Web Sites as Public Relations Tools

Serving Internal and External Stakeholders

ANNE SHROPSHIRE

MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAMME IN BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS
SPECIALIZATION: E-COMMERCE

Department of Business Administration and Social Sciences
Division of Industrial Marketing and e-Commerce
Supervisor: Tim Foster
Abstract

While the number of research studies conducted on the topic of the Internet increases frequently, it was determined that the number of studies that investigates how public relations, the Internet, and sports relate with one another was quite low. Thus, in this study, one collegiate sports Web site will be investigated with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of how sports teams’ Web sites are used as public relations tools. More specifically, this study investigates the objectives of sports Web sites and the stakeholders served on sports Web sites. In addition, the issue of Web site design on sports Web sites will be a point of focus. The data was gathered through personal interviews with internal stakeholders (one student-athlete, one athletic administrator, and one coach) and external stakeholders (one fan, one alum, and one journalist). The findings and conclusions indicated, in part, that improving communication amongst the organization, its leadership and other publics is a more important objective of sports Web sites than communicating with stakeholders and the media. Moreover, the closer the stakeholder is to the point of sports action (such as coaches and athletic department staff), the more these stakeholders are served by sports Web sites. Finally, the provision of strong, relevant content was found to be more important on sports Web sites than bulletin boards and chat line discussion groups.
Preface
The work presented in this thesis was carried out through the resources of Luleå Tekniska Universitet via correspondence from the United States in the fall of 2003.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Tim Foster, for agreeing to supervise me in a way which was likely more burdensome on him at times than had the thesis been written in a more traditional manner. His support and “round the clock” availability via the Internet was crucial in ensuring effective communication and success with the thesis. Secondly, I would like to thank all the respondents for their insight into the topic of this thesis. Finally, I would like to thank those individuals who have served as sounding boards throughout this process. Your patience and encouragement has been vital to the completion of this thesis.

Through the work with this thesis, I have succeeded in gaining a better understanding of how Web sites may be used as Public Relations tools. I am also proud to be able to contribute in part to future research in this area.

Luleå, January 2004

Anne Shropshire
6.2 Cross-Case Analysis ........................................................................................................ 62
  6.2.1 Research Question 1: How may the objectives of sports Web sites be described? ................................................................. 62
  6.2.2 Research Question 2: How can the stakeholders served by sports Web sites be described? ................................................................. 64
  6.2.3 Research Question 3: How may the design of sports Web sites be described? 68
7 Findings and Conclusions ............................................................................................... 71
  7.1 How can the objectives of sports Web sites be described? ........................................ 71
  7.2 How can the stakeholders served by sports Web sites be described? .................... 72
  7.3 How can the design of sports Web sites be described? .......................................... 74
  7.4 Implications for Practitioners ............................................................................... 75
  7.5 Implications for Theory ......................................................................................... 75
  7.6 Implications for Future Research .......................................................................... 76
References .......................................................................................................................... 78

Appendix A: Interview Guide
Appendix B: Observation Checklist
Appendix C: Screen Shots
List of Tables and Figures

List of Tables

Table 2.1  Various solutions to a two-way communications medium……………..11
Table 3.1  Web site attractors………………………………………………………..16
Table 4.1  Relevant situations for different research strategies…………………..29
Table 4.2  Six sources of evidence: strengths and weaknesses…………………..31
Table 5.2.1 Web site attractors………………………………………………………46
Table 5.2.2 Web site’s interaction with publics……………………………………47
Table 5.2.3 Provision of information to the media……………………………..48
Table 5.2.4 Indicators of service to the online fan……………………………..49
Table 6.1  Web site objectives: company/product awareness and information……..62
Table 6.2  Web site objectives: communication and customer support…………..62
Table 6.4  Stakeholder publics served by the WFU sports Web site……………64
Table 6.5  Provision of information to the media……………………………...65
Table 6.6  Indicators of service to the online fan…………………………………66
Table 6.7  Indicators of service to internal staff and athletes……………………67
Table 6.8  Gateway to revenue sources……………………………………………67
Table 6.9  Stakeholder publics served……………………………………………..68
Table 6.10 Web site design…………………………………………………………68
Table 6.11 Web site design………………………………………………………...69
Table 6.12 Web site design…………………………………………………………69
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 The Sports Information Director and the Publics in the Related Communications Universe……………………………………………..11
1 Introduction

This section introduces the background to the problem area, which is then followed by a problem discussion and an overall purpose. From the purpose, specific research questions are formulated for this thesis. Finally, the demarcations and disposition of the thesis are presented.

1.1 Background

The explosive growth of the Internet has been accompanied by a remarkable increase in the population of Internet users. Research estimates that the Internet doubles in size every 11 months, the Web doubles every 53 days, and there were an estimated 707 million Internet users in January 2001. (Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001) This substantial and rapidly growing Internet audience has led to a wide variety of businesses quickly adopting the Internet as a means of conducting their marketing communications functions economically and efficiently. (Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998) However, corporate leaders are still finding it difficult to keep up with the fast-moving markets and high customer demands closely associated with doing business on the Internet. (Aldridge et al., 1997)

A vast number of companies that provide goods and services to the consumer market have invested in the creation of company Web sites, aiming to raise awareness of the company and its offerings to those accessing the sites. (Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998) There are a wide variety of predictions of the potential of doing business via the Internet, including the increasing numbers of people with Internet access, corporate Web sites, Web spending by advertisers, and total online shopping. Organizations are finding it more and more important to represent themselves on the Internet with the objectives of acquiring more customers, increasing the public’s awareness of the companies and their products, and selling more of their products. (Aldridge et al., 1997) The Web is now viewed as a crucial communication tool used to conduct daily business (Kiani, 1998); according to Breitenbach and Van Doren (1998), companies without a Web site are living in the past. However, while many companies have established an Internet presence, they have not gone so far as to create a Web site with sound features and capabilities. (Ibid.)

Just a few years ago, a typical Web site included only text, graphics and content pertaining to the company, its offerings, and points of contact. (Ibid.) Users were expected to gather information, then leave. Over time, Internet marketers have been forced to improve the appeal of their Web sites due to the increased competition for Internet users’ attention. (Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998) Huizingh (2002) maintains that Web sites can influence several aspects of a company’s market space value proposition, as they enable direct interaction, have virtually no variable costs and are more flexible and superior in targeting as compared to traditional media.

Kim et al. (2003) claim that Web sites provide benefits for both corporations and consumers. One benefit for corporations is the provision of a venue in which a corporation can display its identity and advertise its product and services to many people. Additional benefits include: reduction of time and cost for business transactions, extension of the firm’s market reach, option to bypass traditional communication and
distribution channels, augmentation of traditional markets, promotion of services and extension of advertising. Consumers and corporations benefit in the feedback those consumers can give directly to the company via its Web site. Furthermore, Web sites improve communications with other corporations, thus improving the efficiency of business processes by increasing direct sales and reducing costs. Additionally, it must be noted that a corporation’s Web site appearance, structure, and maintenance status all influence the consumer’s perception of both the transaction experience and corporate image. (Ibid.)

While there are numerous benefits to both businesses and consumers in maintaining a Web site, there are also notable limitations. Specifically, problem areas cited by users include too much information presented in an incoherent format, difficulty in maneuvering online, and trouble locating desired information. (Hallahan, 2001) Additionally, the credibility of the information posted online is often called into question, along with a lack of sufficient product information. (Ibid.) Moreover, most organizations cannot determine whether their Web sites are actually reaching their target audience. Hence, while the Web has been lauded as a new medium for business, it is not without its shortcomings. (Kent et al., 2003)

Nevertheless, the Web, the fastest growing and most innovative aspect of the Internet, has some unique and powerful characteristics that makes it central to a paradigm shift in marketing. (Kiani, 1998). The Web has made available a shift from one-way to two-way information flows between producers and consumers, from the conventional “One-to-many” communication model to the “Many-to-Many” model. (Ibid.) Thus, Aldridge (1997) states that a company’s traditional business strategies are likely to be neither appropriate nor transferable to the new medium. Successful Internet marketers will need to recognize the Internet’s peculiarities and embrace them with strategies custom-made for the new medium. Distinct features on the Internet include the concepts that communication is direct, authenticity is a must, and competition is open. Additionally, security is an issue of great concern on the Internet. The consumer market is also different, in that Net users want control and marketer accessibility is key. (Ibid.)

Thus, the Web has the potential to revolutionize and reform the interaction between organizations and their publics, in effect enabling an organization to simultaneously tailor messages that address the concerns and interests of a diverse set of people. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) For organizations, Web site objectives include providing a controlled means through which they can communicate with stakeholder publics and the media. (Kent et al., 2003) Unlike traditional mass media channels, a single Web site can have multiple segments, with each segment targeted to a different audience (such as customers, government officials, news media, and employees). (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) For stakeholders, Web site objectives include providing publics with a means through which organizations can be viewed and better understood. (Kent et al., 2003)
Hence, organizations of all sizes and kinds have embraced the World Wide Web both to conduct business (e-commerce) and to foster and maintain public relations (PR). In fact, few industries have adopted the Web more than public relations, and the field is only just beginning to understand how it has been impacted. (Hallahan, 2001) Traditionally, PR practitioners have managed two tasks, the first involving message production and dissemination to publics, clients and stakeholders in various media channels. The second task involves the planning and execution of communication strategies. (Hurme, 2001) However, the development of the information and communication technologies manifested in the Internet have had multiple implications in the everyday work of public relations practitioners. (Hurme, 2001; Ross and Middleburg, 1999) In fact, PR online may be quite different from what most PR practitioners are used to. (Hurme, 2001)

What public relations practitioners now need most is a new way of thinking about PR: interactive and networked. PR practitioners must now understand how people use the new media, how they actively produce messages, and how the borderline between the reception and production has become blurred as a result of the new information and communication technologies. (Hurme, 2001) Organizations that rely on relationships with their publics to achieve their goals need to solicit, consider and adjust to stakeholder feedback. (Kent et al., 2003) Indeed, PR practitioners who do not use Internet communications in their public relations strategies may cause damage to their clients/employers. (Hurme, 2001)

One industry that has been able to use the Internet in its public relations strategy is the rapidly growing sports industry. The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics is credited with starting the trend of sports marketing on a formal basis when it turned athletics into a sponsored business. (Shannon, 1999) Specifically, in contrast to prior Olympics which were funded by public money and traditionally generated losses, the Los Angeles Olympics generated a profit on account of the private money (primarily major sponsorships) which largely funded the event. This new technique was highly criticized by sports purists, who did not support the level of commercialism to which such sponsorship subjects sports. Nevertheless, the practice continued, and has since led to a growing interest in professional sports. (Ibid.)

Shannon (1999) notes that it is now hard to dispute the fact that sports are “big business”. The sports industry is indeed large and bears substantial impact, both in spending on sports marketing and in the sales potential of products within the sports industry. In 1987, for every dollar spent on sports event sponsorship, another five dollars was spent on other forms of sports marketing, such as television, radio, print advertising, on-site booths and event signage. (Ibid.) Street & Smith’s SportsBusiness Journal estimated the size of the overall sports industry to be $213 billion in 2002, far more than twice the size of the U.S. auto industry and seven times that of the movie industry.

---

1 Public Relations (PR) practice is defined to be “the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.” (Institute of Public Relations; see References)

2 Percentage of $213 billion sorted by category: Advertising: 14.1%, Endorsements: 0.5%, Sporting Goods: 13.2%, Facility Construction: 1.3%, Internet: 0.1%, Licensed Goods: 5.4%, Media Broadcast Rights: 3.6%,
The collective spirit inherent in sports brings together athletes and fans from around the world, with the World Wide Web facilitating this global connection. (Bruno and Whitlock, 2000) Sports and the Web offer many advantages over conventional news media, including the vicarious thrill of interactivity. Moreover, the Web is not only the fastest-growing mass communication and marketing vehicle in history; it is also the perfect demographic partner for sports. The Internet user is 70% male, and sports fans are 64% male; furthermore, the average Internet user is 32.7 years old, while the average sports fan is 34. Finally, the average income of both groups is similar and both of their interest bases are global. (Ibid.)

1.2 Problem Discussion

Public relations strategies have long been designed and implemented by sports teams as a way to win public esteem and cash in on the popularity of sports. (Shannon, 1999) As stated previously, the sports industry is broad and growing. Ranked as the eleventh largest industry in the United States in 1995, the sports industry has certainly been affected by the introduction of the new communication technologies available on the Internet. Thus, Shannon (Ibid.) maintains that the opportunities for research into the marketing of sports are rich.

Solid research can help public relations managers understand how the Web can be used to develop and market offerings that will satisfy changing customer needs. (Huizingh, 2002) One question practitioners have emphasized is how organizations should design their Web pages to facilitate more equitable relationships with publics. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) Kent and Taylor (1998) state that organizations should design Web sites to facilitate real dialogue between the organization and its stakeholders. Moreover, utilizing the interactive capabilities of a Web page has been noted as a key to getting users to not only visit a site but also to return. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) On the other hand, Day (1997) contends that a Web site is successful not because of the site’s icons, graphics, content, color, page length, number of links, connection speed or any other technological variable. Instead, Day (Ibid.) maintains that a Web site works because the people it serves like it. Thus, research is needed to explore Web site’s ‘likeability’ factors, so that marketers can understand how those factors can be controlled and their effectiveness monitored. (Day, 1997; Huizingh, 2002)

Several reasons have been given as to why, in recent years, firms have scurried to create Web sites. (Watson et al., 1998) These reasons include reducing the costs of matching buyers and sellers, promoting the firm’s image and visibility, improving customer service, expanding in the market and lowering stakeholder communication costs. Upon second glance, though, this list is simply a description of tactics that can take advantage of the technology inherent in the Internet; it describes the obvious ways in which the new technology may be employed in business. Thus, businesses are now finding that Web sites can be pursued from a more strategic angle, and are thus grappling with defining the objectives of their online presence. (Ibid.)

Professional Services: 7.8%, Spectator Spending: 13.4%, Sponsorships: 3.3%, Medical Spending: 6.5%, Travel: 8.3%, Multimedia: 1.1%, Gambling: 9.7%, Operating Expenses: 11.8%. 

4
The fact that corporate/organizational Web sites are likely to be seen by a variety of audiences presents several organizational identity management challenges. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) Specifically, Web sites must meet the needs of each audience without simultaneously alienating other groups. This matter is further complicated because each public has its own goals and purposes. An organization subtly displays its commitments to its various publics, issues and communication styles in the content and organization of its Web materials. Thus, on the basis of the links on the page, Web sites can be viewed to infer which publics the corporation considers to be of primary and secondary importance. Web pages also communicate by way of the content that is omitted. Similarly, the presence or absence of email links and other feedback devices on a corporate Web site may be read as a statement of the kind of communication relationships the organization prefers to have with its publics. Hence, Web sites are more than the sum of their components. Sites are designed to highlight some information and place other information in the background. Thus, a question to ponder is how organizations should design their Web sites to facilitate more equitable relationships with publics. (Ibid.)

Hence, the implications of maintaining an organizational Web site are broad, meaning online PR must be considered to be an important component of the overall strategic plan. (Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001) It is vital that organizations rethink their public relations strategies and tactics to include their organizational Web site. (Hurme, 2001) Some questions to be asked: Are organizations creating Web sites that allow for interactivity with stakeholders? Or are organizations simply creating a Web presence to keep up with their competition? (Kent et al., 2003) More specifically, how have sports teams adapted their public relations strategies to meet the changing demands of the publics they serve? (Shannon, 1999) The answers to these questions have serious implications for the development of the Web as a public relations tool. (Kent et al., 2003)

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is specifically formulated as:

“To gain a deeper understanding of how sports teams’ Web sites are used as public relations tools.”

1.4 Research Questions
The research questions are specifically formulated as:

- **Research Question 1:** How can the objectives of sports Web sites be described?
- **Research Question 2:** How can the stakeholders served on sports Web sites be described?
- **Research Question 3:** How can the design of sports Web sites be described?
1.5 Demarcations
Due to the limited amount of time available for this study, an attempt has been made to narrow the focus. Therefore, this study will concentrate on the Web sites and public relations practices of collegiate sports teams in the United States only, leaving out any discussion of professional, semi-professional, high school, or recreational teams. Such a focus has been chosen due to the fact that U.S. collegiate sport teams receive a great amount (if not at times, the highest amount) of attention from the U.S. public in terms of revenues, attendance figures, and fan base.

1.6 Disposition of the Thesis
This thesis is divided into seven chapters. In this, the first chapter, the reader has received an introduction to the field of study, followed by a problem discussion, a presentation of the overall purpose of the study, the research questions to be investigated, and the demarcations of the study. In the second chapter, the reader is provided with a literature review of previous research conducted within the area of the overall purpose, which serve as theories for the study. The conceptual framework, following the literature review and presented in chapter three, further delineates the theories that will be used. Chapter four describes and motivates the choices of methodology made for this thesis. In chapter five, the collected empirical data is presented. The empirical data that has been gathered is then examined and analyzed in chapter six. In the seventh and final chapter, findings and conclusions are drawn based on the findings of the research conducted. At the end of the seventh chapter, implications for further research are presented.
2 Literature Review

In the previous chapter, an introduction and background to the research area of this study was presented, as well as the overall purpose and research questions. This chapter presents a review of literature relating to each of the three stated research questions.

2.1 How can the objectives of sports Web sites be described?

Organizations may have contrasting objectives for establishing and maintaining a Web site (Berthon et al., 1996), yet Kent et al. (2003) maintains that most organizational Web sites are designed to provide some form of information. Berthon et al. (1996) reiterates this, stating that one useful application of Web sites is to provide detailed product information and specifications. A firm may aim to use a Web site as a means of introducing itself and its products to a wide audience, creating corporate and product awareness in the market. (Berthon et al., 1996; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998; Kim et al., 2003) This can be done through the promotion of new initiatives, through a change or improvement of image and through improving or enhancing customer service, all of which may be accomplished with the use of a Web site. (Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001)

Kent et al. (2003) claims that an organization’s Web site objectives include providing a controlled means through which the organization can communicate with stakeholder publics and the media. (Kent et al., 2003) Unlike traditional mass media channels, a single Web site can have multiple segments, with each segment targeted to a different audience, such as customers, government officials, news media, and employees. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) Web sites must thus provide these audiences with a means through which organizations can be viewed and better understood. (Kent et al., 2003) Thus, by fostering and encouraging consumer involvement, Web sites establish interactivity and build a customer database. (Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001)

Additionally, Web sites must provide users with a forum that supports two-way communication; they should be places where users can make requests and get immediate results. (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998) Web sites have the capacity to improve communication amongst the organization, its leadership, and other publics, including providing for customer service communication and feedback (such as email). (Kim et al., 2003) Moreover, they are ideal places to handle customer complaints, queries and suggestions. (Berthon et al., 1996) In fact, Kent (1998) maintains that the availability of a dialogic or feedback loop in organizational Web sites may be the single most important reason that a Web site exists. Dialogic communication is the process of open and negotiated dialogue and is characterized by give and take of all parties involved. Maintaining an effective dialogic loop means more than just having an email address for a Webmaster and a place for visitors to leave “comments” on a Web site. In contrast, this requires open channels of communication and a commitment by organizations to value the ideas of publics. (Ibid.)

Web sites should provide added value to the user; they must give users a reason to visit and a reason to return. (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998) Watson et al. (1998) are in
accordance with this, maintaining that success in the electronic marketplace is due in part to understanding how to attract and lure potential customers into repeatedly visiting a company’s Web site. An “attractor” is a Web site with the capability to both attract and interact with a relatively large number of visitors in a target stakeholder group. Simply attracting visitors is not enough; the strength of a Web site lies in its ability to interact with visitors on the first visit and thereafter. The strategic use of hard-to-imitate attractors, which serve to gain visibility with targeted stakeholders, is a key factor online. (Ibid.)

Hence, Web sites may be grouped into categories by the means through which they attract visitors. (Watson et al., 1998) Web sites may be classified as follows: The Entertainment Park, The Archive, Exclusive Sponsorship, The Town Hall, The Club, The Gift Shop, The Freeway Intersection, and The Customer Service Center. Before illustrating the variety of tactics used by organizations to make their sites attractors, it is important to note that an organization is not restricted to using only one form of attractor. In fact, it makes sense to take a variety of approaches in order to maximize the attractiveness of a site and to meet the diverse needs of Web visitors. (Ibid.)

The Entertainment Park
Web sites in this category engross visitors in activities that demand a high degree of participation while also offering entertainment, such as games. These sites are interactive, recreational and challenging. Potential competitive advantages gained through these attractors are high traffic potential and creation or enforcement of an image of a dynamic, exciting, and friendly corporation. (Ibid.)

The Archive
Archive sites aim to aid visitors in discovering the historical aspects of a company’s activities. Their appeal lies in the instant and universal access to interesting information and the visitor’s ability to research the past. These attractors are hard to imitate and generally impossible to replicate. The potential competitive advantage is both building and maintaining an image of a trusted, reputable, and well-established corporation. (Ibid.)

Exclusive Sponsorship
An organization that is the exclusive sponsor of an event of public interest may use its Web site to extend its audience reach. Sponsorship attractors have broad traffic potential and can attract many visitors in short time periods, such as by providing live, updated scores of a sponsored tennis tournament. These attractors can enhance the image of the corporation through the provision of timely, exclusive, and valuable information. Important considerations for these sites include creating awareness prior to the event and keeping the Web site current. (Ibid.)

The Town Hall
Town halls have traditionally been venues for assembling people to listen to famous speakers, attending a conference, or participating in a seminar. Public forums such as these are now found on certain Web sites. These attractors can have broad traffic potential depending on the forum members. Town halls have a potentially higher level of
interactivity and participation may be more engaging than sponsorship sites (discussed above). (Ibid.)

The Club
People generally have a need to be a part of a group and maintain satisfactory relationships with others, thus for some, a Web club may satisfy this need. Clubs such as these are electronic communities where visitors typically must register or become members to participate. Web clubs are engaging because they are interactive and recreational. Additionally, these attractors can potentially increase company loyalty, enhance customer feedback and improve customer service as members help other members. (Ibid.)

The Gift Shop
Gifts and free samples are generally successful in gaining attention. Web gifts regularly include digitized material such as software, photographs, and research reports, as well as some non-digital offerings. Sites such as these can have bursts of high attractiveness and traffic. (Ibid.)

The Freeway Intersections
Web sites that provide advanced information processing services, such as search engines, can present multi-dimensional Web freeway intersections of visitors moving in all directions. Also within this category are sites that focus upon specific customer segments, trying to become their entry point to the Web. The ultimate goal of these sites is to become a one-stop resource center. (Ibid.)

The Customer Service Center
A Web site can be very attractive to existing customers by directly meeting information needs. Many organizations now use their Web site to assist in the ownership phase of the customer service life cycle. (Ibid.)

Thus, organizations are taking a wide variety of approaches to making their Web sites attractive to a range of stakeholders. Some Web sites’ objective is to attract a broad audience, some of whom may never purchase any products but who may influence the perception of the company via word-of-mouth communication. Other Web sites focus more on serving only one stakeholder group- the customer- by stimulating traffic to the site and offering superior customer service to those customers. (Ibid.)

2.2 How can the stakeholders served on sports Web sites be described?
Stakeholder theory postulates that there are a variety of strategic publics that can influence an organization. Several organizational communication theories (situational, resource dependency and dialogic theory) help to explain the dynamics of organizational response to stakeholders in general and organizational responsiveness through the Internet and WWW specifically. (Kent et al., 2003)
Situational theory states that external publics exert influence on organizations. (Kent et al., 2003) These external publics, or stakeholders, have specific information needs and enact specific communication behaviors. One of the strengths of Internet mediated communication is its ability to unite publics, or to help individuals recognize that they share interests with others. Kent et al. (Ibid.) maintains that in applying situational theory to the Internet, there is a shift in focus away from publics being organized around organizations and their problems and towards a realization that publics are formed, and reformed, through mediated communication behaviors. While situational theory states how and why publics apply pressure to organizations, it is also important to understand why publics have power over some organizations. Hence, another way to understand the stakeholder is through resource dependency theory. (Kent et al., 2003)

Resource dependency theory claims that organizations vary in their dependence on external publics and their environment. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), as referenced in Kent et al. (2003), state that “organizations depend on their environments. Survival comes when the organization adjusts to, and copes with, its environment.” Many public relations managers inherently assume a resource dependency model when they theorize about the organization-public relationship; this dependency extends to Internet-mediated relationships as well. For example, Badaracco, (1998) as referenced in Kent et al. (2003) stated that on account of new communication technologies, “the individual enjoys unprecedented access to information and a newfound advantage in the sphere of public influence.” Thus, the question “How can organizations meet the information needs of mediated stakeholders?” arises. Dialogic theory provides a set of communication assumptions to link the situational and resource-dependency theories discussed above. (Kent et al., 2003)

Dialogic theory proposes that in order for organizations to create effective organization-public communication channels, they must be willing to interact with publics in honest and ethical ways. (Ibid.) Dialogic communication is the process of open and negotiated dialogue and is characterized by give and take of all parties involved. Organizations may initiate dialogue by providing their publics with contact information on the Web site so that publics may write the organization with specific questions, and the questions must be answered. (Kent, 1998) Kent et al. (2003) conclude that the more an organization depends on its publics for achieving its mission, the more it should employ dialogic features into its Web site.

Figure 2.1 shows the various publics with which the collegiate sports organizations in general, and the Sports Information Director³ (SID) in particular, must interact. (Mullin et al., 1993)

³ A collegiate Sports Information Director (SID) is the equivalent to a professional sports team’s PR Director, Press Director, Promotion Director, Director of Communications or Director of Community Relations.
Mullin et al. (1993) claim that organizations are responsible for compiling, presenting, and disseminating organizational information to the general public or to special segments of the population (stakeholders such as alumni, sportswriters, and electronic media). This includes publishing programs and manuals, working with special interest groups to ensure the accuracy of information and answering mail and other inquiries from the general public. (Ibid.)

Helitzer (2001) highlights four stakeholder groups whose needs should be met on collegiate sports Web sites: media, fans, staff and athletes, and revenue sources. With regard to the media, the Web offers Sports Information Directors remarkable freedom, serving as a public relations machine for SID offices of all sizes and effectively placing the media world at its fingertips. (Ibid.) The top 14 categories of information that sports Web sites should provide to the media are:

1. News releases personalized for print or broadcast
2. Event and game schedules
3. Media guide reprint and recent updates
Web sites should provide sports journalists with most of their pre-game and post-game information. (Ibid.) The 24-hour nature of the Web makes it an indispensable tool for reporters whose time-zone deadlines vary. The ease with which the Web can be updated permits the SID to deliver media guides and personalized sports news whenever he/she wishes, and, for reporters, it is waiting for them whenever they need it. (Ibid.)

The second public which sports Web sites should aim to serve is the online fan (Ibid.) Targeting the audience is important, so Web designs should be organized and easy to follow by whoever happens to be at the other screen and keyboard (Ibid.) Key items in fan sites include: future schedules; ticket information and order form; special event registration statistics; current team records; historical records; action photographs; personnel bios of team and administrators; recruiting; research; fundraising and sponsorships; licensed product sales; individual email addresses; outlet for suggestions and complaints; marketing (turn spectators into consumers); broadcast coverage; periodic newsletter; contact titles, numbers and addresses; employment opportunities; community involvement; preseason training and exhibitions; fan clubs; stadium travel and parking advice (maps); contests and free premiums; autograph, photo, and tour sessions; warm-up exercises and training (Helitzer, 2001).

Thirdly, meeting the needs of the internal staff and athletes should not be overlooked on the Web site. Chat sessions allow fans to talk to star players and serve as a nice change from other PR techniques such as personal appearances and autograph signing sessions. (Helitzer, 2001) An additional Web site function includes serving as an effective vehicle for recruiting student-athletes. Potential student-athletes from all over the world may virtually visit a University’s campus and athletics facility, broadening the reach of coaches who generally recruit solely in the surrounding region. (Ibid.)

Finally, Web sites can serve as gateways to lucrative revenue sources. Web sites can serve as profit centers in six major areas, with the first area being advertising. Advertising on the Web has become a popular profit center for collegiate and pro teams alike. It is the most rapidly expanding revenue source because it offers sponsors two important features: a) pinpoint precision in target marketing, and b) the ability to measure each ad by the number of hits. A second potential profit area is the subscription. Some home pages tease the visitor with the home page, then limit special features to those willing to pay a
subscription. Contests, fantasy games, and exclusive columns by prominent sportswriters are also available for an additional charge on some sites. The third profit area discussed by Helitzer (2001) is that of the sale of tickets. Admission tickets are every sport organization’s largest online products, which has been made easier to sell online by offering seating charts and providing tickets at pre-established will-call booths. (Ibid.) A fourth profit center is the sale of licensed merchandise, which has been shown to increase dramatically when offered on the Internet. This medium allows fans to purchase licensed merchandise without every having to go to a game or sporting goods outlet. Moreover, digital offerings may be sold as well, such as highlight reels from recent games and training and news conference videos. A fifth profit center involves fundraising. A fundraising campaign on the Internet has much more reach and depth in terms of whom the message will reach and what the target audience will learn about the campaign. The potential exists to develop fans that are not alumni or local fans. Finally, research may serve to provide profit to the organization. Custom polls may be tailored for Web sites, with responses including demographic and financial data of each participant. This provides future further targeted mailing lists for promotions and fundraising events. (Ibid.)

2.3 How can the design of sports Web sites be described?

The literature reviewed for this research question will be divided into three sections. First, Web site design characteristics will be examined, followed by an examination of Web site opportunities, and concluding with Web site limitations.

2.3.1 Web site Design

Most public relations professionals believe that an effective Web site design has the potential to facilitate public interaction with the organization. (Kent et al., 2003) Thus, a Web site should be viewed as an intentional act of communication that signifies an organization in its multiple facets to its multiple audiences. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) Consequently, organizations should be strategic in the design of their Web sites to improve responsiveness to stakeholder information needs. (Kent et al., 2003) As Web sites have increased in importance, various authors in public relations have proposed recommendations for designing effective Web sites. (Hallahan, 2001)

To begin, it is important to identify the customers. (Day, 1997) Before the site can be designed with text and pictures, a company must know who its customers are and what they hope to gain from being on the company’s site. Additionally, the company must try to learn who is truly interested in the site’s offerings versus who is just passing through, then focus on targeting those who are truly interested. Such knowledge may be gained by using a registration page, a membership fee, or the specificity of the site’s content. The point is to measure the quality of the visitors and see if it matches the profile of the desired customers. (Ibid.)

Along similar lines, the site’s purpose must be distinctly articulated. (Day, 1997) Every effective communication has a clearly stated purpose; thus, the company must tell the customers immediately why the Web site is there and what it will do for them. Web sites
that do not clearly state “who they are” and what they offer customers reflect a high
degree of ambiguity. (Morris-Lee, 2000) Once the purpose is known and stated,
companies may find out whether the right people are visiting the site, and whether they
doing what the company hopes they will do while there. (Day, 1997)

An additional criterion of high importance in designing a user-friendly Web site is strong,
relevant content. An important question to be asked is, does the content serve the needs
of the user? (Hallahan, 2001; Day, 1997) This question is answered by testing the content
on a target group in order to gain a better understanding of the customer’s needs,
behaviors and expectations. (Day, 1997) According to Hallahan (Ibid.) and Ashcroft and
Hoey (2001), successful Web sites are those to which people return frequently, in turn
placing a high importance on the addition of new content and frequent updates to
permanent content. Public relations professionals must help develop Web sites that
contain newsworthy and credible information. (Hallahan, 2001) The information housed
on a Web site should also maintain an element of fun and excitement in line with the
ethos of the new medium; Web sites should provide dynamic, engaging, value-adding
experiences for users; they should never be repositories for passive, static marketing
information. (Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998) All
information contained in a Web site must be brief, timely, accurate, updated often,
contain strong graphic design, and offer click-through links. (Helitzer, 2001) Features and
services should be unique to the Internet and not easily replicated in traditional marketing
media. (Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998)

Moreover, effective Web documents are not merely print documents posted online.
(Hallahan, 2001) Significant differences exist between print and the Web in terms of
layout, with computer screens having smaller “canvas” size, a horizontal orientation,
resolution issues, scrolling, multimedia, and interactivity. Additionally, reading patterns
are different online, so effective writing online uses about half the words found in print
and with information arranged in inverted pyramids, similar to news stories. Equally
concerning to PR practitioners is excessive or needless use of state-of-the-art devices
such as banners, animations, and pop-up windows. Users are content-focused and suffer
from “banner blindness”; thus, important public relations messages should not be placed
in secondary banner positions. Additionally, PR practitioners should think carefully about
how the placement and appearance of key messages on a Web page may influence the
accessibility of the message by users. (Ibid.)

According to Kent (1998), Web sites should offer information that is of value to diverse
publics, rather than just customer or industry specific publics. Web sites receive visitors
because they offer services of ongoing value to a variety of publics, such as hosting
online forums with organizational members. These forums create avenues for publicity in
their own right. (Ibid.) Bulletin board and chat line discussion group systems develop a
sense of shared interests. Such features cost very little to the organization running the
Web site while in turn allowing visitors and fans to share in the team’s glory. Web site
loyalty grows as the community the fans participate in grows as well. (Helitzer, 2001)
Other features of value include providing historical information about the organization,
FAQ’s (frequently asked questions), and product information. (Kent, 1998) Sports Web
sites that contain trivia are very popular, as visitors can test their knowledge and even compete against other visitors, in some instances. The Web home page is important to alumni, as these sites can contain schedules, scores, promotional information, chat rooms, video, radio interviews with coaches and athletes, and much more. For the Sports Information Director, every hit becomes an opportunity to conduct a demographic survey and compile email lists of important alumni. (Helitzer, 2001) Web sites that make an effort to foster revisits by the means discussed above will become informational resources for publics and media representatives. (Kent, 1998)

Hallahan (2001) maintains that regardless of how interesting or pertinent a Web site’s content might be to prospective users, the information’s utility will be diminished if the content cannot be accessed quickly, easily, and in a way that is subjectively pleasing. Thus, coherent structures should be created to mirror customer’s needs. (Day, 1997) Creating a coherent structure is a function of two variables: following the logic determined by the customer and purpose, and stating clearly along the way what you are doing. Anyone should be able to find the site, discern instantaneously what it is about, navigate quickly to key pages, understand what they can do next and decide whether or not to do it. A structure’s effectiveness may be monitored in two ways: first, by observing the behavior of those entering the site and starting to move through it; second, by seeing whether those visitors return to the site. Additionally, a Web site must have a style that is appropriate for the audience’s needs. Simple design rules need to be followed on a Web site just as they do on a printed page. The first rule relates to integrity; the material needs to be presented in a consistent manner. The second rule relates to clarity; a good layout assists comprehension of the site, meaning rules about how text is laid out and why images are used become vital to the comprehension of the site. (Ibid.)

Kent (1998) notes that while the Web is a communication environment designed to be rich in content, graphics and sounds are not the most useful tools for providing publics with information. Thus PR professionals need to be wary of attempting to have the most sophisticated, technologically advanced Web site and instead focus on the user, bearing in mind that a well-designed Web site is one that works. (Hallahan, 2001) However, used in moderation, some graphics and interactive capabilities can make for an effective Web site. (Ibid.)

Public relations professionals should look for the following benchmarks as indicators of design simplicity. First, systems compatibility, which refers to whether the site’s configuration is technically compatible with the largest number of browsers, monitor sizes, screen resolutions, color system, and modem that might be used by target publics. (Hallahan, 2001) Secondly, the importance of speed of use and decision making cannot be overlooked. (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998) Specifically, it is important that the site allows for quick selections of desired items and timely decisions, avoiding items that require excessive loading time, long scrolls of text, or huge menus of choices. Thirdly, ease of navigation is important; users should be allowed to move easily from page to page, aided by navigational devices such as navigation bars and icons, color and typographic coding, backlinks to tops of documents and main pages and simplified main menus. (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998) Finally, accuracy of
use and success of search rates should be emphasized. The site should be logically organized and intuitive to users. Successful searches lead to user satisfaction, assuming the information ultimately obtained is complete, accurate and relevant. (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998)

2.3.2 Web site Opportunities
While Web sites can be used to disseminate messages like traditional media, they can also be used to collect data about target audiences and monitor public opinion on issues of interest to an organization. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) Moreover, through a Web site, an organization can proactively engage publics in direct dialogue about a variety of topics, including organizational policies and customer opinions. Thus, the interactive features of the Web enable organizations to maintain closer contact with their customers than has previously been possible. (Ibid.) Gordon and MacIntosh (2000), as referenced in Ashcroft and Hoey (2001), describe the potential benefits of this interactive medium:

“The fact that the Internet is an interactive medium is the key to the use PR professionals can make of it. It gives [PR professionals] the chance to engage with audiences in ways previously unknown. Traditional top-down one-way communication enables broad, but shallow, relationships with large numbers of people. Networking events, conferences, and briefing meetings allow rich relationships with small numbers of people. The potential of the Internet is to enable rich relationships with broad numbers and to target audiences at low marginal cost.”

As noted by several authors above (Esrock and Leichty, 2000; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001), the basis for the powerful opportunities provided in an interactive medium, as opposed to a one-way medium, is the potential to provide mutual communication. (Kiani, 1998) Communication opportunities provided by the Web are illustrated in the four situations in Table 2.1 below. (Ibid.)

Table 2.1: Various solutions to a two-way communication medium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumers</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumers</td>
<td>Consumers to Consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Consumers to Company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Kiani, 1998, p. 186.

In an interactive medium, such as a Web site, marketers may employ one or a combination of the communications alternatives shown in Table 2.1. These communication alternatives are described in detail below.

Company-to-consumers
Kiani (1998) states that marketers can use interactive media to provide higher services and lower cost by delivering up-dated product- and non-product-related information. As
compared to traditional marketing communication channels, the Web is a faster, less expensive, highly immediate communication medium, round the clock and global. (Ibid.) The immediacy of the Web becomes quite useful as a tool to respond to crises that require quick public relations action. For instance, a media alert posted on a Web site can quickly deny a negative rumor to both the news media and general public in seconds. (Helitzer, 2001) Furthermore, the Web offers wider and deeper material and richer advertisement content. (Kiani, 1998)

Three advantages the Web offer organizations are addressability, flexibility, and accessibility. With concern towards addressability, Kiani (1998) states that the Web is able to track the visitor uniquely in time and space, utilizing a type of “memory” to chart a visitor’s interests. Such memory works to the marketer’s advantage in terms of future targeting. (Ibid.) The low-cost and high-speed electronic management of dialogue is indeed new and value-adding. Specifically, the Web provides the opportunity for marketing to create individual relationships, managing markets of one, and addressing each in terms of its stage of development. Essentially, it represents the opportunity to customize and tailor either the product or the marketing effort to one consumer at a time. This allows the marketer to learn about an individual consumer over continual interaction as well as the possibility to deliver personalized services or products. (Kiani, 1998)

Regarding flexibility, when it comes to marketing, the Web is much more flexible than the traditional mass media. (Ibid.) The dynamic nature of Internet media allows information to be updated and expanded at relatively low cost. (Ainscough and Luckett, 1996) A Web page may be weighed as an electronic billboard, electronic advertisement, or electronic catalog that provides information on products or services plus contact information for interested consumers. (Kiani, 1998) However, a virtual advertisement or catalog is much more flexible than a physical advertisement or catalog in that it can gather updated information based on the immediate feedback received from consumers. (Ibid.)

With regards to accessibility, the Web offers companies the opportunity to expand their hours of business to include 24-hour access to products and (some) services on a global scale. (Kiani, 1998) Such accessibility is important when conducting business across different time zones or internationally, increasing the potential number of customers. Additionally, the virtual value chain redefines economies of scale, allowing small companies to achieve low unit costs for products and services in markets generally dominated by large companies. (Ibid.)

Consumers-to-Company

Consumers can actively choose whether to approach firms through their Web sites, making the customer now an active participant and partner in the production. (Kiani, 1998) According to Kierzkowski et al. (1996) as referenced in Kiani (1998), “In an interactive, two-way addressable world, it is the consumer- and not the marketer- who decides with whom to interact, what to interact about, and how to interact at all. Marketers have to earn the right to the digital relationship, and they have to do so by continuously enhancing the value they offer consumers.” Thus, the opportunity for
customer interaction is unprecedented. (Kiani, 1998) The opportunity can be realized in numerous ways; for instance, the design of new products, the development of product and marketing strategies, and the innovation of content. (Ibid.)

Consumers-to-Consumers
Kiani (1998) claims that there is a new form of segmentation in the market, asserting that commercial success in the on-line market will belong to those firms that organize electronic communities to meet multiple social and commercial needs. As stated by Kierzkowski et al. (1996) in Kiani (1998), “The more consumers invest time and develop familiarity in interacting with others, the less likely they are to start building these virtual relationships again elsewhere.” Kiani (1998) groups the various types of electronic communities into four distinct categories, with the first being a community of transaction which facilitates buying and selling of services and products and delivery of the relevant information. The second category is the community of interest, which brings together participants who interact with one another on specific topics. A community of fantasy constitutes the third category, whereby new environments, personalities, or stories are created. Finally, there exists a community of relationship around certain life experiences that are often very intense.

Company-to-Company
A key success factor in corporations is having the set of core competencies needed for excellence; however, that set of competencies is often too much for one firm, so companies often form partnerships. (Kiani, 1998) The Web facilitates partnering, in that a small company can be part of a group that gives it access to more customers or new markets. Such access is currently gained via increased traffic on a company’s web site. Traffic on a web site may be made by linking “from” other sites, linking “to” other sites, or going under one roof. (Ibid.)

Breitenbach and Van Doren (1998) state that the following Web site elements constitute opportunities for a company to increase its Web site value.

In-depth product/company information
Web sites should provide users the opportunity to receive free information via post regarding a company’s offerings. (Ibid.) Additionally, a company should dedicate a portion of its homepage to daily industry news or press releases regarding new product innovations. Moreover, a homepage must help users identify the location of dealers and/or outlets in the user’s area, as well as provide a toll-free number to contact for additional information and support. Furthermore, a company should make users aware of any community efforts and environmental projects in which the company is involved, as users may be more likely to purchase products from a socially responsible company. Finally, a company should also share information about the company’s history and culture, so that visitors become more familiar with the company with which they to do business. (Ibid.)

Open communications
A Web site should allow users to offer comments and complaints via e-mail to the Web site, allowing users to communicate directly with the company. (Ibid.) Additionally, Web sites should allow users to share their email addresses so that they may receive electronic updates from the company. Likewise, Web sites could also provide users with access to a company representative while online via electronic media, audio media, or video conferencing. (Ibid.)

**Real-time browsing/transactions**
Users should be able to browse a catalog of offerings enhanced by digital pictures, audio, or even video, while online. Moreover, users should also be able to complete transactions while online, including managing ordering, paying, and the shipping logistics online. Also, digital products should be delivered immediately to add value to buying these products online as compared to in a store. (Ibid.)

**Club membership/forum**
Web sites should provide users with the opportunity to join online clubs so that they may be eligible to receive extra benefits and offers. Companies should also dedicate a special section of their Web site to members who then can exchange information and share stories. The forum provides a feeling of belonging for visitors and in turn solidifies their affiliation with a company. Furthermore, company homepages could have an area dedicated to real-time discussions among users visiting the Web site, providing an engaging experience for users and also helping to “humanize” the Internet experience. (Ibid.)

**Give-aways**
Company Web sites could offer free computer-related accessories such as screen savers, wallpaper, and sound files that advertise the company’s products or services. (Ibid.)

**Entertainment**
Homepages could contain a section that focuses on contests and sweepstakes, as most people welcome the opportunity to win something. This technique encourages multiple visits and feeds the word-of-mouth advertising that pulses through the Internet community. Additionally, users should be able to engage in interactive games and puzzles, as such entertainment engages youth and adult audiences alike. (Ibid.)

**Virtual tour/experience**
Web sites could provide an experience whereby users control a virtual environment through the use of audio, graphical images and video. This is a unique way for visitors to share in the virtual experience. Likewise, some Web sites permit users to take real-time snapshots while they are on the company’s site. (Ibid.)

**Instructional support**
Every Web site should dedicate a section of its site to addressing questions and problems, such as a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. (Ibid.)

**Complementary services**
Company Web sites could provide links to other sites that contain information pertinent to the company’s products or services. Companies could also provide some support products and services for free, such as items that enhance or complement another of the company’s offerings. (Ibid.)

2.3.3 Web site Limitations

To begin, one practical limitation of the Internet is that the user must actively decide to visit the Web site. (Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998) The element of choice exists on the Internet, as compared to the element of surprise, which is central to TV and radio. Another limitation is that there is little selectivity of audience; the Web site can be accessed by anyone on the Internet. Moreover, the Web site must compete with thousands of other Web sites, all of which are trying to attract and maintain visitors. Furthermore, individuals on the Internet have well-defined demographics and psychographics which may be inappropriate for certain company Web sites. (Ibid.)

An additional limitation mentioned by Kent et al. (2003) is that most organizations cannot determine whether or not their Web sites are actually reaching their target audience. Moreover, the purpose of many organizations’ Web sites is to serve as a “status symbol” or serve in an “image building” function as opposed to serving as a relationship-building tool. In this sense, having a presence is much more important than having quality content. Kent et al. (Ibid.) reveal that while many public relations practitioners recognize the value of their Web sites for media relations, reaching new audiences, and building relationships, most of the practitioners view their responsibility for the organization’s Web site design and content as a “B-list” job. According to research by Kent et al. (Ibid.), an organization’s Web site is infrequently updated (ranging from less than a month to more than two years) and generally fails to safeguard the privacy of its publics who use the site (97%). Thus, public relations’ responsibility for Web site design and content emerges as tenuous at best. (Kent et al., 2003)

Furthermore, there is an inconsistency between what practitioners believe is possible through the Internet and what they are actually doing to facilitate relationship building. (Kent et al., 2003) Specifically, in the design of corporate Web pages, a gap appears between acknowledging the importance of the concerns of a public and actually engaging that same public interactively. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) If a corporate site is to truly serve as an interactive tool, email links and navigational features should be featured on the front Web page. (Ibid.) Thus, despite the recommendations of scholars to incorporate two-way (and dialogic) communication channels, most Web sites fail to effectively maintain open channels of communication with stakeholders. Hence, to make the Web a successful public relations tool, it is important to understand its potential as well as its limitation. Specifically, the potential with Webbed communication is for organizations to have direct communication with interested publics. The limitation, on the other hand, is that the actual design of a Web site can dramatically influence a visitor’s perception of an organization. (Ibid.)

Some authors are wary of the Web on the grounds that it is being misused and sometimes incorrectly integrated and implemented as a communication tool. (Esrock and Leichty,
2000) In fact, the majority of Web sites fail usability tests because they are extremely slow to load or make it troublesome to locate information. This problem becomes heightened when the home page of a Web site fails to provide strong cues as to content and how it can be accessed. Accordingly, first-time visitors who encounter usability or slow-load problems often will fail to return to a site, rendering the medium a virtually useless communication tool. (Ibid.)

Public relations practitioners have recognized the difficulty that users encounter when utilizing Web site content. (Hallahan, 2001) In a survey of 49 senior U.S. public relations officers in 1998, 11% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the Internet was too chaotic. (Ibid.) Specifically, failure to provide clear content labels has been identified as a persistent design defect in many corporate Web sites. (Esrock and Leichty, 2000) Twenty-six percent agreed or strongly agreed that it was difficult to move about online and 40% agreed or strongly agreed that Internet content was too unwieldy. Additionally, difficulty in using information on the Web ranked fourth among Web-related problems named by 61 public relations professionals in a conference survey. Moreover, studies show that users find information only 42% of the time, even when users are taken to the correct page before beginning a search. (Hallahan, 2001)

Thus, the public relations field might not be taking full advantage of the opportunities available on the Web. (Ibid.) The lack of readily available press contact information is a major complaint by press reporters, along with poor design and the lack of product information. Another pertinent issue deals with the perceived credibility of the Web. Specifically, journalists find Web sites to be sorely lacking in credibility, regardless of the sponsor of the site. An additional problem deals with the cultural appropriateness of a design. While one of the benefits of a Web site is to provide worldwide, 24-hour-a-day access to organizational information, Web design criteria have not tended to reflect the preferences of people in those cultures. Thus, public relations practitioners need to be watchful to avoid ethnocentric practices. (Ibid.)
3 Conceptual Framework

In the previous chapter, literature was reviewed for each of the three stated research questions. In this chapter, the emerged conceptual framework for the literature reviewed will be presented. The structure for this chapter will mirror that of the previous chapter, in that each research question will be addressed in turn.

A conceptual framework may be defined as the main dimensions, factors or variables to be studied, and the presumed relationship between them. (Miles and Huberman, 1994) Of the theories presented in the literature review, the concepts that are perceived to be most pertinent for this research will be chosen, in order to turn the research questions posed into something on which data may be collected. All selected concepts have been chosen on the basis of their potential strength as topics for data collection.

3.1 How can the objectives of sports Web sites be described?
The first research question will investigate how the objectives of sports Web sites may be described. When collecting data, an attempt will be made to see to what degree the literature is applicable in this study. Specific objectives that will be investigated include the eclectic list shown below:

**Company/product awareness and information**
- Provision of general information as well as detailed product information and specifications (Berthon et al., 1996; Kent et al., 2003)
- Creating/increasing awareness by introducing an organization and/or its products to a market(s) (Berthon et al., 1996; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998; Kim et al., 2003)
- Promotion of new initiatives (Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001)

**Communication/customer support**
- Communication with stakeholder publics and the media (Kent et al., 2003)
- Establishing interactivity (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998)
- Building a customer database (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998)
- Providing a forum for two-way communication (Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998)
- Improving communication amongst the organization, its leadership, and other publics (Kim et al., 2003)
- Handling of customer complaints, queries and suggestions. (Berthon et al., 1996)

The investigated objectives shown above were divided into two categories (company/product awareness and information and communication/customer support) by the author in an attempt to simplify the objectives into two general categories. The eclectic list of objectives will be investigated because together they can be used to develop a richer understanding of how the objectives of (sports) Web sites can be described.

Additionally, Watson et al.’s (1998) discussion of Web sites as attractors will be investigated. Specifically, Watson et al. (1998) maintains that success in the electronic marketplace is due in part to understanding how to attract and lure potential customers...
into repeatedly visiting a company’s Web site. The various classifications of Web sites depending on their objectives as attractors will thus be investigated in an attempt to classify sports Web sites into one or more category. Categories to be investigated include those described in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1:** Web site attractors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Attractor</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Entertainment Park</td>
<td>Offers entertainment and a high degree of participation. Interactive, recreational and challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Archive</td>
<td>Aids in discovery of company’s history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive Sponsorship</td>
<td>Provides timely, exclusive, valuable information regarding an event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Town Hall</td>
<td>Venue for forums and discussions; participation is engaging; high interactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Club</td>
<td>Visitors must register to participate; interactive, recreational and social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gift Shop</td>
<td>Gifts and free samples used to gain attention; generally digitized products such as software or photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Freeway Intersection</td>
<td>Present advanced information search services (search engines); may aim to become a user’s entry to the Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Customer Service Center</td>
<td>Meet customer information needs and assist in ownership phase of product life cycle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Watson et al. (1998)*

The aim in investigating the attractors in Table 3.1 is to see whether one or more attractors may be used to describe the objective of the investigated collegiate sports Web site. While this study is also suitable to be investigated as it pertains to a Web site’s design (i.e., under research question three), the decision was made to investigate the attractors as they pertain to (sports) Web sites’ objectives. The author feels that the data collected on the attractors used to lure and engage visitors will aid in describing sports Web sites’ objectives.

3.2 How can the stakeholders served on sports Web sites be described?

This question aims to describe sports Web site stakeholders. Mullin et al. (1993) and Helitzer’s (2001) theories will be investigated to determine their applicability to collegiate sports Web sites. Specifically, Mullin et al. (1993) states that collegiate sports organizations should interact with the following publics:

- NCAA
- Conference
- Booster Club
- Alumni/ae: Local, Regional, and National
- Government: Local, State and National
- Print Media: Local, Regional and National
- Radio
- (University/College): President, Board of Trustees, Athletic Department, Coaching Staff, Players
- Television
- Opponents
- Suppliers/Vendors
- Fans/Spectators
- Potential Recruits
Local Business Community

Sponsors/Patrons

The chosen collegiate sports Web site will be investigated to see if the publics above are addressed and served. Mullin et al.’s (1993) theory will be used due to the fact that it ties directly into sports public relations.

Helitzer (2001) states that four stakeholder groups’ needs should be met on collegiate sports Web sites: media, fans, staff and athletes, and revenue sources. With regards to the media, the top 14 categories of information that sports Web sites should provide are:

1. News releases personalized for print or broadcast
2. Event and game schedules
3. Media guide reprint and recent updates
4. Statistical records and averages
5. Recent game results
6. Season compilations and comparisons
7. Press conference dates and summations
8. Digest of coverage by other media
9. Media alerts and brief news filters
10. Current quote sheet
11. Special feature suggestions
12. Staff contact including all communication devices
13. League or conference information
14. Method of retrieving historical records

The investigated Web site’s inclusion or exclusion of the categories above will determine whether Helitzer’s (2001) theory with regard to the media as stakeholders is applicable. Secondly, sports Web sites should aim to serve the online fan (Ibid.) Indicators of service to the online fan include:

- Future schedules
- Ticket information and order form
- Special event registration statistics
- Current team records
- Historical records
- Action photographs
- Personnel bios of team and administrators
- Recruiting
- Research
- Fundraising and sponsorships
- Licensed product sales
- Individual email addresses
- Outlet for suggestions and complaints
- Marketing (turn spectators into consumers)
- Broadcast coverage
- Periodic newsletter
- Contact titles, numbers and addresses
- Employment opportunities
- Community involvement
- Preseason training and exhibitions
- Fan clubs
- Stadium travel and parking advice (maps)
- Contests and free premiums
- Autograph, photo, and tour sessions
- Warm up exercises and training

The investigated Web site’s inclusion or exclusion of the categories above will determine whether Helitzer’s (2001) theory with regard to fans as stakeholders is applicable.
The third public which sports Web sites should aim to serve is the internal staff and athletes. (Helitzer, 2001) Examples of serving these publics include offering chat sessions and recruiting information. (Ibid.) The investigated Web site will be examined to determine the degree to which these publics are being served online. Finally, Web sites can serve as revenue sources in six major areas (Helitzer, 2001): advertising, subscription, ticket sales, sale of licensed merchandise, fundraising and research. The investigated Web site’s inclusion or exclusion of information attractive to the revenue sources above will determine whether Helitzer’s (2001) theory is applicable.

Helitzer’s (2001) theory will be investigated due to the fact that it ties directly into sports public relations. It must be noted that an investigation of the factors stated in Helitzer’s (2001) theory could also be considered as they pertain to Web site design. However, the author determined that how these stakeholder publics are served on sports Web sites is directly related to describing stakeholders served on sports Web sites.

3.3 How can the design of sports Web sites be described?

This question aims to investigate how sports Web sites’ design may be described. In contrast to the Literature Review, wherein Research Question Three was broken down into three sections (Web site design, Web site opportunities and Web site limitations), data collected on Research Question Three will be limited to factors relating to Web site design only. This decision was made because the number of factors to investigate for all three sections would be too broad; the time allowed for this thesis restricts the amount of research that may be completed. Additionally, as mentioned previously, parts of the first two research questions relate directly or indirectly to Web site design. Thus, the topic of Web site design will not suffer from the exclusion of the two additional sections.

The following is an eclectic list of design guidelines mentioned by several authors with regards to Web sites as public relations tools. The eclectic list was chosen because it provides the richest description of a Web site’s design. The purpose in investigating these elements is to see whether the investigated Web site follows the authors’ (below) stated design criteria.

- Identification of the customers and their goals via registration pages, membership fees or the specificity of content (Day, 1997)
- Statement of the site’s purpose and value to customers (Day, 1997; Morris-Lee, 2000)
- Strong, relevant, updated, newsworthy, and credible content (Hallahan, 2001; Day, 1997)
- Brief text (Helitzer, 2001; Hallahan, 2001)
- Placement of content may influence users’ accessibility (Hallahan, 2001)
- Provision of information and services of value to diverse publics. (Kent, 1998)
  - Online forums, bulletin board, chat line discussion groups, trivia (Helitzer, 2001)
  - Historical company information, FAQ’s, and product information (Kent, 1998)
- Design simplicity
  - Design rules of integrity and clarity must be followed (Day, 1997)
  - Moderate and appropriate use of graphics and interactive features (Hallahan, 2001)
- Systems compatibility (Hallahan, 2001)
- Avoid excessive loading time, long scrolls or text, or huge menus of choices (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998)
- Ease of navigation; quick, easy and subjectively pleasing access to content (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998; Day, 1997)
- Accuracy of use and success of search rates (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998)
4 Methodology

In the previous chapter, a conceptual framework was presented, which detailed theories of relevance to the purpose and research questions of this thesis. In this chapter, the research process will be described. Specifically, the research purpose, research method, research strategy, data collection method, sample selection, data analysis and quality standards will be presented. Additionally, the considerations that have influenced the choices of methods and approaches will be presented.

4.1 Research Purpose

According to Yin (1989), the research purpose can be classified as being exploratory, descriptive or explanatory study. Exploratory research is suitable when a problem is difficult to structure and when there is uncertainty regarding what models to use and what characteristics and relations are important. The research is designed to allow an investigator to “look around” with respect to a phenomenon, with the aim being developing suggestive ideas. (Reynolds, 1971) According to Yin (1989), the research should be as flexible as possible and conducted in such a way that provides guidance for procedures to be performed during the next stage.

The objective of descriptive research is to provide a description of various phenomenon by breaking them into their component parts (Reynolds, 1971). The purpose might be to develop empirical generalizations, which are worth explaining and which lead to theory development (Ibid.). Additionally, descriptive research is often used when a problem is well structured and there is no intention to investigate cause/effect relations (Yin, 1989) In contrast, the objective of explanatory research is to analyze cause-effect relationships, explaining a cause that produces a certain effect. (Yin, 1989) The goal is to develop a precise theory that can be used to explain the empirical generalizations that evolved from the second stage (Reynolds, 1971). Based on this, the researcher formulates hypotheses that are then tested empirically (Yin, 1989).

Reynolds (1971) claims that it is not necessary to choose one of these purposes over of the others. Instead, he proposes a compound procedure whereby the research is divided into three different stages. The aim is to provide the researcher with a cycle of theory construction, theory testing, and finally theory reformulation. (Ibid.)

The research purpose and research questions of this thesis indicate that this study is primarily exploratory in that few studies have been conducted on how sports Web sites are used as public relations tools. The study then becomes somewhat descriptive as data is collected and analyzed. Finally, the study becomes slightly explanatory, as the research questions of this study will be answered in the final chapter and conclusions will be drawn.

4.2 Research Approach

This section will present some of the ways in which research may be approached, followed by the reasons for this study’s chosen approach. Deductive versus inductive research approaches will be examined first, followed by a discussion of qualitative and quantitative research.
4.2.1 Deductive versus Inductive Research
According to Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul (1997), conclusions may be drawn through either inductive or deductive research. Inductive research draws conclusions that are founded on empirical data. The researcher establishes theories and models that are based on different phenomena in reality. In contrast, in deductive research, researchers use existing theories and investigate empirically with different methods. (Ibid.) Existing theory is the base for deciding what information should be selected, how it should be understood and how the results are to be related to theory. (Patel & Davidson, 1994)

This study is deductive due to the means through which the purpose and research questions were developed. The starting point of this research was with theories previously in existence, which will then be compared with the empirical data to be collected and concluding with the drawing of logical conclusions from the research findings.

4.2.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Method
The qualitative and quantitative methods refer to the means through which one chooses to discuss and analyze the selected data (Patel & Davidson, 1994). According to Yin (1994), the best approach to use for a study depends on the purpose of the study and the accompanying research questions.

The qualitative method focuses on acquiring a profound knowledge and understanding of the studied object or objects. The prospect of making generalizations in a qualitative study is limited, as the number of objects is limited and studied more in depth. (Holme & Solvang, 1995) Additionally, qualitative research is distinguished by its closeness to the source form which the information is collected (Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1997). Moreover, Miles and Huberman (1994) note that qualitative data is a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local context. However, subjectivity by the researcher(s) is often an issue when conducting qualitative research (Holme & Solvang, 1995); thus, methods for reducing this subjectivity will be discussed in the validity and reliability section later in this chapter.

Quantitative research is characterized by a formalized and structured method (Ibid.). The research attempts to explain phenomena with numbers to obtain results, thereby founding the conclusions on data that can be quantified. In this approach, there is a relatively high degree of control from the researcher, who is objective in the study. The researcher defines what conditions are of interest to the study based on the stated research questions. Objectivity is essential in order to conduct formalized analyses and make comparisons and generalizations. Finally, generalizations can be made because many objects are studied, despite the fact that relatively little information is collected from each object. (Ibid.)

The qualitative approach was found to be most suitable for the purpose of this thesis, as the purpose is to gain a better understanding of how sports teams’ Web sites are used as public relations tools. The aim is not to make any generalizations, but instead establish a
closer contact with the studied object, with the intention of providing the researcher with a deeper understanding of the respondents’ perceptions of the studied Web site. Moreover, because the intention with this thesis is to explore and describe, and find as complete and detailed information as possible, the qualitative approach is found to be most suitable method.

4.3 Research Strategy

The selection of research strategy depends upon the type of the research questions asked, the extent to which the researcher has control over behavioral events and the degree to which the focus is on contemporary events. Additionally, there are five primary strategies in the field of social sciences: experiment, survey, archival analysis, history, and case study. (Yin, 1989) The relation of each condition to the five different research strategies can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Relevant situations for different research strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Strategy</th>
<th>Form of Research Question</th>
<th>Requires Control Over Behavioral Events</th>
<th>Focus on Contemporary Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, what, where, how many, how much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Analysis</td>
<td>Who, what, where, how many, how much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Yin, 1989, p. 17.*

The strategy to use may be determined in part based on the formulation of the research questions. The most common forms of research questions are formulated as who, what, where, how, and why questions. When how- or why- questions are used, the researcher can benefit by using case studies, experiments, or historical studies. (Yin, 1994)

An experiment is not a suitable research strategy in this study, because the study does not demand any control over behavioral events. A survey is not an appropriate strategy due to the fact that the aim is not to answer who, where, how many, or how much questions. Furthermore, due to the qualitative nature of this study, a survey is not appropriate because of its quantitative character. Archival analysis gives answers to how many and how much, yet this study is qualitative and does not seek to answer these questions, thus this is not found to be a suitable research strategy. Finally, this study is focused on contemporary time, therefore ruling out the use of a historical research strategy. Therefore, the strategy chosen for this study is the case study.

The case study is generally superior when answering how and why questions about a specific topic, when the researcher has little control over behavioral events and when the
events under investigation are contemporary (Yin, 1994). More specifically, case studies investigate a contemporary phenomenon within real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. (Yin, 1989) According to Yin (1994), there is a distinction between single and multiple case study design, in that evidence from multiple case studies tends to be more convincing, making the overall study more robust. Multiple case studies also increase the validity of the research and create an opportunity to compare the cases. (Ibid.)

Therefore, in order to address the research questions of this study, two case studies will be conducted. Cases will be based on stakeholder groups, with one case investigating external stakeholder groups and the other case investigating internal stakeholder groups. These stakeholder groups will be commenting on one collegiate sports Web site with which they are familiar, the Wake Forest University (WFU) Athletics page. By using a multiple case study design, the results may be compared and the study seen as more compelling.

Additionally, it should be noted that the author has a certain pre-understanding of the studied collegiate sports industry. Pre-understanding, as described by Gummeson (2000), is a combination of two factors. One factor that contributes to the growth of one’s pre-understanding is an individual’s own personal experience from both private and working life. The other factor is the knowledge that has been obtained via intermediaries such as textbooks, research reports, and lectures. The combination of one’s own and other people’s experiences comprises a store of knowledge that represents the individual’s pre-understanding at the start of a research project. (Ibid.)

Thus, it is important to note the aspects of the author’s pre-understanding, which in this instance includes being a former student-athlete, fan, and a former employee of the University’s athletic department. All these factors have related to the selection of Wake Forest University as a topic of interest in doing research. Thus, through the author’s experience in these various roles at the University and in its athletic department, the author brings some previous knowledge of collegiate sports to the writing of this thesis.

4.4 Data Collection Method

According to Yin (1994), there are six sources of evidence available for use in collecting qualitative empirical: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use several different sources of evidence. (Ibid.) The use of multiple sources of evidence is called triangulation, which means that the researcher has the opportunity to obtain multiple measures of the same phenomenon, in turn increasing the validity of any scientific study. Findings or conclusions resulting from a case study are likely to be more convincing and accurate when based on several different sources of information. None of the different sources has a complete advantage over the others. Because different sources are highly complementary, as many sources as possible should be used. (Ibid.)
Each data collection method has its own set of unique strengths and weaknesses, shown in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Six sources of evidence: strengths and weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td><em>Stable:</em> can be reviewed repeatedly&lt;br&gt;<em>Unobtrusive:</em> not created as a result of the case&lt;br&gt;<em>Exact:</em> contains exact names, references, and details of an event&lt;br&gt;<em>Broad coverage:</em> long span of time, many events and many settings</td>
<td><em>Retrievability:</em> can be low&lt;br&gt;<em>Biased selectivity:</em> if collection is incomplete&lt;br&gt;<em>Reporting bias:</em> reflects (unknown) bias of author&lt;br&gt;<em>Access:</em> may be deliberately blocked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Records</td>
<td>(Same as above for documentation)&lt;br&gt;Precise and quantitative</td>
<td>(Same as above for documentation)&lt;br&gt;Accessibility due to privacy reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td><em>Targeted:</em> focuses directly on case study topic&lt;br&gt;<em>Insightful:</em> provides perceived causal inferences</td>
<td>Bias due to poorly constructed questionnaires&lt;br&gt;Response bias&lt;br&gt;Inaccuracies due to poor recall&lt;br&gt;<em>Reflexivity:</em> interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Observation</td>
<td><em>Reality:</em> covers events in real time&lt;br&gt;<em>Contextual:</em> covers context of event</td>
<td>Time consuming&lt;br&gt;<em>Selectivity:</em> unless broad coverage&lt;br&gt;<em>Reflexivity:</em> event may proceed differently because it is being observed&lt;br&gt;<em>Cost:</em> hours needed by human observers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>(Same as for direct observations)&lt;br&gt;Insightful into interpersonal behavior and motives</td>
<td>(Same as for direct observations)&lt;br&gt;Bias due to investigator’s manipulation of events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Artifacts</td>
<td>Insightful into cultural features&lt;br&gt;Insightful into technical operations</td>
<td>Selectivity&lt;br&gt;Availability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Yin, 1994, p. 80

Archival records are characterized as precise and quantitative, making them inappropriate for the qualitative approach of this study. Physical artifacts are described as insightful when it comes to cultural features and technical operations; however, because this study is concerned with attitudinal questions, this source of evidence is also inappropriate.

The data collection methods that will be used for this study include interviews, documentation, and observations. Patel & Davidson (1994) claim that two types of data
may be collected: primary and secondary. Primary data is data that is gathered for specific research in response to a particular problem through, for example, interviews, questionnaires, or observations. On the other hand, secondary data may already have been collected for another purpose. More specifically, secondary data may be obtained through various kinds of documents, such as research reports, annual reports, books, and articles. (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1999)

Interviews will be the primary data collection method in this study on account of their strength in focusing directly on the topic of the case study. As a data collection method, interviews are one of the most significant sources for use in obtaining case study information. Specifically, the interview method allows the researcher to focus directly on the case study topic. Additionally, interviews are insightful in that they give perceived causal conclusions. (Yin, 1994) Potential disadvantages with interviews include the threat of bias due to poorly constructed questions as well as the risk of reflexivity, meaning that the interviewee tells the interviewer only what he/she wants to hear. (Ibid.)

Yin (Ibid.) describes three different types of interviews: open-ended, focused, and structured. The most commonly used interview method is the open-ended interview, whereby the researcher asks the respondent unstructured questions, thus allowing the interview to simulate a discussion. In this approach, respondents may be asked for facts as well as their own personal opinion. In a focused interview, the respondent is interviewed during a brief period of time. Similar to an open-ended interview, the character of the interview is open, and may be conducted via conversation between the respondent and the researcher. However, the researcher is most likely following a questionnaire. The purpose of a focused interview may be to confirm certain facts that are already known to the researcher. The third form of interview, the survey, is a combination of an interview and a survey. The interview is structured and based on predetermined questions. (Ibid.)

A focused interview will be used for this study. An interview guide will be used, enabling discussions within a limited number of issues related to the conceptual framework presented in the previous chapter. Consequently, the focused interview may be used to verify or dismiss the theories of this study. A focused interview can generally be conducted by telephone or in person. Telephone interviews are less costly and time consuming, making them useful when contacting distant respondents; on the other hand, personal interviews can be longer and include more complex questions.

Interviews will be conducted over a short period of time, such as 20-30 minutes, and will be conducted in a face-to-face manner. First, respondents will be contacted to assess their interest in participating in the study and to judge their familiarity with the Wake Forest University Athletics Web site. Only respondents familiar with the Wake Forest University Sports Web site will be interviewed. Once interested and qualified respondents have been located, an attempt will be made to set up an interview time. Following this, emails will be sent to the respondents that present subjects to be discussed in the interview, allowing the respondents to prepare themselves.
According to Yin (1994), making a field visit to the case study site provides the researcher with an opportunity for direct observation. Providing the object being studied is not purely historical, some relevant behaviors or conditions will likely be available for observation. This type of observation serves as yet another source of evidence, which is often useful in providing additional information about the object that is being studied. If the case study, for example, is about a new technology, observations of the technology are important to the understanding of it. For these reasons, direct observation will be used as an additional source of evidence for this study. Direct observations of the studied Web sites will be conducted prior to interviewing the respondents.

Finally, documentation, such as academic articles and previous studies on the research topic, has been used as a form of secondary data. As stated by Yin (1994), documentation offers the advantage of being static and thus may be re-examined when necessary. Additionally, documentation is unobtrusive, meaning that it is not made for this case. Moreover, documentation is exact, contains accurate references and other details, and has a broad coverage over time.

4.5 Sample Selection

In performing research, it is often impossible, impractical, or too expensive to collect data from all the potential units of analysis included in the research problem. Hence, a smaller number of units, called a “sample”, are often chosen to represent the relevant attributes of the whole set of units, termed the “population”. Because the samples are not perfectly representative of the population from which they are drawn, the researcher cannot be absolutely certain that the conclusions drawn will generalize the entire population. (Graziano & Raulin, 1997)

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), examining contrasting cases can help further the understanding of a single-case finding by specifying “how” and “where” the studied concepts take place. Thus, the authors maintain that if a finding holds true in one setting as well as in another comparable setting, the finding may be said to be more robust. Furthermore, although contrasting cases are used, a sampling frame is needed. The sampling frame for this study will consist of stakeholders who have certain knowledge of and interest in Wake Forest University (WFU) athletics.

Two case studies will be conducted for this study, each of which will be based on a stakeholder group. The first case study will be based on internal publics, with the sample selection consisting of one student-athlete, one coach, and one athletic administrator. The selected student-athlete is a member of the Women’s Soccer team at WFU. The respondent was a former teammate of the author’s and was known to spend a lot of time online checking on the scores of various sports teams at WFU. The selected coach is the assistant coach of the Women’s Soccer team at WFU. This respondent was selected because the author is aware of the respondent’s interest in Web sites, as she was a former Web site developer, thus indicating that she may be able to speak knowledgeably of the site’s design and usefulness. The chosen athletic administrator has worked in the University’s Athletics office for 12 years, and currently works in the Compliance Office.
The author knows of his familiarity with the Web site as he frequently references the site in speaking with student-athletes.

The second case study will be based on external publics, with the sample selection consisting of one fan, one media representative and one Wake Forest University alumnus. The author is familiar with the chosen fan, in that this fan was often seen at several athletic events at the University when the author attended WFU as well as thereafter. Moreover, in meetings with the fan away from the field/court, the fan always is “in the know” concerning players and teams, often referencing use of the Web site to acquire said knowledge. The media representative is a journalist from the Winston-Salem Journal, the newspaper that most closely covers WFU Athletics, as Wake Forest is located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The alumnus is a former Women’s Soccer player from WFU, who in discussions with the author often mentions using the WFU Web site to check on events and scores.

Thus, the appropriate respondents (those who will be able to provide rich information) have been selected in large part based on the author’s own knowledge of and connection to the Wake Forest University athletic department. It is understood that this association with the respondents may threaten the reliability of the data collected. However, every effort will be made by the author to reserve judgement and bias of the respondents’ comments and opinions so that the authenticity of the thoughts and opinions voiced by the respondents is held intact.

As stated by Gummeson (2000), the traditional research methods used in business research often do not provide satisfactory access. Access in this sense refers to the opportunities available to find empirical data (real-world data) and information. (Ibid.) Thus, there are times during research whereby an author’s access to certain individuals may positively affect the quality of empirical data that is collected. The individuals interviewed in this thesis are an example of such access. The author’s access to knowledge of the respondents’ roles both within the University and external to it have helped the author find respondents who may not be the “absolute best” people to interview, but ones which the author can in good conscience determine are “good enough” to provide accurate empirical data.

All individuals will be interviewed during one day’s time at Wake Forest University. Before each interview, each respondent will be reminded of the purpose of the study and how the interview will be conducted. Furthermore, the respondents will be advised to speak freely of their thoughts and opinions on the subject, and that there will be no right or wrong answers to the questions posed. Finally, the Wake Forest University Sports Web site will be made available to respondents during the interview. Respondents may use the Web site to illustrate their thoughts or opinions by using the mouse or pointing to items of interest. The provision of the site may also help respondents think of things they may otherwise forget to mention.
4.6 Data Analysis
According to Yin (1994), data analysis involves examining, categorizing, tabulating or otherwise recombining the collected data. Furthermore, Yin (1994) states that every investigation should have a general analytical strategy in order to determine what to analyze and why. Two general strategies are suggested: following the theoretical propositions that led to the case study or developing a descriptive framework to organize the case study. Within these strategies, there are four different techniques for analyzing the collected data. The first is pattern matching, which means to compare an empirical based pattern with a predictable one. The second technique is explanation building, which refers to a kind of pattern matching where the goal is to analyze the case study data by building an explanation about the case. The third technique is time-series analysis that refers to repeated measures of the dependent variable(s) in order to look at changes over time. The fourth and final technique is to use program logic models, which is a combination of pattern-matching and time-series analysis where the analysis stipulates a complex chain of patterns over time.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis can be defined “as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification” (p.10). Data reduction is made to make the data sharp, sorted, focused, discarded, and organized in order to be able to draw and verify conclusions. A within-case analysis is often used at this phase, which involves comparing the collected data with the theories used. The data display is the means through which the researcher takes the reduced data and displays it in an organized and compressed manner, making it easier to draw conclusions. (Ibid.) This phase is useful when the researcher is studying multiple cases. (Yin, 1994) Multiple cases can be compared in a cross-case analysis, where data in one case is compared to data in another case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification activity, the researcher notes regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, casual flows and propositions. (Ibid.)

In order to analyze the empirical data in this study, the three steps detailed above will be followed. Additionally, the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis as discussed by Miles and Huberman (Ibid.) will be used. The data will be reduced through a within-case analysis whereby cases will be compared with conceptualized literature. Secondly, the data will be displayed through a cross-case analysis whereby the cases will be compared against one another. Finally, conclusions from these analyses will be drawn based on the patterns of similarities and differences discovered in the data reduction and data display.

4.7 Quality Standards
Validity and reliability are two measures useful in defining research quality. Validity is defined as an instrument’s ability to measure exactly what concepts it is supposed to measure. (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1997) According to Yin (1994) there are three forms of validity: construct validity, internal validity, and external validity. For construct validity, it is important to establish correct operational measures for the concepts that are being studied and to ensure that objective judgement is used to collect the data.
According to Yin (1994), there are three different tactics for increasing construct validity: using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having key informants review a draft of the case study report. First, triangulation will be used to gain multiple sources of evidence. These sources will be interviews, observation, and documentation. Secondly, the thesis supervisor will view the interview guide and observation checklist before the interviews to ensure that it is understandable. In addition, the respondents will view the interview guide prior to the interview, ensuring that they will have the means to prepare for the interview and avoid any misunderstandings ahead of time. Finally, the interviews will be audiotaped and notes will be taken to enhance the construct validity, minimizing the risk of missing important information.

Internal validity means establishing causal relationships, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions. Internal validity only concerns causal or explanatory studies, in which an investigator is trying to determine whether one event leads to another. Using pattern matching during the analysis will strengthen the internal validity of this thesis. More precisely, the empirically based pattern for each case was compared with the pattern predicted in the conceptualized literature (Yin, 1994). Because internal validity is of most concern for causal and explanatory studies, it is most applicable at the close of the study where conclusions are drawn.

External validity deals with discerning whether the findings from a case study can be generalized outside the immediate case study. (Yin, 1994) This type of validity is often a problem in conducting case studies. Therefore, Yin (Ibid.) has suggested a tactic for increasing the external validity of a case study, which is to test theory through replications of the findings in other similar surroundings. If this kind of replication has been made, it might be possible to make generalizations on the findings to a larger number of similar cases. (Ibid.) In order to increase the external validity of this study, the tactic suggested by Yin (1994) will be followed, that is, to use replication logic in multiple case studies. For this study, conducting two case studies will test the relevant theories, yet it may still be difficult to draw any generalizations based on the findings of this study.

Reliability is defined by Yin (1994) as the measurement that demonstrates that the operations of a study, such as the data collection procedures, have the ability to be repeated with the exact same results. The goal is to try to ensure that should a later researcher follow the exact same method and investigate the same case or cases, he or she should come to the same results as in the first study. Two things can increase reliability: the use of a case study protocol and the development of a case study database. (Ibid.) Regarding reliability of observations, Yin (1994) says that to increase the reliability a common procedure is to have more than a single observer making an observation, whether it is of the formal or the casual variety.

To increase the reliability of this thesis, an attempt will be made to avoid leading and subjective questions by utilizing a structured interview guide. In addition, the same interview guide will be used during each interview. However, when interpreting the answers, the reliability might be affected negatively by some personal biases, although an
attempt to avoid these biases will be made. In order to develop a case study database, the audiotapes and notes from the interviews will be saved. The reliability may be further influenced by the fact that peoples’ perceptions and opinions vary over time, making it difficult for another researcher to achieve the same results even if the same sample group was to be used. Additionally, only one researcher will be conducting the interviews, listening to the audiotape, and observing the Web sites, possibly negatively affecting the reliability of this study.
5 Empirical Data Presentation
In the previous chapter, the methodology for this thesis was presented. In this chapter, the empirical data will be presented. Data was collected through six interviews, of which three interviews were with internal stakeholders and together represent one case, and three other interviews were with external stakeholders and together represent a second case. The empirical data will be presented in the order it was obtained, beginning with the internal stakeholders and followed by the external stakeholders. Additionally, direct observation was conducted in the form of the author’s observation of the Web site. The author’s observations will be included throughout the discussion of external stakeholders as the author is herself an alumnus. The author’s observations will be noted clearly so as to not confuse the author’s observations with the thoughts and opinions of the stakeholders. Each case will follow the order presented in the conceptual framework.

5.1 Case One: Internal Stakeholders
Three internal stakeholders were interviewed for case one: one student-athlete\(^4\), one coach, and one athletic administrator. All individuals were interviewed on Monday, November 17, 2003 at Wake Forest University. Before each interview, each respondent was reminded of the purpose of the study, how the interview would be conducted, and was handed a copy of the Interview Guide (see Appendix A). Furthermore, the respondents were advised to speak freely of their thoughts and opinions on the subject, and that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions posed. Finally, the Wake Forest University Sports Web site was available to respondents during the interview. Respondents could use the Web site to illustrate their thoughts or opinions by using the mouse or pointing to items of interest. The provision of the site may also have helped respondents think of things they may have otherwise forgotten to mention.

It should be noted that in this section, the data presented will include only data collected from the interviews with three Internal Stakeholders. Topics covered in interviews with both Internal and External Stakeholders focused on the broad issues under review. Other minor details noted in the Conceptual Framework will be investigated by the author’s direct observation of the site and presented in section 5.2 Case Two: External Stakeholders. These details concern the design of the site, are easily noted by an observation, and likely would become tedious for the respondents to comment on each one. Thus, they will be discussed solely by the author’s observation notes in Case Two.

5.1.1 Objectives of sports Web sites
Company/product awareness and information
Regarding the objectives of sports Web sites, the respondents agreed that the main objective is to provide information about what’s going on with the sports teams concerned. With regards to the Wake Forest University (WFU) sports Web site in particular, they stated the objective as being providing information to students, student-athletes, faculty, athletic department staff and the general public. Information should

\(^4\) A student-athlete is a registered University student who participates on a Varsity sports team. This individual may be a scholarship athlete or a “walk-on” (non-recruited) athlete as long as he/she is part of a Varsity sports team.
include recent game highlights and scores and general information about the team, such as coaches’ and team members’ names. The athletic administrator noted in particular that the site is taking advantage of technology, in that it provides one additional way in which to enhance public relations for the Athletic Department and the University.

The respondents went on to elaborate that the WFU sports page is used to *create awareness and provide information* about WFU athletics by placing the Top Stories front and center on the home page. This section details the latest games, team, and individual performances, and as well as other newsworthy auxiliary happenings with a team. The coach in particular noted that the site provides awareness of its teams’ standings in the nation by keeping visitors up to date with the national rankings, for example.

*Communication/customer support*

As far as *providing customer support and communication with stakeholder groups and the media*, the respondents agreed that providing communication and customer support is not one of the main objectives of the site. However, they did feel that the site could be used in this way. For example, the student-athlete noted that the Web site provides communication to student-athletes whose family does not live locally. Because they cannot physically attend the game and because it is not being broadcast on television or on the radio, these people can find the game’s score immediately following the game on the WFU Sports Web site. As far as the tool “Ask the A.D.”, the coach and athletic administrator agreed that external stakeholders might find this tool useful, but in their current positions within the University, this tool does not serve them. They have more direct ways in which to communicate with the Athletic Director than by using this tool. Moreover, these respondents wondered just how often these emails were checked and who exactly responds to these emails. The athletic administrator noted that the email addresses for athletics department staff members are not prominently placed on the site (they may be found under the WFU Athletic Department link). He commented that this indicates that the site discourages the public from contacting these staff members in this way.

Regarding *factors the Web site uses to attract visitors*, the respondents stated that the site primarily uses information provision to attract visitors to the site. The student-athlete explained that the information these visitors are looking for might include general team information, recent performances, and player bios. Specific publics who could be looking for this information as mentioned by the coach and student-athlete included opposing players and coaches, while the administrator mentioned the general curious fan. Additionally, the respondents all agreed that the site provides historical information to attract visitors. The administrator and student-athlete noted that they had researched past individual, coach and team records and statistics. A third factor mentioned only by the administrator was entertainment provision. Finally, the coach and administrator noted that the site tries to attract visitors by selling University merchandise.

### 5.1.2 Stakeholders served by sports Web sites

With respect to the *stakeholders served by sports Web sites*, the student-athlete and coach agreed that fans are the largest and most important stakeholder group served by the site.
These two respondents also agreed that opponents (players and coaches) are the second largest group, as this public may visit the Web site to scout out the team. The student-athlete and coach stated that they may be interested in reading recent press releases to learn how the team is performing, read player biographies, and check on the team’s schedule and record. Following these groups, the student-athlete stated that WFU staff, student-athletes, recruits, family members of student-athletes, prospective students and alumni also likely visit the site. The coach also posed the possibility that the Sports Information Director at one school may visit the other schools’ Web sites to get ideas on ways to change/improve their own Web site. In contrast to these two respondents, the administrator listed students of WFU as the first group targeted by the site, followed by WFU employees such as coaches and staff, alumni, and the general community.

Each respondent stated different ways in which the media may use the site. The student-athlete claimed that the media likely uses the site to check on team schedules and to identify key players. The respondent also noted that the site might be used for its links to the ACC and NCAA site. The coach noted that should an athlete’s hometown newspaper want to do a story on him/her, this journalist could use the site to find out how much that athlete has been playing, his/her highlights, and learn who to speak with to get in touch with the student-athlete. This respondent also stated that the only other use the media would have for the site would be to use it to find scores if he/she couldn’t physically be at the game. The athletic administrator doesn’t think the needs of the media are served or that their needs should be served on the Web site. This respondent thinks and/or hopes that the media will visit the University personally to gather information and speak with athletes, coaches and administrators their information. This respondent thinks of the Web site itself as a sort of “electronic newspaper” in its own right.

Regarding how fans are served on sports Web sites, the student-athlete and athletic administrator agreed that fans use the site to find out how each team is doing throughout the season. The coach and athletic administrator agreed that the site might be used to learn more about their favorite athlete, such as when the WFU Web site highlights one or two standout student-athletes in articles and photos, as well as staying apprised of individual awards given to certain athletes weekly/annually. The athletic administrator added that fans might use the site to gather recent game information that may be more in-depth than in other sources, stay up-to-date on the season, and research upcoming opponents. Additionally, the student-athlete noted the interest fans might have in the photo galleries following games. This respondent also has knowledge of certain other internal stakeholders, including the respondent herself, who frequently complete the “Fan Poll” and who use the tool “Send a Fan Card”.

Concerning internal staff and athletes, which constitutes the group of respondents for this case, the student-athlete stated that she uses the site to read her team’s game write-up,

---

5 ACC: Atlantic Coast Conference. This is the athletic conference of which WFU and 11 other Universities are members.
6 The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is an association of about 1,200 colleges and universities, athletic conferences and sports organizations devoted to the administration of intercollegiate athletics. (“What is the NCAA?”, www.ncaa.org)
while all respondents stated that student-athletes also use the site to read the write-up of their fellow student-athletes’ games. The coach noted that student-athletes use the site as “fans of their peers”. The administrator noted that the articles on the site are more in-depth than the office voice mails the staff receives regarding individual/team accomplishments.

With regards to revenue sources, the respondents note that the Web site may be used to purchase gear/merchandise relating to WFU and the Demon Deacons. The administrator noted that the WFU sports Web site is an opportunity for a new revenue stream for the University, in that WFU merchandise may be purchased via the link to the Deacon Shop. The coach noted that while there are links for tickets on the various sports teams’ sub-sites, one is not able to actually purchase the tickets online. Instead, there is a phone and fax number for use in purchasing tickets for the “major” sports (football, basketball and baseball) and no ticket information at all for the “minor” (Olympic) sports.

When asked whether all groups’ needs were being met on the site, the student-athlete and administrator agreed that most, if not all, of the publics’ needs are met on the site. While the student-athlete mentioned that there’s always some way to improve, she also noted that oftentimes if a visitor cannot find what he/she needs on the sports site, he/she could easily link back with the main site (WFU.edu) and can find their needs met there. She also added that a bullet point may be added for recruits, while the administrator (a compliance official) noted that while providing material for recruits would be a nice feature, some aspects of doing so would be in violation of NCAA rules.

The coach was not as pleased with the stakeholders served by the Web site. This respondent claimed that while the site does have archives for each sport, it does not highlight past standout athletes such as Mugsy Bogues and Tim Duncan or people who played at WFU prior to the advent of the Web site. This coach suggested an “Alumni” link for historical information that would provide one with historical information on WFU athletics. However, this respondent felt that the needs of recruits are being met on the site by way of the general prospective student-athlete questionnaire on the site, as well as coach and camp information for each team.

5.1.3 Design of sports Web sites
Regarding the relevance and newsworthiness of the site’s content, all respondents felt that the content is relevant and up-to-date. Elaborating on this, the administrator states that there is greater depth of information to be found on the Web site than there would be in the newspaper, which is why he chooses to read about WFU sports on the Web site. The coach noted that the relevance of the content makes up for the busy-ness of the page. Additionally, the coach and student-athlete particularly enjoy looking at the “National Rankings” as well as the “Upcoming Events” boxes. Concerning the relevance of the

---

7 The Demon Deacon, also known as the “Deac”, is the WFU school mascot and represents the sports teams at WFU.
8 Tyrone “Mugsy” Bogues played college basketball at WFU then went on to a successful career in the NBA. He was known for his athletic ability as well as his height: 5’3” (or 1.524 meters). Tim Duncan, also a WFU alum, plays for the San Antonio Spurs in the NBA and was the 2002 and 2003 NBA MVP.
information on the Web site, all respondents felt the information was relevant to their needs. Specifically, the student-athlete noted that injured student-athletes often use the “Game Tracker” or “Live Stats” feature to follow games that they are unable to attend. She added that these tools are also useful for parents, fans, and recruits.

Regarding the brevity of the text, all respondents were pleased, noting that if one doesn’t want to read the whole article, reading the title and the briefing gives one an idea of the gist of the article. The coach and administrator noted that as experienced Web users, they are familiar with the meaning of the “Read More” link and appreciate its usage here. Regarding the placement of text, the respondents stated that the center-placement of the content is appropriate and expected. The student-athlete was happy to see the majority of the banner ads at the bottom, noting that the site’s placement of these items at the bottom serves to “highlight the true purpose of the page: student-athletes and teams”. However, regarding the banner ad at the top of the page, the coach noted that she often doesn’t notice the ad because it blends into the logo and pictures along the top. Other times, she doesn’t notice the WF logo and pictures because she assumes it is itself an advertisement. Moreover, the student-athlete and coach stated that the new design seemed a bit busy to them at first, especially with the banner advertisement at the top of the page. However, they have now become accustomed to the new site and located everything they need in it.

As for the design rules of integrity and clarity, the coach noted that the links on the left side of the page should in a larger font size. However, the coach did appreciate how the navigation bar on the left was constant from page to page. The other two respondents also felt that the site maintains its integrity and clarity throughout.

The respondents generally felt that the graphics on this site were not very noticeable, with the administrator noting that he doesn’t pay attention to graphics on any Web site. However, when they began to take note of the graphics in the interview, they commented that when used, the graphics were appropriate. The coach and student-athlete agreed that the colors of black and gold were very appropriate because these are the school colors. The student-athlete stated that she enjoys these colors because it greets her with a sense of pride in the school and the athletic programs and also helps get her into the mood of WFU Athletics. The student-athlete also felt that the forward placement of the “WF” and the mascot on the home page were appropriate, and was also fond of the scrolling scores at the top of the page. Additionally, the student-athlete stated that she now feels that the site is more exciting, mainly on account of the new colors (black background, white and gold text). This respondent feels that the black text actually helps the Top Stories section stand out, catching the visitor’s attention.

The student-athlete noted that she liked how the pictures of past athletic achievements run across the top of the screen, as this is where she would expect them to be. The administrator noted that the pictures are of a higher quality than they expected, while the coach wished there were more action photographs on the site. While the administrator did

---

9 The WFU Sports Web site was updated and changed significantly on October 1, 2003. The “old” site presented information in a way that was unique to the University; the “new” site resembles many other NCAA Division I schools’ Web sites.
not care to look at the pictures, the other two respondents felt the pictures gave a “hint” as
to who the standout player of a game was.

As for systems compatibility, the coach disliked how the Web site does not take up her
whole (Netscape Navigator) browser page. She thinks that the designers should broaden
the page or change the setting so that they make use of all of the space they have.
Concerning load time, the respondents stated that with a cable modem, the load time is
not a problem. The student-athlete elaborated, saying that when the new site was first
launched, she had some trouble getting the page to pull up, but now it comes up faster
than other sites. She added that the quick load time makes the “Live Stats” feature less
tedious, allowing visitors to comfortably follow the game in progress.

When asked about navigation, all respondents stated that they find the navigation to be
simple, self-explanatory and easy to follow throughout the site. All respondents agreed
that they liked how the men’s and women’s sports teams’ links are organized in the
navigation bar on the left. They felt that dividing the teams between the sexes made
finding the link to the team in which one is interested very easy. As for the search button,
the respondents generally do not use it because they feel they already know where
everything they need to find on the site is located. The coach added that search buttons
are usually a pain and generally inaccurate, so she prefers to search for things on her own.

5.2 Case Study Two: External Stakeholders

Three external stakeholders were interviewed for case two: one fan, one media
representative (a journalist), and an alumnus. All individuals were interviewed on
Monday, November 17, 2003 at Wake Forest University. Before each interview, each
respondent was reminded of the purpose of the study and how the interview would be
conducted. Furthermore, the respondents were advised to speak freely of their thoughts
and opinions on the subject, and that there were no right or wrong answers to the
questions posed. Finally, the Wake Forest University Sports Web site was available to
respondents during the interview. Respondents could use the Web site to illustrate their
thoughts or opinions by using the mouse or pointing to items of interest. The provision of
the site may also have helped respondents think of things they may have otherwise
forgotten to mention.

It should be noted that in this section, the data presented will include data collected from
the interviews with three external stakeholders as well as the author’s own direct
observation data. Topics covered in interviews with both internal and external
stakeholders focused on the broad issues under review. Other minor details noted in the
conceptual framework have been investigated by the author’s direct observation of the
site and presented in this section. Thus, direct observation will be used to “fill in the
gaps” left by the interviews. These notes will make case two longer and more detailed
than case one, yet will instill a richer perspective on the data collected.

5.2.1 Objectives of sports Web sites

Company/product awareness and information
When asked to describe the objectives of sports Web sites, the respondents all noted that the provision of accurate, up-to-date information was the main objective of the site. The fan and alum agreed that this information was targeted towards students, alumni and other interested parties, such as fans. The fan also noted that the entertainment and “gossip” found on sports Web sites, paired with the statistics, scores, pictures, and feature articles, are what makes visitors return to the site. He also noted that sports Web sites are for the fans, so the objective of the site is to serve and speak to the fan, from buying team merchandise to the way in which articles are titled and presented. This respondent has gone to other ACC school sites to find out more information, especially when other teams have won matches against WFU teams. This is the best way to find out “the other side of the story”, he claims, as the information presented on the WFU Sports site has an (expected) slant to it.

The media representative postulated that the Sports Information Director (SID) most likely has a two-fold objective: first, to inform the media of what’s going on with sports at WFU. Second, to promote the WFU sports teams, making them more appealing to fans. He went on to note that making a sports Web site is likely similar to making a sports media guide. For instance, he stated that in the 2003-2004 WFU basketball media guide the first ten-fifteen pages were of casual, non-informational value interest to him as a reporter. Once he read past the promotional part of the guide, he came to the more informational section of the media guide. The respondent drew a parallel between the media guide and the WFU Web site in this sense, in that the SID likely wants to appeal to both the casual fan as well as to the media.

The respondents described how the site was used to create awareness and provide information about WFU Athletics by noting how they navigate the site. For instance, the fan generally goes to the site’s home page, becomes aware of a Top Story featured in the center of the page, then follows this story to find out more information. Alternatively, he will use the link on the left (Men’s/Women’s Sports) to link directly to the sport he’s interested in. Once there, he will look within that sport’s “sub-site” to find what he’s looking for, such as scores, an athlete’s name and bio, or schedules. The author also notes general and detailed product information on the site by the ticker running across the top of the home page. The center part of the page ("Top Stories") provides information on recent games and news regarding the teams. The primary products in this case are the sports teams; secondary products seem to include merchandise and tickets. Product specifications in this case could include recent scores, Upcoming Events, and National Rankings. Regarding promotion of new initiatives on the WFU Sports Web site, the author notes that the site promotes upcoming events in the “Top Stories” as well as in the window “Upcoming Events” on the right. The “Fan Poll” also gives visitors an idea of current issues concerning the athletics department.

Communication/customer support
All of the respondents felt that providing communication/customer support with stakeholder groups and the media is not one of the main objectives of the WFU Sports Web site. The alum elaborated by stating that “the Web site gives enough information on its own; there is no need for it to serve as a communication tool.” The fan saw providing
communication and customer support as an intention of the site, but not primary purpose; instead, these functions serve as a means to get people to come back. The media representative clarified his position by stating that the interactive features offered by the site are likely greeted warmly by visitors who use the Internet, and this site, as a sort of entertainment. This respondent stated that these features make the Web site visitor feel like their voice is being heard by those in charge at the University. He feels that the interactive features offered by this site serve to empower the audience by giving them the opportunity to ask the Athletic Director (A.D.) a question, sign up for email updates, and participate in a fan poll.

The author notes that communication seems to be acceptable but limited. For example, there is the option of emailing the A.D. a question. It is not known how many emails he receives and whether he in fact replies to them personally; at any rate, the impression is made that the University cares about the publics’ questions and concerns regarding WFU Athletics. Thus, the author notes that interactivity on this site is low, as other than emailing the A.D., interactivity is limited to participating in a Fan Poll and Sending an e-Card from certain sports teams’ sub-sites. While the interaction is low and there is no registration page, a customer database may be under construction by way of collecting email addresses from the site’s email accounts (available for a yearly fee of between $19.99 and $29.99/year), Send an e-Card function and Ask the A.D. function.

While the author notes that the Web site allows visitors to contact the Athletic Administration’s support staff and the A.D., the site does not seem to provide a forum for real-time two-way communication. The site does provide a service that enables two-way communication that improves communication between the general public and the A.D., giving the appearance of aims to improve communication amongst the organization, its leadership and other publics. However, it seems that other communication features could be added that do not stretch to (only) the top of the organization. As far as the Web site’s ability to handle customer complaints, queries and suggestions, it seems the only way in which customers/visitors may complain is by sending an email to the A.D. himself via the large link and picture at the bottom of the page. Upon further investigation into the links on the site, the author learns that people may also email specific members of the Athletics Administration by clicking on the link “WFU Athletic Department”. This link provides a listing of phone numbers and email addresses for WFU Athletics Dept. staff. However, the link “WFU Athletic Department” does not quickly and precisely describe that this function is available beyond this link. Thus, the capability to contact administrators with complaints, queries or suggestions is available on the Web site; however, this opportunity is not advertised or described clearly on the home page.

Factors the Web site uses to attract visitors as stated by the respondents were broad. The fan sees the site attracting visitors via provision of archival information such as old press releases and scores. The alum views the site as place to find historical information and event information such as live statistics. The media representative feels the site attracts visitors by providing information and entertainment such as Stan Cotton’s columns (“100% Cotton”). All respondents stated that they generally think of the site as a place to go to gather information of some kind. The alum noted that the appearance of the site is
used to attract visitors, adding that she thinks the WFU Web site developers have made the site more advanced to better compete for visitors attention, pulling them away from other sites and towards the WFU site. The media representative disagreed with the argument that the site is used for archival information; he noted that he would not rely on the archival information on the Web site to be the most accurate and up to date in terms of historical information. This respondent wouldn’t go to the site first for this information, but would instead get in contact with someone from the University for the information.

The author has investigated the various attractors mentioned by Watson (1998). The author’s examination of these attractors and their employment by the WFU Sports Web site is detailed in Table 5.2.1 below.

**Table 5.2.1 Web site attractors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Attractor</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Author: Used on WFU Sports Web site, &amp; to what degree?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Entertainment Park</em></td>
<td>Offers entertainment and a high degree of participation. Interactive, recreational and challenging</td>
<td>Yes, to a small degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Archive</em></td>
<td>Aids in discovery of company’s history</td>
<td>Yes, although some sports more updated than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Exclusive Sponsorship</em></td>
<td>Provides timely, exclusive, valuable information regarding an event</td>
<td>Yes, provides updated game information, such as scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Town Hall</em></td>
<td>Venue for forums and discussions; participation is engaging; high interactivity</td>
<td>No, not exactly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Club</em></td>
<td>Visitors must register to participate; interactive, recreational and social</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Gift Shop</em></td>
<td>Gifts and free samples used to gain attention; generally digitized products such as software or photographs</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent. FanCard and merchandise available here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Freeway Intersection</em></td>
<td>Present advanced information search services (search engines); may aim to become a user’s entry to the Web</td>
<td>No; search function is only for use on this site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Customer Service Center</em></td>
<td>Meet customer information needs and assist in ownership phase of product life cycle</td>
<td>Yes, this site contains much information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Watson et al., 1998.

Table 5.2.1 above details the author’s observation of factors employed by the WFU Sports Web site. According to the author, it seems that the Web site uses entertainment, archives, gift shop merchandise and customer service (information provision) to attract visitors to the site.

5.2.2 Stakeholders served by sports Web sites

Concerning stakeholders served by sports Web sites, the fan and alum stated that students, alumni, media, friends and family of students or student-athletes at Wake
Forest. An additional group served by the site, as mentioned by the alum, is the media, while the fan noted faculty, opponents and opposing fans. Elaborating on this thought, the fan went on to state that he would be particularly interested in the site if the sport is one that is not televised or otherwise publicized. In this instance, he would use the site to find out the current score and to get the transcript of the game. He noted that he has had trouble in the past getting the live broadcast link to work, yet does not have the same trouble with the scrolling play-by-play transcript. Finally, the third respondent, the media representative postulated that the Web site serves the media and prospective ticket buyers.

The author’s observation of the Web site served to investigate which of the following publics the Wake Forest University Sports Web site seems to serve. The data from this observation is in Table 5.2.2 below.

**Table 5.2.2 Web site’s interaction with publics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Interaction with?</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Interaction with?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCAA</td>
<td>No link to their page; is discussion of NCAA compliance</td>
<td>Alumni/ae: Local, Regional, National</td>
<td>Yes, by information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>Yes- link to ACC.com</td>
<td>Government: Local, Regional, National</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booster Club</td>
<td>Yes- link to Deacon Club</td>
<td>Print Media: Local, Regional, National</td>
<td>Yes- links to newspaper articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>University President</td>
<td>Not directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>University Board of Trustees</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponents</td>
<td>Yes, by information</td>
<td>University Athletic Department</td>
<td>Yes- link to AD and Athletic Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppliers/Vendors</td>
<td>Yes- ads on bottom left</td>
<td>University Coaching Staff</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fans/Spectators</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Players</td>
<td>Not directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Recruits</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Business Community</td>
<td>Yes, via ads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors/Patrons</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked how the media’s needs are met on the site, all respondents agreed that the media would likely use the site to as a means of verifying information and details of stories and events. They elaborated on this use by saying that the media may use the site to verify the spelling of an athlete/team’s name, game schedule, statistics, and coach/player post-game quotes. The fan noted that the media may use the site for its archives and to get press releases, however he hoped that the media would contact the University more directly than via the Web site for the information that they then present to the public. Moreover, this respondent stated that he would expect that the reporters on the newspaper would want to ask more questions of the players and coach than what was merely stated in the statistics or press releases online. This respondent also added that the Web site might be very useful to non-local media as far as serving as a low-cost conduit...
of information. Furthermore, the respondent noted that the site could also be used to find out whom to contact for more direct information or interviews.

Moreover, concerning the media, the media representative stated that he sees the site as a way to find out a more detailed and trustworthy account of what is truly “going on” with certain athletes or teams at the University. This respondent feels that this is one of the great advantages of the WFU Sports Web site over the local newspaper. He stated that, “Recent information will not be posted on the local newspaper’s Web site until the next morning, yet on the WFU Sports site, the information is posted as soon as University officials know it. So the timeliness of the Web site is so valuable.” He added, “You can get information on the WFU Sports site before you can get it from any other major media source, which is valuable to the media as well as to the fans.” This respondent, a journalist, also claims that “90% of time I get on Web site, the purpose is to get a statistic. I will generally know the other information before I get there.” He also uses the site to substantiate information he already feels somewhat confident in, such as spelling, game times, and other details. The respondent stated, “The essence of the value of the site to me is the research I am able to do before I write an article or meet with a player/coach for an interview.” The respondent feels that once he sees information reported on the site, he feels comfortable reporting on that information. He notes that he certainly trusts the site and feels that other journalists and other media sources trust it as well.

The author’s observation of the WFU Sports Web site indicates that information is provided to the media by the means described in Table 5.2.3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Info.</th>
<th>Provided?</th>
<th>Category of Info.</th>
<th>Provided?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News releases personalized for print or broadcast</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Event and game schedules</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Guide Reprint and recent updates</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Statistical records and averages</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent game results</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Season compilations and comparisons</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press conference dates and summations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Digest of coverage by other media</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media alerts and brief news filters</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Current quote sheet</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special feature suggestions</td>
<td>Maybe- subjective</td>
<td>Staff contact including all communication devices</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>League or conference information</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Method of retrieving historical records</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regards to fans, the respondents differed in the way they presumed fans use the site. The fan offered the opinion that the Q & A (question and answer) features with coaches are likely the most popular with fans. Another nice feature that this respondent felt fans
might enjoy is the ability to put a face with a name and roster number. This respondent, a fan, stated that he knows the players by their roster numbers, which is only helpful at the game. He enjoys reading a bit more about each player and seeing what he or she looks like. The alum remarked that fans that are not local to Winston-Salem\textsuperscript{10} likely use the WFU Sports Web site more than other fans. This respondent elaborated by saying that, “This may be the only way in which fans attain information on the smaller sports which are not regularly covered in the national media, such as field hockey or soccer.” The respondent commented that fans might also use the site for ticket information, in terms of where/how to purchase tickets. Finally, she noted that photographs are an added benefit to the fan, but are not the primary way to serve fans online. The media representative offered yet another way that fans likely use the site: “To find team schedules, mainly.” This respondent went on to add that the content gives fans a sense of who’s playing well and gives an up-close, detailed look at what issues the team is facing throughout their season.

The author’s observation of the WFU Sports Web site investigated indicators of service to the online fan. These indicators and their usage on the site are displayed in Table 5.2.4 below.

\textbf{Table 5.2.4: Indicators of service to the online fan}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator of service</th>
<th>Used?</th>
<th>Indicator of service</th>
<th>Used?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future schedules</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ticket information and order form</td>
<td>Yes, for some sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special event registration statistics</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Current team records</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical records</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Action photographs</td>
<td>Yes (some)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel bios of team and administrators</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Stadium travel and parking advice (maps)</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fundraising and sponsorships</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed product sales</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Individual email addresses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlet for suggestions and complaints</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Marketing (turn spectators into consumers)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast coverage</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Periodic newsletter</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact titles, numbers and addresses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Preseason training and exhibitions</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan clubs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Recruiting</td>
<td>Not specifically, per NCAA rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contests and free premium</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Autograph, photo and tour sessions</td>
<td>As advertised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm-up exercises and training</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{10} Wake Forest University is located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, U.S.A.
When discussing how *internal staff and athletes* use the site, the media representative stated that these groups are likely served more marginally, and are certainly not targeted by the site, as these groups are expected to already be more familiar with current sports events on campus. In contrast, the alum felt that students and student-athletes use the site extensively to see how their peers have fared in competition. Additionally, she commented that it’s always exciting to read what the media said about the game, as this is a good way to get an outside perspective. As a student at WFU, this respondent often would read the site to support the teams and to see how coaches and players have been performing recently. The fan postulated that internal staff and faculty likely use the site to try to learn about the student-athletes so that they may connect with these students when they see them on campus. This respondent felt that the Web site served the staff and athletes as a means of bringing the two groups together.

The author’s observation noted that service to internal staff and athletes on the Web site includes chat sessions from time to time and only with specific (revenue-generating) sports. These chat sessions are often via partnership with sports broadcasters such as ESPN. Recruiting information is not found specifically on the site, as per NCAA rules, however general information on the University and it’s sports teams is found there.

When discussing how the site meets *revenue sources’* needs the respondents all stated that they think this group’s needs are few and that the site is not responsible for meeting those needs. The respondents felt that people who are interested in purchasing products have the capability of doing so on the site, but the respondents do not feel that meeting this need is a main objective of the site. The alum stated that advertisers might use the site to view and judge the ads they already have on the site, but for no other reason.

The author found that certain revenue sources were served on the site, such as *advertisers* whose ads were found on the page, both across the top in a banner format and along the bottom left navigation bar. Publics do not have to *subscribe* to the site to get information, so this is not counted as a revenue source served on the site. *Ticket sales* do create revenue on the site, although in an indirect manner: publics may research ticket prices yet must call or fax in their request for tickets for some selected sporting events. The *sale of licensed merchandise* is also available on this site, and is promoted heavily. Finally, *fundraising* and *research* were not served on the site.

All three respondents felt that *all publics whose needs should be met on the site have been served.* However, the media representative commented on some ways to enhance the ways the publics are currently served. For example, the respondent noted that perhaps former student-athletes and recruits could have a special place on the site. This respondent felt that such a link would be one way to keep people who either once had interest or who still have interest in the site involved. In fact, this respondent noted, that should be one of the goals of a marketing office and University Sports Information office: to keep people who have a certain interest in the school involved.
5.2.3 Design of Sports Web sites

In generally describing the site, it was learned that the “National Rankings” feature is the fan’s favorite feature, as seeing the different sports’ national rankings makes him proud. The alum’s favorites include the National Rankings feature and Stan Cotton’s columns on typically non-standout stars. The alum enjoys the entertainment value these columns bring to the page. This alum feels that any visitor’s immediate concerns are taken care of on the home page of the site. The media representative appreciates the updated scores and inside information provided.

The author’s observation of the site focused on whether the customers and their goals were identified on a registration page, whether membership fees are taken and to describe the specificity of content. The author concluded that the specificity of the content dictates who the Web site serves; the site does not use a registration page or take membership fees. Additionally, there was no statement of purpose found on the site, other than the sub-heading “The Official Site of Wake Forest Athletics” in the title bar along the top. (See screen shots in Appendix C)

All respondents find the site to be relevant and newsworthy, noting the updates in the center of the page and that the WFU Web site is the first place they would look online for information about WFU sports teams. The alum stated how pleased she was with the timeliness in which new scores and articles are posted to the site. The author also noted that the featured stories on the home page are credible and newsworthy. Regarding the brevity of the text, the three respondents disagreed; the fan prefers that the titles are all that is shown of the “Top Stories” articles, the media representative was indifferent and the alum likes the mini-paragraphs about the most recent “Top Stories”. The fan stated that he would rather not see the first paragraph of text shown under the “Top Stories”, but instead would like to see the titles only, with a “Read More” link. The alum stated that if only the titles were featured, she wouldn’t read anything about certain sports teams that she has no interest in. However, with the small paragraphs already on the home page, she ends up reading about sports she would not generally read about, simply because they’re in front of her. The respondent enjoys this because she feels it broadens her knowledge of all sports at WFU. The author notes that the text that is featured under each heading on the home page is a synopsis of a recent event or story; the visitor may learn more about a story should he/she wish to read more at a later time.

As for the placement of text in the center of the page, the fan and alum stated that they like the placement in the middle of the page while the media representative stated that the placement of the text was unimportant. The fan stated that the WFU banner and the advertisement together take up too much space on the page which should be used for content, while the alum stated that the advertisement does not belong at the top of the page but rather with the rest of the ads at the bottom. The alum added that the two banners blend together and that she had not even noticed that the ad was separate from the WFU banner until that instant, which she felt was bad advertising for WFU. The author noted that the Top Stories’ placement in the center of the page indicates their importance, with the most recent story at the top.
Concerning the provision of information and services of value to diverse publics, the author’s observation reveals that the WFU sports Web site does succeed in this aspect. Information is provided to diverse publics via links such as those for all the Varsity sports teams, Cheerleaders, the Deacon Club (athletic boosters), Deacon Newsstand (archived newspaper stories relating to WFU sports), Traditions, Summer Camps (information for all prospective campers and parents), and On Campus (link for information about the University itself). As for the usage of online forums, bulletin board, chat line discussion groups, and trivia, the only evidence of tools such as these are the “Fan Polls” which change weekly and which test the visitor’s knowledge or opinion of WFU sports. As for historical information, FAQ’s, and product information, the archives for certain sports as well as individual team sites serve this purpose. Moreover, “product information” such as game times and scores may be found in several places on the site (Upcoming Events, Schedules, or on each team’s page).

With regards to design rules of integrity and clarity, the author notes that the site is easy to understand and that the integrity of the site’s design has been maintained throughout the site. Concerning the how the graphics affect the design of the site, the fan and media representative claim that the site is too “busy”. The media representative stated that although the site is busy, he’s become accustomed to the site’s design. He stated, “That’s modern web site design. Each year the Internet is here, most sites seem to get busier each year.” The fan and alum noted that they don’t like the black background and white text, with the fan noting that he thinks this makes the text harder to read. Additionally, the alum stated, “I like it, but I do not love it.” She respects the University/Administrators for taking a chance and using design techniques that are not common elsewhere, such as the black background. In contrast to the other two respondents, the media representative noted that the colors are appropriate and particularly likes the black background.

Also concerning the graphics, the fan and alum mentioned their dislike for the banner at the top of the page. The alum felt that the banner was too “busy”, making it difficult to read the banner that says “Wake Forest Sports.com”. Nevertheless, the alum commented that the new site’s updates have greatly enhanced the Web site. In fact, she would consider it a good advertising technique to change the site more often, as she feels that this keeps the site fresh and ensures return visits. Her specific favorites include the game ticker (showing recent scores) across the top of the screen, the navigation bar on the left-hand side of the page listing teams, the “Top Stories” featured in the middle and the “Upcoming Events” box. Finally, the fan and alum like the pictures on the site, while the media representative does not pay attention to the pictures. The author notes that the graphics are used sparsely aside from the logo and heading on the home page, which the author finds to be busy and disturbing to the eye.

The author notes that the site is compatible with Apple computers and a variety of browsers (Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer). The author notes that the site takes up the same percentage of space when viewed on a laptop’s small screen in a Navigator window as it does on a larger desktop computer in an Internet Explorer window. Concerning the Web site’s load time, all three respondents noted that the site loads quite quickly with a cable modem. The fan noted that “I would hate to be on a 56k modem and
try to upload the site.” The alum claimed that she does remember having issues with the load time in the past. She went on to explain that, “Of course, it’s hard to know the source of the problem—whether it is the computer or the connection or the Web site.” The media representative stated that he “always wants it to be faster, but it is faster than many other sites. Not as fast as you may want it to be, but that doesn’t deter me from going to the site.” The author also noted that the load time is fast and that visitors are not required to scroll excessively through long menus or choices.

Regarding the navigation on this site, all three respondents feel that the navigation is quite simple to understand. All respondents particularly like the menu of sports teams in the navigation bar, which they feel makes it simple to go where you need to go on the site. The fan likes being able to scroll down in the “Upcoming Events” box rather than click on each sport’s schedule to find game times and places. He also likes the fact that he no longer has to go to “Sportsfinder” to search for a sport; he has found the listing of the sports on the left-hand navigation bar to be much easier to navigate. However, the fan noted that while he realizes that a Web site’s home page needs to have links on it, he thinks there are too many links on the navigation bar. The author noted that the navigation resembles other sports Web sites and other Web sites in general, making the site easier to understand and more immediately familiar to visitors.

Regarding the search tool, all three respondents have never used the tool and can’t imagine that they ever will, as they think things are very easy to find on the site. The fan and alum were curious about the Search tool’s functionality during the interview and decided to give it a try. Both typed in a “star” athlete’s name at the University but both times the search did not yield any information. The alum stated, “I don’t think the search tool is necessary on a site like this.” The author’s observation echoed the frustration of the respondents with the search tool, as every search entered was returned as “Error”.

---

11 “Sportsfinder”, drop-down menu of sports teams at WFU, was a tool on the previous version of the site.
6 Analysis

In the previous chapter, the empirical data for this thesis was presented. In this chapter, the empirical data will be analyzed in the order of the research questions. To begin, a within-case analysis will be conducted for each of the case studies by comparing the empirical data presented in chapter five with the conceptual framework presented in chapter two. This analysis is done to reduce the data, as per Miles and Huberman (1994). This analysis will be conducted for each case under the heading of each research question. Thereafter, the data for each research question will be displayed through a cross-case analysis, where the two case studies are compared with each other to find similarities and differences.

6.1 Within-Case Analysis

In this first section, the empirical data from both the Internal and External Stakeholder presented in chapter five will be analyzed against the previous research in chapter two. The analysis will be displayed in the order of the research questions, starting with objectives, then stakeholders and finally Web site design.

6.1.1 Research Question 1: How may the objectives of sports Web sites be described?

Company/product awareness and information

Kent et al. (2003) maintain that most organizational Web sites are designed to provide some form of information. Berthon et al. (1996) add that one useful application of Web sites is to provide detailed product information and specifications. The data collected in case one verifies these theories, in that the internal stakeholders stated that the main objective is to provide information about the product (sports teams). Moreover, the respondents stated that detailed product information in the form of recent game highlights and scores should be contained on the site. These theories were further verified in case two, as the external stakeholders stated that the provision of accurate, up-to-date information was the main objective of the site. However, one additional objective was mentioned by an external stakeholder, which was that a secondary objective of sports Web sites is to serve as a promotional tool.

Several authors (Berthon et al., 1996; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Breitenbach & Van Doren, 1998; Kim et al., 2003) note that Web sites may also be used as a means for an organization to introduce itself and its products to a large audience. The comments of the respondents in case one support this theory, as they noted that the WFU sports Web site uses its home page to introduce and detail its teams’ (products) recent accomplishments and news. The data collected in case two further verifies this theory, as the respondents noted that the “Top Stories” create awareness of the teams to the visitor, thus introducing the visitor to not only the product but detailed information about it.

Ashcroft and Hoey (2001) note that the product may be introduced by a promotion of new initiatives on the Web site. The respondents in case one did not note such promotions, which neither supports nor contradicts theory; however, the respondents in case two did note such promotions, supporting theory. One respondent claimed that this is one objective of the site, while the author’s observation noted the following forms of
promotion on the site: Upcoming Events, National Rankings, the Fan Poll and Top Stories.

Communication/customer support

Kent et al. (2003) mentions that an organization’s Web site objectives should also include providing a controlled means through which the organization can communicate with stakeholder publics and the media. The respondents in case one noted that providing communication and support does not seem to be one of the main objectives of the WFU sports Web site. However, these respondents did feel that the site could be used in this way. The respondents in case two agreed with those in case one, stating that this does not seem to be an objective of this site, with one respondent noting that the site shouldn’t in fact serve as a communication tool. Thus, data collected from both cases does not support Kent et al.’s (2003) theory.

Ashcroft and Hoey (2001) note that Web sites should foster and encourage customer involvement by establishing interactivity and building a customer database. The respondents in case one, the internal stakeholders, did not make note of any interactivity or building of databases on the site meaning the theory was neither proven nor disproved. The author’s observation in case two claims that interactivity on this site seems to be a low priority. Thus, the data collected in case two does not verify the theory investigated regarding establishing interactivity. Concerning building a customer database, the respondents in case one did not note such a goal, meaning the theory was neither proven nor disproved. The author in case two claims that the low interactivity on the site combined with the lack of a registration page indicates that the site is not building a customer database. However, the site may collect email addresses from the email account service, emailed newsletter as well as the Ask the A.D. function, indicating that a database is in fact being built. Thus, no conclusion has been drawn, meaning the data in case two neither supports nor is critical of the previous theory.

Breitenbach and Van Doren (1998) state that Web sites must provide users with a forum that supports two-way communication. The respondents in case one did not comment on the two-way communication provided/neglected on the site. The author in case two notes that the site does not provide a forum for real-time two-way communication. Thus, the findings show that the data in case one and case two does not support this theory. With regards to Kim et al.’s (2003) theory that Web sites should improve the communication amongst the organization, its leadership and other publics, the respondents in case one noted that avenues for such communication do exist on this site, thus taking a stance in support of stated theory. The author’s observation as an external stakeholder in case two noted that the tool provided on the site serves to attempt to improve communication between the general public and the A.D. This claim supports the theory as stated by Kim et al. (2003).

Berthon et al. (1996) note that Web sites are ideal places to handle customer complaints, queries and suggestions. The respondents in case one stated that they would not consider this an ideal way for them, as internal stakeholders, to make complaints, queries and suggestions. However, this group is hardly seen as “customers”, although they could be
customers in some instances. At any rate, this data seems to disagree with the stated theory. The data collected by the author’s observations in case two notes that the capability to contact administrators with complaints, queries or suggestions is available on the Web site; however, this opportunity is not advertised or described clearly on the home page, save the “Ask the A.D.” function. Nevertheless, it must be stated that customer complaints, queries and suggestions may in fact be handled on this site, thus agreeing with Berthon et al.’s (1996) theory.

Watson et al. (1998) maintains that success in the electronic marketplace is due in part to understanding how to attract and lure potential customers into repeatedly visiting a company’s Web site. The theory maintains that Web sites will use one or more of the factors defined in Section 2.1 of this thesis to attract repeat visitors. The respondents in the internal stakeholder group state that the factors the WFU sports Web site uses to attract visitors includes information provision, archival information, entertainment provision and as a gift shop. Thus, the data collected in this case supports Watson et al.’s (1998) theory. The external stakeholders noted factors such as information provision, archival information, exclusive sponsorship information (such as live statistics), and entertainment. The author echoed the factors mentioned by the external stakeholders and added the factor of a customer service center as well. Thus, the data collected in this case supports Watson et al.’s (1998) theory.

6.1.2 Research Question 2: How can the stakeholders served by sports Web sites be described?

Mullin et al. (1993) state the collegiate sports organizations should interact with the 19 stakeholder publics listed in section 3.2 of this thesis (they will not be listed here for the purpose of brevity). Of these 19 publics, the respondents in case one (internal stakeholders) noted eight which are served by the site and noted by Mullin et al. (1993): opponents, fans, recruits, general community (sponsors/patrons), alumni, athletic department- staff, athletic department- coaches, and student-athletes (players). Additionally, the internal stakeholders noted five publics who are also served by the site but which were not mentioned by Mullin et al. (1993): WFU faculty, WFU students, family members of student-athletes, prospective students, and opposing SID’s. Thus, it seems that the data collected from the internal stakeholders supports the theory to a certain extent, yet also brings up additional groups not mentioned by the theory. Of the 25 publics, the external stakeholders in case two noted three publics that are served by the site and noted by Mullin et al. (1993): alumni, media, and opponents, while the author’s observation of the site states that 14 publics seem to be served by the site (see Table 5.2.2A). Additionally, the external stakeholders noted four publics who are also served by the site but which were not mentioned by Mullin et al. (1993): WFU faculty, WFU students, friends and family of students or student-athletes, and prospective ticket buyers. Thus, the data collected from the external stakeholders supports the theory to a certain extent, yet also brings up additional groups not mentioned by the theory.

Helitzer (2001) lists 14 categories of information that Web sites should provide to the sports media (listed in Section 2.2). The respondents in case one mention three of the fourteen uses by the media in their discussion: recent game results (especially if they
couldn’t be at the game), links to the ACC/NCAA, and checking on team schedules. Two other uses mentioned by the respondents but not mentioned by Helitzer (2001) are the identification of current key players and the use of “hometown journalists” searching for information and highlights of past “hometown” standout athletes. Thus, the data collected both supports (to a certain extent) Helitzer’s (2001) theory as well as introduces some new uses of sports Web sites by the media. The respondents in case two, the external stakeholders, noted seven categories also noted by Helitzer (2001): news releases, event and game schedules, statistical records and averages, recent game results (especially by non-local media), current quote sheet, and staff contact list. Additional ways in which the media is served, as noted by a journalist, include detailed and trustworthy accounts of breaking news as well as the timeliness of the news, both of which serve to assist the media. Finally, the author’s observation of the Web site indicates that in fact, 13 to 14 of the 14 categories are provided on the site, verifying that the data collected in the second case is supportive of Helitzer’s (2001) theory to a large extent.

Helitzer (2001) lists 25 ways in which Web sites should aim to serve the online fan (listed in Section 2.2). Five of the six ways in which the respondents in case one thought that the Web site should serve fans were mentioned by Helitzer (2001) as well, and are listed here: personnel bios of team/administrator, research (opponents), contests and free premiums (Fan Poll and Send a FanCard), current team records, and action photographs. According to the respondents, the final way in which the fan should be served online is via in-depth recent game information. Thus, the collected data supports the stated theory to a certain extent as well as introduces a new way in which the fan should be served online. The external stakeholders in case two mentioned four ways in which the online fan should be served which corresponded with Helitzer’s (2001) theory: provision of schedules, ticket information, photographs and personnel bios of the team/administrators. Two additional ways in which the fans may be served as mentioned by the respondents included question and answer features with coaches and the content (of articles) which may give a hint as to the current issues the team is facing. Moreover, the author’s observation of the site indicates that 20 of the 25 indicators of service mentioned by Helitzer (2001) are featured on this site, supporting the theory to a certain extent as well as introducing two new ways in which fans may be served online.

Helitzer (2001) states the sports Web sites should also aim to serve the internal staff and athletes. Two examples of such service include offering chat sessions and recruiting information. The internal stakeholders in case one use the Web site primarily to read up on their own team’s game as well as other University teams’ games, noting that the write-ups are generally more informative than other means of getting the information. This data neither supports nor opposes stated theory, yet brings up a new finding not mentioned by Helitzer (2001). The external stakeholders in case two had differing opinions, although the dominant opinion was that the staff and athletes use the site to learn about their peers. The minority opinion was that this group is not targeted at all but instead served marginally. The author notes that chat sessions occur from time to time with certain sports and that recruiting information is not formally found on the site. Thus, this data overall neither supports nor opposes previous theory, yet brings up some new findings.
Helitzer (2001) claims that Web sites can serve as revenue sources in six major areas (listed on in Section 2.2). The respondents in case one note that the purchase of tickets online could serve to create revenue for the University, yet this functionality is not currently available. The respondents also commented that the merchandise that may be purchased online creates revenue for the University. Thus, the data only marginally supports the theory in this case. In the case of the external stakeholders, the respondents state that the needs of this group are few and that the site should not be responsible for meeting the needs of this group. They note that merchandise may be purchased on the site but do not feel that this should be a main concern of the site. The author’s observation found that the advertisements and sale of merchandise are the main revenue streams on this site, with the sale of tickets serving as a prime future opportunity for additional revenue. Thus, the theory is only marginally supported by the data in this case as well.

Finally, Helitzer’s (2001) theory stated that the needs of four stakeholder groups should be met on sports Web sites. This theory was investigated to see whether any other stakeholder groups who also had needs yet whose needs are not currently being met on the site. One respondent in case one felt that all concerned publics needs are met on the site, while the others felt that service to other publics was needed. One respondent felt that recruits needs should be met more clearly while the other respondent felt past standout athletes’ should be served more clearly. Thus, overall, the data in this case disproves Helitzer’s (2001) theory. The external stakeholders in case two felt that all the necessary publics were being served. However, one respondent felt that one enhancement could be the provision of links for recruits and former student-athletes. Thus, overall, the data in this case supports Helitzer’s (2001) theory.

6.2.3 Research Question 3: How may the design of sports Web sites be described?
Day (1997) states that before a site can be designed with text and pictures, a company must know who its customers are and what they hope to gain from being on the site. Day (Ibid.) states that this may be done via a registration page, a membership fee, or the specificity of the site’s content. Such factors were only investigated by the author’s observation, which concluded that the specificity of content dictates whom the Web site serves; there is no registration page nor does the site take membership fees. Therefore, the data is partially in agreement with previous theory, in that the site’s content may help delineate who the site hopes to serve. Additionally, Day (1997) and Morris-Lee (2000) state that the site’s purpose must be distinctly articulated. The author’s observation revealed no such statement, other than the sub-heading “Official Site of Wake Forest Athletics” in the title bar along the top of the home page. Thus, the data for this issue is not in accordance with previous theory.

Day (1997) and Hallahan (2001) note that a Web site must have strong, relevant content. The respondents in case one felt that the WFU sports Web site’s content is relevant and up-to-date. One respondent felt that there was greater depth of information to be found on the Web site than is in the newspaper, while others particularly enjoy checking out the National Rankings and Upcoming Events features. The respondents in case two also

12 The only fees collected on this site are for use of the Web site as a person’s email address. Fees would be taken only if a person voluntarily signed up for this service.
claim that the site’s content is relevant and newsworthy, noting the newsworthiness of the Top Stories as well as the timeliness of the scores and articles on the site. The respondents claim that the WFU sports Web site is the first place they would look online to find information about the WFU sports teams. The author’s observation was in accordance with the respondents’ opinions on the site’s content.

Helitzer (2001) and Hallahan (2001) note the importance of the brevity of information and text on a Web site. The respondents in case one approved of the length of text, noting that if one doesn’t want to read the whole article, reading the title and the briefing gives one an idea of the gist of the article. Thus, the findings support previous theory in this case. The three respondents in case two each felt differently; the fan prefers that the titles are all that is shown of the “Top Stories” articles, the media representative was indifferent and the alum likes the mini-paragraphs about the most recent “Top Stories”. The alum elaborated by stating the small paragraphs on the home page broadens her knowledge of all sports at WFU. The author notes that the text that is featured under each heading on the home page is a synopsis of a recent event or story; the visitor may learn more about a story should he/she wish to read more at a later time. Therefore, the findings in this case neither supports nor is critical of previous theory.

Hallahan (2001) notes that PR practitioners should think carefully about how the placement and appearance of key messages on a Web page may influence the accessibility of the message. Specifically, important public relations messages should not be placed in secondary banner positions. The respondents in case one felt that the center-placement of the content is appropriate and expected. The student-athlete was particularly pleased to see the majority of the banner ads at the bottom, noting that the site’s placement of these items at the bottom serves to “highlight the true purpose of the page: student-athletes and teams”. Thus, the findings in this case support previous theory. The fan and alum in case two stated that they like the placement of the text in the middle of the page while the media representative said that the placement was unimportant. The fan stated that the WFU banner and the advertisement together take up too much space on the top of the page which should be used for content, while the alum stated that the advertisement does not belong at the top of the page but rather at the bottom. The author noted that the Top Stories’ placement in the center of the page indicates their importance, with the most recent story at the top. Therefore, the findings in this case support theory as stated by Hallahan (2001).

Kent (1998) notes that Web sites receive visitors because they provide information and services of value to diverse publics. This topic was only investigated by the author’s observation in case two, which revealed that the WFU sports Web site does succeed in this aspect. Information is provided to diverse publics via links such as those for all the Varsity sports teams, Cheerleaders, the Deacon Club (athletic boosters), Deacon Newsstand (archived newspaper stories relating to WFU sports), Traditions, Summer Camps (information for all prospective campers and parents), and On Campus (link for information about the University itself). Thus, Kent’s (1998) theory was upheld in this instance.
Bulletin boards and chat line discussion groups develop a sense of shared interests and allow visitors and fans to share in the team’s glory while also increasing Web site loyalty (Helitzer, 2001). This topic was only investigated by the author’s observation in case two, which revealed that the only evidence of tools such as these on the WFU sports Web site are the “Fan Polls” which change weekly and which test the visitor’s knowledge or opinion of WFU sports. While this tool allows visitors to see how other visitors feel about certain issues, it is not a way for these visitors to interact, thus indicating that the findings in this instance do not fit previous theory.

Other valuable features on Web sites, as noted by Kent (1998), include historical company information, FAQ’s, and product information. This topic was only investigated by the author’s observation in case two, which revealed that the archives for certain sports found on individual team pages, as well as the link “Traditions”, serves to provide historical company information. “Product information” such as game times and scores may be found in several places on the site (Upcoming Events, Schedules, or on each team’s page). A section for FAQ’s was not found on the site. Thus, the findings in this case generally support Kent’s (1998) theory.

Day (1997) states that the simple design rules of integrity and clarity must be followed on a Web site. The respondents in case one felt that the site maintains its integrity and clarity throughout. One respondent stated that the links on the left side of the page should be in a larger font size. She also disliked how the Web site does not take up the whole browser page; she thinks that the designers should broaden the page or change the setting so that they make use of all of the space they have. However, the coach did appreciate how the navigation bar on the left was constant from page to page. Thus, the findings in this case agree with Day’s (1997) theory. The findings for case two were limited to the author’s observation, which revealed that the site is easy to understand that the integrity of the site’s design has been maintained throughout the site. Thus, these findings are in agreement with theory.

Hallahan (2001) notes that graphics and interactive features, used in moderation, can make for an effective Web site. The respondents in case one felt that the graphics on this site were not very noticeable, yet when used, they were appropriate. The coach and student-athlete agreed that the colors of black and gold were appropriate because these are the school colors. The student-athlete also felt that the forward placement of the “WF” and the picture of the mascot on the home page were appropriate. She was also fond of the scrolling scores at the top of the page. Additionally, the student-athlete stated that she now feels that the site is more exciting, mainly on account of the new colors (black background, white and gold text). Thus, the findings support Hallahan’s (2001) theory, as these respondents seemed to feel that the graphics served to enhance the site.

Concerning the graphics, the respondents in case two stated that the site is too “busy”. The fan and alum noted that they don’t like the black background and white text, with the fan stating that he thinks this makes the text harder to read. In contrast, the media representative noted that the colors are appropriate and particularly likes the black background. The fan and alum mentioned their dislike for the banner at the top of the
page. The alum felt that the banner was too “busy”, making it difficult to read the part that says “Wake Forest Sports.com”. The alum’s favorite graphics are the game ticker (showing recent scores) running across the top of the screen, the navigation bar on the left-hand side of the page, the “Top Stories” and the “Upcoming Events” boxes. Finally, the fan and alum like the pictures on the site, while the media representative does not pay attention to them. The author’s observation revealed that the graphics are used sparsely, aside from the logo and heading on the home page, which the author finds to be busy and disturbing to the eye. Thus, the findings in this case neither support nor refute the previous theory.

Hallahan (2001) states that PR professionals should look to systems compatibility as an indicator of design simplicity. The coach, in case one, noted her dislike for how the Web site does not take up the entire Netscape Navigator browser. She thinks that the designers should broaden the page or change the setting so that they make use of all of the space they have. Thus the WFU sports Web site does not practice design simplicity in terms of its compatibility, refuting previous theory. The author’s observation in case two reveals that the site is in fact compatible and consistent in all browsers, supporting the previous theory.

A variety of authors (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998) note the importance of avoiding including items on a site that will require excessive loading time, long scrolls of text, or huge menus of choices. The respondents in case one note that, with a cable modem, the load time for the WFU sports Web site not a problem. Therefore the findings in this case are in accordance with theory. In case two, similar results were uncovered, as all three respondents felt the site loads quickly with a cable modem. The author also noted that the load time is fast and that visitors are not required to scroll excessively through long menus or choices. Thus, it seems that the findings in this case are also in accordance with previous theory.

According to certain authors, (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998) ease of navigation is very important on Web sites; users should be allowed to move easily from page to page. The respondents in case one felt that the WFU sports Web site’s navigation is simple, self-explanatory and easy to follow throughout the site. All respondents agreed that they liked how the men’s and women’s sports teams’ links are organized in the navigation bar on the left. Thus, the findings agree with previous theories. The result in case two was similar, in that all three respondents feel that the navigation is quite simple to understand. All respondents particularly like the menu of sports teams in the navigation bar. The fan particularly likes being able to scroll down in the “Upcoming Events” box. The only complaint from this group was the amount of links on the navigation bar. The author noted that the navigation resembles other sports Web sites and other Web sites in general, making the site easier to understand and more immediately familiar to visitors. Thus the findings agree with previous theories.

Finally, accuracy of use and success of search rates were stressed as important components of successful Web sites by several authors. (Hallahan, 2001; Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Kent, 1998) The respondents in case one generally do not use the search tool
because they feel they already know where everything they need to find on the site is located. The coach added that search buttons are usually a pain and generally inaccurate, so she prefers to search for things on her own. Thus, these findings do not support previous theory. All respondents in case two state that they have never used the tool and can’t imagine that they ever will, as they think things are very easy to find on the site. The alum stated, “I don’t think the search tool is necessary on a site like this.” The author’s observation showed that the search tool returned inaccurate results the majority of the time. Thus, the findings in this case do not support previous theory.

6.2 Cross-Case Analysis

In this part of the analysis, the two cases will be analyzed and the results compared to one another. Research question one will be analyzed first followed by research questions two and three.

6.2.1 Research Question 1: How may the objectives of sports Web sites be described?

Table 6.1 below shows the variables concerning the WFU sports Web site’s objectives as they relate to company/product awareness and information alongside the data from the internal and external stakeholders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Case</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provision of information and specifications</td>
<td>Yes, and the main objective</td>
<td>Yes, and the main objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of company and/or products</td>
<td>Yes, used for this</td>
<td>Yes, used for this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of new initiatives</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>Yes, used for this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The similarities between the two cases are found in the fact that both internal and external stakeholders found “provision of information and specifications” to be the main objectives of the WFU Sports Web site. Additionally, respondents from each group agreed that an additional objective of the WFU Sports Web site is to introduce a company and/or its products. Finally, the internal and external stakeholders differed on whether an objective of the site was to promote new initiatives, with no conclusion drawn by the internal stakeholders and the external stakeholders claiming that this is an objective.

Table 6.2 below shows the variables concerning the WFU sports Web site’s objectives as they relate to providing communication and customer support alongside the data from the internal and external stakeholders.
Table 6.2: Web site objectives: communication and customer support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Case</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with stakeholders and media</td>
<td>No, and not a main objective</td>
<td>No, and not a main objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish interactivity</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>No, and not a main objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build a customer database</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a forum for two-way communication</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving communication amongst the organization, its leadership and other publics</td>
<td>Yes, the site attempts to do this</td>
<td>Yes, the site attempts to do this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handles customer complaints, queries and suggestions</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The internal and external stakeholder groups agreed on certain aspects of ways in which the WFU Web site’s objectives include or exclude providing communication and customer support. The two groups agreed that communicating with stakeholders and the media is not a main objective of this site. They also agreed that the site attempts to improve communication amongst the organization, its leadership and other publics. The groups disagree as to the whether an objective of the WFU Sports Web site is to handle customer complaints, queries and suggestions, with the internal stakeholders feeling this is not an objective and the external stakeholders feeling that because the capability is available, it is an objective. Finally, the groups neither agree nor disagree on three topics: establishing interactivity, building a customer database and providing a forum for two-way communication. The internal stakeholders did not comment on these issues, while the external stakeholders felt that the site does not establish interactivity nor provide a forum for two-way communication. The external stakeholders did not come to a conclusion as to whether the site may build a customer database.

Table 6.3 below shows the variables concerning the WFU sports Web site’s objectives as they relate to Watson’s (1998) list of attractors alongside the data from the internal and external stakeholders.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Attractor</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Entertainment Park</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Archive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive Sponsorship</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Town Hall</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Club</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gift Shop</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Freeway Intersection</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Customer Service Center</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The internal and external stakeholders agree that the WFU Sports Web site does serve as an Entertainment Park, an Archive, a Gift Shop and a Customer Service Center, and that it is not a Town Hall, Club, or Freeway Intersection, as defined by Watson et al. (1998). The stakeholder groups disagree, however, as to whether the site provides Exclusive Sponsorship, with the internal stakeholders claiming it doesn’t and with the external stakeholders claiming that it does.

6.2.2 Research Question 2: How can the stakeholders served by sports Web sites be described?

Table 6.4 below shows the stakeholders publics with whom Mullin (1993) maintains that collegiate sports organizations should interact. Data from the internal and external stakeholders is shown regarding the stakeholders served by the WFU sports Web site.

Table 6.4: Stakeholder publics served by the WFU sports Web site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCAA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booster Club</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppliers/Vendors</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fans/Spectators</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Recruits</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors/Patrons</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni/ae: Local, Regional, National</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government: Local, Regional, National</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Media: Local, Regional, National</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University President</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Board of Trustees</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Athletic Department</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Coaching Staff</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Players</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Business Community</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4 above shows that the internal and external stakeholder groups agree on seven stakeholder publics that the WFU Sports Web site serves. The two groups are in agreement that the site serves: opponents, fans/spectators, potential recruits, sponsors/patrons, alumni, University athletic department, and University coaching staff. The groups are in agreement that the site does not serve: NCAA, government, University President, and the University Board of Trustees. While the internal stakeholders felt that the site does not serve conference, booster club, radio, television, suppliers/vendors, print
media, and the local business community, the external stakeholders feel that the site does serve these publics. On the other hand, the internal stakeholders feel that the site serves the players while the external stakeholders do not feel that it does.

The five additional publics mentioned by the internal stakeholders but not mentioned by Mullin et al. (1993) were: WFU faculty, WFU students, family members of student-athletes, prospective students and opposing SID’s. The external stakeholders noted four publics who are also served by the site but which were not mentioned by Mullin et al. (1993): WFU faculty, WFU students, friends and family of students or student-athletes, and prospective ticket buyers.

Table 6.5 below shows the means through which a sports Web site may provide information to the media, according to Helitzer (2001). The data collected from the internal and external stakeholder groups are shown opposite these factors in the Table, then described below it.

Table 6.5: Provision of information to the media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Info.</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News releases personalized for print or broadcast</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Guide Reprint and recent updates</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent game results</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press conference dates and summations</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media alerts and brief news filters</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special feature suggestions</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Maybe- subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>League or conference information</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event and game schedules</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical records and averages</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season compilations and comparisons</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digest of coverage by other media</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current quote sheet</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff contact including all communication devices</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of retrieving historical records</td>
<td>No- not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The internal and external stakeholders both mentioned that the media likely uses the site to get recent game results, league or conference information, and event/game schedules. The two groups differed on all other categories, aside from “special feature suggestions”, whereby the external group felt this was subjective while the internal group did not mention this as a possibility.
The thirteen categories represented with a “Yes” in the case two data above signifies that information which the respondents in the external group felt was provided on the site (seven categories) as well as that which the author felt was used on the site (13 categories). The seven categories noted by external stakeholders as well as by Helitzer (2001) include: news releases, event and game schedules, statistical records and averages, recent game results, current quote sheet and staff contact list.

Two additional ways in which the media may use the Web site as mentioned by the internal stakeholders includes identification of current key players and “hometown” journalists who use the site to catch up on highlights of past hometown standout athletes. The external stakeholders stated that additional ways the media is served by the site includes the provision of detailed and trustworthy accounts of breaking news as well as the timeliness of the news.

Table 6.6 shows the indicators of service to the online fan alongside the data collected from the internal and external stakeholders.

**Table 6.6: Indicators of service to the online fan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator of service</th>
<th>Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future schedules</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special event registration statistics</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical records</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel bios of team and administrators</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed product sales</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlet for suggestions and complaints</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast coverage</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact titles, numbers and addresses</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan clubs</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contests and free premiums</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm-up exercises and training</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticket information and order form</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes (for selected sports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current team records</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action photographs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stadium travel and parking advice (maps)</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes (for selected sports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising and sponsorships</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual email addresses</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing (turn spectators into consumers)</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic newsletter</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preseason training and exhibitions</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autograph, photo and tour sessions</td>
<td>No, not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes (as advertised)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The internal and external stakeholders agreed (as shown in Table 6.6) that the site serves the online fan by providing personnel bios of the team and administrators, research, contests and free premiums, current team records and action photographs. They also agreed that certain indicators were absent on the site, specifically special event registration and statistics, warm-up exercises and training, fundraising and sponsorships, employment opportunities and recruiting. All other indicators were not mentioned by the internal stakeholders yet were noted by the external stakeholders (which includes the author’s observation).

The twenty categories represented with a “Yes” in the case two data above (Table 6.6) represents the indicators of service which the respondents in the external group felt was provided on the site (four categories) as well as that which the author felt was used on the site (the aforementioned four and sixteen other categories). The four categories noted by external stakeholders as well as by Helitzer (2001) include provision of schedules, personnel bios of the team/administrators, ticket information, and photographs. Additionally, the internal stakeholders mentioned that fans may be served via in-depth recent game information, which was not mentioned by Helitzer’s (2001) theory. The external stakeholders mention question and answer features with coaches and the content of the articles both also serve the online fan.

Table 6.7 below shows the indicators of service to the internal staff and athletes as outlined by Helitzer (2001) alongside the data collected from the internal and external stakeholders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Case</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chat Sessions</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting Information</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 6.7 (above), neither internal nor external stakeholders saw the use of chat sessions or provision of recruiting information on the site as ways in which the internal staff and athletes are served. Alternatively, the internal stakeholders stated that these publics are served on the site by way of the rich content found in the articles on the site. The external stakeholders saw service in the content as well, as staff and athlete learn about their peers and colleagues, with some noting that these publics are not targeted on the site at all. Thus, both internal and external groups bring up new findings.

Table 6.8 below shows the ways in which the internal and external stakeholders saw the Web site serve as a gateway to lucrative revenue sources as outlined by Helitzer (2001).
Table 6.8: Gateway to revenue services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Case</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscription</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticket Sales</td>
<td>No, not currently</td>
<td>No, not currently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of Licensed Merchandise</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 6.8 shows that the internal and external stakeholders agree that the site does not currently gain revenue by way of subscription, ticket sales, fundraising and research, while it does gain revenue by way of the sale of licensed merchandise. The stakeholder groups disagreed when it came to advertising, as the respondents in the internal and external groups did not note this as a source of revenue, while the author did mention it. Moreover, the external stakeholders felt that the site should not serve as a revenue source, which was not the same stance taken by the internal stakeholders and is thus worthwhile to note.

Table 6.9 displays the four stakeholder publics that Helitzer (2001) felt the WFU sports Web site should serve, alongside the data collected from the two cases.

Table 6.9: Stakeholder publics served

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Case</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Fan</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Staff/Athletes</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue Sources</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent</td>
<td>Yes, to some extent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 6.9, all stakeholder publics that Helitzer (2001) claim should be served on sports Web sites have been served to some extent on the WFU Sports Web site, according to the data from the two cases. Additionally, the respondents in both cases noted that two stakeholder groups whose needs have not been served on the site but who the site should consider serving in the future are recruits and former student-athletes.

6.2.3 Research Question 3: How may the design of sports Web sites be described?

Table 6.10 displays some of the variables mentioned by various authors to be important to the design of Web sites.
Table 6.10: Web site design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Case</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify customers via registration page</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify customers via membership fee</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify customers via specificity of site’s content</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of site’s purpose</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data collected regarding whether the site identified customers via a registration page, membership fee, the specificity of the site’s content, and the statement of the site’s purpose was investigated only by the author’s observation and recorded in the external stakeholder cells in Table 6.10 above. These variables were not found on the site, save identification of customers via the specificity of the site’s content.

Table 6.11 displays some additional variables mentioned by various authors to be important to the design of Web sites.

Table 6.11: Web site design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Case</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong, relevant, newsworthy, &amp; credible content</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief text</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Both yes and no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement of content</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of information and services to diverse publics</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin boards and chat line discussion groups</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical company information, FAQ’s, and product information</td>
<td>Neither yes nor no</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.11 shows that both internal and external respondents felt that the WFU Sports Web site provided strong, relevant and appropriately placed content. With regards to the brevity of the text, the internal stakeholders approved of the text length while the external stakeholders had mixed responses. The site’s provision of information and services to diverse publics, bulletin boards and chat line discussion groups, and historical company information, FAQ’s, and product information were investigated by the author only. This data was recorded under the case two data in Table 6.11 above. The author found the site to provide information and services to diverse publics as well as provide historical company information, FAQ’s and product information, while the author did not find bulletin boards and chat line discussion groups.
Table 6.12 displays some additional variables mentioned by various authors to be important to the design of Web sites.

Table 6.12: Web site design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Case</th>
<th>Case One: Internal Stakeholders</th>
<th>Case Two: External Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design rules of integrity and clarity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphics and interactive features</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
<td>Neither appropriate nor inappropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems compatibility</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive load time, long scrolls of text, large menus</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of navigation</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success of search rates</td>
<td>Unsuccessful/unnecessary</td>
<td>Unsuccessful/unnecessary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 6.12 above, the respondents in both cases agreed that the design rules of integrity and clarity were followed on the site, the load time and navigation is appropriate, and that the search function is both unsuccessful and unnecessary. The respondents in case one also felt that the graphics on the site were appropriate, while the respondents in case two felt differently; some enjoyed the graphics while other felt they made the site too “busy”. A similar disagreement was found on the topic of systems compatibility, where the internal stakeholders felt the site was not compatible while the external stakeholders disagreed.
7 Findings and Conclusions

In the previous chapter, the empirical data gathered from the two case studies were analyzed. In this chapter, the research questions posed in chapter one will be answered by presenting the findings of this study. Thereafter, some general conclusions regarding each research question will be made. Finally, implications for further research will be suggested.

7.1 How can the objectives of sports Web sites be described?

The findings of this study suggest that the primary objective of sports Web sites is to provide information and product specifications. An ancillary objective was discovered to be the introduction of a sports organization, in this instance, and/or its products. Promoting new initiatives seemed to be truer in the case of the external stakeholders than the internal stakeholders. This could be because external stakeholders view topics on the Web site as “news”, thus making much of the content appear to be “new initiatives”, while the topics may be “old news” to the internal stakeholders due to their proprietary position within the University.

Furthermore, as concerns communication and customer support, the study reveals that communicating with stakeholders and the media is not an objective of sports Web sites. However, the findings of this study maintain that improving communication amongst the organization, its leadership and other publics is an objective of sports Web sites. Establishing interactivity and providing a forum for two-way communication seems to be less true in the case of external stakeholders than internal stakeholders. This could be because external stakeholders are more suited to handling these issues in an offline format. Handling customer complaints, queries and suggestions seems to be truer in the case of the external stakeholders than internal stakeholders. This could be simply because of the differing perspectives; while the internal stakeholders may never consider going to the Web site to handle a complaint, going instead straight to the source, the external stakeholders may have no choice but to use other media, such as the Web site. Thus, the external stakeholders see the Web site as a vehicle for this type of communication, while the internal stakeholders do not. As for whether a database is being built on the site, it seems that the potential is there to build a database, and one may in fact be being built. The internal stakeholders did not discuss the possibility of this functionality, while the external stakeholders did, making the concept of this possibly being an objective truer in the case of the external stakeholders than internal stakeholders.

The data collected in this study maintain that sports Web site objectives include providing visitors with exciting entertainment opportunities (serving as virtual entertainment parks), historical information (archives), and opportunities to obtain/purchase gifts and free samples (gift shop). Additionally, it was discovered that serving as a virtual town hall, electronic community/“club”, or as a one-stop resource center for Web surfers (freeway intersection) does not comprise the objectives of sports Web sites. Providing exclusive sponsorship to events and serving as a customer service center seemed to be truer in the case of the external stakeholders than the internal stakeholders. Following the line of statements made above, while the internal stakeholders may not see the Web site as a way to get event information or provide...
customer service, this may be the main concern of those external to the day-to-day functions of the University.

From the basis of the analysis and the findings for research question one, the following specific conclusions have been drawn:

- Providing information and product specifications are more important objectives for sports Web sites than promoting new initiatives.
- Improving communication amongst the organization, its leadership and other publics is a more important objective than communicating with stakeholders and the media.
- Providing entertainment opportunities, information and free gifts and samples are more important objectives than serving as a virtual town hall, electronic community or club, or as a one-stop resource center for Web surfers.

7.2 How can the stakeholders served by sports Web sites be described?

The stakeholders served by sports Web sites may be described in various ways. To begin, it was determined that opponents, fans/spectators, potential recruits, sponsors/patrons, alumni, university athletic department and university coaching staff are all served by sports Web sites. It was also determined that the NCAA, government, university president, and university board of trustees are not served by sports Web sites. An explanation for the difference in these two groups is that one is seen to be more closely involved with the actual sport, in terms of playing it, coaching it or watching it, as opposed to the other group, whose activities are linked more indirectly. Thus, it seems that the closer the individual is to the actual sport/activity, the more that person is served by the sports Web site. An additional discovery was that the university faculty, university students, friends and family of students/student-athletes, prospective students, prospective ticket buyers, and opposing SID’s may also be stakeholders served by collegiate sports Web sites.

The study revealed that sports Web sites provide information to the media such as recent game results, league or conference information, and event and game schedules. Additional ways in which the media may use sports Web sites includes identifying current key players, researching standout “hometown” athletes, and learning the details of breaking news in a timely fashion. This finding could be explained in that journalists tend to use the site to “back-up” information they have already received from University athletics administrators; they will then create their own story, as journalists do, based on what they themselves witness in person.

Data collected in this study also revealed that online fans are served by sports Web sites by providing personnel bios of the team and administrators, research, contests and free premiums, current team records, and action photographs. Moreover, the findings show that special event registration statistics, warm-up exercises and training, fundraising and scholarships, employment opportunities, and recruiting. It was also discovered that online
fans could be served by providing in-depth recent game information, question and answer features with coaches, and the content of the articles.

The findings of the study also indicate that internal staff and athletes are not served by chat sessions or recruiting information posted on sports Web sites. In contrast, this stakeholder public is likely better served by the content in the articles. This finding can best be explained by the natural human tendency to want to read about things in which they are involved or interested in. Thus, while this public is not interested in chatting with each (they likely can do this in person) nor do they have any interest in recruiting information, they do maintain an interest in the University, which the site seems to satisfy in the articles on the site. Moreover, regarding revenue sources served by the site, it was found that the sale of licensed merchandise is the main revenue source targeted by sports Web sites. It was also discovered that subscriptions, fundraising and research are not the main ways in which a sports organization seeks to produce revenue from its Web site.

It was also discovered that while the media, online fans, internal staff/athletes and revenue sources are all served by sports Web sites, other publics whose needs also should be met are recruits and former student-athletes. Thus, it seems that while the former publics have a current involvement with the University, the findings in this study indicate that the latter publics who may not yet be involved with the University (such as recruits) and those that were once closely involved with the University (former student athletes) need to be served online as well. Thus, the timeline which the Web site targets needs to be broadened, in a sense; it has room to expand from simply serving present publics to serving past and future publics as well.

From the basis of the analysis and the findings for research question two, the following specific conclusions arise:

- The closer the stakeholder is to the point of sports action (such as opponents, fans/spectators, potential recruits, university athletic department and coaching staff) the more these stakeholders are served by sports Web sites.

- The media is best served on sports Web sites through the provision factual information, such as recent game results, league or conference information, and event and game schedules, as opposed to more contextual or anecdotal information.

- The provision of team and administrator bios, research, contests and free premiums, current team records, and action photographs serves the online fan more than the provision of special event registration statistics, warm-up exercises and training, fundraising, employment opportunities and recruiting.

- Internal publics, such as staff and athletes, are best served on sports Web sites by the site’s content-rich articles.

- Selling merchandise is a better way to gain revenue on sports Web sites than via subscriptions, fundraising and research.
- Publics currently involved with a sports organization are most likely to be served on sports Web sites, while publics past and future should also be served online.

### 7.3 How can the design of sports Web sites be described?

The design of sports Web sites can be described in a variety of ways. One important variable to consider in designing a sports Web site was found to be identifying customers via the specificity of the site’s content. Identifying customers via the specificity of the site’s content was found to be more important than via registration pages, membership fees, or a statement of the site’s purpose. This could be because the designers felt that the content and graphics of the page immediately identified the site’s purpose. Additionally, it is possible that the site designers knew that opponents and fans, for example, visit the site frequently and may be “turned off” should they have to register on a site that provides entertainment.

Moreover, strong, relevant, newsworthy and credible content, the provision of information and services to diverse publics and the provision of historical company (sports organization) information, FAQ’s, and product information were found to be more important on sports Web sites than bulletin boards and chat line discussion groups. The popularity of “sports talk radio” in the U.S. may lead one to believe that such a concept would be just as popular online, however this finding is in contrast to that. The reason for this could be that publics view the site as an information source (as noted in the findings for research question one) and thus would not consider visiting the site to have discussion which they are used to having offline. Web designers may have sensed this and thus left such features off of the Web site.

Finally, the data in this study reveals that the design rules of integrity and clarity must be followed on sports Web sites, as well as appropriate load times, scrolls of text, and navigation. These features were found to be more important than graphics and interactive features and search tools. Moreover, search tools were found to be unsuccessful/unnecessary on sports Web sites.

From the basis of the analysis and the findings for research question three, the following specific conclusions may be deduced:

- Sports Web sites identify and track visitors more by the specificity of the site’s content, provision of information to diverse publics and historical information, FAQ’s and product information than by registration pages, membership fees or statements of the site’s purpose.

- The provision of strong, relevant content was found to be more important on sports Web sites than bulletin boards and chat line discussion groups.

- The design rules of integrity and clarity were found to be more important than graphics and interactive features and search tools.
7.4 Implications for Practitioners

The implication for practitioners can be seen as suggestions for companies that design sports Web sites for various publics. The following implications are based on the empirical data, analysis, and conclusions conducted during this study.

To begin, practitioners should keep in mind that internal and external publics feel that sports Web sites’ main objective is to provide information and product specifications, as well as to introduce a sports organization and its products. Secondly, practitioners should use the Web site to improve communication amongst the organization, its leadership and other publics. Finally, practitioners should aim to create sports Web sites that aim to provide visitors with exciting entertainment opportunities, historical information, and opportunities to purchase gifts and obtain free samples.

Additionally, practitioners should note that opponents, fans/spectators, potential recruits, sponsors/patrons, alumni, university athletic department and university coaching staff should be the “main” stakeholders served by sports Web sites. The media, online fans, internal staff/athletes, revenue sources, recruits and former student-athletes should also be served by sports Web sites. Specifically, practitioners should aim to serve the media by providing recent game results, league or conference information, and event and game schedules. Practitioners can serve the online fan by providing personnel bios of the team and administrators, research, contests and free premiums, current team records, and action photographs. Practitioners may serve the internal staff and athletes via the content found in the site’s articles. In terms of revenue, practitioners should know that the sale of licensed merchandise is the main revenue source of sports Web sites.

Finally, practitioners should bear in mind that customers on sports Web sites may be identified by the specificity of the site’s content, thus sports Web sites should be designed with strong, relevant content. Additionally, practitioners should take into consideration that brief text is desirable on sports Web sites. Moreover, providing information and services to diverse publics, historical organization information, FAQ’s, and product information are important to the design of sports Web sites. Practitioners should not neglect the design rules of integrity and clarity on sports Web sites, as well as appropriate load times, scrolls of text, and navigation. Finally, practitioners should remember that, in this study, search tools were found to be unsuccessful/unnecessary on sports Web sites.

7.5 Implications for Theory

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe a phenomenon within a specific research area, as well as to deepen the understanding of this phenomenon by answering certain research questions. These research questions were connected to how Web sites are used as public relations tools for sports teams. This study’s contribution to theory regarded applying existing theories concerning Web sites and public relations and testing their validity. More specifically, for research question one it was determined that with regard to the overall objectives of sports Web sites, the empirical findings generally agreed with theory. In contrast, the empirical data gathered in this study was generally in opposition to theories concerning the degree to which Web sites provide communication
and customer support. Moreover, the empirical data was in agreement with theory on Web sites as attractors, as the theory served as a guideline to describe functions of Web sites as attractors.

Regarding research question two, the majority of the findings for this study do not support theory on the way in which sports Web sites serve stakeholders such as the media, online fan, internal staff and athletes, and revenue sources. However, the empirical data did note that these publics are served to some extent on the investigated sports Web site, although not to the extent described by theory. The empirical data was successful in uncovering some new findings concerning this topic, such as the concept that university faculty, university students, friends and family of students/student-athletes, prospective students, prospective ticket buyers, and opposing SID’s should also be included in the list of stakeholders served by collegiate sports Web sites. Additionally, empirical data revealed that the media may use sports Web sites to identify current key players, research standout “hometown” athletes, and learn the details of breaking news in a timely fashion. Moreover, online fans may be served by providing in-depth recent game information, question and answer features with coaches, and the content of the articles. Additionally, internal staff and athletes are likely best served on sports Web sites by the content in the articles. The empirical data also uncovered additional stakeholder publics who should be served on sports Web sites, such as recruits and former student-athletes.

Concerning the third and final research question, the findings in this study reveal that previous theories were only supported minimally. The most notable finding was that, in contrast to theory, search tools were found to be unsuccessful/unnecessary on sports Web sites.

In addition, it should be noted this study has contributed to previous theory by increasing the understanding of how sports Web sites are used as public relations tools.

7.6 Implications for Future Research

Over the course of the research collected for this study, issues that were not within the scope of this study were uncovered. Many of these issues would make interesting propositions for other researchers; thus, they have been included as implications for further research.

- The effectiveness of sports Web sites could be investigated with the aim of discovering how sports teams assess the effectiveness of their Web sites.

- The way in which sports organizations assess the effectiveness of their public relations efforts could be investigated.

- A sports organization’s public relations strategy could be investigated to determine how this strategy fits into the organization’s overall strategy.

- The research questions from this thesis could be quantified with the purpose of determining whether the results could be generalized.
- The purpose and research questions of this thesis could remain constant while altering its focus to a comparative analysis of collegiate versus professional sports Web sites.

- The purpose and research questions of this thesis could remain constant while altering its focus to a comparative analysis of Division I, II, III and NAIA colleges and universities.
References


Appendix A: Interview Guide

Investigated Web site: http://wakeforestsports.ocsn.com

How would you describe the objectives of sports Web sites?

- Describe how the WFU sports Web site is used to provide awareness and information about WFU Athletics. If it is not used in this way, why not?
- Do you feel that providing communication and “customer” support is an objective of this site? Why/how so?
- What factors do you feel the Web site uses to attract visitors?
  - How are these factors used?

Is there anything you would like to add on this topic?

Describe the stakeholder groups (publics) served by this Web site.

- How are the needs of these groups met on this Web site:
  - Media
  - Fans
  - Internal staff and athletes
  - Revenue sources

- Why are these groups important/are there other groups whose needs are not met by the site?

Is there anything you would like to add on this topic?

Describe the design of this Web site.

- Do you find the content to be relevant and newsworthy? Explain how.
- Describe the placement and length of the text (content) on the home page.
- Describe the placement and purpose of the graphics. How are they (in)appropriate?
- Do you feel the navigation is easy to understand, in terms of search capability, accuracy, and menus of choices? Explain.
- Do you feel the load time is too long? Explain.

Is there anything you would like to add on this topic?
Appendix B: Observation Checklist

Research Question 1: How can the objectives of (sports) Web sites be described?

Provision of general information as well as detailed product information and specifications

Promotion of new initiatives

Fostering and encouraging consumer interaction with the product range

Handles customer complaints, queries and suggestions

Provides a forum for two-way communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Attractor</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Used on WFU Sports Web site, &amp; to what degree?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Entertainment Park</td>
<td>Offers entertainment and a high degree of participation. Interactive, recreational and challenging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Archive</td>
<td>Aids in discovery of company’s history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive Sponsorship</td>
<td>Provides timely, exclusive, valuable information regarding an event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Town Hall</td>
<td>Venue for forums and discussions; participation is engaging; high interactivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Club</td>
<td>Visitors must register to participate; interactive, recreational and social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gift Shop</td>
<td>Gifts and free samples used to gain attention; generally digitized products such as software or photographs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Freeway Intersection</td>
<td>Present advanced information search services (search engines); may aim to become a user’s entry to the Web</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Customer Service Center</td>
<td>Meet customer information needs and assist in ownership phase of product life cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Watson et al. (1998)

Research Question 2: How can the stakeholders served on (sports) Web sites be described?

Interaction with the following publics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Interaction with?</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Interaction with?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCAA</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alumni/ae: Local, Regional, National</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category of Info.</td>
<td>Provided?</td>
<td>Category of Info.</td>
<td>Provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News releases personalized for print or broadcast</td>
<td></td>
<td>Event and game schedules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Guide Reprint and recent updates</td>
<td></td>
<td>Statistical records and averages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent game results</td>
<td></td>
<td>Season compilations and comparisons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press conference dates and summations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Digest of coverage by other media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media alerts and brief news filters</td>
<td></td>
<td>Current quote sheet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special feature suggestions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff contact including all communication devices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>League or conference information</td>
<td></td>
<td>Method of retrieving historical records</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicators of service to the online fan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator of service</th>
<th>Used?</th>
<th>Indicator of service</th>
<th>Used?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future schedules</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ticket information and order form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special event registration statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td>Current team records</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical records</td>
<td></td>
<td>Action photographs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel bios of team and administrators</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stadium travel and parking advice (maps)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fundraising and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to internal staff and athletes:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Chat sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Recruiting information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Service to the following revenue sources:

- Advertising
- Subscription
- Ticket Sales
- Sale of licensed merchandise
- Fundraising
- Research

**Research Question 3: How can the design of (sports) Web sites be described?**

With regards to Web site design, the following factors will be investigated:

- Identification of the customers and their goals via registration pages, membership fees or the specificity of content

- Statement of the site’s purpose and value to customers

- Strong, relevant content
  - New, updated, newsworthy and credible content
- Brief text
- Placement of content

- Provision of information and services of value to diverse publics.
  - Online forums, bulletin board, chat line discussion groups, trivia
  - Historical company information, FAQ’s, and product information

- Design simplicity
  - Integrity and clarity
    - Moderate and appropriate use of graphics and interactive features

- Systems compatibility
  - Avoid excessive loading time, long scrolls or text, or huge menus of choices
  - Ease of navigation; quick, easy and subjectively pleasing access to content

- Accuracy of use and success of search rates
Appendix C: Screen Shots of WFU Sports Website