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ALL SPORTS, ALL THE TIME: SPORTS TALK RADIO  
AND ITS USES BY LISTENERS

A Thesis

Presented to the

School of Communication

and the Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Communication

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by Andrew W. Peacock

December 16, 2005

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ALL SPORTS, ALL THE TIME: SPORTS TALK RADIO  
AND ITS USES BY LISTENERS

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts in  
Communication, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Mike was instrumental in showing me the wonderful world of sports, including sports writing and the discussion of sport. We would talk for hours about Iowa Hawkeye football and current sports topics and those experiences have been engrained in me for a lifetime. I would also like to extend my love and gratitude to my dad, Gary. My dad got me started playing sports and has fully supported my athletic and academic career. Finally, I want to thank my wife Kari for her support, patience and encouragement during my academic career. She is my foundation and has also kept me on task. I hope you are proud of me. I could not have gotten here without all of you.

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# ALL SPORTS, ALL THE TIME: SPORTS TALK RADIO AND ITS USES BY LISTENERS

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University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2005

Advisor: Dr. Dave Ogden

Over the past few decades, sports talk radio has become an increasingly popular communication vehicle for delivering and consuming sports news. However, there is limited research to indicate how sports fans interact and connect through sports talk radio. Further, do sports fans incorporate the topics they hear on sports talk radio into their daily sports conversations with friends and other sports fans? How are sports fans using the information they hear on sports talk radio shows? How do fans use sports information in building and maintaining relationships?

The goal of this study is to examine the role of sports talk radio and how consumers ingest and use information. The focus of this study will be to gauge how participating in sports talk radio contributes to self-perceived knowledge of sport and discussion of sports topics with others. Additionally, the study will also investigate demographics of sports talk radio listeners.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

*In the life of every sports fan, there comes a moment of reckoning. It may happen when your team wins on a last-second field goal and you suddenly find yourself clenched in a loving embrace with a large hairy man you've never met...Or in the long, hormonally depleted days after a loss, when you're felled by a sensation similar to the one you first experienced following the death of a pet. At such moments the fan is forced to confront the question others - spouses, friends, children and colleagues – have asked for years: Why do I care?*

*- Warren St. John, Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer, (2004)*

It is a weekday afternoon and I am in my car, en-route to one of my favorite lunch establishments. Being a self-described sports fanatic, I flip the radio to a local sports talk radio station. In a matter of seconds, I hear the loud, high-pitched voice of singer Axel Rose screech the introduction to "Welcome to the Jungle," and then the radio announcer suddenly cuts in... "Live from Los Angeles...you're listening to the Jim Rome Show." Rome, who moderates one of the most popular sports talk radio shows carrying an estimated



audience of two million listeners nationwide, interrupts the song: “Clones, I have a major announcement today. During today’s show, I will be announcing the next Jungle Tour Stop.” And so begins another three hours of “smack,” “run” and references to Rome’s loyal legion of “clones” across the country.

Tired of yelling at the television after your team failed to win the big game? Sports fans can now join other Monday morning quarterbacks in a venue to rant, rave and debate. The medium is sports talk radio and it is just a turn-of-the-dial away.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the past few decades, sports talk radio has become an increasingly popular communication vehicle for delivering and consuming sports news. However, there is limited research to indicate how sports fans interact and connect with others through sports talk radio. Further, do sports fans incorporate the topics they hear on sports talk radio into their daily sports conversations with family, friends and co-workers? How are sports fans using the information they hear on sports talk radio shows? How do fans use this sports information in building and maintaining relationships? Finally, what is the demographic composition of sports talk radio listeners with regard to gender, age, income and education?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this study is to examine the role of sports talk radio and how consumers ingest and use information. The focus of this study will be to gauge levels of sports fandom and how participating in sports talk radio contributes to self-perceived knowledge of sport and discussion of sports topics with others. Additionally, the study will also investigate the demographics of sports talk radio listeners.

For purposes of this study, sports talk radio listeners are referred to as "fans" (Eastman & Riggs, 1994) and a community of fans can comprise a sports subculture. Fiske (1992) defined fans as "subordinated formations of people, particularly those empowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race" (p.30).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### History of Talk Radio

Rubin and Step (2000) defined talk radio as being “characterized by conversation initiated by a program host with listeners who may telephone to discuss such topics as politics, sports, finances, personal problems or current events” (p.636).

Radio talk shows have been around since the early years of radio broadcasting. Throughout the 1920s, music and variety programs dominated the radio airwaves; amassing 75% of an average station's programming (Gesell-Streeter, 2004). Any type of program that did not contain music and some sort of dramatic element was considered a talk show.

The remaining 25% of radio programming included coverage of political and other special news events (regular newscasts were not yet part of radio programming), religious programming, limited sports broadcasts, informational programs spanning a wide range of topics and news commentary shows (Gesell-Streeter, 2004). While not an exact replica of today's modern-day talk shows, the information and news commentary shows closely resembled today's equivalent of a radio talk show.

The first radio call-in show was created in 1930 by a disc jockey named John J. Anthony (Gesell-Streeter, 2004). Anthony asked his listeners to call him at the station and he, in turn, repeated what they said on the telephone into the microphone for the listening audience to consume, effectively shifting the focus from the communicator to the purposes of the receiver, a precursor to Katz's uses and gratifications theory (Severin & Tankard, 2001).

According to Brownlee (1997), over the next few decades, participatory talk shows "merged interviews with human interest programs" (p.3). Unlike today's interactive format, early talk shows featured monologues with the host engaging in conversation with the audience (Munson, 1993).

In 1945, while working an overnight shift, Barry Gray experimented with a new format while working as a disc jockey for radio station WMCA in New York. While on-air, Gray decided to converse with one of the callers to his show. This particular caller happened to be big band leader Woody Herman, a popular musical celebrity at the time. After receiving overwhelmingly popular feedback from his listeners, Gray's show began to gradually feature less and less music as he invited more celebrity guests into the studio to participate and interact with listeners. The development of

this new show format earned Gray the distinction of being regarded as the father of talk radio (Munson, 1993).

In the early 1960s, the all-talk format of radio programming was created. The pioneers of this format included: KMOX, St. Louis; KABC, Los Angeles; and KVOR, Colorado Springs.

Today, there are a number of niche programming options within the talk radio format, including: advice programs, gardening and home décor, business and information programs and sports talk.

### **Popularity of Talk Radio**

The talk radio format (specifically, political talk radio) grew increasingly popular in the 1980s as a direct result of deregulation, radio corporatization and niche marketing (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999). Deregulation loosened mass-media ownership and restrictions on show content, which opened the door to two new programming options in the 1990s: radio talk shows featuring “shock” jocks (i.e. radio disc jockeys who utilize crude language and tactics for ratings) and all-sports programming (Nylund, 2004). It was no surprise, then, that talk radio became the fastest growing medium of popular-culture in the U.S. during the 1990s.

The sheer explosion of the talk radio format is well documented. In 1987, the number of talk radio stations numbered

237, and by 1992 it had swelled to 875 (Mariscal, 1999). By 2002, the total number of talk radio stations was estimated at approximately 8,000 (Lee, 2002).

Talk radio differs from other electronic communication forms in that it is less stodgy, impersonal, routinized, and conformist than, say, TV and most print media. Further, it is far less attached to the visual image than TV, film and popular music (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999).

For millions of talk radio listeners and participants, radio is an appealing source because it can engage audiences in free discourse (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999). If you chose to participate in a talk radio program, you can speak freely, whether you agree or disagree with the topics being discussed, or one can simply listen and be entertained or become better informed on a current topic.

Another reason talk radio swelled in popularity, according to Rubin and Step (2000), is that "we live in a period where we think nobody is listening and we need an outlet" (p.640). Boggs and Dirmann (1999) argued that it is difficult to be heard on television and on the Internet and "that it is possible to find in talk radio an easy, cheap and accessible outlet for expressing opinions and feelings" (p.70). In our hustle-and-bustle society, spouses, co-workers and the government seem to turn a deaf ear to our

opinions and beliefs (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999). This perspective generates a larger market for talk radio, as people want to be heard, whether it is a sports topic, a money question or a simple personal matter.

Talk radio is personality driven and it carries a strong participatory quality. Participants often go through stages of attraction to talk radio, from curiosity to passive participation (i.e. listening attentively) and finally to active participation (i.e. calling the show) (Rubin & Step, 2000). Talk radio invites listeners to participate, open their minds and express their opinions and also offers a “mediated interpersonal communication experience for its audience,” providing listeners with a sense of personal contact (Rubin & Step, 2000, p.635).

### **Fanship and Sports Relationships**

Talk radio’s participatory qualities were noted in the mid 1990’s by Gantz and Wenner (1995) who studied the relationship between fanship and television sports viewing experiences. They approached their study with the uses and gratifications paradigm in mind (i.e. what do people do with the media presented to them), depicting the audience as active and its selection of media and specific programming as goal-oriented.

They hypothesized that fans, when compared to non-fans, would more frequently engage in pre-game activities, watch sports more intently and be more emotionally affected by the outcome of a game. This study illustrated that, overall, fans ingested a qualitatively different and deeper set of expectations and responses than non-fans after a favorite team's victory or success, including: remaining in a good mood after a victory, talking about the game with friends, deliberately watching television highlights of the victory multiple times and reading the following morning's sports headlines in the newspaper. These activities have commonly been referred to as basking in reflected glory or "birging" (Cialdini, 1976, p.366).

Cialdini (1976) conducted a study that demonstrated how undergraduate students at seven universities (Arizona State, Louisiana State, Ohio State, Notre Dame, Michigan, Pittsburgh and USC) were more likely to wear university-affiliated apparel the Monday morning after a victorious football Saturday. They also found that the college students were more likely to use the pronoun "we" (Cialdini, 1976, p.366) after a successful athletic weekend than if their team had lost. Essentially, students sought to have the success of the team linked to them by wearing clothing associated with their respective school or university.



## History of Sports Talk Radio

Sports talk radio programs were introduced in an effort to attract young male listeners to stations (Goldberg, 1998). WFAN in New York premiered the first all-sports talk radio station in 1987 and other major markets abruptly launched their own stations, including: XTRA (San Diego), WEEI (Boston), WIP (Philadelphia), KMPC (Los Angeles), and WWLS (Oklahoma City) (Mariscal, 1999).

The rise of all-sports talk radio was a cultural phenomenon of the late 1980s and early 1990s that depended to a large extent on the restructuring of the AM band and the explosion of talk radio as a low-cost programming option (Mariscal, 1999).

In 1995, even after heavy growth in the number of all-sports talk radio stations, academic scholars and the general public alike were still not convinced sports talk radio had firmly entrenched itself as a primary contender for sport fans' attention. Because sports talk radio program hosts borrowed their techniques and style from shock jocks and the main demographic was 25 to 54 year-old males, industry experts dismissed this new medium as the realm of "uneducated testosterone freaks and uninformed hosts" (Mariscal, 1999, p.111).

Goldberg (1998) summed up this new talk radio genre as hyper-masculine posing, where hosts and callers alike delivered forceful opinions and engaged in loudmouth shouting for several hours. Nylund (2004) pointed out that with white masculinity being challenged more than ever in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to feminism, affirmative action and gay/lesbian movements, "sports talk shows were an attractive alternative for embattled white men seeking recreational repose" (p.139).

In a 1994 *Sports Illustrated* article, columnist Rick Reilly openly hoped for the speedy demise of this new radio format (Mariscal, 1999). What happened, however, was the exact opposite of what Reilly predicted and all-sports talk radio programming spread like an unchecked virus throughout the United States during the 1990s (Mariscal, 1999). In fact, according to Heyler (2004) there are approximately 500 radio stations dedicated to all sports talk today.

Radio quickly became a medium that seemed to offer a glimpse of a revitalized public sphere made possible by new media and the digital divide (e.g. the proliferation of new media, such as the Internet, cable television and cellular phones) (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999).

Lee (2002) agreed that the long-term success of sports radio was tied to technology. However, if technology (i.e. cell phones, fax machines, satellite radio) failed, the level of interest in sports talk radio may wane. Although local taverns and sports bars are primary sites for male bonding and Wenner (1998) argued that beer, sports and masculinity operated as a holy trinity when combined, sports talk radio seems to be poised to displace the local tavern as the place to talk sports (Wenner, 1998).

### **Demographics and Psychographics of Talk Radio Listeners**

By 1994, "20 million people were rushing each week to laugh along with Rush Limbaugh on 659 stations" (Goldberg, 1998, p.214). Goldberg (1988) reported "talk radio listeners and participants are primarily white men" (p.214) and Heyler (2004) noted that this genre's listeners are 7% Hispanic and 11% black. These percentages do not reflect that of the general population, according to Heyler (2004). There are 36 million African-Americans in the U.S., many who are avid sports fans. You just wouldn't know it to listen to sports-talk America. Clearly, it is tough for people of color to relate to all this white noise.

With that in mind, Boggs and Dirmann (1999) found that most Americans listen to at least some form of talk radio: 52%

tuned in for at least one hour a week, while 30% listened for three or more hours on a weekly basis.

Sports talk radio caters to a wide spectrum of sports fans. At one end, it appeals to the unemployed and those who do not have anything else to do, and at the other end it entices those who have cell phones (which one can use to contact a sports talk radio show) and are in their office work environments (e.g. doctors and lawyers) (Haag, 1996).

Previous talk radio research has focused primarily on talk radio discourse and the characteristics of listeners. Empirical themes have included the functions of talk radio, characteristics of callers and non-callers, and the interpersonal nature of talk radio (Rubin & Step, 2000). In fact, Rubin and Step (2000) discovered that callers to sports talk radio programs (when compared to non-callers) were more isolated, less mobile, often single, not part of organizations and less willing to communicate face-to-face.

### **Sports Talk Radio as a Forum**

Haag (1996) revealed that sports talk radio was one of the last social melting pots, where the under or unemployed can rub elbows with the white-collar crowd, who have cell phones and plush homes. Goldberg (1998) declared that by the late 1990s, sports talk radio became a "leading forum for expressing white maleness"

(p.219). Haag (1996) also offered that sports talk radio belongs to those who spend obscene amounts of time commuting on congested interstates and call in on their car phones while stuck in traffic.

Today's average work commute spans anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours and commuters are captive audiences that media (e.g. talk radio) can successfully target. Given the high percentage of commuters traveling alone, the lone conversation may come from the radio (Fineman, 1993).

Haag (1996) agreed that those traveling by car are primary targets for broadcasters.

All you have to do is look at the freeways at quarter to five. Every traffic jam is an opportunity to a broadcaster. You're dealing with a medium that has very much a captive audience in the automobile. It's bordering on the oppressive (p.456).

### **Communication Theories**

This study will examine the uses and gratifications and agenda-setting communication theories. The uses and gratifications theory is forged in how and why sports talk radio listeners both consume and use sports talk radio programs. One of the first references to the uses and gratifications approach surfaced in a

1959 article by Elihu Katz in which he reacted to a claim that interest in the communication research field was waning (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Katz suggested that the communication field as a whole might be better served to answer the question of “what do people do with the media?” instead of “what does media do to people?” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p.293).

Specifically, Katz examined a 1949 study concerning what delivery workers missed most during a local newspaper strike. He found that a majority of readers were forced to find other sources of news to feed their hunger for headlines, which, overwhelmingly was the single thing they missed the most (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Readers responded that they read and followed the news primarily because it was the “socially acceptable thing to do” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p.294).

Other respondents indicated that the newspaper was key to staying current on world affairs while a number of respondents noted that they sought “escape, relaxation, entertainment and social prestige” through reading the newspaper (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p.294).

Shortly after Katz argued that mass media should be asking, “what do people do with the media,” Blumler and McQuail (1969) applied the uses and gratifications theory as their primary strategy

during an examination of the 1964 general election in Great Britain. Their aim was to discover why people watch or refrain from party broadcasts and what uses they wish to make of them.

Prior to Blumler and McQuail's (1969) study, previous election research studies indicated that mass media campaigns had little or no effect on how a particular individual may vote. Their study yielded the fact that people watched political broadcasts for several reasons, including a source of information for political affairs and to become better educated about campaign platforms and pledges.

This is one of the questions (what do people do with the media, specifically sports talk radio) on which this study will be focused. Some of the central questions are: "Why do people listen to sports talk radio and what uses do they wish to make of it?"

### **Agenda-Setting Theory**

Agenda-setting theory stemmed from Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922) idea that the mass media helps create the pictures of the world, or in other words, the reality of what we are seeing and hearing, effectively explaining what is going on in the world. Several decades later, Cohen (1963) suggested that the mass media and press inform its consumers what to think about. McCombs and Shaw (1972) studied agenda-setting in relation to

the 1972 presidential campaign and theorized that the mass media set the agenda for our nation's political campaign, all the while influencing the public's attitude and personal platform. They honed in on undecided voters due to the standing theory that they would be most influenced by agenda-setting effects.

In their research, McCombs and Shaw focused on two elements: awareness and information. Investigating the agenda-setting function of the mass media, they attempted to assess the relationship between what voters in one community said were important issues and the actual content of the media messages used during the campaign (Severin & Tankard, 2001). McCombs and Shaw (1972) concluded that the mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues of the campaign.

Following in the footsteps of McCombs and Shaw, Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller (1980) discovered that interpersonal communication may increase issue salience by playing an essential role when people are attempting to make sense of topics reported in the media. In a more recent study, Larsorsa and Wanta (1990) reported that the more an individual was exposed to political communication via interpersonal means, the less likely he or she would conform to the media agenda.



The core of agenda-setting, then, is that the mass media's increased attention to a particular issue may cause that particular issue to be given more importance in the public's mind than it would have if it had not been reported through the mass media.

### **Sports Communities and Subcultures**

Talk show participants, the media and even social scientists dubbed radio as the "next potential mechanism of electronic populism – a kind of town-meeting of the airwaves" (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999, p.65). Talk radio offers a mediated interpersonal communication experience for its audience and provides listeners with a different form of personal contact and also a forum to learn about societal and sports issues (Rubin & Step, 2000).

Sports talk radio has created new communities of like-minded, like-thinking listeners who are separated only by a virtual gated circle (Goldberg, 1998). Participants in sports talk radio programs are also cognizant of their group identity. According to social identity scholars Murrell and Dietz (1992), people strive to enhance both their personal and group identity. They feel that they have virtual friends (i.e. other sports talk radio participants and listeners) and that virtuality is "reflected by the abstractness, the unreality of the friendships and the ethereality of the community" (Goldberg, 1998, p.221).

Donnelly's study of sport subcultures (1981) revealed that a group forms an identity based on a set of beliefs, norms and values distinct from those of mainstream society and it is those traits which comprise a subculture. Membership in this subculture can be a highly significant aspect of one's life and it often serves as the activity on which one's life is focused. It could be said, then, that sports fans who cheer for the same team and listen to sports talk radio have created a sports subculture. Their common interest in sports and a particular communication vehicle (e.g. a sports talk radio program) is the focal point for their sub-cultural formation as illustrated later in this thesis.

Collectively, these types of interactions and smaller sets of sports subcultures are referred to as a sports community. In fact, the formation of a sports talk radio community can occur quite innocently. Nylund (2004) discovered that sports talk radio provided a safe area "for men to bond and reaffirm their essential masculinity" (p.149) during his social research of the "clones" (Jim Rome's listeners) on Jim Rome's sports talk radio show.

While some fans tune in strictly to gather sports news and listen to sports, some listeners (especially males) are looking for other sports fans who speak the same sports language, affiliate

with a common team or laugh at the same sports jokes (Nylund, 2004).

Those types of sports bonds can be strengthened as evidenced by St. John's (2004) travels with a roving convoy of sports fans who religiously followed (via recreational vehicles) the Alabama Crimson Tide football team game-by-game. St. John (2004) described a husband and wife who skipped their own daughter's wedding to attend a Crimson Tide game (they made it to the reception), an Episcopalian minister named Ray Pradat who viewed games on a television beside his altar while performing weddings — and a man named Chip Glass who lost several jobs and forced himself to become physically ill due to his affection for Alabama football.

Consequently, St. John (2004) found himself enamored and immersed in this unique sports community, ultimately purchasing a motor home for himself called the "Hawg." He joined the RV community and took to the pavement for a season, discovering there was much more to Alabama football than just the game on Saturday and it was perfectly normal to arrive at the stadium three days ahead of time to prepare for kickoff.

### **Caller Relationships with Sports Talk Radio Hosts**

Often times, listeners develop somewhat of an interpersonal attraction to a sports talk radio host and can become addicted to a particular show, host or callers (Rubin & Step, 2000). Rubin and Step (2000) reported “audience members often develop quasi-relationships with media personalities, similar to that with social friends” (p.639). These members also feel that they know, understand and can relate to a sports talk radio host — and even that they might look forward to meeting the host or interacting with him or her in the future (Rubin & Step, 2000).

Koenigh and Lessan (1985) agreed and suggested that participants in sports talk radio call-in shows may feel a deeper connection to quasi-friends (e.g. sports talk radio hosts) than social friends (Rubin & Step, 2001). Farred (2000) concurred that sports talk radio facilitates a sense of community, in that it can “temporarily break down barriers of race, ethnicity and class” (p.103). Everyone, including Caucasians in the suburbs, Latinos in the inner city and African-Americans can cheer for the Boston Red Sox, Los Angeles Lakers or Detroit Red Wings.

The appeal of sports talk radio, Haag (1996) said, lies in “the idiosyncrasies of its hosts...and regionalism of issues covered” (p.460). These examples illustrate a basic aspect of the uses and

gratifications approach – people can use the same communication message for very different purposes. With regard to sports talk radio, a sports fan may listen to pass the time, to be entertained, to voice his or her opinion or as an escape from the daily grind.

### **Fandom**

Sports fans who may never call a sports call-in show are not necessarily referred to as passive, non-participatory audience members when compared to fans, who may phone, email or fax a particular sports radio program on a regular basis. Both communities have members who can identify with sports fans in cities all across the United States, even though they may not be rooting for the same team.

Haag (1996) explained why the concept of fandom is relevant.

Everyone who listens to sports talk knows that what is being discussed is not necessarily sports. Through displacement, sports talk speaks to a particular moment in the fan's life and to a special feeling of regional affinity. In every town with any kind of team, there's some fool like me with as many stories about his franchise as I have about the Colts (p.464).

Every individual or audience chooses how he or she uses the media and what meanings he or she wishes to make of it. Essentially, the focus has shifted from the communication delivery vehicle to the receiver and how a listener interprets and utilizes the information (Severin & Tankard, 2001). This could be accomplished via diversion (i.e. to escape from the daily routine and problems), to strengthen personal identity, or through surveillance (i.e. information about things that might affect an individual or will help one accomplish something).

### **Jim Rome and *the Jungle***

Jim Rome is one of the more popular voices in the world of sports broadcasting and one of the leading opinion-makers and agenda-setters of his generation (Nylund, 2004). As the host of the nation's premiere sports radio talk show, Rome is best known for his aggressive, rapid-fire dialogue and insider language.

Rome's nationally syndicated radio program, *The Jim Rome Show*, a.k.a. *The Jungle*, airs on more than 200 affiliate radio stations each weekday and carries more than two million listeners (Nylund, 2004). Rome, who hosts the sports talk radio show from Los Angeles, California, is one example of a sports talk radio host who has created a sports subculture and a community of fans —

establishing himself as one of the top choices of athletes and fans when it is time to know what is happening beyond the field of play.

The meteoric rise of Rome is at once a Horatio Alger story for Generation X and a story of how wild personal ambition, coupled with intelligence, timing and deregulation, transformed an unknown college student into a national celebrity in a short period of time (Rubin & Step, 2002). Rome's listeners are not your average sports talk consumers. They are a loyal legion of fans known as "clones" who live and breathe for Jim Rome's "take" (i.e. dialogue) on the day's larger issues of sport (Mariscal, 1999).

Rome began his radio career at KTMS, Santa Barbara, as a \$5 dollar-an-hour traffic reporter and covered UC Santa Barbara's sports teams. He left KTMS for San Diego's all-sports station, XTRA Sports 690 (Mariscal, 1999). It was during a temporary stint on a late-night show at XTRA that Rome debuted his "smack" speech (sports talk in a gloating or unbridled manner).

His style yielded high ratings, and, by acclimation of his listeners, *the Jungle* was born. In 1996, to further keep up with listener demand, Premiere Radio Networks acquired exclusive syndication rights and his talk radio show continues to pick up affiliates throughout the country (Mariscal, 1999).

It is his departure from conventional sports commentary that has resulted in Rome's unique dialogue with his listeners (Nylund, 2004). In addition to his daily radio grind, Rome hosts "Rome Is Burning", a provocative sports talk show on ESPN. The program originates from Los Angeles and features opinion, Rome's "rants," debates and guest appearances by some of the bigger names in sports (Nylund, 2004). Those who call *the Jungle* are referred to as "clones" (i.e. meaning an excessively imitative fan of Rome's show) by Rome and there is an inherent sense of community surrounding the show, but with that also comes an understanding of *the Jungle's* format and ground rules.

The clones deliver their sports opinions (referred to as a "take") regarding what is going on in the world of sports. Rome usually listens closely while the clone (often shouting into the receiver) performs his take (Nylund, 2004). Rome opts either to "run" the call (meaning he disconnects the call) or he permits them to complete their take. If the take does not "suck" (by Rome's opinion), he may also elect to "rack" the call (meaning he cues the take up to play at a later time for the rest of the clones across America to hear).

All racked calls are also eligible to claim the "huge-call-of-the-day" award. "Huge calls" are those which contain what Rome



considers good “smack” speech (the huge-call-of-the-day is also rebroadcast and posted to *the Jungle’s* website, [www.jimrome.com](http://www.jimrome.com), to exhibit the most definitive and denunciatory commentary).

This distinction is given to the clone who displays the best take during the three-hour, jargon-laden *Jungle*. A complete *Jungle* “Smacktionary” is also available on *the Jungle’s* website, featuring several pages of Rome’s metaphors, catch phrases and urban slang amassed over the show’s seven years.

Not to be upstaged, *the Jungle’s* affiliates are eligible for special recognition. *The Jungle’s* website features an affiliate power rankings (APR) poll, which is similar to college football’s Associated Press (AP) poll. To garner recognition on the APR poll, clones must email *the Jungle* and note which affiliate they listen to. Additional points can also be awarded for the huge-call-of-the-day or the huge-email-of-the-day. Rome is also distinct in the fact that he, unlike other all-sports talk radio hosts, rarely engages in two-way conversation with the clones during the call. The caller commentaries are “highly performative, full of insider language and monological” (Nylund, 2004, p.137). Rome usually listens quietly and will intervene when he feels it necessary, whether he agrees or disagrees with the caller.

*The Jungle* also employs a strict hierarchy in regard to callers. Although that credo is not published and rarely mentioned (i.e. in Rome's opinion it's simple...have a take and don't suck!) the clones know the ropes. Rarely does a caller disagree with Rome. If a caller disagrees, his or her status in the community (i.e. *the Jungle*) may be tainted. Callers who have a great take and don't suck are publicly lauded by Rome. This type of praise by Rome enhances the interaction and future takes of other callers. Consequently, if Rome receives several consecutive calls that suck, he'll run the callers and inform everyone that they had better have a strong call or they will be publicly humiliated in front of the rest of the clone nation.

In essence, Rome is serving as the ultimate gatekeeper and agenda-setter. During the course of each program, he determines the ground rules and the show's topics for the day. He predetermines what the Clones will talk about and if he feels it is off the course from what he wishes to hear, he will not take their call.

### **Minorities in *the Jungle***

For the first time in the history of sports talk radio, (at least in California) African American callers participated in *the Jungle* on a frequent basis. Mariscal (1999) discovered this was not surprising, perhaps, because Rome's persona was premised to a large extent

on the “construction of a faux-hip hop persona – generous borrowings from Black English, a gangster rap attitude, and an explicit dislike of rednecks” (p.112).

Rome was also one of the first sports talk radio hosts to ask African American sportscasters to substitute for him on *the Jungle* when he was on vacation. This, in fact, is a field where minority talk show hosts are few and far between (Mariscal, 1999). Rome’s *Jungle* served as a station that policed its own members and set an agenda that had little tolerance for racial attacks, raising the importance of racial equality in the public’s mind.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

While previous research has focused primarily on the definition and political affiliation of sports talk radio listeners, this study investigated the role of sports talk radio and the following communication theories: uses and gratifications and agenda-setting.

The following research questions were addressed:

Research Question #1: Why do sports fans listen to sports talk radio?

Research Question #2: How frequently do sports fans listen to sports talk radio?

Research Question #3: Do listeners of the Jim Rome Show introduce the topics they hear on his show into their sports conversations?

During the summer of 2005, following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a 20-item sports survey (both hard copy and electronic, found in Appendix A) was developed (with some items being multiple answers) to address the three research questions. In addition, a four-item follow-up survey was developed and delivered either via phone or email to those participants who indicated that they would be interested in completing a follow-up

survey. Follow-up survey findings were referenced in the above research questions as well.

The study also included a content analysis from *The Jungle* with Jim Rome, a national sports radio show which is syndicated locally through Big Sports 590 AM (KXSP, Omaha, Nebraska). The researcher conducted a content analysis of the Jim Rome Show over a period of one week from June 21-28, 2005 (six shows for a total of 9 hours).

Each show was taped and sports topics were coded (in total minutes) according to how long they were discussed. The findings from the content analysis were included primarily in research question three to address the significance of the agenda-setting function of the Jim Rome show. In sum, the researcher examined the frequency in which the topics on Jim Rome's *Jungle* were infused into the respondent's conversations with family, friends and co-workers.

**Subjects:** During the period of June 21-28, 2005, 109 surveys (hard copy and electronic) were completed and compiled from several field research sites.

Table 1

Initial Survey Collection at Various Field Sites

<u>Research Site</u>	<u>Number of Surveys Collected</u>
HawkeyeNation.com	70
TiderInsider.com	12
College World Series (Rosenblatt Stadium)	14
Skyboxx Sports Bar (Omaha, Neb.)	4
Brewsky's Pub (Omaha, Neb.)	7
At respondent's residence	2
*Total	109

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*\*Note: 25 respondents noted they would like to participate in a follow-up survey and 12 follow-up surveys were secured*

Subjects who appeared to be within the target demographic (males and females at least 19 years of age) were randomly approached and asked if they would like to participate in a research study on sports talk radio. Of the 109, 82 were received electronically from Hawkeyenation.com and TiderInsider.com and 27 were hard copies (see Table 1). Fourteen surveys were collected from the College World Series at Rosenblatt Stadium, four from the Skyboxx Sports Bar and seven from Brewsky's Pub (both

Skyboxx and Brewsky's are local Omaha sports bars). Additionally, two surveys were completed in person at the respondent's place of residence. A total of 12 follow-up surveys were conducted and compiled (out of 25 prospective respondents who indicated that they would like to participate in a follow-up survey).

The College World Series was chosen as a survey site for many reasons, including its proximity to the researcher's residence, its reputation as one of the premiere college sporting events in America and a venue where a representative cross section of sports fans could be accessed. As Nylund (2004) noted, local sports bars provide a fascinating venue for field research and a large potential pool of survey respondents. The researcher agreed with Nylund's assessment and chose to include sports bars to acquire a better feel for the research and to interact in a more intimate setting with sports fans while conducting the research.

The electronic survey was available online during the same time period (June 21-28, 2005) on 'Hawkeye Nation' (<http://iowa.rivals.com>) and TiderInsider (<http://www.tiderinsider.com>). The electronic survey was also featured on the 'Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer' sports blog (a source noted earlier in this thesis). These online sports communities were chosen because they cater to sports fans who

post various sports messages regarding their preferred college team (in this case the Iowa Hawkeyes and Alabama Crimson Tide). Additionally, the Iowa Hawkeye fansite was chosen because the researcher has a working relationship with the website editor and pre-survey discussions with the editor yielded positive feedback. With regard to the Alabama fansite, it was offered as a forum to survey by a friend who is an Alabama fan and who knew the editor of that particular fansite.

**Parameters and Procedures.** Participation in this survey/e-survey required approximately 15 minutes of time (unless directly contacted by researcher for a follow-up interview. Follow-up interviews required an additional 10-15 minutes). There were no risks or potential discomforts associated with this research.

The survey instruments were designed to identify reasons why sports fans listen to talk radio, how frequently they listen to sports talk radio and to investigate if Jim Rome set the agenda for sports fans listening to his show. The content analysis focused primarily on how long Rome spoke about certain topics and their relationship to topics noted in the hard copy and e-surveys.

Sports fans were questioned about: their sources of sports information; how often they tune into sports talk radio programs; how long they have listened to sports talk radio; how often they



discuss sports topics and which topics they discussed with their family and co-workers; what sports talk radio shows they listen to (and why they listen to those shows); how often they call into a sports talk radio program (and the reasons for calling); how the program content helps them as a sports fan; what sports topics interest them; what sports they play; and various demographic information, such as gender, age, income and education (see Appendix A for the full survey).

The 12 follow-up surveys were administered via phone and email by the researcher during the week of July 4, 2005 and questioned fans about: what person they consult when they have a sports question; their earliest sports memories; their frequency in attending live sporting events; and in their opinion, the biggest story in sports over the past year.

**Statistical Methods.** As the data was primarily nominal, the chi-square test was used almost exclusively to analyze the data and determine its level of significance to the three proposed research questions. A bivariate correlation (Spearman rho) was also used in reference to Research Question #3.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Following the collection of surveys and an analysis of the raw data, 103 of the 109 respondents (94%) indicated that they tune into sports talk radio. When specifically focusing on gender, five of the six female respondents (83%) responded that they tune into sports talk radio and 98 of the 103 male respondents (95%) indicated that they listen to sports talk radio. With regard to age breakdown of those sports talk radio listeners, 15% were between the ages of 19-24, 45% between the ages of 25-35, 19% between the ages of 36-45, 17% between the ages of 46-55 and 2% noted "other age range."

Concerning what sources of information respondents utilized to gather sports news, respondents overwhelmingly indicated they use Internet resources (i.e. espn.com, cnnsi.com) as a primary source in gathering sports information (93 out of the 109 respondents marked this category, 85%). In contrast, only 38% of the respondents selected local television and 7% noted radio as a source in which they gather sports information.

**Research Question #1: Why do sports fans listen to sports talk radio?**

A majority of the 109 respondents indicated that they listen to sports talk radio because it is entertaining (70 responses, 64%) and it is an informative sports source (61 responses, 56%). Fifty-six respondents indicated that they listen in order to gather sports news (51%) and 51 respondents noted that sports talk radio hosts were funny (47%). A minority said they tuned into a sports program to listen to the show's guests (35 respondents, 32%).

While analyzing the data, one must remember that responses were secured from those who indicated they follow sports and were occasional listeners of sports talk radio, regardless of what show they listened to.

Chi-square analyses comparing age group with the reasons they listen to sports talk radio did not yield significant results. Among age groups 19-24, 25-35, 36-45 and 46-55, none were more apt than the others to cite the following reasons for listening: to become better informed on current sports topics, the entertainment value of the sports talk radio show, humor on the show and as a method to gather sports news,  $\chi^2 (4, N=109) = 5.596, p=.231$ .

A chi-square analysis comparing Rome listeners and listeners of other popular sports talk radio shows and how the sports talk radio program content helps them as sports fans

produced some significant results (full results in Table 2). Listeners to Unsportsmanlike Conduct (local Omaha sports talk radio program, KOZN 1620 AM) noted they discuss the topics they hear with others  $\chi^2 (1, N=21) = 5.121, p=.024$ , listeners to the Herd (national ESPN radio, locally on KOZN 1620 AM) indicated the show was entertaining  $\chi^2 (1, N=60) = 4.037, p=.045$  and the Dan Patrick Show (national ESPN radio, locally on KOZN 1620 AM) listeners indicated they were entertained as well  $\chi^2 (1, N=106) = 10.181, p=.001$ .

Table 2

Sports Talk Radio Shows and How Program Content Helps Fans\*

<u>Show</u>	<u>Current Topics</u>	<u>Mental Prep</u>	<u>Entertainment</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
Jim Rome	26 (35%)	1 (<1%)	26 (35%)	21 (28%)	74
Unsportsmanlike	7 (33%)	2 (<1%)	4 (19%)	8 (38%)	21
Mike & Mike	38 (35%)	5 (<1%)	33 (31%)	32 (30%)	108
The Herd	23 (38%)	2 (<1%)	23 (38%)	12 (20%)	60
Dan Patrick	32 (31%)	5 (<1%)	35 (34%)	31 (30%)	103
Other	23 (37%)	5 (<1%)	20 (32%)	15 (24%)	63
**Total	149	20	141	119	429

*Note: Results are from chi-square on group items*

\* $\chi^2$  (78,  $N=109$ ) = 3.576,  $p=.059$

\*\*Total number of respondents who marked this category. Since respondents could mark more than one answer, total percentages may be in excess of 100%

**Research Question #2: How frequently do sports fans listen to sports talk radio?**

Overall, the highest percentage of those 35 years and younger tuned in twice a day (40% of respondents) while 30% of those 35 and older tuned in twice a day [to even out the results, age was divided into two groups (35 years and younger and over 35 years of age)]. The full results are in Table 3.

Table 3

**Frequency of Listening by Age (35 and under and Over 35)\***

<u>How Often Age Groups Tune In**</u>	<u>35 and under</u>	<u>Over 35</u>
Twice a day	27 (42%)	11 (30%)
Once a day	12 (18%)	11 (30%)
Every other day	8 (12%)	4 (11%)
Twice a week	8 (12%)	6 (15%)
Other frequency	10 (15%)	5 (14%)
Never	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)
***Total	65 (100%)	37 (100%)

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*Note: Results are from chi-square on group items. For 35 and under,  $N = 65$ , and for those over 35,  $N = 37$ . The remaining seven respondents did not complete this question.*

*\* $\chi^2$  (52,  $N=102$ ) =57.663,  $p=.274$*

*\*\*Both males and females were combined into the age categories*

*\*\*\*Total number of respondents who marked this category*

Comparisons of frequency of listening with the education of respondents were also made. Thirty-two percent of those holding a college degree tuned in at least twice a day while 30% of those without a college degree tuned in at the same frequency (full results appear in Table 4). A chi-square comparing those two groups showed no statistically significant difference.

Table 4

Frequency of Listening by Education\*

<u>Frequency of Listening</u>	<u>With College Degree</u>	<u>Without Degree</u>
Twice a day	25 (32%)	9 (30%)
Every other day	11 (14%)	5 (17%)
Twice a week	12 (15%)	5 (17%)

Once a week	15 (19%)	7 (23%)
Other frequency	16 (20%)	4 (13%)
**Total	79 (100%)	30 (100%)

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*Note: Results are from chi-square on group items. For those achieving a college degree,  $N = 79$  and for those without a degree,  $N = 30$ .*

*\* $\chi^2$  (13,  $N=109$ ) = 10.471,  $p=.655$*

*\*\*Total number of respondents who marked this category*

The final demographic category compared total household income with frequency of tuning in (see Table 5). Overall, the frequency with which one tuned in was somewhat proportionate to household income, although there was no statistical significance (with a larger sample size statistical significance may occur). For example, 42% of those with household income of \$51-74K listened twice a day and 41% of those with household income greater than \$75K tuned in twice a day. Comparatively, 29% of those with household income of \$25-35K listened twice a day and 30% with household income of \$36-50K listened at the same frequency.

Table 5

Frequency of Listening by Household Income\*

<u>Frequency of Listening</u>	<u>\$25-\$35K</u>	<u>\$36-\$50K</u>	<u>\$51-74K</u>	<u>&gt;\$75K</u>
Twice a day	2 (29%)	4 (30%)	11 (42%)	17 (41%)
Once a day	2 (29%)	4 (30%)	3 (11%)	12 (29%)
Every other day	0 (0%)	1 (<1%)	5 (19%)	4 (<1%)
Twice a week	1 (13%)	1 (<1%)	4 (15%)	3 (<1%)
Other frequency	2 (29%)	2 (15%)	3 (12%)	5 (12%)
**Total	7 (100%)	12 (77%)	26 (99%)	41 (84%)

*Note: Results are from chi-square on group items. For those with household income of \$25-35K,  $N = 7$ , for those with household income of \$36-50K,  $N = 12$ , for those household income of \$51-74K,  $N = 26$  and for those with household income of greater than \$75K,  $N = 41$ . Twelve respondents had less than \$25K of household income and 11 respondents left this question blank.*

*\* $\chi^2 (78, N=87) = 85.767, p=.097$*

*\*\*Total number of respondents who marked this category*

Duration of listenership was also addressed and a frequency analysis revealed that the top two responses were five years of



listening and 10 years of total listening (20 responses each, 18% of the total).

A comparison was made between frequency and total duration of tuning into sports talk radio. For the chi-square analysis, duration of sports talk radio listening was split into two categories: less than or equal to five years of total listening and greater than five years of total listening.

Overall, the results demonstrated that those who had listened to sports talk radio more than five years were more apt to tune in on a more frequent basis, although the difference was not statistically significant. For example, 28% of those who had listened more than five years tuned in once a day when compared to 17% of those who had listened less than five years (full results in Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency and Total Duration of Tuning into Sports Talk Radio\*

<u>Frequency</u>	<u>&lt;= Five Years Listening</u>	<u>&gt; Five Years Listening</u>
Twice a day	16 (35%)	21 (40%)
Once a day	8 (17%)	15 (28%)
Every other day	6 (13%)	7 (13%)
Twice a week	8 (17%)	4 (<1%)
Other frequency	8 (17%)	6 (11%)
**Total	46 (99%)	53 (93%)

---

*Note: Results are from chi-square on group items. For less than or equal to five years of listening,  $N = 46$ , and for those with more than 5 years of listening,  $N = 53$ . The remaining 10 respondents did not complete this question.*

*\* $\chi^2$  (209,  $N=104$ ) =221.765,  $p=.260$*

*\*\*Total number of respondents who marked this category*

**Research Question #3: Do *Jungle* listeners introduce the topics they hear on the show into their sports conversations?**

There is some evidence that the Jim Rome show is setting some of the sports fan's agenda, which means that respondents introduced Rome show topics into their sports conversations.

Respondents were asked what particular sports topics they discussed with family, friends and co-workers (survey questions 3a, 4a and 5a). Due to the sheer number of topics tallied from these questions, the number of topics to be studied was trimmed from 27 to seven. After counting the number of sports topic references in those survey questions, a clear break emerged to manage the data more efficiently.

The final seven topics studied were: Major League Baseball (122 occurrences and 31% of respondents noted this topic),

College Football (49 occurrences, 12%); National Basketball Association (48 occurrences, 12%); Iowa Hawkeye Football (44 occurrences, 11%); College World Series (39 occurrences, 10%); Golf (25 occurrences, 6%) and the National Football League (20 occurrences, 5%).

The next most noted topics were Pro Soccer and College Basketball, with less than 1% of respondents noting these sports topics. Overall, the top seven topics totaled 83% of all respondent topics (345 out of 409).

A chi-square analysis comparing the most frequent topics from the content analysis from Rome's show (MLB, NBA, College Football, Iowa Hawkeye Football, NFL, Pro Golf, College World Series) and the top seven topics that Rome's listeners noted on their surveys in talking with family, friends and co-workers (MLB, NBA, College Football, Iowa Hawkeye Football, NFL, Pro Golf, College World Series) was not significant,  $\chi^2 (12, N=109) = 15.000, p = .241$ ). However, if one examines the raw data without running the chi-square, there is a pattern.

For example, the NBA comprised 58% of all minutes on the Jim Rome show during the content analysis. Thirty-one percent of Rome listeners indicated that they had spoken with family, friends and/or co-workers about this particular topic while just 10% of non-

Rome listeners talked about the NBA. That being said, it was discovered that the CWS (11% Rome, 7% non-Rome) and Iowa Hawkeye football (11% Rome, 32% non-Rome) both were not mentioned on the Jim Rome show during the content analysis period.

The initial survey instrument (question #10) also asked participants what general sports radio topics were of most interest to them (full results in Table 7). The top three choices for both Rome and non-Rome listeners were: team issues, player issues and coach/referee issues.

The chi-square analysis comparing Rome (35 respondents) and non-Rome listeners (74 respondents) and what other sports topics interested them yielded no significant results. Among both Rome and non-Rome listeners, neither group indicated a significance toward listening in order to become educated on social issues (e.g. drug testing, race in sports, etc.),  $\chi^2 (1, N=109) = .400$ ,  $p=.655$ , behavior at sporting events (e.g. fan, coach, player behavior),  $\chi^2 (1, N=109) = .842$ ,  $p=.359$  or player issues (e.g. a particular play or player's performance)  $\chi^2 (1, N=109) = .556$ ,  $p=.556$ .

Table 7

Most Interesting Sports Talk Radio Topics\*

Topics	Rome listeners	Non-Rome listeners	Total
Social issues	10	17	27
Behavior	15	25	40
Player issues	25	54	79
Coach/referee issues	18	44	62
Team issues	28	68	96
Other	1	3	4
Not interested in sports	0	0	0
**Total responses	97	211	308

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*\*Respondents could mark more than one category for this question*

*\*\*Total number of responses*

A bivariate Spearman rho correlation addressed the percentage of the top seven sports topics comprising the Rome show with the percentage of Rome and non-Rome listeners who noted those sports topics in conversations with family, friends and co-workers (full results in Table 8). When comparing how frequently the sports topics appeared on the Rome show with the frequency in which Rome listeners recalled them in conversations, there was a

high correlation coefficient ( $\rho=.935$ ), which was statistically significant ( $p=.002$ ). Further, when comparing the topics between the Jim Rome show and those reported by non-Rome listeners as being part of their conversations, there was a moderate correlation ( $\rho=.337$ ), however it was not statistically significant.

Table 8

Top Seven Sports Topics, Total Rome Show Minutes and Percentage of Listeners who Marked Those Topics

<u>Topic</u>	<u>%Rome Minutes</u>	<u>%Rome Listeners*</u>	<u>%Non-Rome Listeners**</u>
MLB	15	65	46
NBA	58	31	10
NFL	9	23	24
Pro golf	6	20	28
Col. football	0	17	7
CWS	0	11	7
Hawkeye fball	0	11	32
***Total	88	178	154

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\* $\rho=.935$ ,  $p=.002$

\*\* $\rho=.337$ ,  $p=.460$

\*\*\*Totals for each column

### **Follow-up survey instrument**

As stated earlier, a follow-up survey was also administered to further investigate what sources sports fans use to gather information as well as other sports questions.

A frequency analysis of the follow-up survey revealed that 42% of respondents indicated that they turn to a friend when they have a sports question or want to gather sports news. The other categories broke down as follows: Forty-one percent indicated electronic sources (even when prompted to name a person) and 17% noted a media source. Question #2 on the follow-up survey asked respondents to describe some of their earliest sports memories. The majority of responses were linked with some of the top seven sports topics as indicated earlier, including attending MLB games (25%), attending Iowa Hawkeye football games (17%) and participating in Little League Baseball games (17%).

The predominant response to Question #3 on the follow-up survey (attendance at live sports events) indicated that respondents preferred to attend (watch the live content in person) college football games (33%) and MLB, Iowa Hawkeye Football and NFL games (all 17%).

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, this study dealt directly with the uses and gratifications theory which describes “what do people do with the media?” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p.293). Another dominant communication theory which was included was the agenda-setting theory. It was first reported by McCombs and Shaw in the 1970s and concluded that if topics are given more attention in the mass media, they become increasingly important in the general public’s mind (Severin & Tankard, 2001). The concepts of fandom, sports community and sport subcultures were also examined.

With regard to the survey instrument, it was clear that males comprised almost all of the responses (103 male responses vs. six responses). Does that mean that males listen to sports talk radio that much more than females? Or, do females simply defer to their male companions when approached by a sports researcher or a friend, family member and/or co-workers asking a sports question? Although several females did defer to a male companion, there is not enough evidence to answer the question completely.

The field research sites also included large numbers of males, which could be a reason for an overwhelmingly male sample. As referred to earlier, Nylund (2004) pointed out that with



white masculinity being challenged more than it ever has in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to feminism, affirmative action and gay/lesbian movements, sports “talk shows are an attractive alternative for embattled white men seeking recreational repose” (p.139). As referenced earlier, only six females completed the survey instrument.

That being said, a higher number of males were targeted for this study due to the fact that previous research has indicated that females, as a whole, do not listen to talk radio on a frequent basis and even if they do, they are hesitant to participate (Heyler, 2004). A recent Arbitron study (2005) found that while 87% of the 18-plus male population in the United States listened to sports talk radio at least 15 minutes a day during the Spring 2005 ratings period, only 12% of the 18+ female population listened.

Respondents leaned primarily toward sports talk radio’s ability to inform and entertain listeners. Does that reflect that all reasons for listening were listed in the survey instrument or perhaps the respondents felt that due to the nature of the multiple choice question those were the most coveted answers? It is the researcher’s opinion that although the survey captured a wide range of responses, all possible topics may not have been covered,

thus the respondent may have obliged to select one of the options on the survey in lieu of noting something else.

It is the researcher's conclusions and the results indicated that survey respondents are drawn to sports talk radio because of its informational and entertainment value, as evidenced in the results section by Rome listeners tuning in for mental game preparation,  $\chi^2 (1, N=60) = 5.165, p=.023$ . A majority of listeners indicated that they listen to sports talk radio because it is entertaining (70 responses, 64% of all respondents marked this category) and it serves as an informative sports source (61 responses, 56%).

Further, when examining listener characteristics, it is evident that the listeners are male, they tune in at least once a day to become better informed about sports and reap some entertainment value from sports talk radio. In addition, the average number of years that they have listened to sports talk radio was just over nine years. In a sense, these males have created a pseudo sports culture. They are connected due to the fact that they are male, they are tuning into sports talk radio programs and their primary functions for tuning in are to gather sports information and for recreation value. It doesn't matter which show they are listening to (Rome, Mike and Mike, Dan Patrick, etc.), they are virtually

connected to the same show via their listening habits and choice of sports talk show.

It is also important to understand how a person uses the various media to seek news and/or information and how those media influence the behavior of the person. In essence, sports fans in this study used a process called bundling (i.e. combining multiple sports sources for different reasons).

Models like Crumley and Stricklin's (1980) mass media bundling show that the relations among people and media are complex and nonlinear. In many ways, this model recognizes that the authority and responsibility for interpreting the news lie both with the media and their users, a direct correlation to the uses and gratifications behaviors of the subjects in this thesis. As indicated earlier, sports talk radio listeners indicated several sports media (both hard copy and electronic) when asked how they gather sports news. They also noted that they listen primarily to gather news and to be entertained. Viewing (and consuming) behavior may be multi-faceted, perhaps multi-medial. In essence, a sports fan is not only utilizing different news sources for unique needs, but he or she is combining the sources in a way which satisfies individual needs.

Research Question #3 offers the most opportunity for further research. Early in the data collection phase, it was hypothesized

that *the Jungle* with Jim Rome would have an impact on the typical sports fans' agendas and the topics Rome discussed would work their way into respondents' conversations with family, friends and/or co-workers.

Again, there was a high correlation ( $\rho=.935$ ,  $p=.002$ ) when comparing how frequently the sports topics appeared on the Rome Show with the degree to which Rome listeners introduced them in their conversations with others.

While this is the only statistically significant data to indicate Rome set the sports fans' agendas, a cursory examination demonstrates that his show covered some of the same topics as those recalled in conversations (primarily the NBA, as it comprised 58% of the minutes during the content analysis and 31% of the respondents noted they talked about this topic). Thus, at least in this study, it appears that sports talk radio not only informs and entertains white males, but it may also bear some influence on sports conversations, whether it is with family, friends or co-workers.

Especially noteworthy in follow-up survey question #1 (what person do you consult when you have a sports question or you want to gather news) is the fact that even when prompted to name a person, five out of 12 respondents (42%) noted an electronic

source. Earlier in the thesis, it was noted that Rubin and Step (2000) found that callers to sports talk radio programs (when compared to non-callers) were more isolated, less mobile, often single, not part of organizations and less willing to communicate face-to-face.

Even given a small follow-up survey population, it appears that some sports talk radio listeners prefer communication that is electronic (not face-to-face) and given the advent of electronic sports websites, they prefer to gather their information from those types of sources rather than traditional media outlets such as television, radio and newspapers.

That said, businesses and entities which program sports content may derive a clearer picture of the sports fan who listens to their programs, how often sports fans listen, why sports fans listen and what topics sports fans find most interesting.

As noted earlier, males are the predominant consumers of sports talk radio programs. Males and females who listen to sports talk radio do so primarily not only for entertainment value, but to gather sports news and information. By the same token, perhaps these fans have an interest in listening to gather regular news headlines and not just sports.

make their website a one-stop-shopping marketplace for sports fans, where they can not only read the sports headlines, but click to listen to a live feed of the sports talk programming and submit their feedback to the show.

This behavior points back to the uses and gratifications theory and “what do people do with media?” Obviously, fans are logging onto the Internet at a much greater clip than other sports communication vehicles and not allowing the media to act upon them.

Fans and consumers alike prefer bundled information, that is they are more likely to visit your website if everything is contained in the same space (sports headlines, live feeds, email for calling in/comments, etc.)

The application of a sports subculture should not be ignored. A sports subculture offers a forum of personal contact which includes like-minded and like-thinking individuals. These individuals ascribe themselves to a group based on these characteristics and view their talk radio bond as a town meeting over the airwaves (e.g. Rome’s clones). Those who both study and market to these individuals should be cognizant of a sports subculture’s gender, demographics and psychographics to better understand both its consumer and social behavior.

To address these questions more fully and to provide a guide for further research, one may consider refining the survey instrument (initial survey). Specifically, when referencing what topics a respondent discussed with family, friends and co-workers, it may be beneficial to have respondents list them in order of importance rather than what immediately came to mind. Additionally, when asking respondents about their sources of sports information, the survey listed only seven (the list could be infinite) so the respondents may have felt constricted to these choices.

Along with some revisions to the initial survey instrument, there were other limitations which may have impacted some of the results. The survey sample was somewhat small (109 respondents). The survey sample was overwhelmingly male and as noted earlier, the research was limited to three field research sites and all sites featured large male populations. A field research site which features a large female population (i.e. a women's health club) would be appropriate for further research should an investigator wish to specifically focus on female sports talk radio listeners.

The time period in which the survey was conducted was condensed (one week) and surveying ran parallel to the College World Series. Another noted limitation was the specific topic of

Iowa Hawkeye football. This was one of the seven most popular sports topics studied and the primary reasons for this may be due to the geographic region in which the survey was conducted and where the e-survey instrument was linked (directly to an Iowa Hawkeye fansite).

As far as short and long-term applications, a deeper and more significant measure of agenda-setting would be recommended to include multiple sports talk radio shows in different geographic regions. For purposes of this study, only one sports talk show was analyzed in detail and it was a nationally syndicated show. Perhaps further research could also focus on a local sports talk show in a specific geographic region where subjects may be somewhat more isolated.



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NEBRASKA'S HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER

Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA)

June 15, 2005

Andrew Peacock  
16556 Monroe Street  
Omaha, NE 68135

IRB#: 200-05-EX

**TITLE OF PROTOCOL:** All Sports, All the Time: Sports Talk Radio Community and Subculture

Dear Mr. Peacock:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for Exempt Educational, Behavioral, and Social Science Research on the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are, therefore, authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol **approval period of three years** from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ernest D. Prentice by RJE".

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.  
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/kje



COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
School of Communication  
Broadcasting Journalism Speech

IRB#: 200-05-EX  
Page #1

Dear Sports Fan:

You are invited to participate in a research project on sports talk radio. The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) is conducting the research. The purpose of the research is to find out why sports fans listen to sports talk radio and how sports talk radio listeners interact. The researcher also wants your perspectives on how you are utilizing sports talk radio, your primary sources of sports information and the frequency/content of your sports conversations.

The investigator would like to administer a survey to you during your time here. Completing the survey would take only a few minutes and your identity will be protected and confidentiality assured.

The information from the questionnaire will be used by a researcher at UNO to determine why you listen to sports talk radio, the frequency of your listening and how prevalent sports talk radio programs are in setting your agenda for sport conversations. This information may be published in the researcher's master's thesis, academic journals or presented at scientific meetings. The information may also be used by the NCAA, Rosenblatt Stadium and Hawkeyenation.com, however your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Your welfare is of concern to the researcher. If you experience any problems as a result of this research, you should immediately contact the researcher listed at the bottom of this form.

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. Data will be secured at the researcher's home. The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person or agency required by law.

You have rights as a research subject and they have been explained in this letter. There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey and participation is voluntary. There are no costs to you to participate in the survey and you will receive no payment for completing the survey. If you have any questions concerning your rights, talk to the investigator or call the IRB board at (402) 559-6463.

You are freely making a decision whether to participate in this research study. Participating in this research means that (1) you have read and understood this form, (2) you have had the form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to participate in the research study.

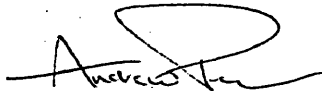


IRB#: 200-05-EX  
Page#2

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact the primary researcher at (402) 339-1901, or reach him by e-mail at [apeacock@mail.unomaha.edu](mailto:apeacock@mail.unomaha.edu). Also, please feel free to contact the researcher if you would like to see results of the research once completed.

Thanks for your time and participation!

Sincerely,



Andrew Peacock  
University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO)  
(402) 339-1901



Appendix A:  
Sports Talk Radio Survey

Researcher: Andrew Peacock, MA Candidate, University of Nebraska at Omaha

**Note:** Information gathered through this survey is strictly confidential and results will be used as group data. This survey will be administered via both electronic means and face-to-face with participants.

Directions: For each of the questions below, circle a response or responses as appropriate. If no choices are provided or if "other," please write in your answer.

---

1) What are your sources of sports information? (please write in or circle answer(s) below):

- a. Internet or website (e.g. espn.com, cnnsi.com) \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Sports magazines (e.g. *ESPN the Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. Local TV (write in station) \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Radio (write in station) \_\_\_\_\_
- e. ESPN Sports Center
- f. ESPN News
- g. *Omaha World-Herald*
- h. Other \_\_\_\_\_

2) How often do you tune into sports talk radio programs?

- a. Once a day      b. Twice a day
- c. Every other day      d. Twice a week
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_      f. Never

2a) If you answered a, b, c, d, or e, how many months/years have you listened to sports talk radio?

3) How often do you discuss sports topics with your family?

- a. Once a day      b. Twice a day
- c. Every other day      d. Twice a week
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_      f. Never

If you answered a, b, c, d or e, what sports topics did you discuss most during the past week?

4) How often do you discuss sports topics with your friends?

- a. Once a day      b. Twice a day
- c. Every other day      d. Twice a week
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_      f. Never

If you answered a, b, c, d or e, what sports topics did you discuss most during the past week?

5) How often do you discuss sports topics with your co-workers?

- a. Once a day      b. Twice a day
- c. Every other day      d. Twice a week
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_      f. Never

If you answered a, b, c, d or e, what sports topics did you discuss most during the past week?



- 6) What sports talk radio show(s) do you listen to? (circle any/all that apply)
- a. Jim Rome Show ("*The Jungle*")
  - b. Unsportsmanlike Conduct (Omaha - local, 1620 AM the Zone)
  - c. Mike and Mike in the Morning (ESPN radio)
  - d. The Herd (ESPN radio)
  - e. The Dan Patrick Show (ESPN radio)
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Don't listen to sports talk radio
- 7) If you marked a show above, why do you listen to that/those shows? (circle any/all that apply. If you didn't mark a show, please proceed to question #8).
- a. Show is informative
  - b. Show is entertaining
  - c. Hosts are funny
  - d. To listen to the guests
  - e. To gather sports news
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) How often do you call into a sports talk radio program? (e.g. Mike & Mike in the Morning, *the Jungle* with Jim Rome, Unsportsmanlike Conduct, etc.)
- a. At least once a day
  - b. At least once a week
  - c. At least once a month
  - d. At least once a year
  - e. Never

If you answered a-d (i.e. you call in at least once a year), what prompted you to call in?

9) In what ways does the program content help you as a sports fan? (Circle all that apply)

- a. It provides me with current sports information
- b. It provides me with topics that I can discuss with other people
- c. It helps me mentally prepare for upcoming games
- d. It doesn't help me, it's just on in the background
- e. I listen for entertainment purposes
- f. I listen for other reasons (please indicate)

10) What sports radio topics most interest you? (circle any/all that apply)

- a. Social issues/outcomes (e.g. drug testing, race in sports, etc.)
- b. Behavior at sporting events (e.g. fans, coaches, players)
- c. Player issues (e.g. a particular play or a player's performance)
- d. Coach/Manager/Referee issues (e.g. a coach's play calling, lineup, etc.)
- e. Team issues (e.g. team's performance, playoffs, postseason, etc.)
- f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Not interested in sports

11) What sports have you played? (competitive and/or recreational, circle any/all that apply)

- a. Basketball   b. Baseball   c. Football   d. Softball
- e. Volleyball   f. Soccer   g. Track/Cross Country   h. Golf
- i. Tennis   j. Other \_\_\_\_\_   k. None

12) What sports do you currently play? (competitive and/or recreational, circle any/all that apply).

- a. Basketball   b. Baseball   c. Football   d. Softball
- e. Volleyball   f. Soccer   g. Track/Cross Country   h. Golf
- i. Tennis   j. Other \_\_\_\_\_   k. None

13) How long have you been a sports fan?

- a. Since you were a child
- b. Since middle school
- c. Since high school
- d. Since college
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

14) Other than sports, name at least one other major hobby you have (e.g. home improvement, classic cars, etc.)

For the next set of questions, please circle your answer, but write in answer for #18 and #19.

15) Are you male or female?

Male/Female

16) What is your age?

- a. 19-24
- b. 25-35
- c. 36-45
- d. 46-55
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

17) What is your annual household income? (circle one)

- a. <\$24,999
- b. \$25-\$35,000
- c. \$36-\$50,000
- d. \$51-\$74,999
- e. >\$75,000

18) What is your job or occupation?

19) What is your zip code?

20) What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- a. High School diploma    b. Some College
- c. College Degree    d. Some Graduate School
- e. Master's Degree    f. Some Doctoral School
- g. Doctoral Degree

Would you be willing to be called by the researcher to answer a few more questions about your interest in sports talk radio?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

If "yes" please provide your telephone number (please provide area code)

(    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Your first name: \_\_\_\_\_

Which day(s) and time(s) would be most convenient for the researcher to contact you?

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Weekdays</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Saturdays</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Sundays</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evening 7-9     | <input type="checkbox"/> 8-noon           | <input type="checkbox"/> 9-noon         |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Noon-5           | <input type="checkbox"/> Noon-5         |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-9              | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-9            |

Thank you for your time!

Appendix A:  
Sports Talk Radio Follow-up Survey

Researcher: Andrew Peacock, MA, University of Nebraska at Omaha

**Note:** Information gathered through this survey is strictly confidential and results will be used as group data.

Directions: This follow-up survey will be administered to some participants who completed the initial survey and answered that they listen to sports talk radio programs. The researcher will contact and proctor the survey either via phone or email.

**Can We Talk More About Sports Talk Radio?**

1) What person do you consult when you have a sports question or you want to gather sports news?

2) Describe some of your earliest sports memories.

3) Do you attend live sports events? If so, which ones and how often?

4) In your opinion, what was the biggest sports story over the past year?