read stuff without pictures (laughs). If I see a twitpic in the tweet, I'm going to click the tweet no matter who said it.

Ethan: That's true. I'm always like, 'oh a picture.'

Scott: Exactly. If you're scrolling through something fast and you see, twitpic, you're like 'oh let's see what happened.'

Ethan: Yeah I always see like those little icons on the photos and I'm like, 'I don't know who you are but I want to see your photo.'

Emily: When you take the time to put a picture on there its kind of cool to look at it.

Ethan: Yeah I don't want to be rude.

Jarrett: Other than football and basketball, I think you could do more stuff about what people are doing in their pros or what they're doing after college.

Scott: There you go. I like that. Every week...like every Thursday, alumni Thursday.

Tim: Overall I really like what K-State Sports has done with their use of social media, but I would like to see them allow for more conversation and less PR.

## **Alumni Focus Group Responses**

*1.) How often do you use social media in general? What outlets do you use the most?*

Andrew: I use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube on a daily basis.

Gavin: I sit at a computer desk all day. I have tabs on my Internet Explorer open up all day for both (Twitter and Facebook). Throughout the day for like two minutes I'll kind of take a mental break from whatever I'm working on to refresh and check what's going on; more so for Twitter than Facebook.

Jake: I use Facebook to keep in touch with others but I use Twitter everyday. I'll get on in between classes and keep up to date with what's going on.

Angela: I don't have a Twitter account. I just do Facebook. I check it on mobile but not so much on my computer (because I'm not supposed to at work). I like it because it does give you the opportunity to just real quick check up on some things but I use Facebook to keep in touch with old friends. It took me forever to open up a Facebook account. I was like 'no I don't really need one.' Now I wish I would have done it sooner.

Brett: I would say...I mean Facebook to me is not necessarily a news source. Its more of an entertainment thing. Twitter is more of a news-oriented thing that allows you for a quick check up like in between classes or just on a simple break walking or driving to wherever, waiting at a stop light...I mean even though you're not supposed to text and drive but...its one of those things that's so readily acceptable/accessible and one of those things that you can always check. But I think that's kind of the benefit of having it and its almost like a (word) to me now more than it was for me a year ago.

Jake: I feel like Twitter helps in the sports department a lot more because if you're going to get your sports news you have to go to watch ESPN. If you want to know the K-State score you have to sit through 30 minutes of other highlights and then they (ESPN) kind of hunch on 'oh here's K-State Sports' where if you go and follow K-State Sports they'll give you up to date of...like this is what happened at the 18:20 mark. It's a lot easier to follow.

Hannah: I use social media daily. I use Twitter and Facebook via iPhone the most.

*2.) How often do you go on K-State Sports' Facebook and/or Twitter pages?*

Andrew: I subscribe to both from personal and work accounts, so I view their content daily.

Gavin: On Facebook, I might see a topic of interest but as far as going on the page...very rarely. Twitter shows up on my timeline.

Jake: I'm kind of the same. I don't really follow it much on Facebook but I look at all the timeline on my Twitter and follow it that way.

Angela: I usually pick headlines and then if its something that I...usually if I want to read like whatever the article is I'll just go straight to the K-State website as opposed to going to Facebook to get the same information.

Brett: I agree with what everyone says. I mean its already readily accessible on your timeline, its already on your newsfeed...its kind of a rarity to actually go on their homepage without being enticed by something...even just an interesting headline. They could have tennis on there that you may not be interested in but if they have a men's basketball feature story then more people will be inclined to look at it that way.

*3.) What do you use K-State Sports' Facebook and Twitter pages for? Why?*

Hannah: I use the Facebook Football page to support the team. I use the Twitter feed to keep up with scores and media releases during the season.

Andrew: To me, these pages are helpful for news related to K-State athletic teams and schedule announcements.

Angela: I usually just check the headline and then if its something that would be of interest or I want more details in what I'm seeing ...and like I said, usually I'm using the mobile so I get the very very cliff notes version of it. Usually if I want to read the article, I'll either go straight to the actual website as opposed to the Facebook page. A lot of the content is the same. You can find the same article.

Brett: Well I mean its apples and oranges. Its whatever medium you would like to have whether its Facebook, whether its Twitter. As far as what I typically use it for, more than likely I've been using it for (word). Its actually like in my job. I'm a news reporter and as far as finding out something I may not know or be something to kind of fact check, I would probably say that's the most beneficial thing that I could use it for professionally.

Jake: I like if I'm ever on Twitter...when there's no classes or homework or other obligations, you can't always watch the game and so its not that big a deal because I can always take a quick break, scroll through timeline and see what's been going on.

Gavin: I use my cell phone for sports like baseball and volleyball. Usually if it's a football or basketball game, I was watching it so I'd know the score. But like baseball, I checked Twitter last night to see how we did yesterday at the baseball game because I was out of town. But football and basketball not so much, more like volleyball and baseball. (In terms of using Twitter on his cell phone.)

*4.) What do you think of the current social media content on K-State Sports' Facebook and Twitter pages? What do you like? Dislike?*

Andrew: I think both achieve a good balance of content between what I believe are viewed as the "primary sports" — football and men's basketball — and all other athletic teams. The content is engaging and easy to digest. The pages both do a good job of keeping the posts short and spread out over the proper timeline so users aren't overloaded with K-State sports stories in their news feeds.

Hannah: I think that it is extremely useful and helps all who follow it on a regular basis. I enjoy game updates the most.

Brett: I would say one thing...you know being readily acceptable where you can have it in front of you whether it be on your phone, whether it be on your laptop in class, whether it be anywhere...you just have it. As far as the content is concerned, its really good at recap. But as far as in-game process, that's one thing that could be corrected with a little bit more...you know for instance at a basketball game, very seldom you'll see a tweet at the under 16 timeout, at the under 8 timeout, at the under 4, halftime...you're not going to get 5 or 6 tweets in a half. Maybe someone who's not watching the game may not know what's happening. I mean you don't need a play-by-play, especially when you have those 5-6-7 minute gaps during media timeouts. You could have a little bit more. I mean in quarters for football...you know maybe after the 7<sup>th</sup> inning or 4<sup>th</sup> inning of baseball, just kind of giving more updates I think would be more useful than what it has. Add more to the content that's already there.

Angela: I would agree (with Brett).

Gavin: @kstategameday already does that.

Jake: And, if I'm not mistaken, they're pretty much one in the same. You look and they have the same tweets.

Gavin: @kstategameday does the inning by inning or every timeout in a basketball game. Also, if K-State's on like an 8-0 run they'll throw something like that in there too.

Brett: Out of curiosity, why not just have a one-stop shop where you get everything all at once. I mean I know you're able to follow numerous and unlimited things, but as far as having it all in one... if someone was just refreshing their computer page instead of their timeline, they'd get it from one and not the other. Just throwing it out there.

Angela: I would like a one-stop shop, more so than having 5 things to try and follow. I mean I don't have a Twitter account but if I were to have one, I would rather have one place to go than 5.

Jake: But I think having 2 gives you a choice of yeah you don't have to follow gameday and get the 30-40 tweets a day.

Brett: You could get the 4 and get the brief recap of everything that happened that day or if you really wanted to be a die hard, you could have the rest of it separate if you really wanted.

Jake: It gives you a choice of what you want to do.

*5.) What would you like to see more of?*

Andrew: I enjoy reading interviews and learning more about what makes student-athletes tick. For many, all we know about them is what happens on the court or field, and we don't always have an understanding of who they are as people and/or students.



Gavin: I miss the Trivia... Trivia Tuesdays or whatever it was.

Angela: I like the behind the scenes stuff. I have a 14 year old and so he's always, 'hey mom, can you check the Facebook page and see what's going on?' I'm not ready for him to have a Facebook page yet. So I think for me, he would like that but I like the behind the scenes stuff and I would also echo off the trivia.

Jake: I love the stats. I'm a huge stats guy... like past history, odds and just other stats.

Brett: The list could go on. We all want to be different. I mean it all has to do with time and who's running it. If one person controls it one day they could be more inclined or more knowledgeable to do one thing or to post something that's a little odd or unique, kind of like a random stat or random fact. But someone that's new to the system may not know everything. So it just kind of depends who runs it.

*6.) K-State Sports is thinking about adopting Pinterest. Pinterest is a virtual pinboard. It lets you organize and share the things you find interesting on the Web. It connects people through similar tastes and interests. Some people use it to decorate homes, plan weddings, share recipes and more. What are your thoughts on this? Would you sign up for Pinterest if K-State Sports had an account?*

Hannah: I don't think that I would use a specific board for just K-State pins. I have a few K-State things pinned but I really don't have a certain board that is used specifically for K-State products that I re-pin on Pinterest.

Gavin: I think Pinterest kind of has a limited reach. I'm not saying not to do it but... I think the guys here are outnumbered for Pinterest. I think it is geared more towards females but I don't think that's a reason not to do it.

Angela: I second that. A lot of my friends go on Pinterest and they've all said its very addictive so from that aspect it might be good. People would go there and look for K-State stuff or whatever but I don't know that... I would get an account if that was the only way to get that shirt. If you connected the dots the right way, yes I would open a Pinterest account or whatever that mechanism is. I live right here in Manhattan so its easy for me to just go down to Varney's or go to GTM or go wherever and get a K-State shirt. My sister in Oregon... not so easy for her to get a K-State shirt so she is addicted to Pinterest. I think there is some value to it. I don't know that I would go create an account just because of that.

Brett: Its almost like a luxury, just like having a Facebook or a Twitter. You add it for your own benefit; you follow what you want to follow, you talk to who you want to talk to. As far as adopting it, I think it would be beneficial just because its kind of like a trend. Pinterest is just like any other fad that jean shorts were in the 80's. Its one of those things right now where its not a requirement but its almost heavily encouraged. By diving into that aspect of it and having that, it would just allow more people to be more interactive with their social media and also to allow them to be more interactive with K-State in general.

Jake: Never even heard of it.

*7.) Are there any other forms of social media that you would like to see K-State Sports use? Why?*

Hannah: No.

Andrew: Between Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, I think those three provide a steady stream of good information and engaging content without over-saturating fans with content.

Brett: Foursquare would be interesting but I just don't think you're going to have 50,000 people check into BSFS. I don't think people would do that.

Angela: I don't have the app on my phone. I have Blackberry, and I don't know that its available for Blackberry. I think its available for the iPhone or iPad.

Brett: If you think about it, your phones hardly work on gamedays anyways.

Angela: That's true. You could check in when you get there to tailgate but if you arrived at game time you wouldn't be able to check in anyway.

Brett: Well you know ESPN does that in their own little way. They check into games. You could have a check in at any game. Whatever the box score is, just go to the box score and check in if you have an account. Take Bramlage for instance, there could be 12, 528 people there but only 339 of them are going to check in.

Angela: I think it depends on too what you're targeting. Are you targeting K-State fans as a whole or are you targeting age groups within K-State fans? People my age now and older, some might do the check in thing...but that's going to be more of your college-aged students so some of that just depends on what your target audience is. If the target audience is K-State fans as a whole...then yeah I think you do something in real life that not every fan is going to participate in; each group that you get little pockets out of each group but if you're targeting a certain age group or segment of K-State fans then you probably are a little more selective in which media you're targeting and using.

*8.) If K-State Sports did not have a Facebook or Twitter page how would you feel? Where would you obtain your information about K-State Sports?*

Angela: [kstatesports.com](http://kstatesports.com)

Brett: Yeah, it'd be the hard way.

Andrew: I also use kstatesports.com pretty regularly, which is good for ticket information, seating charts and other content that isn't necessarily social media appropriate. Facebook and Twitter are good tools to share content while also driving traffic to the main website.

Jake: I mean I follow ESPN (on Twitter) but I could always just go watch ESPN to get the update that way. It would just take longer.

Brett: A lot of people like authenticity, they want everything to be authentic and the fact that you get a final score from K-State sports you know its true. If you get anything from anyone else its fabricated. You rely on K-State Sports to be absolutely accurate.

Hannah: I feel that a lot of alumni and distant fans use the Facebook and Twitter to stay connected even though they may be in places other than Kansas or even the United States.

*9.) As a "liker" and/or "follower" of K-State Sports, do you feel that you are interacting with the brand? Does your interaction on these social media outlets add to your experience of being a K-State fan?*

Andrew: I do enjoy posting comments and the opportunities to not only receive direct responses from K-State sports, but also the interaction with other fans on the pages.

Gavin: Its like THE authentic source. Its not like GoPowercat or anything like that, it's the K-State Athletic Department. I think there's some value to that.

Brett: You definitely relate to it. K-State prides itself on a whole family atmosphere and being in a smaller community and living in a smaller community you kind of dwell on that and having that authentic source or that genuine source...it kind of brings something to you that you wouldn't get otherwise. There's certainly something that would be missing if there wasn't a Twitter or a Facebook because let's face, everyone in that 18-24 age demographic...you're going on an 80% cliff that someone has 1 of the 2; its not higher than that.

Angela: Yeah.

Hannah: I would say that using K-State Sports has changed my fan experience and had a direct influence on it because of the many informational opportunities that are right at your fingertips.

*10.) Any additional thoughts or comments?*

Angela: I personally think it's a really nice, cool, interesting, whatever, that both President Schultz and the Athletic Director participate in it. They are fairly active on those accounts and I think that's really nice too. I think that kind of brings in that family tie too. You feel like you are apart of the family when you're hearing it from them also.

Brett: Having that medium is a luxury. You don't have to be there to know what's going on which is completely different from what it was back in the day. Go back to the 60's, 70's, 80's and even to the 90's, you kind of had to be there to experience it or wait for the 10pm news or listen to it on the radio or just do something that was completely different. Now this, its just created its own monster because of the demand. K-State certainly meets that demand right now and there's just always going to be a growing demand. Its going to be interesting to see how it all evolves and goes from there.

Gavin: I know John Currie runs his own Twitter but I would suggest to him to do a live chat via Twitter...like Eric Stonestreet when he gets on that kick and will reply to 20 tweets in a row. I think that would be cool for John Currie to do a live chat. I think it would attract a younger demographic. I know they are always looking to get that next wave of donors and K-Staters.

Brett: And especially with that point, with his newsletter for instance, not everyone is signed up to get that email. So if someone posted a link whether it be the University or whether it be him himself that would post it, I think that maybe that could be even more beneficial for those that don't read it all the time. I mean the whole point is to just be interactive.

Gavin: For the chat, you wouldn't even necessarily have to do it on John's personal account. You can have someone from the Public Relations office sitting there with him trying to help screen which questions he should answer.

Brett: Would you participate in something like that? If you had the chance, a 20- minute window to talk to John Currie, would you?

Angela: Oh yes. I email him.

Brett: I mean its just one of those questions to ask because some people just may not care.

Angela: I think it would depend too on like...about this time last weekend if they would have had it, there would have been a lot of people saying, 'why didn't Jamar play? Why couldn't we let Jamar play?' You pick your windows so today there's not really a hot topic going on other than the baseball game so there would probably be fewer people wanting to participate.

Brett: Well it would certainly give those dead spots an opportunity to expel, to talk about the major sports. Baseball is not considered a major sport for the University like it is out at Wichita State or Texas. We live and breathe by football and men's basketball around here and that's the way its been, certainly since I've been in school and likely much before that.

Andrew: Keep up the good work.