



Sports fan experience: Electronic word-of-mouth in ephemeral social media



Lane T. Wakefield^{a,*}, Gregg Bennett^b

^a Mercer University, United States

^b Texas A&M University, United States

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ABSTRACT

Fans consuming sporting events commonly use social media to spread electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) related to their experiences. Ephemeral social media, an emerging form of social media that auto-deletes content after a prescribed time, allows fans to have greater control over their messages than ever before. The purpose of this experimental study was to investigate factors leading fans to lengthen or shorten the lifespan of their social media content. A nationwide panel ($N = 242$) created social media content in a controlled setting in which the fan experience and audience size were manipulated. Results suggest fans having a positive experience or who were broadcasting to a large audience were likely to share their content for a longer period of time. In contrast, fans having other than positive experiences, sharing with a small audience, or displaying greater team identification wished to limit the availability of their content. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

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Introduction

"Everyday consumers are wielding greater control over their media habits and their role in the commercial marketplace."

Cate Riegner (2007)

Fans have more control of media surrounding their favorite teams than ever before. Rather than being limited to messages from marketers, thoughts and opinions from anyone can be distributed and accessed across the globe using the internet (Dellarocas, 2003). Consumers are empowered to create electronic-word-of-mouth about their experiences (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014) and become active participants in conversation about brands (Riegner, 2007). Fans consuming or attending sporting events commonly use social media to share their experiences, such as Chinese fans discussing the World Cup (e.g., Yang, Wang, & Billings, 2016). In addition to controlling the reach of a message, fans also control the timing and valence of conversations—all aspects previously under the watch of marketing managers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Fans can create, share, and access content of any kind at any time through various sources, such as branded communities (Popp & Woratschek, 2016) or brand publics (e.g., Twitter; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). The Internet medium has consistently given

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: wakefield_LT@mercer.edu (L.T. Wakefield).

high control to users (Ha & McCann, 2008) and, now, fans control even more about their media—the length of time that others are exposed to their messages.

Ephemeral social media, an emerging form of social media that auto-deletes content after a prescribed time, has recently drawn the attention of scholars (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2016; Billings, Qia, Conlin, & Nie, 2017; Piwek & Joinson 2016). Unlike archived social media, ephemeral social media applications like Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook Stories or Xpire allow user content to be shared for a set time limit before auto-deletion (see Table 1 for examples of ephemeral social media and the time limit given to messages before they auto-delete). Snapchat, the most popular ephemeral social media application, boasts over 160 million active daily users, and shares of its parent company are traded publicly (Constine, 2017). Sport teams heavily use the application (Mason, 2016), and Billings et al. (2017) suggest it is the preferred social media to facilitate fandom.

It is important for scholars and practitioners to understand what may result from fans' control over the length of time messages are available. Lengthening (limiting) a message's lifespan could lengthen (limit) its reach and exposure. Further reach and exposure is helpful for branding as consumers of branded social media intend to (a) share such information with others (Park & Dittmore, 2014), (b) purchase the brand's products (Moyer, Pokrywczynski, & Griffin, 2015), and (c) maintain stronger relationships with their brand (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015; Schmittle & Hull, 2015). With the exception of cases of wearout (see Calder & Sternthal, 1980), marketers have long known such positive impacts of brand exposure (Keller 1993 Zajonc, 1968) over lengthier periods of time (Puto & Wells, 1984). However, while marketers hope to increase exposures (e.g., viral marketing; Hinz, Skiera, Barrot, & Becker, 2011), fans indicate a desire to decrease exposure through adoption of ephemeral social media.

Therefore, the purpose of this experimental study is to investigate what factors lead fans to lengthen or limit the lifespan of social media content. For example, do fans prefer their messages to be available for a few minutes or a few weeks? As Chandler and Lusch (2014) suggest that consumer behavior is strongly circumstantial and may change in various contexts, we focus on the sport fan experience and aspects of that context that are prevalent for a fan creating a social media post. To explicate the theoretical support, the time a message is made available is examined as a function of the size of the audience and sharer focus. Both influence what people talk about and share (Barasch & Berger, 2014). Fan experience, which represents an experiential view of consumption that is “directed toward the pursuit of fantasies, feelings, and fun” (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; p. 132), has been largely overlooked in sport literature. In including fan experience, we join Delia and Armstrong (2015) in assessing the role of valence (e.g., positive experience) in fan experiences. We accomplish this by way of experimental design in order to isolate the effects of each chosen factor on the length of time a message is made available.

Furthermore, while a plethora of research has been conducted on eWOM via social media channels, to date the overwhelming majority of empirical investigations have been conducted within the context of archived (permanent unless manually deleted) social media, like Facebook and Twitter. These investigations have focused on motives for social media use by consumers (e.g., Witkemper, Blaszk, & Chung, 2016) and professionals (Armstrong, Delia, & Giardina, 2016; Hambrick & Kang, 2015; Roberts & Emmons, 2016), linking social media use to purchasing (Moyer et al., 2015) or maintaining relationships with consumers (Filo et al., 2015; Schmittle & Hull, 2015). Therefore, we contribute to the knowledge base through our focus on the process of content creation of eWOM rather than on its motivations, and on ephemeral social media rather than archived social media.

2. Theory and hypothesis development

2.1. eWOM and control of media

Word of mouth (WOM), the “informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers” (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261), has an enormous impact on consumers. According to Berger (2014), eWOM generates over 3 billion daily brand impressions. These impressions come in various media, such as social media. Due to its relevance, scholars have focused on examining the value and influence of such

Table 1
Examples of Ephemeral Social Media Applications.

Social Media Platform	Time Limit Options
Snapchat	1–10 s; 24 h
Instagram-Stories	24 h
Facebook-Stories	24 h
Xpire	Minutes to Years
Wickr	Seconds to Days
Jott	5 s; 10 s; 20 s
CyberDust	30 s
Clipchat	5 s
Burn Note	2–120 s
Bleep	10 s

communication (Cabosky, 2016). For instance, eWOM has favorable outcomes on online consumer purchasing behavior (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006), drives marketers' social media marketing efforts (Chu & Kim, 2011), impacts customer value and loyalty (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006), and increases product sales (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008). Additional eWOM research focuses on relationship marketing (Williams & Chinn, 2010) and how consumers assess messages (e.g., Doh & Hwang, 2009), as these evaluations influence the recipients' attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014). While the outcomes of eWOM have been thoroughly investigated (Cabosky, 2016) and provide great support for further practice, the context of content creation has received considerably less attention.

The context of content creation is important as fans capture more control over WOM. Whereas marketers could previously control the length, reach, valence and timing of mass messages sent to fans (e.g., advertising media plans; Lancaster, Kreshel, & Harris, 1986), the advent of (archived) social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) drastically altered communication for consumers (Berger, 2014). Of the many changes in communication brought about by social media, we focus on the changes in control of messages surrounding a given brand.

Fans easily create eWOM that reaches others as quickly as messages from marketers. What was once limited as one-to-many communication extended to many-to-many interactions (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Fans now share their experiences with like-minded fans across the globe, participating in virtual fan communities that reach far past the confines of the geographic area surrounding a team (McClung, Eveland, Sweeney, & James, 2012). Some brands attempt to orchestrate their own communities while others sponsor or operate the community of fans generating mass content related to their brands (Popp & Woratschek, 2016). In either case, the role of the brand is not to control the reach (or any other aspect) of the message.

Unfortunately, for sport organizations, valence in fans' messages may not be positive. To illustrate, nearly 11% of fans' sponsor-related Tweets at the French Open were not positive, and 79% of Tweets about the main sponsor were also not positive, largely because of confusion over the acronym in their logo with that of a political party (Delia & Armstrong, 2015). Marketers previously controlled the general valence of messages surrounding their brand, as fans' messages sans Internet were not exposed to many others. Now, marketers are at the mercy of their followers as to the valence of the sentiment. Although positive messages are more viral (Berger & Milkman, 2012), online firestorms are also prevalent (Pfeffer, Zorbach, & Carley, 2014) and can control a brand's public narrative. Marketers may utilize various strategies to influence conversations (e.g., seeding strategy; Hinz et al., 2011; Van Der Lans, Bruggen, Eliashberg, & Wierenga 2010), yet such efforts are still dependent on like-minded fans to share the information.

In addition to fans' control of the reach and valence of messages about a sport brand, fans also determine the timing of message exposure. Unlike brands that strategically interrupt a user task (see Chan, Jiang, & Tan, 2010, for a review) or force exposure online (Edwards, Li, & Lee, 2002), fan messages are far more docile. While fans create content and can broadcast on a whim, recipients control the timing of their exposure to the messages. Aided by mobile devices, fans can access the content at their leisure or set instant notifications for messages sent by selected sources. The fan experience is not devoid of messages timed by the marketer. For example, during timeouts in game action there will be sponsored promotions for those in attendance or watching on television. However, those brand-generated messages are less popular than those sent by other fans (Geurin & Burch, in press). Thus, fans control the timing of content creation and consumption of the most important messages.

Although marketers cannot regain control of reach, valence, and timing, they can attempt to influence them in a given context. For example, Sacramento Kings fans were encouraged to post #KingsSelfie pictures or check-in on Facebook when attending a game at Sleep Train Arena (Khan, 2016). However, even if fans acquiesce, sport marketers now must realize an additional attribute of eWOM they cannot control—the time limit of exposure to the content.

The popularity of social media has changed everyday communications between consumers from “ephemeral, transient, unmappable, and invisible” to “permanent, mappable, and viewable” (Manovich, 2009, p. 324). Thus, the length of time messages were available were typically constant as online communication stayed accessible as a “permanent chronicle of people's lives” (Solove, 2007, p. 11). The permanent length of exposure to archived branded messages can be valuable for brands, such as those who benefit from ongoing discussion on Facebook (Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker, 2012). Outside of social media, the length of exposure to a branded message often has positive consequences. For example, Puto and Wells (1984) suggested that brands that elicit no psychological response initially can realize a much stronger response over time. Repeated exposure to ads allow them to wear-in (Pechmann & Stewart, 1988) and become more believable (Hawkins & Hoch, 1992). The same results could logically be expected from user-generated messages about a brand; however, the shift from mostly ephemeral communication when offline and archived when online may in itself be short-lived.

Limiting message availability is attractive to many consumers and has led to the development of ephemeral social media applications. As the market leader, Snapchat has gained millions of users each year (Shontell, 2014), and other competitors are quickly becoming popular (e.g., Dua, 2016; Prigg, 2015) or copying their functionality (Wagner, 2017). Therefore, the time a message is available is now in the control of consumers. Sport marketers and managers should realize this challenge. Fans, unlike sport organizations that are interested in increasing brand exposure, are apt to limit the exposure to their messages. The questions are how long and in what scenarios? To find these answers, we focus our study on the audience size, sharer focus, and the fan experience as conditions that may have an effect on the lifespan of ephemeral social media messages.

2.2. Audience size and sharer focus

Barasch and Berger (2014) suggest that the audience size and the focus of the sharer are factors that influence what people choose to share. According to their research, broadcasting refers to communication involving an audience of two or more, whereas narrowcasting is communication involving one other person. When two or more individuals are receiving a message (broadcasting), the sharer is more likely to focus on self and avoid looking bad by sharing protective self-presenting information. One-to-one messaging (narrowcasting), on the other hand, results in more other-focus and sharing more helpful content (Barasch & Berger, 2014). Self-focus is considered a default communication habit as people are inclined to share personal opinions and interests (Chambers & Windschitl, 2004).

In social media, the focus of the sharer would be on self when creating eWOM as long as the message is posted to an audience size greater than one (Berger, 2014; Cabosky, 2016). As social media audience sizes are larger (Berger, 2014), researchers suggest that it may become even more difficult for the sharer to focus on anyone other than self, due to the fact that considering others' perspectives is generally challenging (Barasch & Berger, 2014; Dunning et al., 2001). Social media audiences can be large and nearly impossible for the sharer to construe the potential reactions of so many individuals. Thus, social media users are likely compelled to maintain a self-focus rather than expend the cognitive effort to consider the perspectives of numerous others when posting on social media.

While prior researchers offer insights as to how a large audience and associated self-focus of the sharer may influence what people share, suggestions for how long an individual may want their eWOM content available are sparse. In determining the amount of time a message should be made available, those sharing with increasingly large audiences may desire a longer period of time to allow for a greater ratio of the audience to view the content. Since online sharing can be gratifying for the sharer (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Shao, 2009), allowing additional time for friends to view the content could provide more opportunity for positive feedback for the sharer. In order to experience similar levels of gratification as fans would in archived social media settings, it would intuit that individuals may experience additional gratification from more expected interactions made possible by making the message available for a longer time. Thus, to gain insight into whether or not audience size affects how long sharers wish to expose others to their message, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1. Broadcasting will result in messages being made available for a longer period of time than will narrowcasting.

Similarly, those who are self-focused are also expected to want their messages to last longer. Sharers in social media are primarily self-focused (Berger, 2014; Cabosky, 2016; DuBois, Bonezzi & De Angelis, 2016), referred to as “me-formers” rather than “informers” when communicating in social media, as they describe current surroundings or share personal feelings and opinions (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010, p. 10). A self-focused message from a sports fan may include current views of the team, crowd, stadium, or self, and associated feelings or opinions. For example, a fan may want to share how good it feels to win or to have a nice night out at the game. Given that people place high value on giving their opinions (Chambers & Windschitl, 2004) and spending time in socially desirable settings may make the sharer look good, allowing for more exposure of a self-focused message would be beneficial. Therefore, we hypothesized

Hypothesis 2. Self-focus of the sharer will result in messages being made available for a longer period of time than messages sent from those who are focused on others.

2.3. Fan experience

Personal relationships and experiences are what people share or discuss the most with others (Berger, 2014). This is true with the experiences of sports fans who use social media to share their experience with others not in attendance. For instance, Red Sox fans enjoying their experience at Fenway Park may share it with other friends on social media: “WOW, can you imagine a better baseball experience than sitting on the Green Monster for a big win??!!! #PerfectNight.” This behavior is part of a fans' consumption experience, or the experiential view of consumption centered on pursuing hedonism (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). A consumption experience (referred to as fan experiences hereon) is inclusive of feelings held towards the surroundings, like the stadium and the team's performance. However, these experiences fluctuate, as even historically successful teams suffer poor performances or service failures. Nonetheless, given the lack of control over team performance, the importance of providing a quality experience to fans is critically important to developing positive word-of-mouth (Wakefield, 2015).

Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban accentuated the importance of focusing on the fan experience rather than the game core. According to Cuban (2010): “we [in the sports business] don't sell the game [based on the team winning] . . . we are in the business of selling fun and unique experiences [regardless of the outcome].” Providing such a positive service experience has its challenges. For example, parking, concessions, and using restrooms are important to fans but can be difficult to maintain (Wakefield & Blodgett, 2016). Service quality is likely to be even more salient for certain segments, such as those fans who may only have situational involvement (i.e., those attending as a part of a social group who have little care as to the team's performance) with the event (see Richins & Bloch, 1986).

However, selling (or promoting) the fan experience to various others not in attendance is now far more in the control of fans than marketers. Marketing messages from consumers are trusted and well received in comparison to those from the firm (Bampo et al., 2008; Kumar & Gupta, 2016; Kumar & Gupta, 2016; Schulze, Scholer, & Skiera, 2014). Therefore, some sport organizations smartly realize that some key performance indicators (KPI) (e.g., sales) can be influenced indirectly. Rather than only improving variables with direct links to a particular KPI (e.g., hiring more salespeople to increase sales), the focus can be on improving the fan experience, which in turn increases positive WOM and selected KPIs.

Outside of Howat and Assaker (2013), prior academic work often fails to account for the fact that the most relevant marketing messages about the fan experience are in control of the fans. For example, one research group estimated market demand for sport incorporated game promotion (i.e., advertising, direct mail, publicity and web information) without accounting for communications from/with social connections (Byon, Zhang, & Connaughton, 2010). Other scholars make mention of the importance of WOM without measuring it (Clemes, Brush, & Collins, 2011). To better understand the WOM creation process (e.g., how fans limit the lifespan of their social media posts), it is imperative to experiment with the context (i.e., the fan experience) in which fans will be prone to create WOM. An important part of the context is incorporating the audience of eWOM—who may influence decision making regarding the exposure time of their messages.

It is unknown how long into the future a fan would want to project their experience in a social media context. Offline, fans have shown the need to express behaviors related to their experience even days later (Cialdini et al., 1976; Jensen et al., 2016). However, online, people expect scrutiny when sharing on social media and therefore engage in self-preservation strategies when posting content (Berger, 2014; Cabosky, 2016; DuBois et al., 2016; Kramer & Winter, 2008). Fans anticipating scrutiny may limit message availability through an ephemeral messaging service, as it is a viable option to limit reaction from the audience. Put differently, those not having a positive experience may be more likely to remove that association sooner rather than later. Conversely, those having a positive experience may expect a more positive reaction from the social media audience (a general motivation for social media users; see Shao, 2009), and desire greater message availability. Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 3. A positive fan experience will result in messages being made available for a longer period of time than other fan experiences.

In sum, we expect broadcasting, self-focus, and positive fan experiences to cause sport fans to lengthen the amount of time that their message will be made available. Narrowcasting, other-focus, and other fan experiences (i.e., those that are not positive) are expected to decrease the lifespan of messages. Lengthening the lifespan of the message can extend the reach of the message and potential to produce favorable outcomes for sports brands in the case of a positive fan experience. The following experiment isolates the effects of each factor and tests each hypothesis.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and setting

A nationwide online sample of adult participants ($N=242$) was recruited for data collection through Amazon's Mechanical Turk. This type of respondent panel has been recommended for experimental studies (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010) as it provides high quality subjects who tend to be more representative of the general population and exhibit similar attentiveness, judgment, and decision biases (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participants were paid \$0.75 in exchange for completing the survey in an environment of their choice via an internet-enabled device. Of the participants, 85 were female and 158 were male. The majority identified as Caucasian (74%) joined by Asian (16%), Hispanic (5%), African-American (6%) and participants from other races (1%). The mean average age of the respondents was 36 years old ($SD = 10.4$) in a pool ranging from 20 to 67. Income was comparable to the national average with 51% (44.8% nationally) earning less than \$50,000, 33.5% (28.8%) earning between \$50,000–\$100,000, and 16.5% (26.3%) earning \$100,000 or more annually (United States Census Bureau, 2016).

3.2. Experimental design and methodology

A 2 (experience: positive/other experience) $\times$ 2 (audience size: narrowcasting/broadcasting) between-subjects experimental design was utilized to test the hypotheses. Respondents were randomly assigned into one of the four groups. The participants were then given a brief description of how a recently released ephemeral messaging app¹ works with social media accounts: "A new messaging app allows you to set a timer on social media posts and messages. The timer can be set for any amount of time. Once the time runs out, your post is set to delete itself."

Then, participants were asked to imagine an experience with their favorite professional team. The fan experience scenarios were adapted from Barasch and Berger (2014) and were pretested in a between-subjects design among members of a subject pool ($n = 85$) asked, "How would the following event make you appear to others?" Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *extremely bad* to (7) *extremely good*. Paired samples *t*-test confirmed that the two

¹ The app described is 'Xpire.' See www.getxpire.com or mobile app stores for more information.

scenarios had mean scores significantly different from each other, $t(4, 84) = 4.71$, $p = 0.009$, with a higher mean for the positive scenario in which the respondents indicated a better outcome ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.46$) compared to the other scenario ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.31$). Each survey participant's favorite professional sports team was piped into each scenario. Using each individual's favorite team in the manipulation also increases its plausibility for the sharer (i.e., decreases the hypothetical psychological distance of the event, see [Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007](#)).

[Table 2](#) indicates the total number of panel respondents randomly assigned to each group. The sample size reached the minimum benchmark of 5 times the number of independent variables used in the study ([Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001](#)).

After receiving the scenario, respondents were prompted to write a Facebook post that could be viewed by “all of your friends” (broadcasting) or a Facebook message sent directly to “one friend” (narrowcasting) if posted on the network. They were reminded that they would be able to choose the lifespan of the message through the use of the ephemeral platform described. Participants who did not use Facebook ($n = 9$) were given tutorials prior to receiving the manipulation and remained in the analysis. Removing them provided no changes in the results.

Once the qualitative response was typed into the survey, the respondents were asked to indicate how much time the message would be made available before auto-deletion. The question was: “How much time would you like to pass before the messaging app deletes your message/post?” Responses were periods of time adapted from the categorical format given to actual users in the ephemeral app Xpire, ranging from: (1) “minutes (1–60),” (2) “hours (1–24),” (3) “days (1–7),” (4) “weeks (1–4),” (5) “months (1–12),” (6) “years,” and finally (7) “I don’t want to delete this message/post.” Xpire works in tandem with popular archived social media, Facebook and Twitter, to allow users to set an amount of time before their posts will auto-delete.

Replicating the prior research, sharer focus was measured with two items: “how much are you thinking about yourself right now?” and “how much are you thinking about others right now?” ([Barasch & Berger, 2014](#)). The order of the questions was counterbalanced and measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “not at all” to (7) “a lot.” The score from the self-focused item minus the other-focused item equals a single measure of sharer focus, as suggested by [Barasch and Berger \(2014\)](#).

As a manipulation check, we utilized textual analysis using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) ([Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001](#)) to measure positivity and negativity in the qualitative eWOM responses. LIWC provides the percentage of emotion words (e.g., positive words may include amazing, nice, and awesome, among others) used in each passage analyzed. LIWC has been used to evaluate open-ended responses in psychology ([Barasch & Berger, 2014](#); [Berger & Milkman, 2012](#)), marketing ([Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010](#)), and sport management ([Mankad, Gorman, & Wallman, 2009](#)). Two additional manipulation checks were used to verify that the respondents were in fact imagining sending a message to one friend (narrowcasting) or all of their friends (broadcasting) as well as to assess their understanding of ephemeral messaging.

Finally, we included various control variables based on their identification in past research. Given the sport context, team identification ([Fisher & Wakefield, 1998](#)) was measured using a 7-point scale to be used as a covariate. [Barasch and Berger \(2014\)](#) suggest that the effects of audience size could be influenced by the level of respondent arousal, which has been coupled with anxiety in sport settings ([Cox, 1998](#)), and embarrassment and closeness ([Barasch & Berger, 2014](#)). Several controls for underlying affective influences used in prior investigations were measured. The controls included 7-point scales for arousal ([Berger, 2011](#)), anxiety and embarrassment ([Brooks & Schweitzer, 2011](#); [Kelly & Jones, 1997](#)), and closeness ([Barasch & Berger, 2014](#)).

4. Results

4.1. Manipulation checks

We used a manipulation check to determine whether the fan experience scenarios influenced the participants in each group. The manipulation check was conducted through the use of LIWC ([Pennebaker et al., 2001](#)) to count positive and

Table 2
Scenario and Group Sizes.

Scenario		n
Positive	You went with your friend to a [chosen team's] game and it was really great.	71
Experience × Broadcasting	Now, imagine that you are using Facebook to write a post about the event that can be viewed by all of your friends.	
Other Experience × Broadcasting	You are at a [chosen team's] game and they are losing horribly.	54
	Now, imagine that you are using Facebook to write a post about the event that can be viewed by all of your friends.	
Positive	You went with your friend to a [chosen team's] game and it was really great.	61
Experience × Narrowcasting	Now, imagine that you are using Facebook to send a message directly to one friend about the event.	
Other	You are at a [chosen team's] game and they are losing horribly.	56
Experience × Narrowcasting	Now, imagine that you are using Facebook to send a message directly to one friend about the event.	

negative emotion words used in the passages provided by members of each group. Those in the positive fan experience group used more positive emotion words ($M = 9.67$, $SD = 5.25$) than those in the other fan experience group ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 4.02$). Furthermore, those in the other fan experience group used more negative emotion words ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 3.97$) than those in the positive fan experience group ($M = 1.20$, $SD = 2.31$). Some of the results from the qualitative responses with the highest number of positive emotion words (as indicated by the LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2001) include:

“The Grizzlies game was awesome!!! So happy we won. We must be good luck! Maybe we should start going to more games. LOL”

“I’m proud to be a Lakers fan tonight, it was an amazing game, they were in full capacity, I’m in a super mood, my friend [is] also. I feel super.”

“Go Red Wings! We had a great time at the game tonight, they played very well and we were having so much fun cheering for them.”

“A warm and sunny evening at Safeco Field with my friend, Cliff. Cold beer and hot dogs aplenty. Let’s Go Mariners! We need to stay in 1st Place.”

Respondents with the most negative emotion words include:

“This is painful to report to everyone, but my beloved Cowboys are losing. The agony, the agony. Life will improve next week.”

“Well ****, the Cavs are losing. I don’t know why they fired Blatt, but I do know that Lue is not any better. Maybe next year.”

“Well I picked the wrong Ravens game to attend. This game sucks. I was really hoping to see a win today.”

“At the Canadiens game right now. Not a happy camper – boy are they losing! They’re playing like amateurs and I’m seriously considering leaving soon if they don’t get their act together. This is pathetic.”

“Hey, how’s it going? I am here at the Browns game and it sucks! They are losing bad. So I am not feeling too good. I wanted to see them win. Now the rest of my day is going to be bad. I hate when they lose.”

Two additional manipulation checks were performed. The first asked, “How many people did you imagine receiving your Facebook message about the [participant’s favorite team] game?” The vast majority (91%) of respondents confirmed imagining the audience size as randomly assigned—either one (narrowcasting) or more than one (broadcasting)—while others (9%) reported imagining an audience different ($\chi^2(1, 241) = 165.29$, $p = 0.000$) than their assignment (i.e., imagining an audience of greater than one when assigned to the narrowcasting group and vice-versa). The second confirmed understanding of ephemeral messaging as the vast majority (90%; $\chi^2(1, 241) = 152.33$, $p = 0.000$) responded that their message would “be set to delete itself after a set period of time.” The direction and significance levels for all hypothesized relationships were not affected by removing those who missed either manipulation check; thus, their responses were included in subsequent analyses.

4.2. Hypothesis testing

Using SPSS 22.0, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed to test the hypotheses as well as the effect of the covariates: team identification, arousal, anxiety, closeness and embarrassment. Independent variables were the audience size, sharer focus, and fan experience. The dependent variable was the time of message availability.

An analysis of covariance revealed that the model was significant, $F(12, 231) = 2.326$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.114$, leading to the following results from univariate testing regarding the hypotheses. Audience size, $F(1, 231) = 5.231$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.023$, had a significant effect on the amount of time a message was made available. Those broadcasting were willing to share for a longer period of time (i.e., nearer to weeks, $M = 3.81$, $SD = 2.12$) than those narrowcasting (i.e., nearer to days, $M = 3.14$, $SD = 2.01$), in support of Hypothesis 1.

The focus of the sharer did not have a significant effect, $F(1, 231) = 0.438$, $p = 0.50$; those self-focused (i.e., values of 1 or greater; $M = 3.56$, $SD = 2.16$) and those focused on others (i.e., values of -1 or less) desired nearly the same amount of time ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 2.18$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Fan experience had a significant effect, $F(1, 231) = 11.0$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.048$, indicating that those in the positive scenario desired their messages be made available for a longer period of time (i.e., nearer to weeks, $M = 3.92$, $SD = 2.03$) than those in the other scenario (i.e., days, $M = 3.04$, $SD = 2.05$), supporting Hypothesis 3. The overall mean for time of message availability

Table 3
Correlations.

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Time of Message Availability				
2. Fan Experience	0.16**			
3. Audience Size	0.13*	0.05		
4. Sharer Focus	0.01	−0.05	0.03	
5. Team Identification	−0.15*	0.12*	0.08	−0.03

Note: * - significant at the 0.05 level, ** - significant at the 0.01 level.

was 3.50 ($SD = 2.09$), or directly between a chosen number of days and weeks. The partial eta squared values between 0.01 and 0.06 are seen as moderate effects (Cohen, 1988). The correlations between variables are shown in Table 3. All interactions between variables in the analyses were non-significant.

4.3. Covariates and alternative explanations

Team identification was a significant covariate, $F(1, 231) = 9.23$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$. The direction of the relationship was negative ($t = -2.25$), suggesting that those with greater identification with the team desired for their messages to be made available for less time. There were no significant interactions between team identification and fan experience, audience size, or sharer focus. Finally, variables suggested in the literature as alternative explanations were not significant: arousal, $F(1, 231) = 0.68$, $p = 0.41$; anxiety, $F(1, 231) = 0.29$, $p = 0.59$; embarrassment, $F(1, 231) = 0.36$, $p = 0.54$; and closeness, $F(1, 231) = 2.314$, $p = 0.22$.

5. Discussion

In this experiment, we examined the role of audience size, sharer focus, and fan experience on the time fans desire for their message to be available. These findings extend the work of Barasch and Berger (2014) regarding how audience size affects sharing behavior. For those broadcasting, our results indicate the desire for lifespan of eWOM to be considerably longer (available for weeks rather than days) than those narrowcasting. This result provides logical support for previous findings of consumers who find gratification in online sharing through various forms of socialization and entertainment (Park et al., 2009; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Shao, 2009) as more time for such uses is likely to increase gratifications. Fans' desire for increased message availability when broadcasting is an especially important outcome. As more fans adopt ephemeral social media, management may be wary of the idea that fans in control of the longevity of positive eWOM may opt for shorter time availability (possibly limiting exposures) when posting to large audiences of other fans or potential customers. The finding suggests that fans who may use Instagram or Facebook Stories, Xpire, Snapchat, or other emerging platforms want larger audiences to have the ability to see their WOM for a longer period of time than do small audiences.

Sharer focus did not have an effect on how long respondents wanted their messages to last. While we expected that self-focused messages would be shared for longer, it seems that sports fans focusing more on the self wanted their messages available for about the same time (weeks) as those focused on others. While sharer focus may have an effect on what is shared (Barasch & Berger, 2014), it does not seem to have an effect on how long sharers would like to post their content.

Those with greater team identification intended to limit message availability. Fans who identify with the team are those who feel a "oneness with or belongingness to the organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he/she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; p. 104). Sharing for less time may be explained by the fact that fans who have greater identification with the team may understand the relevance of their posts to the organization and have greater knowledge of the organization. For instance, identified fans likely understand the team's schedule, knowing that a good performance is only relevant until the next game. Those who do not identify as strongly with the team may not know or consider relevance, resulting in messages being made available for longer than those sent from highly identified fans.

In support of our predictions, a positive fan experience resulted in a desire to make an ephemeral message available for a longer period. That is, those in the positive scenario were willing to post their content for a significantly longer period after a positive fan experience than other fan experiences. As the Internet has allowed for high consumer control (Ha & McCann, 2008) and fans through adoption of ephemeral social media now take control of the longevity of messages, they have an even greater influence on the promotion of the fan experience to other fans and potential fans. While marketers have previously relinquished other important aspects of messages (i.e., reach, timing, ad valence) to their customers as they use online media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), losing the permanence of archived eWOM may bring new challenges. While consumers' messages are more trusted than those from the firm (Bampo et al., 2008; Kumar and Gupta 2016 Kumar and Gupta 2016; Schulze et al., 2014), they could be less impactful if set to self-delete in a matter of seconds or minutes. In that instance, consumers' messages typically available for large audiences at any time may self-delete before the entire audience would typically consume the content. However, we find that fans lengthen the lifespan of messages when considering a social media post regarding a positive fan experience.

Since valenced word-of-mouth greatly influences the success or demise of products (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006), it is good for sport marketers and managers that the use of ephemeral social media does not vastly limit the message availability of positive sentiment. Since positive messages are expected to last longer than others, fans (and connections with the potential to become fans) will have more opportunity to see positive messages. Furthermore, since consumers of social media intend to share the content with other friends (Park & Dittmore, 2014), the more positive content available for distribution, the better for sport marketers. While sports fans are not expected to use ephemeral media as sports marketers and managers might to increase availability, they do not limit or lengthen the lifespan of their content to extreme ends.

5.1. Managerial contributions

The results of this study have implications for sport marketers related to their fan's use of social media. First, larger audiences resulted in a longer period of time that fans wanted their messages to be made available. As the value and influence of eWOM communication gains attention from scholars (Cabosky, 2016), knowing that the larger the audience, the longer period of time a message may be available is helpful for sport marketers and managers interested in using ephemeral social media to facilitate eWOM. While it may intuit that a social media campaign focused around the generation of disappearing messages could miss a segment of fans who would have seen it if it were archived, this research suggests that fans wanted their messages to be available for days and weeks, rather than a few minutes or moments. This is beneficial for sport marketers initiating their own social media campaigns and, particularly, those selling inclusion in such campaigns to sponsors. Sponsors need greater intelligence in order to spend resources on non-traditional marketing like sport sponsorship (Jensen, Wakefield, Cobbs, & Turner, 2015). Since the vast majority of global firms use social media (i.e., 97%; Statista, 2015) and many are increasing their budget for social media marketing (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016), being able to expect longevity of messages is helpful in selling the efficacy of ephemeral social media to sponsors who are utilizing and spending in the social media space.

Additional support has also been offered for sports fans' willingness to use ephemeral social media. To this point, little evidence has been provided to suggest that fans find utility in using ephemeral social media to facilitate sports fandom. Billings et al.'s (2017) initial work suggested that sports fans prefer ephemeral social media (i.e., Snapchat) to other media. While the purpose of this study was not to weigh preference of one medium to another, we do offer an additional adult sample that elected to use the self-delete feature when offered. Of participants over the age of 30 (63.2%), a small percent (11.7%) did not want their content to self-delete. Given that Snapchat (and other ephemeral social media platforms) is targeting and acquiring adults at an increasing rate (Dave, 2016), it would behoove sport marketers to consider adults as well as children in their marketing through ephemeral social media channels.

The positive effects of eWOM, such as customer value and loyalty (Gruen et al., 2006), sales (Duan et al., 2008), and marketers' social media marketing efforts (Chu & Kim, 2011) may still be limited by the defined lifespan of messages. For example, the volume of consumers that may typically participate in customer-to-customer exchanges (Gruen et al., 2006) is likely to shrink in ephemeral contexts, where interchanges may disappear before others have a chance to consume them or share with others. However, fans given control of the life expectancy of messages did not choose to extensively limit sharing of their positive fan experiences or when sharing to large audiences. Overall, sport managers and marketers now have reason to believe that fans creating eWOM in ephemeral social media are not very interested in drastically reducing the lifespan of their messages.

5.2. Limitations and future research

The sample employed in the study represents the greater population of nationwide sports fans by including fans of teams across the country from across generations and socioeconomic status levels, thus helping to establish generalizability of the findings. However, the extent to which the results are reproduced in specific psychographic segments of fans on social media (e.g., highly passionate season ticket holders) is unknown. This is a limitation to the study as casual fans who may attend one game a year may behave differently than an everyday attendee. While this was partially accounted for by team identification, further investigations might offer insights into the motivations of specific segments in their use of ephemeral social media.

This study could also have been improved by accounting for participants' prior use of ephemeral social media. For those who may already have an ephemeral social media account (or an account with a complementary app, like Xpire), the information provided to them in this study about a "new" social media application would be more easily understood. Those who were less familiar with ephemeral messaging, such as those without ephemeral messaging experience, were likely experiencing greater difficulty in understanding the use and purpose of the app. While checks for understanding were included, future researchers could limit their sample to those with similar experience with ephemeral social media. This may be less of an issue as additional prominent social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, are introducing ephemeral features (Wagner, 2017).

Future research paths could be drawn in multiple directions. First, manipulating the interpersonal closeness of the sharer and recipient(s) could be valuable in determining what sports fans will share in ephemeral social media. Dubois et al. (2016) found that WOM valence was determined by interpersonal closeness between those communicating. Those who seemed closer were more likely to share negative information (in order to help) and those with less closeness were more likely to share positive information (in order to self-enhance). In a similar study, Chen (2017) found that friends are more likely to share negative information (to connect on an emotional level) and strangers are more apt to share positive information (to form relationships). While we did measure closeness, replicating the present study while manipulating interpersonal closeness felt by the sharer may help to better understand the role of closeness and, in turn, more accurately predict the amount of time a message would be made available. This may be especially warranted since Snapchat users were found to use the service to primarily message close ties (Piwek & Joinson, 2016), which, following Dubois et al. (2016) and Chen (2017), should result in more negative information. While we did not expressly account for negative experiences, future researchers could do so and find whether it has an effect on message availability.

Second, greater attention could be paid to the brand. While we focused on eWOM surrounding team brands, future scholars could examine human branding. As fans' identification with individual athletes has a bearing on what teams they follow (Carlson & Donovan, 2013), eWOM concerning single players may be more relevant to fans. In a separate vein, greater attention can be paid to the effect of the brand of the product being evaluated. Barasch and Berger (2014) used unbranded products (e.g., pen, camera) in their studies; thus, consumers were not affected by branding. It is commonly held that brands are central to eWOM and affect what consumers discuss. For example, many consumers wish to share about products that help them gain social currency (Berger, 2014). In addition to thinking about the self or others, sharers in this experiment also had to consider their relationship with the brand (their favorite team). It is possible that the sharer's focus may have been on the team as much (or even more than) the recipient or themselves. We somewhat account for this by way of measuring team identification, but future research could parse out differences between others. A more precise definition of others-focus including differentiating between the team and its fans, social acquaintances, and so on, could be helpful to uncover the role of sharer focus.

Third, future researchers could place an even greater focus on the nature of sports fans. While we do account for team identification and include favorite teams in the manipulation, we do not place a complete focus on particular aspects of sport fan behavior that likely influence eWOM creation. Fan passion, which encompasses involvement, is one example of a variable that impacts fan behavior (Wakefield, 2015) and may be unique or more prevalent in the sports context over other product categories (e.g., packaged goods). Team identification may also result in greater fan knowledge, which could impact eWOM creation and message availability. For example, highly identified fans are likely knowledgeable of the team schedule and media timing. In regard to scheduling, Major League Baseball fans know that their team may play 5–6 more games that week, which may alter the level of significance of the present game's result and subsequently affect choices in spreading eWOM. Concerning media, those who identify with the team are also more likely contributors to associated brand communities or brand publics, in which topics and posts are typically categorized, sorted and updated daily. Further, as the news cycle of information on players, coaches, games, and management are updated on a near-continuous basis, discussion centered around these topics are short-lived as they are replaced with the next piece of information circulated. Further exploration into the nature of sports fans, such as their passion or knowledge, relative to the process of creating eWOM could be worthwhile.

Finally, the reach of ephemeral eWOM should be measured. While this research suggests that fans, on average, are not interested in their messages deleting themselves in a very short amount of time, the fact that their longevity is limited to some extent could have ramifications on the effectiveness of the message (in terms of reach). On the other hand, if a message is shared on an archived medium, the fact that the message was originally meant to self-delete in a short period becomes a moot point. The reach in that case may be just as far as if it was originally shared on an archived medium. Marketers could benefit from knowing how many (if any) fans miss out on content distributed through ephemeral media versus the same content disseminated through archived media.

At times, sport organizations have information to share that is not positive. Team personnel may be suspended, fined, or found guilty of a crime, the team could be suffering an embarrassing loss, or the organization must offer an apology to its fan base. In each of these cases, ephemeral social media applications may be ideal to make the announcement. Since fans are found to limit the lifespan of sentiment in ephemeral social media, particularly comments that are not positive, promoting the use of such media may be beneficial to curtail damage to the brand. If negative eWOM is shared, it can have damaging effects to brand equity (Pfeffer et al., 2014) and directly impact revenue (Smith, 2014). While the valence and reach of fans' messages are out of the control of the team or sport organization, encouraging fans to use ephemeral rather than archived social media could help to mitigate the spread of potentially negative eWOM. Sport organizations who proactively use ephemeral social media could be another fruitful avenue for future research.

This is the first study to our knowledge that addresses eWOM within an ephemeral social media context using an adult sample. The preceding literature on ephemeral social media is limited to college student samples (Bayer et al., 2016; Piwek & Joinson, 2016), although adoption of ephemeral social media by adult populations is increasing (Dave, 2016). Our study supports the future of adults using ephemeral social media as our adult sample, as the overwhelming majority chose to limit the lifespan of their message. Further study on adult use of ephemeral social media is necessary.

5.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, we address the call for further investigations of social media consumer behavior (Ratchford, 2015) and add to extant literature by addressing a gap on the control over the length of time eWOM content is made available by sports consumers. Specifically, these results provide empirical data addressing how long fans desire a message to be available based upon audience size, sharer focus and fan experience. Findings suggest fans who had a positive experience or were broadcasting to a large audience are likely to share their content for a longer period of time. In contrast, fans displaying higher team identification wished to limit the availability of their content, regardless of experience or audience.

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