

Spring 2018

# REINFORCING NARRATIVE TO BENEFIT THE BRAND: AN INSTAGRAM CASE STUDY OF SEATTLE SEAHAWKS QUARTERBACK RUSSELL WILSON

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REINFORCING NARRATIVE TO BENEFIT THE BRAND: AN INSTAGRAM CASE  
STUDY OF SEATTLE SEAHAWKS QUARTERBACK RUSSELL WILSON

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—  
A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Science in Communications

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By

John W. Collett

Spring 2018

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## ABSTRACT

This research is a case study of Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson that focuses on how he uses the social media platform Instagram to reinforce the narrative surrounding his life. A total of four methods are used in this study. A Content Analysis categorized all of Russell Wilson's Instagram posts for 2017 based on a framework developed by Smith & Sanderson (2015). The combination of the Rhetorical Criticism methods Close Textual Analysis and Narrative Criticism took a more in-depth look into one specific video post from Wilson's Instagram account. Lastly, an interview was conducted with Wilson's branding company, West2East Empire, to understand what strategies are used by Wilson on his social media platforms. Mixed methodologies allowed for the development of interconnections between the results from each method. Some of the most noteworthy findings were that (1) Wilson uses narrative to develop posts that benefit both his brand and outside brands, (2) Walter Fisher's Narrative Coherence and Fidelity are a key strategy used by West2East Empire, and (3) athletes have a stronger influence on social media when their sport is in-season rather than out of season. Social media use by athletes continues to be a popular topic to study, and this investigation takes a multifaceted approach to better understand one of the most popular athletes in the social media landscape.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever indebted to the guidance and dedication of Dr. Patricia Chantrill. You helped me shape this curiosity into a detailed and multilayered thesis. Thank you for your commitment and support to me in this pursuit. I'd also like to express my gratitude for the rest of my committee, Dr. Chadron Hazelbaker and Dr. Robert Bartlett. Dr. Hazelbaker provided superb guidance and perspective as the study built around Russell Wilson began to take shape. Dr. Bartlett's suggestion pushed me to make contact with West2East Empire, which turned out to be one of the more meaningful pieces of the study. Thank you as well to all the professors who were kind enough to listen to my thesis idea and offer support over my two years at Eastern Washington University, especially Dr. Peter Shields, Dr. Susan Stearns, and Professor Steve Stewart. I'd also like to acknowledge my parents, Bill and Sally Collett. My dad shaped my deep love for sports since I was child, and any writing ability I may possess comes from my mother's influence. In a way, this thesis represents their combined impact on my life. Lastly, I would not have survived the thesis process, or graduate school in general, without the love and support of my wife, Melanie. You have been such a rock for me physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I love being on your team! A special thanks to my baby daughter who is due in mid-June. While you are still in the womb now, your coming has given me plenty of motivation to finish this thesis to the best of my ability.

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## INTRODUCTION

The world of sports has been a central focus for all my life. My grade school mornings were spent with my dad, eating cereal and watching ESPN's *Sportscenter*. As I've entered the world of research, I am in agreement with Sports Communication Scholar Dr. Jimmy Sanderson who explains why sports is a proper vantage point to study the world: "It is difficult to find an avenue in life that is not influenced or affected in some degree, by sports" (Sanderson, 2011, p. ix). Sports are fun. At their core they are just a game or an event. From a broader perspective though, sports forms communities and relationships, while being the lifeblood of American culture.

I have always been a big sports fan, but when I was a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader in 1997, I especially loved the National Basketball Association. Living in Peoria, Arizona, my favorite team was the Phoenix Suns, but I could name nearly every star player on any roster throughout the league. My fandom led to a basketball card collection, followed by a unique idea. While reading *Beckett Magazine*, mostly to study the value of my sports card collection, I noticed that a page in the magazine listed the addresses for every NBA team. I remember thinking, maybe this would provide a way to connect to some of my favorite athletes. It wasn't enough to watch them play the game, collect their basketball cards, or know all their stats. Perhaps, writing a letter would connect me with them like never before.

I proceeded to draft a letter to Detroit Pistons' star Grant Hill. I don't remember what the content of the letter said, but I remember asking for a response of some sort. As an 8-year-old, I likely asked for an autographed picture or basketball card to add to my collection. I mailed the letter out with plenty of hope. As the weeks passed, I forgot about

the letter. It nearly escaped my mind entirely until one day when I came home from school. My mom told me I received a letter from the Detroit Pistons. I opened the letter and in it found a printed message and picture of Grant Hill. I was ecstatic. It was clearly a mass-produced letter that Grant sent out to thank his fans, but it didn't take away from the meaning I associated with it. Receiving mail from one of my favorite NBA players gave me a sense of connection like I had never felt before. It felt like this athlete now knew about me, and I had the ability to know even more about him.

As impressionable as my experience was, I wonder how it would compare to the opportunities for young sports fans in today's social media climate. Whether it's through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or other social media platforms, fans can connect with athletes like never before. It seems a far cry from receiving a letter back from an athlete. Fans can learn more than ever about their favorite athletes, especially their life outside of the sport they play. Social media platforms make it possible to feel like we can know these athletes on a personal level. They can even respond to our tweets and messages or respond to our posts with likes and comments. There is now the perception that fans can be even more connected to their favorite athlete.

This idea got me thinking. If social media is the way that we connect with our athletes today, what messages are the athletes communicating to their fans? While there is a broad spectrum of athletes that I choose to follow on social media, my experience in my professional career and graduate school led me to study Seattle Seahawks' quarterback Russell Wilson.



### **Why Russell Wilson?**

It is fair to wonder then of all the well-known people in the world, why should this study focus on Seattle Seahawks' quarterback Russell Wilson? For one, I've been able to study Wilson for far longer than the timeline of this research. My professional work experience has always been connected with Wilson. My first job out of college started in August of 2010. I was a weekend sports anchor for KEPR-TV in Pasco, Washington. That summer Russell Wilson was playing minor league baseball for the local team, the Tri-City Dust Devils. Wilson's time in Pasco was short-lived. He returned to North Carolina State University in the fall for his junior football season, but as a sports department we continued to show his football highlights. Even though we were more than 3,000 miles away from NC State, it's a classic move by any small-town sports market to mention on the news, "Hey, here's former Tri-City Dust Devil Russell Wilson." I kept tabs on Wilson the following year as he led the University of Wisconsin to the Rose Bowl. What happened next was something that no one could have anticipated.

Russell Wilson was selected by the Seattle Seahawks in the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of the 2012 NFL Draft. A local hero to the Tri-Cities of Washington was now getting a shot with the football team that embodied the Pacific Northwest. As my professional career moved to Spokane, Washington, I continued to follow Russell's career as he emerged as one of the premiere players in all the National Football League. I watched nearly every game of his during his first four seasons, as I prepared highlights for our Sunday night sportscast. I traveled to Renton, Washington to cover Seahawks' training camp, and even covered Wilson and the Seahawks in Super Bowl XLIX. I can still remember hearing a co-worker of mine at Super Bowl XLIX Media Day yelling to Russell, "You're a good man. You're

a good man,” as Russell was responding to a question about the influence his family has made on him. For many reasons, I have been following Russell Wilson’s career for nearly eight years now. My professional experience adds a unique perspective to this study.

The other main reason for studying Wilson is because he embodies the unique combination of a new age athlete endorser whose brand is much bigger than just football. Wilson is one of the most popular endorsers in the National Football League. In 2016, he earned \$10 million alone from endorsements (Badenhausen, 2016). Russell is also one of the most popular NFL athletes in all of social media with nearly nine million followers combined on Instagram and Twitter (@DangeRussWilson, 2018; dangerusswilson, 2018). As a quarterback, Wilson plays the most well-known position in the NFL, but it’s arguably the most dangerous position in all of sports. Any given Sunday could see his career come to an end because of an injury. This makes it especially timely for him to maximize this present opportunity of fame and branding.

While Wilson is best known for what he does on the football field, there are other elements about his life that make him a uniquely interesting subject for study. For instance, he’s married to another celebrity, musical artist Ciara. When it comes to Instagram, she’s more popular than her husband with 18 million followers (ciara, 2018). His marriage also allows him the opportunity to showcase his role as a loyal husband and a strong father to his daughter Sienna and stepson Future. Moreover, Wilson is seen as a humanitarian because of his charity work and his consistent visits to young fans at Seattle Children’s Hospital. These are the characteristics that fans point to when they say Wilson is a “good man.”

What might be his most unique quality off the field is his status as a true business entrepreneur. “He is the founder and CEO not only of Good Man Brand [his clothing line] but also West2East Empire, which Wilson describes as a creative brand management company. At the same time, he has acquired equity interest in Luvo, a frozen-food company that promotes health eating; and Juice Press, an organic food retailer” (Peter, 2016). He has ownership in multiple companies while still endorsing major corporations such as Nike, Microsoft, Bose, and Alaska Airlines. This puts Wilson in a singular category: he’s getting paid by particular companies for his endorsements even as he’s using his status to promote his own business interests. Every step of Wilson’s life appears to be calculated, including the companies he chooses to associate with. Most of Russell’s endorsement opportunities occurred after the Seahawks won the Super Bowl in February of 2014. Additionally, he isn’t just grabbing money at every endorsement opportunity. He’s selecting companies that fit his brand and image, which in turn make money initially and promote how he wants to be represented (Bishop, 2014).

Wilson’s combination of self-branding, advertising, entrepreneurship, and social media is both generative and self-reinforcing. The ways he is using social media, specifically his Instagram account, to promote his individual brand while advertising products is a model for athletes and other celebrities to follow, and a complex example for sports communication research.

## Questions Guiding Research

This study was designed to explore how athletes use social media to incorporate endorsements and frame their narrative, with a specific focus on Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson.

Initially, three questions drove the Literature Review:

RQ1: How do athletes use social media?

RQ2: What are the ways for personalities (professional athletes) to connect with an audience?

RQ3: How does the media narrative frame Russell Wilson?

As the Review served to answer these three relatively general questions, new inquiries surfaced and were refined in both specificity and complexity. Ultimately, the research moved to answer the following six questions relative to Russell Wilson and Instagram in particular:

RQ1: What themes (based on Smith & Sanderson, 2015) emerged from the images and captions used by Russell Wilson on Instagram? How are these themes received by his audience? (Measured on likes, views, and comments)

RQ2: Do these themes align with specific strategies Russell Wilson is using on Instagram?

RQ3: Does being in-season versus being out of season make a difference to the quantity of posts and reception of posts based on the above themes?

RQ4: How does Russell Wilson build trust with his audience through social media?

RQ5: What strategies are used on Instagram to reinforce the media framed narrative of Russell Wilson?

RQ6: How do advertisements through Instagram reinforce the narrative surrounding Wilson?

### **Structure of the Thesis**

To answer these questions, this research study explored existing scholarship in related fields, identified methodologies that matched well to the specificity of the questions asked, collected data through these methods, and interpreted the results.

With the current Introduction as Chapter 1, Chapter 2 is the Literature Review, which is divided into three sections: social media use by athletes, fan-athlete connection through Fan Identification and Parasocial Interaction, and the media framing of Russell Wilson's narrative. First, understanding how athletes are using social media provides some strength to the context of looking at Russell Wilson's approach. With social media being a relatively recent development, this section of the review examines how its use has evolved over the last ten years. Next, Fan Identification and Parasocial Interaction are incorporated to provide a thorough understanding of how fans connect with athletes and sports teams. Parasocial Interaction (a concept originally conceived over 60 years ago) is especially emphasized because of its updated application to social media. Lastly, a focus on the media framing surrounding Russell Wilson is applied to identify how the media works to frame Wilson's story. Narrative is an important theme within this study, so it is

useful to determine the narrative framed by the media as it relates to the narrative that Wilson is embodying in his social media.

Chapter 3, Methodology, provides rationale for choosing a mixed methods approach to this study by incorporating Content Analysis, Close Textual Analysis, Narrative Criticism, and Interview. Each method has its own purpose for answering specific research questions.

Chapter 4, Results and Discussion, incorporates the results for all of the different methods used in this study. The Content Analysis uses a quantitative approach with graphs and charts to illustrate the findings. The qualitative methods of Close Textual Analysis, Narrative Criticism, and Interview rely on a more detailed and thorough explanation for the results. The Discussion part highlights key results of each method, as well as appropriate interpretations and implications from those results.

Chapter 5, Synthesis of Discussion, blends the Results and Discussion from all three sections to illustrate the key findings and how they relate to one another. This section demonstrates the value of a mixed method approach to research, and how each finding is strengthened from the results of multiple methods.

Chapter 6, the Conclusion, reflects on the research process, summarizes the results, provides thoughts on limitations and suggestions for future research, and examines the role this research has in the broader narrative of how social media impacts American society.

It is my hope that the readers of this research will appreciate this multi-faceted exploration into the role of social media in the life narrative of Russell Wilson.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Questions Guiding Literature Review:**

RQ1: How do athletes use social media?

RQ2: What are the ways for personalities (professional athletes) to connect with an audience?

RQ3: How does the media narrative frame Russell Wilson?

To properly understand the social media use and effectiveness of one athlete, it requires a multilayered approach to the research areas that this topic intersects. The following literature review is divided up into three main sections: social media use by athletes, fan-athlete connection through Fan Identification and Parasocial Interaction, and the media framing surrounding Russell Wilson. This section explores each topic in greater detail in that order. The goal of this literature review is to better assess the state of social media use between athletes and fans to identify the gaps in the current literature that still need to be explored.

### **Social Media Use by Athletes**

Social media use by athletes is the first of three reviews of the literature. Social media has increased in popularity every year since its inception and has become more and more common within sports. One of the foremost research experts of social media and sports is sports communication scholar Dr. Jimmy Sanderson. As noted in the Introduction to this research, Sanderson's reasoning for choosing to study social media through the lens of sports is simple: "It is difficult to find an avenue in life that is not

influenced or affected in some degree, by sports” (2011, p. ix). In 2011, Sanderson wrote the book *It's a Whole New Ballgame: How Social Media is Changing Sports*. The book provides a strong baseline for understanding social media's use and impact in the sports world. Its impact on sports is divided into three specific categories: “Social Media as Sports Media,” “Organizational Implications From Using Social Media,” and “Athletes Connecting to Fans Through Social Media.”

“Social Media as Sports Media” exemplifies how social media is allowing athletes to take control of the narrative that had traditionally been framed by the news media. Social media allows athletes to communicate directly to the public without having to go through traditional media channels, such as newspaper and television. Sanderson references former Major League Baseball pitcher Curt Schilling as an example of this new course of action. Rather than holding a formal press conference to announce his retirement in 2009, the former World Series MVP decided to make the announcement on his personal blog. Sanderson (2011) cites the major benefit of this step is that it “enabled Schilling to maintain complete control over this important message, allowing fans to both consume the message and communicate directly to him about his announcement” (p. 26). It was an unprecedented method of delivery at the time, but it has since become a prime example of an athlete controlling the narrative and not relying on the traditional media to frame the narrative for an important event.

With regard to the second category, “Organization Implications of Using Social Media,” Sanderson recognizes that informational control by an organization, athlete self-disclosure, and athlete dissent against the organization are three major concerns for social media use within any sports organization. One such example occurred in 2009 with



Minnesota Timberwolves star Kevin Love. Love tweeted out that his coach Kevin McHale had been fired prior to the Timberwolves making the announcement publicly. Love thought it was common knowledge. Although innocent, his tweet created a public relations nightmare for the Timberwolves (Sanderson, 2011). This was an instance where the athlete was the one breaking the story through social media, rather than the organization controlling the release of information. Prior to social media, something like this could have never happened in such a public way. The organization was no longer in complete control of the information going out to the public.

Sanderson's third category is "Athletes Connecting to Fans through Social Media." Before the use of social media, there were limited opportunities for a fan to interact with their favorite athlete. Yet, with a social media platform such as Twitter, athletes can post their thoughts and feelings in a public way. These posts create the opportunity for fans to respond to with the perception that the athlete is likely to read the message. Sanderson (2011) references the way Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner shares about his family on Twitter. Specifically, Warner incorporates his role as a father to help fans identify with him. Such examples of tweets from Warner include "I can't even win at fam wiffle ball... all downhill from here!" (p. 84) and "Up playing chess (or as my 6yr old calls it 'CHEST') w my son ... any tips, I really stink at it ...?" (p.84). Sanderson notes that social media posts can spark identification for a fan. In this example fathers can identify with Warner. "Identification stems from perceptions of similarity. As athletes increasingly use social media to reveal personal information, these domains are prime venues for identification to develop" (p. 83). Fan Identification will be explored in greater detail later in the literature review.

While Sanderson's book provides a strong foundation to the study of social media and sports, there have been multiple studies that have continued to explore this topic. Pegoraro (2010) investigated the reasons behind athletes using Twitter. The study performed a content analysis of 49 athletes and a total of 1193 tweets, with a majority of the content being related to athletes interacting with fans. In all, 58% of tweets from NFL players were directed to fans (Pegoraro, 2010). The most popular content areas were personal life and then business life, which includes endorsements. A further point of Pegoraro's study is that in 2010 only a few select athletes had recognized the use of Twitter as a marketing tool. The study speculated that more athletes would capitalize on their fans as consumers (p. 511).

Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) built off of Pegoraro's work by conducting a gender analysis based on self-presentation of tennis players on Twitter. A content analysis was structured around the time period of the 2011 U.S. Open. Lebel and Danylchuk focused more on athlete branding based on Pegoraro's work. Whether the athlete is tweeting, or a professional is tweeting on that athlete's account, social media is still seen as an extension of the athlete's brand. Social media's role was viewed as more important because the athlete, not someone in the media, had control of their narrative. It offered the athlete control of their brand and the ability to consistently frame them in a positive light. An additional finding from this study is that male athletes spent more time performing the role of being a sports fan on Twitter, while female athletes were more invested in their roles as brand managers (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

While most studies have analyzed the athlete, Lebel and Danylchuck (2014) expanded their research by targeting the audience's reaction to an athlete's social media

use. The study polled 206 participants from Generation Y (or Millennials aged 20-35) to give their first impression of Twitter profile pictures presented by different athletes. One reason Generation Y was selected for the study was that “it’s predicted by 2020 that they will make up 30% of the total market... combining for upward of \$1.4 trillion in annual revenue generation” (p. 320-321). The study selected the top ten most followed male and female athletes from Twitter and had participants give their first response. The findings for both men and women were that athletes who presented themselves in a sports setting were viewed most positively. Other preferences by participants were for photos that were business professional in appearance, that provide insight into the athlete’s personality, and that remained in line with their established brand. (p. 331) An overall theme that emerged from this research is the importance of profile content, profile photos, and brand establishment. These are all aspects that a more visual social media platform can offer an athlete.

Additionally, with a focus on social media use by athletes, some researchers have sought to develop a guide for social media strategies for elite athletes. Guerin (2016) developed seven steps for athletes to follow when using social media:

1. Determine What You’re Trying to Achieve
2. Determine Your Intended Audience for Social Media
3. Develop an Understanding of What Your Competitors Are Doing
4. Develop Your Key Types of Message
5. Choose Your Outlets
6. Build a Content Plan
7. Evaluate Your Social Media Use

The major call by Guerin is that athletes can influence society through social media while simultaneously building their own brand.

### *Instagram*

Instagram is a social media platform with a visual focus. Users make posts based on pictures and videos. Users can follow other users and can “like” or post a comment on any of their select images. Users can do the same for videos, although simply watching a video adds to the total numbers of views. A vast majority of the research regarding social media and athletes have used the platforms of Twitter and Facebook (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2014; Pegoraro, 2010), yet only a few have incorporated Instagram (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). The image based social media platform launched in October of 2010 and had over a million users in just over two months (Desreumaux, 2014). A year and half later, in April of 2012 Facebook bought Instagram for \$1 billion (Wu, 2016). This is especially noteworthy because by September of 2017, Instagram announced it had over 800 million users (Balakrishnan & Boorstin, 2017). According to a study by Statistica, that’s more than twice as many users than Twitter. (Most famous social network, 2018). Instagram’s parent company Facebook is still the leader in social media with 2.1 billion users.

Few researchers have selected Instagram as a platform for studying social media use by athletes. Smith and Sanderson (2015) chose Instagram as a platform to learn about gender differences in athlete self-presentation. By combining a content analysis and textual analysis of 27 athletes, one of the major findings was that 77% of the photographs were of the athlete not in a sport related context (p. 35). The major differences between female and male posts include the findings that females were more active in posts, females were more likely to emphasize revealing clothing and body parts, and females were more likely to be embracing or touching someone else in the photo. With regard to

captions, there were six major themes that emerged: Humanitarian, Family Driven, Personality Traits and Interests, Dedicated Athletes, Endorser, and Socialite (p. 351-353). These trait themes furnish future researchers with a framework for subsequent studies of Instagram posts as athletes use Instagram to portray their lives and personalities outside of sports more often. While the 2015 Smith and Sanderson study is one of the few that focused on Instagram, it only selected images and did not include videos. This is especially noteworthy as video content has become more and more common on social media. Additionally, the study made note of the potential influence of athlete branding: “The athletes themselves are the brand, so even pure self-presentation could be considered a form of brand management” (p. 355).

Further research involving Instagram and sports studied whether Twitter or Instagram was the more powerful branding tool for college athletic departments (Watkins & Lee, 2016). While this doesn't apply directly to athletes, there are aspects that are comparable. The study found that those surveyed connected the brand image more directly through the use of Instagram than Twitter. The content analysis revealed that the university highlighted star athletes most often in posts. With regard to non-game related content, school colors and logos were used most often (Watkins & Lee, 2016). This study illustrates that images better reinforce a brand for the university.

### *Gaps in the Literature*

With social media use by athletes being such a recent phenomenon, there are still many gaps in the literature to explore. Similar to what Pegoraro (2010) identified, more studies need to focus on how social media is being used as a marketing tool for an athlete. Additionally, Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) suggest it would be prudent to study whether

the marketing tool is being used to control the narrative. It would also be worth investigating how the narrative presented on social media matches the narrative presented in the traditional news media. Perhaps, one's brand could be strengthened when a traditional media narrative and a social media narrative share similar strategies and themes.

Further, more research needs to include visually based social media platforms such as Instagram and SnapChat. While Smith and Sanderson (2015) took great strides in closing this gap through their work with Instagram, more needs to be done. For example, their textual analysis only applied to the captions of the post (not the images), and their research didn't include any video. If we believe that "actions speak louder than words" and "a picture is worth a thousand words," it's imperative to gain more insight into what images and videos are showing us about athletes.

Additionally, similar to the work of Lebel and Danylchuck (2014), the audience on social media needs to be better understood. Many of these studies have shown the ability to categorize posting based on content analysis, and within these categories we should identify which ones are responded to most favorably by the audience. Items such as number of "likes," views, and the content of comments can be incorporated into research as rich data for analysis and a better understanding of what fans like or identify with relative to the athlete. This knowledge could help athletes and marketing teams in their branding to know how to better connect the athlete with their audience.

While social media and sports have an interconnected relationship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the use by athletes is worth further investigation. Specifically, the understanding

of Parasocial Interaction can make an athlete especially effective to their social media audience.

### **Fan-Athlete Connection: Parasocial Interaction and Fan Identification**

This is the second of three reviews of the literature. The focus of this section is on connecting with an audience, specifically the connections between athletes and fans. The review incorporates aspects of Parasocial Interaction (PSI) and Fan Identification as they relate to a fan-athlete connection.

#### *Parasocial Interaction*

Parasocial Interaction (PSI) is a concept originally developed by Horton and Wohl (1956) and focused on the perceived relationship that media users make with media personas. PSI was defined for the audience as the “illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer” (p. 32). The study originally targeted shows known as the “personality program,” such as the Johnny Carson variety show or local news personalities. The purpose was to identify how the persona in these programs was connecting with the audience by the illusion of a face-to-face interaction.

There are many notable aspects that Horton and Wohl (1956) mentioned in their initial study that can be applied to the framework of social media use by professional athletes. One of the aspects is the illusion of intimacy that the persona can make with an audience (p. 34). The audience gets to “know such a persona in somewhat the same way they know their chosen friends: through direct observation and interpretation of his appearance, his gestures and voice, his conversation and conduct in a variety of

situations” (p. 34). Additionally, “in time, the devotee—the ‘fan’—comes to believe that he ‘knows’ the persona more intimately and profoundly than others do; that he ‘understands’ his character and appreciates his values and motives” (p. 35). The illusion of intimacy is built from a perceived interpersonal connection between the audience and the persona.

To achieve the illusion of intimacy, Horton and Wohl (1956) suggest four principal strategies:

1. Attempt of the persona to duplicate the gestures, conversational style, and milieu of an informal face-to-face gathering
2. The persona tries as far as possible to eradicate, or at least blur, the line which divides him and his show, as a formal performance from the audience
3. The persona may try to step out of the particular format of his show and literally blend with the audience
4. Technical devices of the media themselves are exploited to create illusions of intimacy (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 36-37).

Another striking feature of PSI is the role that the audience plays. Most notably, “if [the persona] is successful in initiating an intimacy which his audience can believe in, then the audience may help him maintain it” by fan mail and by the various other kinds of support which can be provided indirectly to buttress his actions” (p. 37). The audience is the one that defines whether the given situation is credible based on what they have experienced before. From the audience reinforcement, the persona is put in a position of power and influence over the audience. In the perceived relationship, the audience “should play the role of the loved one to the persona’s lover... the audience is expected to



benefit by his wisdom, reflect on his advice, sympathize with him in his difficulties, forgive his mistakes, buy the products that he recommends, and keep his sponsor informed of the esteem in which he is held” (p. 38) An audience that follows this pattern to the persona is considered a “faithful audience” (p. 39), and this is ideal for a successful parasocial relationship.

In order to lead a Parasocial Interaction with an audience, the persona must maintain the façade created by their presentation. To do this, the persona needs to conceal any differences between their public life and private life (p. 48). While the people behind these personas are still human and thus not perfect, their role as a persona elevates them to a higher status than that of an ordinary person. This idea fits well with what we already know about the worship of celebrities in American culture. “Hollywood stars... are modern ‘heroes’ in whom are embodied popular culture values, and that the interest in them is a form of hero-worship and vicarious experience through identification” (p. 48). This “hero-worship” gives the persona a large audience to influence. The audience may never truly know the person for who he or she really is because the persona’s presentation and façade will inform their “relationship.” Overall, Parasocial Interaction resembles enough of the interaction that the audience experiences within their regular social network.

Further studies involving Parasocial Interaction found that the interaction with an audience was positively influenced based on the social and task attraction to the media personality (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). These findings relate to previous research that showed that parasocial relationships can be studied using elements of interpersonal relationship theories (Rubin et. al, 1985). Social attraction and task attractions are two of

three dimensions of interpersonal attraction described by McRoskey and McCain (1974). Social attraction is the overall liking of someone, often based on their personality. Task attraction is how easy or worthwhile working with that person would be, gleaned from perceptions of the person's abilities and whether they are dependable (Pekker, 2013). The third dimension, not previously mentioned, is physical attraction. Physical attraction is based on conventional standards of how a person looks (Pekker, 2013). McRoskey and McCain also pointed out that these "dimensions are independent of one another and should be considered so in future interpersonal attraction research" (p. 6)

Others have used this interpersonal attraction framework to study social media now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Frederick, et. al., 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; Sanderson, 2011). It's also been a central focus for studies built around Fan Identification.

### *Fan Identification*

Fan Identification was defined by Trail, Anderson, and Fink (2000) as "an orientation of the self with regard to other objects, including a person or group that results in feelings or sentiments of close attachment" (p. 165-166). Fan identification is rooted within Parasocial Interaction (PSI) and Social Identification Theory (SIT). However, unlike SIT, PSI is "one-sided and mediated" (Frederick, et. al., 2012, p. 482-483). Social Identity Theory identified in-group and out-group behavior, believing that social groups differentiate themselves based on the evaluation of one's group more positively than other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1963). Both of these theories relate to Fan Identification and are the cornerstones to most studies regarding the topic.

PSI was the principle theory behind a research study examining why fans follow who they follow (Frederick, et. al., 2012). The research showed that the more social the athlete was on Twitter, the more users felt engaged with the athlete. Findings also illustrated that fans felt actively engaged with the media persona, even though it was the personas with the message control.

Other Fan Identification research studied the popularity of NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) football coaches (Jensen, Ervin, & Dittmore, 2014). The twitter accounts of FBS head coaches were studied and the findings showed that the number of followers a coach had was most likely related to the overall tradition and on-field success of the program. Both market size and athletic budget did not prove to be a significant factor for a coach's popularity (p. 273). The importance of winning was a major factor in popularity, and follows similar results found regarding identification and loyalty to a group.

Jai Han, Misuk, and Eunkyong (2016) found similar results. However, rather than coaches, the focus of the study was on an athlete's reputation to fans. The quantitative study made noteworthy findings such as the discovery that game results are the most important factor that influences reputation. In contrast, factors like sportsmanship and personal character were deemed far less important for reputation.

The theme of trust was also a reoccurring item that appeared in multiple studies around Fan Identification (Sukioon & Backman, 2017; Shih-Hao, Ching-Yi, & Chung-Chieh, 2012). Most studies identified trust in relation to team identification. The results showed that trust, along with team attraction and team involvement all lead to team attachment and loyalty (Shih-Hao, Ching-Yi, & Chung-Chieh, 2012). Other studies

compared team loyalty with player loyalty by fans (Sukioon & Backman, 2017). Although trust is equally important and foundational for loyalty towards both a player and a team, results showed that team-identification is stronger than player-identification.

Within Social Identification Theory (SIT), levels of Fan Identification can be measured based on a particular brand personality (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). This specific study compared Terrell Owens to Tony Romo while both were playing in the National Football League for the Dallas Cowboys. The findings showed that prestige and distinctiveness significantly correlated with fan identification with that athlete. In addition, fans are likely to affiliate with an athlete to enhance their self-esteem (Carlson & Donovan, 2013).

#### *Gaps in the Literature*

While the topic of fan-athlete connection has been explored through Parasocial Interaction and Fan Identification for decades, there are still gaps within the literature. One particular gap is the impact of endorsements and advertising on the fan-athlete relationship. Horton and Wohl (1956) recognized the value of the “faithful audience” to a persona but more research could identify how endorsements can positively or negatively impact likability.

Additionally, many of the ideas developed by Horton and Wohl were originally established for television. While recent research has incorporated PSI towards social media, a specific version of PSI could be developed for social media that differs from television. More research would be needed to identify what this looks like exactly. Furthermore, studying videos on social media platforms could be compared to previous

PSI studies looking at news personalities on television. The use of video is similar to face-to-face communication and can inform studies on social media to see what strategies are used to develop trust in that relationship.

In regard to Fan Identification, more research can be done to test the findings by Sukioon & Backman (2017) that team-identification is stronger than player-identification. Future studies should examine the role of social media in fan devotion to an athlete rather than a team.

Additionally, while studies have highlighted winning as the most important factor impacting likability (Jensen, Ervin, & Dittmore, 2014; Jai Han, Misuk, & Eunkyong, 2016), the question remains of what other attributes of an athlete impact likability and identification? Specifically, researchers can determine the elements of popular culture or American values that athletes need to embody to be likable.

Overall, there are multiple factors that influence likability or attraction by an audience to a persona. It appears that many of these principles could be applied towards a study involving social media. While social media is becoming more and more common in society, traditional media framing is still an important influence in an athlete's public narrative.

### **Media Framing of Russell Wilson's Narrative**

The third section of this literature review is about the media's portrayal and framing of Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson. Wilson's life has been a popular story in the media ever since he entered the National Football League in 2012.

From reading through a multitude of articles about Wilson's life and playing career, seven major themes emerged: Christian Faith, Entrepreneurship, Fatherly Influence, Overcoming Adversity, Trouble Free Lifestyle, and Criticism. Each of these will be reviewed in that order.

### *Christian Faith*

Within the theme of Christian Faith, Russell Wilson has been an outspoken Christian for most of his life. It is very common to see Wilson post the Bible verse of the day on his Twitter account (@DangeRussWilson, 2018). The media has also taken notice of Wilson's faith and has made a point to mention it in multiple articles. "Because Wilson recites Bible verses and visits sick children and presents an image that can appear crafted for consumption, it's easy to forget there is a ferocious athlete underneath" (Bishop, 2014). While Wilson has the "ferocious" qualities of a professional athlete, the narrative includes a softer side represented by his devotion to a Christian faith and service to others.

Stories about Wilson being a Christian have even mentioned specific moments when God had spoken to him. After being drafted for the first time by Major League Baseball in 2007, Wilson explained his reasoning for not giving up on football and solely focusing on baseball out of high school. "I woke up one morning – it was June 27 – and God told me, 'Be unique. Do something that not many people have done before'" (Schuler, 2014).

A further example of Wilson reflecting his Christian faith started during a late NFL playoff run in 2015. It was the NFC Championship Game, where the Seahawks

came back from a 19-7 deficit in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter to beat the Green Bay Packers. Wilson played one of the most disappointing games of his life, throwing a career-worst four interceptions. Yet, even in those struggles he led the Seahawks back for a 28-22 victory in overtime. After the game, he pointed to the influence that God had on that moment. “That’s God setting it up, to make it so dramatic, so rewarding, so special... I’ve been through a lot in life, and had some ups and downs. It’s what’s led me to this day.” (King, 2015)

As bad a performance as the NFC Championship Game was, two weeks later in Super Bowl XLIX, Wilson had his worst moment in his NFL career. With less than 30 seconds left in the game and the Seahawks trailing the New England Patriots 28-24, Wilson had Seattle just one yard away from a Super Bowl victory. On second and goal, he threw a pass on a slant route that was intercepted in the end zone. This play lost the Super Bowl for the Seahawks. After the loss, Wilson still cited God’s influence on that situation. A few months later, he made these comments when speaking at The Rock Church in San Diego, California, on July 5, 2015. The media found out about the comments and turned it into a news story.

Wilson described the moment as follows:

“The play happens, and they pick the ball off. And I take three steps... And on the third step God says to me, ‘I’m using you. ... I want to see how you respond. But most importantly, I want them to see how you respond’” (Cole, 2015).

There is consistent mention of Wilson not simply having a faith in God, but God speaking directly to him. It was from this same speaking engagement at Rock Church where the media also reported another way God was influencing Wilson: practicing abstinence in his relationship with Ciara. “God spoke to me and said ‘I need you to lead her’... And I asked her, ‘What would you do if we took all that extra stuff off the table? And just did it Jesus’ way?’” (McRady, 2015). This article continued by mentioning that Wilson shared about God’s plan for using both Ciara and him together. “I knew that God had brought me in her life to bless her and for her to bless me... he’s anointed both of us and he’s calling for us to do something special” (McRady, 2015). Wilson’s faith is a key part of his identity, and his description of calling is especially compelling in a media narrative. It’s a consistent piece of his story throughout his career; it also aligns with the fact that a majority of Americans report that religion plays an important role in their lives with most Americans identifying as members of the Christian faith.

### *Business and Entrepreneurship*

One of the unique pieces of Wilson’s story is that he’s always had a focus on life outside of football. Specifically, he’s parlayed his clean-cut, good guy image to venture into the world of business (Jones, 2014). First, it started with endorsements opportunities following the Seahawks winning the Super Bowl in 2014. Being a Super Bowl winning quarterback creates quite the platform. It also appeared natural for Wilson to pursue these ventures based on his salary as a third-round pick. In the 2012 NFL Draft, the number one overall pick Andrew Luck signed a four-year, \$22.1 million contract (Sessler, 2012). Wilson was a third-round pick, 75<sup>th</sup> overall, which gave him a four-year contract worth \$3 million total (Arthur, 2013). With Wilson as the lowest paid starting quarterback in the



NFL, the Seahawks had a steal for their salary cap. Wilson earned opportunities to leverage his success on the field with financial gain outside of sports. “He’s created the opportunity to earn money, so you have to capitalize on some of that. It would be silly not to” (Jones, 2014). It seemed logical for Wilson to pursue endorsements after being relatively underpaid as an NFL starting quarterback.

Moreover, writer Greg Bishop highlighted in a 2014 *Sports Illustrated* article the connection of Wilson’s brand to his endorsements.

“His team went to Alaska Airlines and noted the similarities between Wilson and their company -- smaller than competitors, chasing more established counterparts, on the rise... Wilson turned down one major fast food franchise because he didn’t eat there... every commercial was chosen for a purpose, as part of a larger strategy. Wilson is meticulous like that” (Bishop, 2014).

This article provides some additional insight as to how the business life of Russell Wilson plays a role into the larger narrative surrounding him.

Additionally, his wealth also helps in his fame. In 2016, Wilson made \$10 Million from endorsements (Badenhausen, 2016). While money and business are factors in his status, the core of who Wilson is relates to his family.

### *Fatherly Influence*

There are few stories written about Russell Wilson that don’t mention his father, Harrison Wilson III. *Sporting News* put it best with a story headline that read “Want to know Russell Wilson? First, learn about his father” (Steele, 2014). Russell’s father has a

remarkable narrative in his own rite. He played football and baseball at Dartmouth College (Steele, 2014). He even finished up law school at the University of Virginia before trying out in the NFL with the San Diego Chargers. He nearly made the team, too, but became the last man to be cut before the 1980 NFL season (Steele, 2014). Friends described Harrison saying “I never heard a single person say a negative thing about him” (Steele, 2014). This description serves as a character endorsement that his son seems to have inherited as well.

Russell Wilson’s love for sports came from his father. Articles mention that early mornings growing up in the Wilson home were spent with Russell throwing passes to his father and older brother Harrison (Tapper, 2014). Wilson’s father even held mock press conferences for him growing up (Bishop, 2014), with questions around such events as winning the Super Bowl. Many of the mantras that have come to define Wilson are actually originals from his father Harrison. “Harry would often ask, ‘Russ, why not you?’” (Murphy, 2014). Why not us? Became a phrase Wilson associated with his Seahawks team that won the Super Bowl in 2014. Wilson’s non-profit is also called the Why Not You Foundation.

While much has been made of his father’s influence, few stories have dug deep into Wilson’s family life the way *Rolling Stone* did. Wilson told *Rolling Stone* “My dad was a hardworking guy. At one point he was working multiple jobs. He would do whatever it takes to help us go to school and help us survive. I’m grateful for my dad. I miss him every day” (Rodrick, 2015). Growing up for Russell Wilson was far from a silver spoon childhood. Knowing his background and family’s financial struggles even leads to additional speculation to how his father’s influence is fueling Wilson today. “The

information provides a window into Wilson; he is trying to have the perfect life his father almost had. And that quest for perfection allows for no moments of weakness or doubt” (Rodrick, 2015). Russell is human, but he is portrayed as near perfect.

Harrison Wilson battled diabetes for most of his adult life and died in June of 2010. It was the day after Russell had been selected in the 4<sup>th</sup> round of the 2010 MLB Draft (Tapper, 2014). His loss is something that Russell continues to carry with him and it is part of the reason that he mentions his father’s influence throughout his career.

### *Overcoming Adversity*

When Russell Wilson was preparing for the 2012 NFL Draft, he possessed many of the intangibles that any general manager would dream of: leadership, confidence, and a team-first mentality. However, the major criticism holding Wilson back was his height. Wilson measured 5 feet, 10 and 5/8 inches at the NFL combine. “Pro Football Weekly rated Wilson as a fifth-round pick, primarily because, it noted, ‘his height will always be a limiting factor’” (Schuler, 2014). It’s a measurement that likely cost him millions of dollars at the time, pushing him to a third-round selection, 75<sup>th</sup> overall. Wilson was even quoted as saying “someone said that if I was 2 inches taller, I’d be the number one pick overall” (Schuler, 2014). Draft experts liked what they saw of Wilson on film but didn’t believe it would translate to NFL success. “Height would matter more to teams as they assess whether a quarterback can see the field well enough from inside the pocket. Edwards' feeling is that Wilson should be a good backup...” (Sando, 2012). Most scouts and media experts pointed to his short stature as the reason he couldn’t succeed as an NFL quarterback.

However, for Russell “slights and adversity—and the tendency for people to underestimate him—have fueled him all along his journey” (Murphy, 2014). Other articles promote the idea that Wilson has constantly been doubted throughout his career because of his height (Bishop, 2014; Tapper, 2014). “He has heard ‘You’re too short to play pro sports’ so much that by age 13, Wilson started using those discouraging words to fuel his journey” (Tapper, 2014). His height hasn’t just been a challenge as a professional, but it has been a reinforcing obstacle throughout his life. However, his height wasn’t the only obstacle he’s had to overcome in his playing career.

When Wilson joined the Seattle Seahawks, he wasn’t expected to be the team’s starting quarterback. The Seahawks had signed Matt Flynn during the offseason to a multi-million dollar contract. Yet, Wilson won the starting job in training camp and never let go of it. The media had framed Wilson early on as “Seattle’s accidental hero, a would-be backup who joined a perennial loser and, in a year’s time, helped turn it into one of the NFL’s best teams” (Kugiyu, 2013). Wilson has defied expectations throughout his career to cement himself as one of the top quarterbacks in the NFL. In many ways the doubters have fueled Wilson to become one of the best stories in the league.

### *Trouble-Free Lifestyle*

The National Football League has been a hotbed of controversy for player conduct on and off the field. From issues related to athletes kneeling during the national anthem, to domestic violence, there has been a consistent stream of negativity in the media associated with football players. While fans might be skeptical of their favorite athlete, Russell Wilson is a source of hope as someone who won’t let you down. Or at least that’s what his agent Mark Rodgers would have you believe. Rodgers was the main

source for multiple stories written about Wilson (Kugiya, 2013), including a national publication (Jones, 2014). Rodgers reinforces this idea of Russell being a “good guy.” “I’m working with someone genuine and honest... he has a moral compass” (Jones, 2014). Even Kugiya (2013) noted that “Rodgers does not lose a wink of sleep worrying about whether Wilson is going to fail a drug test or get arrested for driving under the influence or cause a Twitter controversy with an untoward, impulsive remark.” The story around Wilson is that he really is as good as he seems. (Kugiya, 2014). While Wilson has backed up this “good guy” image by staying out of trouble off the field, it’s noteworthy that these publications would rely so heavily on an agent as a primary source. It’s a way that those affiliated with Wilson are controlling the media narrative surrounding his life.

Kugiya (2013) also provides a detailed commentary to why this trouble-free lifestyle is so attractive and relatable for fans.

As an audience, we relate to athletes in a way we do not relate to actors, musicians or other entertainers, perhaps because many of us, at one time, have caught a football, hit a baseball, shot a basketball or struck a golf ball, run a race. As such, we unreasonably hope or want athletes to be reflections of our best selves. (Kugiya, 2013).

Through his six years in the NFL, Wilson has lived up to this reflection of our best selves. “Russell Wilson is someone who can make people believe again that professional athletes can truly be heroes” (Kugiya, 2013). The character portrayed by Wilson fits a heroic narrative that has been mentioned by multiple writers (Kugiya, 2013; Schuler, 2014; Tapper, 2014)

Other writers have commented on Wilson's likeable image and linked him to following the establishment (Bishop, 2014). His image and success on the football field is imperative to his narrative. "He hasn't gotten in any troubles... It's important to keep your nose clean, especially in the sports world these days... As long as he keeps on the straight and narrow and keeps winning, he's going to continue to grow" (Jones, 2014). His life and ability to be a role model offer so much needed positivity for the National Football League that stories are often more focused on his life than they are on anything related to being a football player.

### *Criticism*

There is unquestionably an overall positive association when looking at the framing of the Russell Wilson narrative by the media. It's fitting based on the overall demeanor of Wilson in his press conferences and interactions with the fans. He's always positive, so much so that an initial criticism of him is that he is too scripted, with authors of articles even referring to him as "The Robot" (Bishop, 2014).

One of the more noteworthy articles that highlighted a criticism around Wilson was a piece written by Seth Wickersham (2017) for *ESPN.com*. The article mentioned contradictory actions by Russell such as living a seemingly transparent life yet he "requires guests to sign nondisclosure agreements before entering his box at a Mariners game" (Wickersham, 2017). The article proceeded to cite dysfunction in the Seahawks' locker room around Wilson because of being too close to management and because of head coach Pete Carroll not calling him out for mistakes. Much of that criticism within the team reportedly came from Seahawks' standout cornerback Richard Sherman

(Wickersham, 2017). It should be noted that as of 2018, Sherman is no longer a member of the Seahawks.

Additionally, a *Bleacher Report* article in October of 2014 cited Wilson as the reason why the Seahawks traded wide receiver Percy Harvin during the 2014 season. There was a locker room conflict reported between Harvin and Wilson, with the writer stating “my feeling on this—and it’s backed up by several interviews with Seahawks players—is that some of the black players think Wilson isn’t black enough” (Freeman, 2014). Wilson would later respond to this allegation stating “I don’t even know what that means... I believe that I am an educated young male that is not perfect, that tries to do things right. That just tries to lead and tries to help others and tries to win games for this football team, for this franchise” (Boren, 2014). This criticism of not “being black enough” is unique, but raises the question of how he is perceived by his teammates.

The last major criticism on Wilson is that he has become too concerned with his brand and image outside of football, compared to his concerns regarding his play on the field. So far this criticism appears unwarranted with no significant drop-off in Wilson’s success on the field. However, this study became a topic of conversation before the 2015 season, right after Wilson married Ciara. His marriage occurred in the same summer that he launched his new clothing line Good Man Brand and hosted the Nickelodeon Kid’s Choice Awards (Jenks, 2016). Wilson simply responded to this criticism of being too busy off the field by saying “I’m always motivated to be the best in the world at playing quarterback” (Jenks, 2016). It seems like as long as Wilson is winning football games and being a “good man,” these criticisms won’t have much traction in the media.

*Gaps in the Literature*

Russell Wilson's story has increased in popularity throughout the media as his career has continued to grow. When looking at the different stories about his life, there's still a question of whether this guy is too good to be true? The best accounts of him often come from his agent. Specifically, researchers might ask how Wilson's use of social media serves to reinforce the narrative that already exists surrounding his life.

Each one of the seven themes that emerged in these stories fit within the narrative that formed around Wilson throughout his career. After becoming a Super Bowl winning quarterback, does he still have to prove himself as an elite NFL player? It seems like there is this element of consistency in him. Perhaps it's his consistency and reliability that makes his narrative so eye-catching because as human beings we are flawed and imperfect. We look for the flaws in others to make us feel better, yet there appear to be no flaws for Wilson. This leads to a question of how the narrative surrounding Wilson matches the narrative that he chooses to present on social media. Moreover, what strategies does his marketing and branding team use to consistently promote him in a certain light that is so likable to fans?

Overall, there are many factors that make Russell Wilson an ideal and compelling candidate for a case study. In the next section, I explore in further details what questions remain that drove my research, and what methods were incorporated to help find these answers.



## METHODOLOGY

While the Literature Review provided a strong level of understanding surrounding the topic of social media use by athletes, athlete-fan connection, and the media framing of Russell Wilson, there are still specific questions that remain. These questions are the fuel that drives this particular case study regarding Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson. To guide this analysis, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: What themes (based on Smith & Sanderson, 2015) emerged from the images and captions used by Russell Wilson on Instagram? How are these themes received, based on likes, views, and comments, by the audience on Instagram?

RQ2: Do these themes align with specific strategies Russell Wilson is using on Instagram?

RQ3: Does being in-season versus being out-of-season make a difference on the quantity of posts and reception of posts based on themes?

RQ4: How does Russell Wilson build trust with his audience through social media?

RQ5: What strategies are used on Instagram to reinforce the media framed narrative of Russell Wilson?

RQ6: How can advertisements through Instagram reinforce the narrative surrounding Wilson?

Four methods are incorporated in this research study: Content Analysis, Close Textual Analysis, Narrative Criticism, and Interview. Close Textual Analysis and Narrative Criticism are combined and used as complimentary methods within the same

section. Rationale for choosing each method as it relates to the remaining research questions is explored in greater detail throughout this section.

### **Content Analysis**

In order to study Russell Wilson's Instagram account, I selected the method of Content Analysis. This method was chosen to answer RQ1: What themes emerged from the images and captions used by Russell Wilson on Instagram? How are these themes received, based on likes, views, and comments, by the audience on Instagram? And RQ3: Does being in-season versus being out-of-season make a difference on the quantity of posts and reception of posts based on themes?

Content Analysis is a data collecting method that has been used in studies structured around analyzing the media (Krippendorff, 2004). Specifically, it has been incorporated in previous studies to measure social media use by athletes (Level & Danylchuck, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010; Watkins & Lee, 2016), including specific research targeting athletes and the use of Instagram (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Because social media is still a relatively new phenomenon in academic research, it appears that Content Analysis has emerged as the leading method to study it.

Rather than looking at all social media platforms, I decided to focus solely on Instagram. Twitter and Facebook have been used in multiple studies before, but there have been much fewer involving Instagram. Additionally, Instagram has consistently grown in popularity and use. As of September of 2017, Instagram announced it had over 800 million users (Balakrishnan & Boorstin, 2017). Moreover, Instagram provides a

focus on visuals, whether it be images or videos, to go along with written texts. The use of visuals “offers fans additional insight into [athletes’] lives that promote intimacy and closeness” (Sanderson, 2011, p. 25).

Content Analysis helps answer many of the research questions that I want to know. For example, it provides a large enough sample to identify what themes Russell Wilson is incorporating more than others when he posts on Instagram. It also helps gauge audience reaction of these themes based on likes, views, and comments. Moreover, the Literature Review showed that the media has identified key pieces of Wilson’s narrative, and we can compare that to his Instagram account to see if parts or all of his narrative are represented. Overall, a Content Analysis allows the researcher to gain a broad perspective on Wilson’s Instagram use, while also gaining knowledge about the representation of specific themes in his posts.

This study incorporates a framework for categorizing Instagram posts based on the research of Smith and Sanderson (2015). In their study about athlete self-presentation on Instagram, the two researchers identified six prominent themes related to captions on Instagram: *Humanitarian, Family Driven, Personality Traits and Interests, Dedicated Athlete, Endorser, and Socialite*. Those same six themes are used to categorize posts on Russell Wilson’s Instagram during the calendar year of 2017. The calendar year of 2017 was selected in order to collect data from an entire time period and to avoid random sampling. Additionally, the use of a full calendar year allows the research to compare in-season versus out of season posts. Smith and Sanderson (2015) used captions as their guide for categorizing, whereas this study uses both the visual content and caption to

decide which of the six themes is most applicable. Smith and Sanderson provide further details about what defines each theme.

### *Humanitarian*

“Athletes were very civic-minded and utilized Instagram to promote their charitable work and community advocacy” (p. 352). This theme is applicable to Russell Wilson’s life, most notably through his non-profit organization, the Why Not You Foundation, and his visits to Seattle Children’s Hospital during the NFL season.

### *Family Driven*

“Many of the athletes shared events with family members and emphasized how much they cherished these times and relationships” (p. 352). This theme is applicable to Russell Wilson’s life regarding both the family he grew up in and being the father of his own family. Wilson’s late father Harrison has had a significant influence on his life, as well as his mother and siblings, Harrison and Anna. Additionally, his wife Ciara, stepson Future, and daughter Sienna provide a narrative focus for Wilson’s Instagram posts underscored by themes of being a good man by being a loyal husband and dedicated father.

### *Personality Traits and Interests*

“Athletes also expressed personality characteristics in their posts, which enabled audiences to see them in ways not typically depicted in mainstream media coverage” (p. 352). This theme is applicable to Russell Wilson’s life in many ways but especially in regard to his Christian faith. Social media allows him to share his faith and spirituality in a prominent way beyond what is covered in the mainstream media. Moreover, the use of

video and images on Instagram provides more opportunities to see Wilson's personality beyond the football field.

### *Dedicated Athlete*

“Athletes showcased the training and work they were putting in to excel in their sports” (p. 352). This theme is applicable to Russell Wilson's life through his life mantras such as “Separation is in the preparation” and “No time to sleep.” He is committed to being the best quarterback, and this is embodied by his work ethic, both in-season and during the off-season.

### *Endorser*

“Sponsorship and endorsement is a major part of most athletes' careers and they employed self-presentation to highlight this role” (p. 353). This theme is applicable to Russell Wilson's life due to the many endorsements he has received after the Seahawks won Super Bowl XLVIII. Unique to Wilson is the fact that he not only makes endorsements for other companies, but he is an entrepreneur in his own right. He has invested in businesses off the football field, and he has a chance to endorse those interests that benefit him personally. Examples include the Russell Wilson Passing Academy, or his most recent business venture with the TraceMe App.

### *Socialite*

“Athletes also conveyed that they were active in social parties, galas, and events” (p. 353). This theme is applicable to Russell Wilson because, as a high-profile athlete, he's made appearances at such events such as the ESPYs and even hosted the

Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards. Additionally, being married to musical artist Ciara offers many opportunities to attend even more celebrity galas and social events.

### **Analyzing Russell Wilson's Narrative**

Although Content Analysis is a popular method for studying social media, I believe that the use of mix methods provides greater detail and understanding. I agree with Smith and Sanderson (2015) who used mixed methods for their study of Instagram as well. "The researchers believed that limiting the study to one methodology would ultimately result in the loss of significant findings" (p. 347). While Content Analysis gives a broad view of Russell Wilson's use of Instagram, I've also incorporated Close Textual Analysis and Narrative Criticism to analyze a single post on Instagram in much greater detail. Both Close Textual Analysis and Narrative Criticism are applied to a specific video post on Russell Wilson's Instagram to provide further understanding of the research topic. The goal of this method is to answer RQ6: How can advertisements through Instagram reinforce the narrative surrounding Wilson?

Narrative Criticism was used as a method because Russell Wilson's image exemplifies a "great story" in American culture. His story is about a man who has overcome adversity in many areas of his life to become one of the best quarterbacks in the NFL. He excels on the football field all while being known as a good man off the field; his narrative symbolizes the importance of his role as a father, husband, and his commitment to the community. The story that has been shaped about Wilson, whether it's from the media or from his brand, makes Narrative Criticism an especially

compelling method for researching him. The method of Narrative Criticism is complimented by using Close Textual Analysis as a way of understanding a particular text (in this case, an Instagram video advertisement). The methods of Narrative Criticism and Close Textual Analysis will be explored in further detail.

### *Narrative Criticism*

The use of stories has shaped human history. Stories, whether it be surrounding our nation or our family, help shape our life experience. Stories are how we relate to people and share experiences in our lives. We are all storytellers. This is exactly what Walter R. Fisher believed when he developed the Narrative Paradigm. Burghardt (2010) paraphrases Fisher's work when he states, "stories are fundamental to communication because they provided structure for our experience as humans and because they influence people to live in communities that share common explanations and understandings" (p. 289). Our stories structure our experience and help us relate to the world by making sense out of it. While stories may be all around us, not all stories are true or believable.

Fisher identified five premises to structure the Narrative Paradigm:

1. Humans are storytellers.
2. Human decision making and communication are based on "good reasons".
3. Good reasons are determined by matters of history, biography, culture, and character.
4. Rationality is based on people's awareness of how internally consistent, and truthful to lived experience stories appear.

5. The world is experienced by people as a set of stories from which to choose among. As we choose, we live life in a process of continual re-creation.

Within these five premises, rationality is of primary importance and can be evaluated based on Narrative Coherence and Narrative Fidelity. Narrative Coherence relates to whether the structure of the narrative makes sense. Additional areas to focus on within coherence include whether there is resemblance between stories and if the characters involved are credible (“The narrative paradigm,” 2013). Narrative Fidelity is looking at whether the story presented is true. Further areas to consider around Narrative Fidelity include whether the facts have been distorted, what reasoning patterns were followed, does the argument in the story affect the decision making of the listener, and how has the importance of the story been narrated? (“The narrative paradigm,” 2013). Fisher (1984) sees Narrative Fidelity as a resource the audience is using to test “whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives” (p. 8). Narrative Criticism roots itself in the fact that society already knows how to understand and interpret narratives by the way we experience truth. In essence, we are living our own narratives while living in a world surrounded by narratives.

### *Close Textual Analysis*

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the preferred rhetorical criticism was the Neo-Aristotelian method. Much of the focus was on the impact that a speech would have on the audience, rather than a focus on the text itself. However, in 1965 Edwin Black broke from the established Neo-Aristotelian method and began to incorporate Close Textual Analysis (CTA) for rhetorical criticism. His 1965 book *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in*



*Method* explained his conflict with the old Neo-Aristotelian method. The primary issue Black saw with the Neo-Aristotelian method came from being “founded upon a restricted view of human behavior, that there are discourses, which function in ways not dreamed of in Aristotle’s Rhetoric, and that there are discourses not designed for rational judges, but for men as they are” (Black, 1965, p. 131). A few decades later, Black’s work *Gettysburg and Silence* demonstrated the use of CTA by comparing it to a prism. “How does one examine a prism? By looking at it through one facet after another, in no particular order” (Black, 1994, p. 222). The method is used to identify aspects that come from the text itself rather than looking at events outside the text, such as the effect of rhetorical discourse on the audience. Many other scholars saw the value that came from using CTA. Rhetorical scholar Stephen Lucas echoed Black’s view stating “that adequate assessment... can only be reached by radical attention to the internal dynamics of the text itself” (Lucas, 1988, p. 248). Carl R. Burghardt paraphrased this method, stating “close textual analysis aims to reveal and explicate the precise, often hidden, mechanisms that give a particular text artistic unity and rhetorical effort” (Burghardt, 2010, p.199). Black, Burghardt, and Lucas argued that the text embodies meaning that has often been overlooked. When using CTA to analyze rhetoric, the critic’s focus returns to the text and asks, what is the text revealing about this particular artifact? The word “text” has a broad meaning and can be applied to creative works such as statues, monuments, or even Instagram videos.

### *Choosing the Artifact*

For this study, I analyzed a single post on Russell Wilson’s Instagram in much greater detail. The post is originally from November 10, 2017. It is a 30 second video that

can be described as a Bose advertisement appearing on Instagram. The video incorporates two scenes, one of Wilson working out and one of Wilson spending time with his baby daughter. This example was chosen because of the way it fits the narrative surrounding Russell Wilson, while also matching some of his commercial and business interests. A detailed analysis of this video also helps to better understand how Wilson's narrative relates to some of the other themes that we see on his Instagram account. If it's a story that the audience is used to seeing already on Instagram, perhaps it may become more effective as an advertisement.

At first glance, it may not seem prudent to use CTA as an additional method to analyze a 30-second commercial with no dialogue and a total of six words shown in it. However, CTA can be used to analyze more than just written or spoken language. The word "text" incorporates the entire video, with specific aspects of analysis available for scrutiny, including time allotment for scenes, imagery within the commercial, and the use of sound. CTA provides a way to examine all the elements that comprise the 30-second commercial and offers an in-depth look at many of the strategies at work in this artifact.

## **Interview**

The use of an in-depth interview is also incorporated in this research study to help answer the remaining research questions. Those questions include: RQ2: Do these themes (based on Smith & Sanderson, 2015) match specific strategies Russell Wilson is using on Instagram? RQ4: How does Russell Wilson build trust with his audience through social media? And RQ5: What strategies are used on Instagram to reinforce the media framed narrative of Russell Wilson?

An in-depth interview as a research method is defined as “a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspective on a particular idea, program, or situation” (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p.3). In this study, there is a single interview with a professional who is considered an expert in the field, especially as it relates to Russell Wilson, rather than a series or collection of interviews to then be compared to each other. The interview helps to compare its findings to the results from the other methods, while also gathering data that would only be possible from talking to someone who works with Russell Wilson. This interview is with the Chief Operating Office of West2East Empire, Russell Wilson’s brand-management company (Mogg, 2018). The idea of interviewing a professional who works with athlete social media is a similar concept employed in previous publications (Bae, 2015; Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). However, this opportunity is unique in that it provides a perspective from one specific company that is owned by the athlete it is representing. It would be ideal to interview the athlete, similar to what Kunkel, Scott, and Beaton (2016) did with professional soccer player Michael Lahoud. However, due to the time restraints of the research, Russell Wilson was not made available for an interview. His interview was substituted with a high-ranking member of his branding company, West2East Empire.

This method is being used for this research because it provides a perspective that wouldn’t be possible from other methods. It’s one thing to analyze what is presented on Instagram from an outside perspective, but this method delivers an added dimension of strength and relevance by understanding the inside motives and strategies used by the company representing the athlete. The use of Interview provides the opportunity to learn

from those working firsthand with Wilson. It is a detailed perspective that could only be attained through conducting an interview. However, interviewing someone working for Russell Wilson presents some limitations and would not be warranted to do alone as a method. The answers from the interview are likely to be skewed in favor of Wilson, so it's important to have other methods looking at the same research.

The focus of narrative for Russell Wilson can also be reinforced by understanding how West2East Empire strives to tell stories. For example, the front page of their website reads "Brand Management. Strategic Storytelling" (West2East Empire, 2017), and another part of their website reads "Our vision is to impact the world through storytelling" (West2East Empire, 2017). The interview may provide an opportunity to understand what "Strategic Storytelling" entails, while also providing a relevant comparison to the results obtained from the Content Analysis as well as the Narrative Criticism and Close Textual Analysis.

The interview was conducted over the phone and recorded by the interviewer. The questions were developed and shared with the interviewee prior to recording the interview. This research received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Eastern Washington University before conducting the interview on Tuesday, May 1, 2018. The subject signed a consent form prior to participating in the interview.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Results: CONTENT ANALYSIS**

#### *Data Collection*

The dates of January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017 were set as the parameters for the data collection of posts on Russell Wilson's Instagram account. Rather than sampling, I recorded all 302 Instagram posts to give a more detailed depiction of the types of posts presented within a single calendar year. The data was collected over the time period of April 6, 2018 to April 13, 2018. However, all likes, views, and comments for each post were recorded on the same day, April 7, 2018. This decision was made to give a more accurate representation for audience response. It was also deemed unfair to allow any extra time when collecting these totals because certain posts would likely receive more likes, views, and comments.

#### *Coding*

The coding of the posts on Instagram were divided into the six themes: Humanitarian, Family Driven, Personality Traits and Interests, Dedicated Athlete, Endorser, and Socialite. Those that did not fit into one of these categories were labeled "Outliers." Along with the related theme, every post was labeled in an excel spreadsheet with the following information: date of post, description of posts, image caption, hashtags used, users tagged in post, video or image, who is pictured in post, likes, views (for videos), and comments.

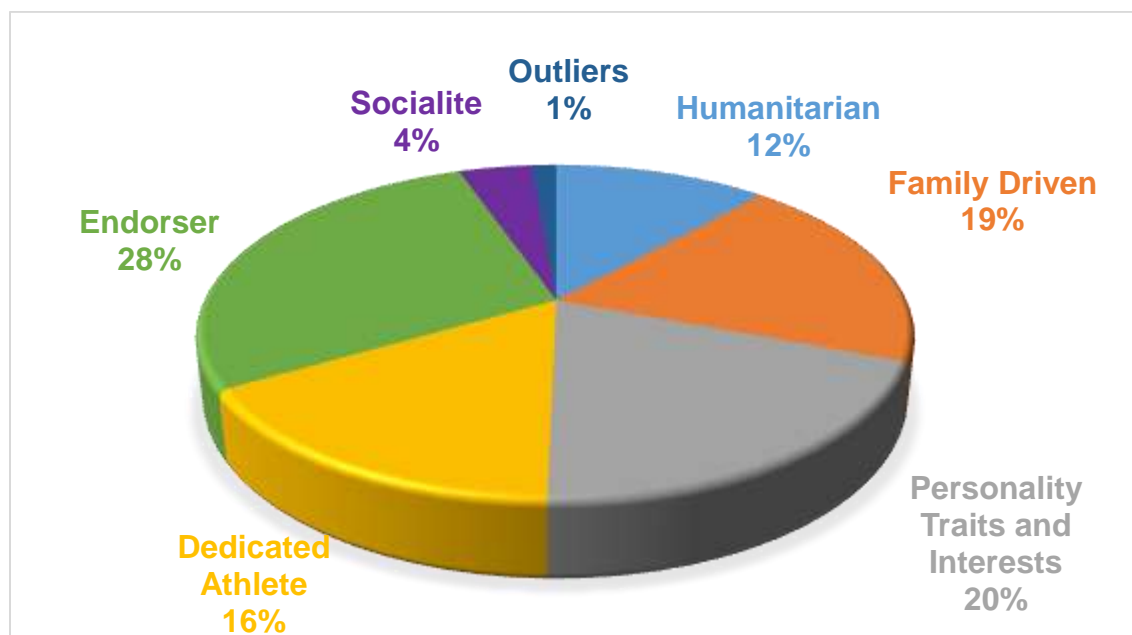
### *Instagram Use for All of 2017*

All 302 posts on Russell Wilson’s Instagram account during the calendar year of 2017 were analyzed and categorized into one of the six themes identified by Smith and Sanderson (2015). The breakdown of posts based on theme is referenced in Table 1 and Graph 1.

Table 1 – Russell Wilson’s Instagram Theme Distribution During 2017

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Posts</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Images</b>	<b>Video</b>
<b>Humanitarian</b>	35	12%	24	11
<b>Family Driven</b>	58	19%	33	25
<b>Personality Traits/Interests</b>	59	20%	30	29
<b>Dedicated Athlete</b>	49	16%	29	20
<b>Endorser</b>	85	28%	39	46
<b>Socialite</b>	12	4%	5	7
<b>Outliers</b>	4	1%	4	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	302	100%	164	138

Graph 1 – Russell Wilson’s Instagram Theme Distribution During 2017



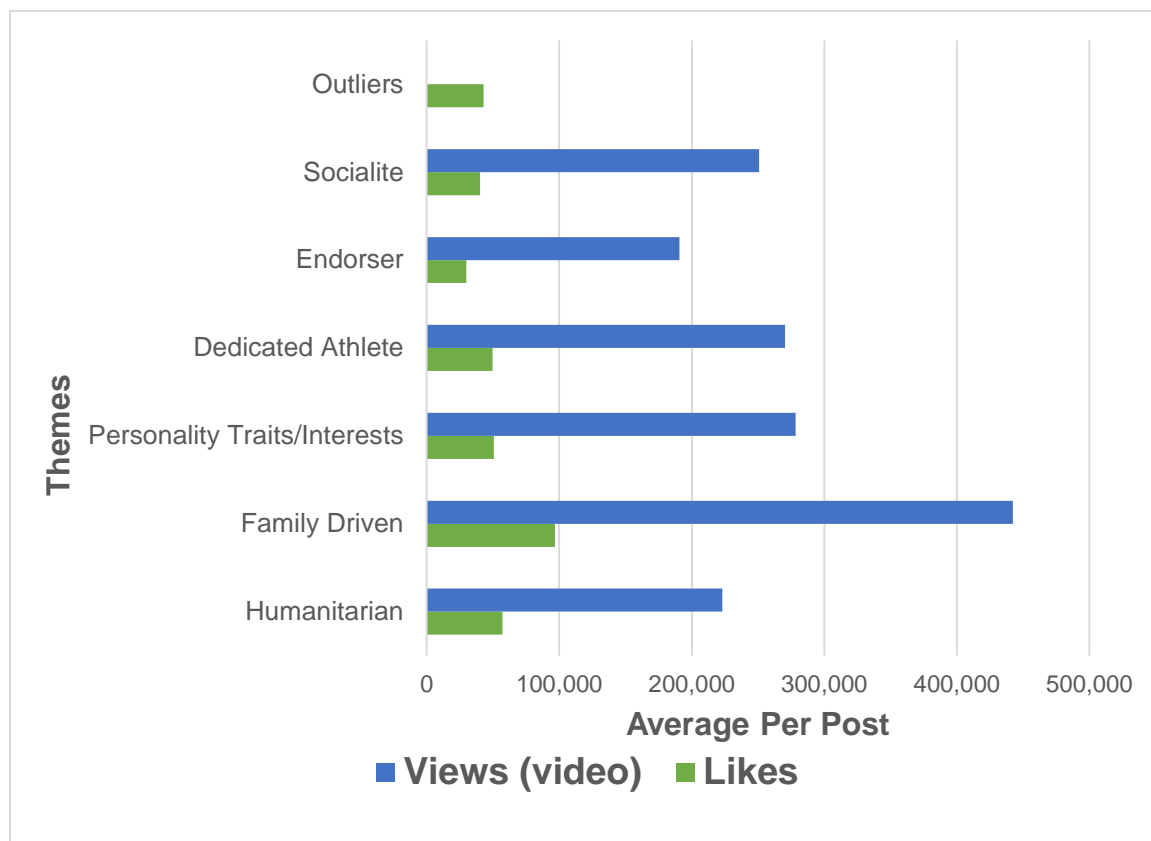
The details are as follows: 85 posts (28%) were Endorser, 59 posts (20%) were Personality Traits and Interests, 58 posts (19%) were Family Driven, 49 posts (16%) were Dedicated Athlete, 35 posts (12%) were Humanitarian, and 12 posts (4%) were Socialite. 4 posts (1%) of the 302 total posts were deemed as outliers and didn't have a dominant theme that they fit within.

Part two of RQ1 asked about how these themes were received by his audience. This data was measured through the average number of likes, views, and comments from posts that fit a certain theme. The numbers for likes, views, and comments are reflected in Table 2, while a visual representation of likes and views is displayed in Graph 2.

Table 2 – Average Likes, Views, and Comments Based on Themes for Russell Wilson's Instagram During 2017

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Likes</b>	<b>Views (video)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Humanitarian</b>	57,046	223,125	328
<b>Family Driven</b>	96,639	442,322	1,137
<b>Personality Traits/Interests</b>	50,650	278,378	451
<b>Dedicated Athlete</b>	49,614	270,303	455
<b>Endorser</b>	29,953	190,716	278
<b>Socialite</b>	40,333	250,724	243
<b>Outliers</b>	42,957	N/A	224
<b>AVERAGE</b>	52,456	275,928	445

Graph 2 - Average Likes, Views, and Comments Based on Themes for Russell Wilson's Instagram During 2017



### *In-Season Posts Versus Out of Season Posts*

RQ3 asked if being in-season versus being out of season made a difference in the quantity of posts and reception of the posts based on themes. The 302 posts were divided into two categories: In-Season, which was made up of January 1 through January 14 as well as July 30<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>, and Out of Season, which was January 15 to July 29<sup>th</sup>. The two weeks in January were included for In-season because the Seattle Seahawks were still in the NFL Playoffs up until January 14, 2017. The In-season start date July 30<sup>th</sup> was selected because it was the start of Seahawks' training camp for the 2017 season.



The data for quantity of posts by theme for In-Season is represented by Table 3 and Graph 3. The data for quantity of posts by theme for Out of Season is represented by Table 4 and Graph 4.

Table 3 – 2017 In-Season Posts By Theme

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Posts</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Images</b>	<b>Video</b>
<b>Humanitarian</b>	21	17	14	7
<b>Family Driven</b>	23	18	13	10
<b>Personality Traits and Interests</b>	26	20	10	16
<b>Dedicated Athlete</b>	11	9	9	2
<b>Endorser</b>	42	33	21	21
<b>Socialite</b>	4	3	0	4
<b>Outliers</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	127	100	67	60

Graph 3 – 2017 In-Season Posts By Theme Percentage

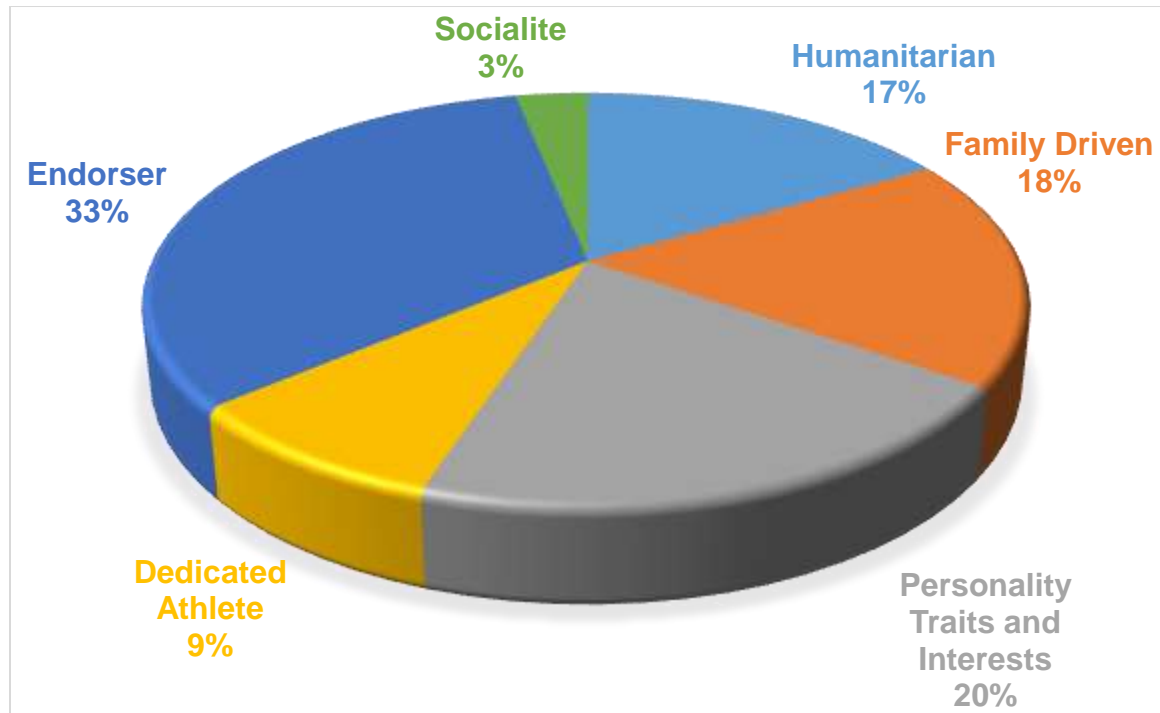
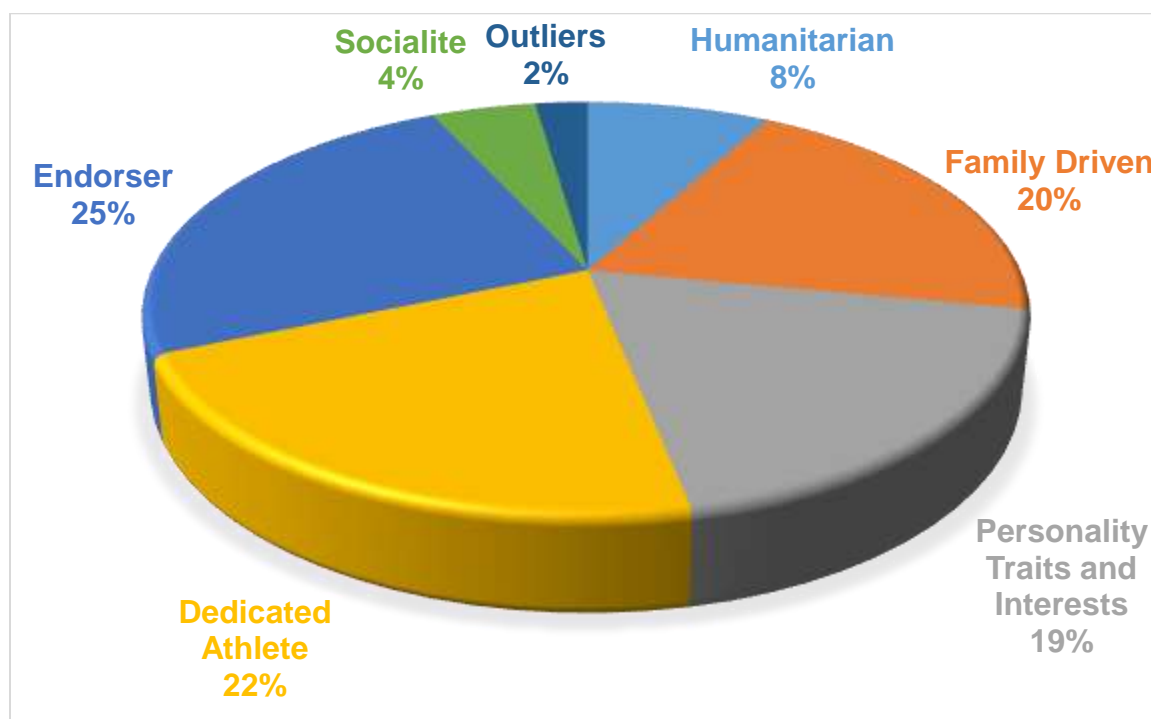


Table 4 – 2017 Out of Season Posts by Theme

Themes	Posts	%	Images	Video
<b>Humanitarian</b>	14	8	10	4
<b>Family Driven</b>	35	20	20	15
<b>Personality Traits and Interests</b>	33	19	20	13
<b>Dedicated Athlete</b>	38	22	20	18
<b>Endorser</b>	43	24	18	25
<b>Socialite</b>	8	5	5	3
<b>Outliers</b>	4	2	4	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	175	100	97	78

Graph 4 – 2017 Out of Season Posts by Theme Percentage



In addition to total number and percentage of posts, RQ3 also asks about how posts are received for In-Season compared to Out of Season. These questions were analyzed through counting and averaging of likes and views. Likes are represented by Table 5 and Graph 5, while views are shown in Table 6 and Graph 6.

Table 5 – Average Likes by Theme for In-Season vs. Out of Season

<b>Theme</b>	<b>In Season</b>	<b>Out of Season</b>
<b>Humanitarian</b>	67,195	41,822
<b>Family Driven</b>	119,369	82,749
<b>Personality Traits/Interests</b>	65,457	38,983
<b>Dedicated Athlete</b>	60,962	46,330
<b>Endorser</b>	31,115	28,818
<b>Socialite</b>	36,357	42,321
<b>Outliers</b>	N/A	42,957
<b>AVERAGE</b>	63,409	46,283

Graph 5 – Average Likes by Theme for In-Season vs. Out of Season

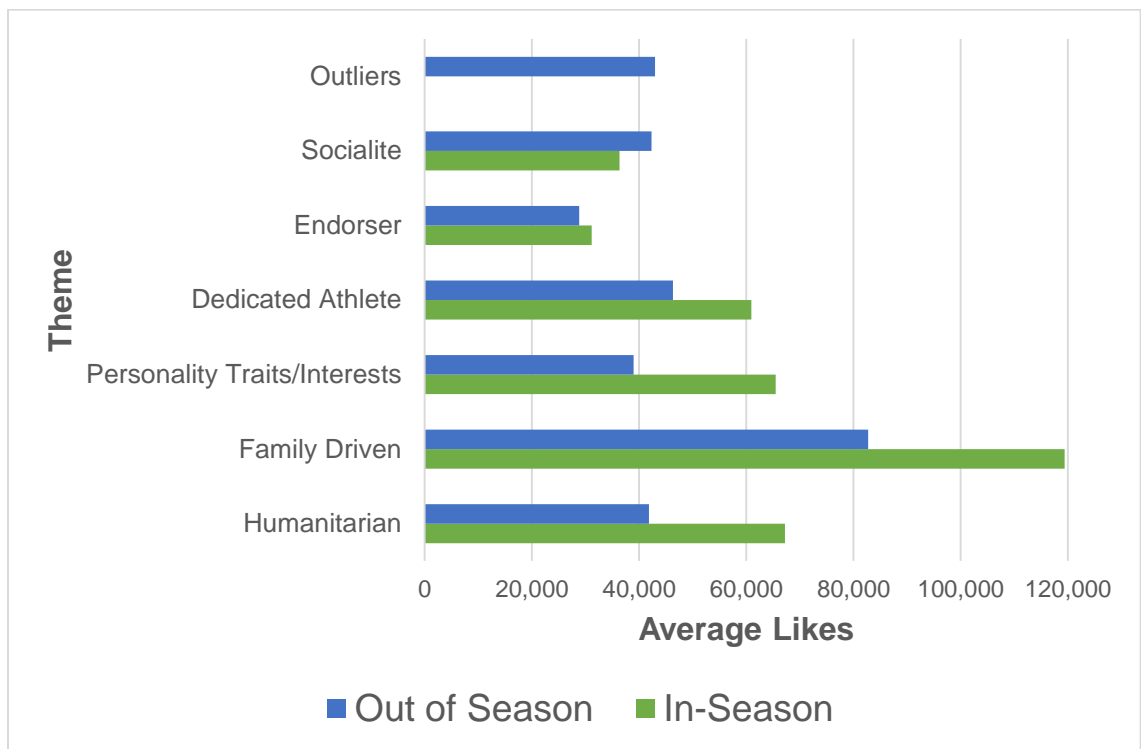
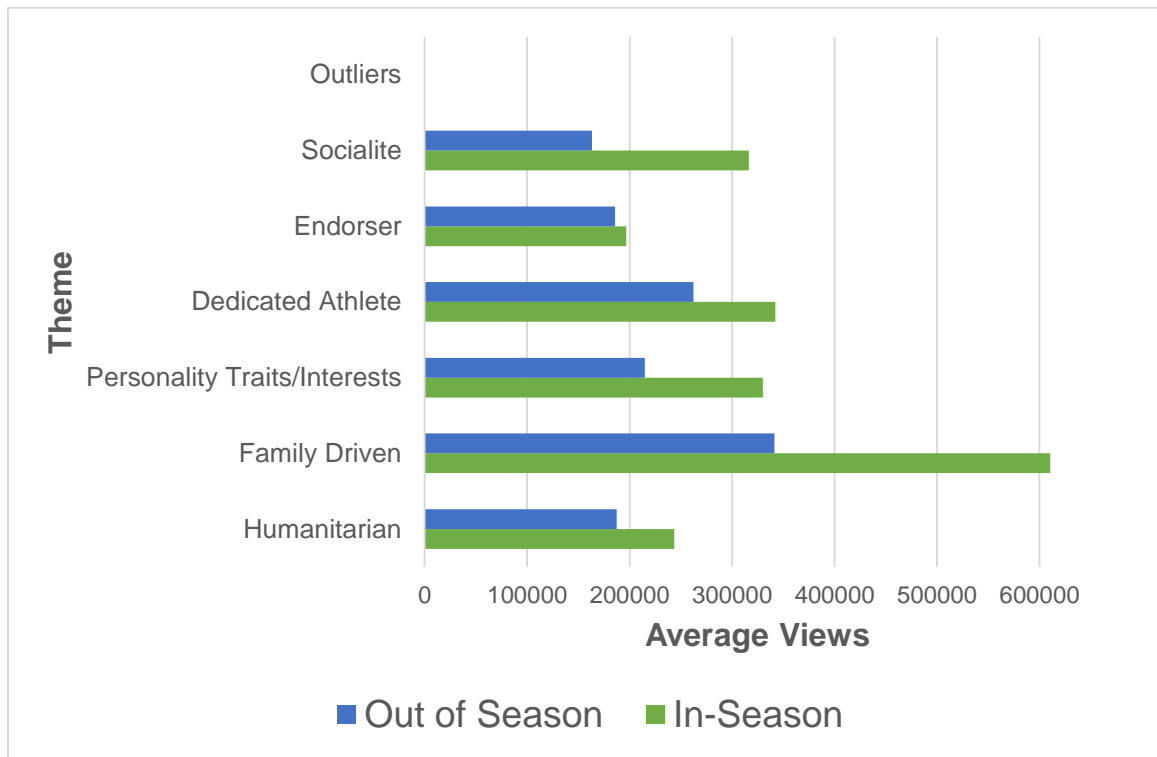


Table 6 – Average Video Views by Theme for In Season vs. Out of Season

<b>Theme</b>	<b>In Season</b>	<b>Out of Season</b>
<b>Humanitarian</b>	243,527	187,422
<b>Family Driven</b>	610,483	341,426
<b>Personality Traits/Interests</b>	329,944	214,911
<b>Dedicated Athlete</b>	342,238	262,310
<b>Endorser</b>	196,738	185,658
<b>Socialite</b>	316,351	163,220
<b>Outliers</b>	N/A	N/A
<b>AVERAGE</b>	339,880	225,825

Graph 6 – Average Video Views by Theme for In Season vs. Out of Season



**DISCUSSION: Content Analysis**

The use of Content Analysis revealed many interesting findings by taking a broad view of Russell Wilson's Instagram account during 2017. RQ1 asked what themes (based on Smith & Sanderson, 2015) emerged from the images and captions used by Russell Wilson on Instagram? How are they received, based on likes, views, and comments, by the audience on Instagram? All six of the themes were represented by Wilson on Instagram. The theme of Endorser was by far the most commonly posted theme at 28%. Personality Traits and Interests (20%) and Family Driven (19%) were the next two most popular themes. This data becomes even more compelling when comparing it to how the themes were received by Wilson's Instagram audience.

The second part of RQ1 asked how themes were received based on likes, views, and comments. The theme of Family Driven was by far the most popular with an average of 96,639 likes, 442,322 views, and 1,137 comments. As a reference, both likes and comments for this theme were more than double the average for all posts in 2017. There are certain aspects that make Wilson's family life unique, such as having a celebrity musical artist for a wife. However, these numbers relate to the audience identifying with Russell most as a family man. Not every person can relate easily to themes like being a professional athlete, humanitarian, or socialite. However, family is very relatable to an audience. These results are nearly identical to what Sanderson (2011) saw from the Twitter account of Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner. Posts related to family also share with the audience a glimpse of Russell that isn't as present on the football field. This is another source of identification for fans, much like Sanderson's (2011) findings revealed

when he claimed that, “as athletes increasingly use social media to reveal personal information, these domains are prime venues for identification to develop” (p. 83).

Endorser was the least popular theme with an average of 29,953 likes, 190,716 video views, and 278 comments. It should be noted that this is a drop of 43% for likes, 31% for video views, and 38% for comments based on the average of all posts in 2017. Endorser is the least popular theme based on audience response, but it is also the most common theme that Wilson posts about. This seemingly contradictory result underscores the fact that certain posts that involve endorsements are going to be made no matter what the response. It isn't so much the audience's response that matters for these posts as much as it is the money being paid to the athlete as a marketer (Pegoraro, 2010). It also illustrates that even when posts appear on a personal Instagram account, the audience can still decipher what is advertising and what is authentic. The audience is much more likely to respond favorably when it doesn't involve a company or event being endorsed. Endorsements can improve their engagement numbers by incorporating more popular themes, such as Family Driven, Humanitarian, and Dedicated Athlete, into their messaging.

RQ3 asked if being in-season versus being out of season made a difference in the quantity of posts and reception of the posts based on themes. While Endorser remained the most popular theme for both In-Season and Out of Season, there are a few striking differences between the time periods. First, In-Season had a total of 127 posts, while Out of Season had a total of 175. Out of Season lasted about a month longer and it exhibited a more active posting rate between the two groups. In-Season had about 23 posts per

month, while Out of Season was about 27 posts per month. Although it is a more active time for posting it is only four more posts a month.

Overall, average likes and average video views showed higher totals for In-Season than it did Out of Season. For In-Season, the average likes were 63,409 and the average views were 339,880. For Out of Season, the average likes were 46,283 and the average views were 225,825.

Moreover, the themes that have the most striking differences between time periods are Endorser, Dedicated Athlete, and Humanitarian. Starting with Endorser, the percentage for In-Season was 33% (42 posts) but dropped to 25% (43 posts) for Out of Season. There was only one more post for Endorser for Out of Season than there was for In-Season. There's reason to think that since the NFL season puts more eyes on Russell Wilson, there's more of a demand to post content related to companies he endorses or owns. In terms of likes and views, Endorser saw a minor increase for both likes and views for In-Season.

Next, Dedicated Athlete only appears 9% of the time for In-Season, while it is the second most popular category for Out of Season at 22%. Since Wilson's games are played on television, he may rely less on social media to prove that he is a dedicated athlete during the season. When the spotlight is off the NFL season, he appears to rely more on social media to display his dedication. While there were fewer posts for In-Season, it still achieve a much higher response from the Instagram audience.

Humanitarian-themed posts appear 17% of the time for In-Season but then drops by more than half when it goes to 8% in the offseason. This fits what is known about

Wilson since he visits Seattle Children's Hospital every week during the NFL Season. That commitment is less commonly featured during the offseason.

While most themes for In-Season performed better than Out of Season, Socialite provide a unique finding in regard to likes. Out of Season received a higher number of average likes with 42,321 as compared to 36,357 for In-Season. Perhaps, this role for Russell is more accepted by fans when the NFL season isn't going on.

### **Results: CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE CRITICISM**

Artifacts located on Russell Wilson's Instagram account are a large part of his rhetorical catalogue and worthy of closer study. In the midst of hundreds of personal pictures and videos is a 30-second video posted on November 10, 2017 that can only be described as a Bose commercial (dangerusswilson, 2017). Wilson has been endorsed by Bose for *over* three years, and during that time Wilson has posted multiple images and videos related to the company on his Instagram. Bose is just one of many companies that have advertising-related content available on Wilson's Instagram. This observation sparked this investigation of how endorsements, intermixed with personal content on Wilson's Instagram, impact his public image.

To answer this question, the rhetorical critical methods of Close Textual Analysis (CTA) and Narrative Criticism were used to examine Russell Wilson's Bose commercial entitled "Devoted" (dangerrusswilson, 2017). It was the goal of this combination of methods to dig deeper into the content posted on Instagram to understand the role of Wilson's life narrative as an attractive investment for commercial endorsement.



*Close Textual Analysis and the “Devoted” Text*

The use of close textual analysis (CTA) as a method represents a reasonable choice for a speech or written discourse loaded with verbal content for microscopic, word-by-word analysis. However, Russell Wilson’s Bose commercial called “Devoted” poses a challenge relative to its lack of spoken words and minimal written content. Yet, it is still rich with visual and audio elements CTA can take on.

The written text in the 30 second video doesn’t appear until only nine seconds remain. The first word that appears is “Devoted,” followed by the phrase “However You Feel Really Feel.” The remaining written text describes the Bose product itself: “New Quietcomfort 35 Wireless Headphones II.” A few seconds later, it reads, “Bose: Official Sound of the NFL.” These last two examples of text, description and endorsement, are common strategies for any advertisement. Even the phrase “However You Feel Really Feel” isn’t unique to this commercial. It’s the tagline of an entire advertising campaign by Bose for the Quietcomfort 35 Wireless Headphones II, including two other ads with NFL stars Larry Fitzgerald and Julio Jones (larryfitzgerald, 2017). When sorting through the text in the commercial, there’s only one unique word: Devoted.

Additionally, Wilson adds more text to support this connection from within the framework of Instagram’s platform. The caption underneath the Bose video reads, “Nobody’s more devoted than me. Or @Bose. #QC35 II #TeamBose #BoseAmbassador” (dangerusswilson, 2017).

Beyond the scant number of words, the text can be described in terms of screen time. The commercial totals 30 seconds with 26 seconds involving images of Russell

Wilson. With 87% of the screen time, Wilson is the primary focus of the ad. The remaining four seconds, or 13% of the screen time, present the product. That's also when the text of Bose's "New Quietcomfort 35 Wireless Headphones II" is displayed. The headphones are the same ones that Wilson has been wearing throughout the video, though they now become the focus. Of the 26 seconds that include Wilson, the scenes are equally divided into two 13-second increments. Scene one is Wilson working out alone. Scene two is Wilson post-work out checking on his infant daughter in her room. The two major scenes in the video are given the exact same amount of time.

Close-ups are used a total of four times in this 30 second piece. The workout scene uses a close-up of Wilson's face at the start of the video and a brief close-up of his feet at the 10 second mark while he's jumping rope. The other two close-ups occur during the crib scene with Wilson's baby. The first close-up is of the baby's side of her head in the crib around the 15 second mark, while the other is Wilson's face at the 22 second mark. The 22 second mark is also the moment when Wilson first smiles at his child, just as the word "Devoted" appears on the screen. Additionally, Wilson's close-up is the only time he smiles in the entire ad. It also provides a contrast to the close up we saw of Wilson at the start of the ad, while working out. He looked focused and determined, much like we would expect of an athlete during a workout

The scene of the advertisement appears to be taking place in the early morning around the time that the sun is rising. Wilson is working out early in the morning, prior to his child waking up. In addition to scenery, music plays in all 30 seconds of this particular ad. The music sounds like a lullaby or a type of simple instrumental tones that might be played to help put a child to sleep. When the ad starts with Russell Wilson

doing an intensive workout, the lullaby choice doesn't seem to fit the type of music we would expect to be hearing during a workout. The music is the only dominant sound in the entire commercial, coupled only with the quiet sounds of jump rope or Wilson breathing during his workout. Additionally, in his daughter's room, a singular, infant cooing sound softly breaks the silence.

*Using Narrative Criticism on "Devoted" Text*

Narrative Criticism is a fairly common tool when it comes to understanding advertising and fits the cultural prioritization of storytelling. The use of narrative in this Bose commercial works simultaneously on the surface and on a deeper level because of the story built around Russell Wilson's family life and football career.

The narrative of this specific post is a relatively simple story on the surface. Russell Wilson wakes up early in the morning to work out and is relatively quiet during his workout because of his headphones. After his workout he goes to check on his newborn daughter to spend time with her. In this short story we see firsthand Wilson's devotion to the physical fitness needed for professional athletes, even as he is equally devoted to his family, represented by his daughter. The Bose headphones are what help him to be so fully devoted to both, not unlike how an intricate balance of audio makes the sound quality better when using headphones. The moral of the story is hard to miss: the Bose headphones balance the duality of Wilson's demanding and devoted life.

## **DISCUSSION: Close Textual Analysis and Narrative Criticism**

### *Close Textual Analysis*

The word devoted is the only unique written word in the entire video. This is the word that connects what Russell Wilson is doing in the commercial to much-publicized and well-known attributes of his public image. Bose is hoping to capitalize on-- and be associated with-- “Devoted” as a trait that the audience can associate with their company as well.

Within the caption related to the video on Instagram, the connection between Wilson and Bose becomes even clearer. Wilson emphasizes that not only is *he* devoted, but the brand Bose is as well. Moreover, the use of hashtags, particularly #TeamBose and #BoseAmbassador, make it seem like Wilson is a part of something bigger, a member of a whole team of people who are affiliated with Bose. The use of the word “team” also sounds inclusive and could give the audience the idea that they, too, can be on Wilson’s team by buying Bose.

Down to the second, the video shows Wilson being equally committed, or “devoted,” to the training required to be an NFL quarterback *and* the demands it takes to be a father. Russell Wilson is equally and fully devoted to both family and football. When he appears later with his daughter, Wilson, the determined and focused athlete has given way to Wilson, the tender and devoted father. The close-up is used throughout the ad to help the audience relate to Wilson’s approach to both aspects of his life. It shows that he is capable of both the focused and emotional energy needed for football and the fatherly attentiveness needed for raising a child.

The early morning setting is especially compelling as well. In general, it's extraordinary for any parent to wake up before their baby. For Wilson, this ability appears to be a natural and normal, perhaps even necessary part of his daily routine. This suggests that he is truly unique in the world of sports and the world of parenting. Furthermore, this nursery scene resonates with one of the mantras that Wilson adopted since joining the NFL: "No Time to Sleep." In essence, this video reflects the idea that Wilson is so driven and motivated *and devoted* that he doesn't need as much sleep as the rest of us. This advertisement attempts to give the audience a glimpse into the real life of Russell Wilson, but it does so at the expense of every sleep-deprived and exhausted parent of an infant. The images of a before-dawn workout and rising before the baby wakes reinforces the idea that Wilson doesn't sleep much; and, when he is awake, he is always working on his dual priorities of football and family.

Additionally, the decision to use the lullaby music subtly suggests a priority for parenting in the duality of Wilson's story. He may still make time to exercise, but the music is used as a reminder that his responsibilities of being a dad are always on his mind. The lullaby-quiet nature of the video helps the audience to realize Wilson's baby has been asleep the whole time. For Bose, this lack of noise ties in nicely with the name of their headphones "Quietcomfort." The headphones show that Wilson's devotion to working out and preparing for football don't interrupt his other devotion of being a father. All of these details fit within the larger narrative at play.

### *Narrative Criticism*

There are five premises when analyzing an artifact through Fisher's Narrative Paradigm. The first premise is that humans are storytellers. Through this story, we

experience a brief glimpse into Russell Wilson's life. The audience can identify with what they are seeing, especially those who are parents. It's not easy to be fully committed to two different things, so seeing Wilson do both is an encouragement. Most parents viewing this ad can likely identify with what Wilson's story is suggesting, even if they aren't professional football players. The story resonates with them.

The second component of the paradigm requires critics to examine the decisions made based on the standard of good reasons. It appears that Wilson is waking up before his daughter to get his workout in. He's keeping his fitness a priority by sacrificing his sleep. As a professional athlete, this would be seen as a good reason, especially with the unpredictability of having a newborn. Our society would also see it as a good reason for Wilson to be investing in his daughter's life as well as his career.

The third premise of the paradigm states that good reasons are determined by matters of history, biography, culture, and character. Russell Wilson's biography or personal narrative fits this story. Through social media, Wilson has shown how he's prioritized his family, including his late father. It's logical to think that he would also prioritize fatherhood with his own child. In the first part of the commercial, Russell is already famous for his life mantras that highlight his preparation and dedication to his craft as an NFL quarterback. Fans would be well aware of these phrases. Based on that knowledge, they would find the Bose version of Wilson's story as believable and corresponding to his effort to outwork his opponents. Waking up before his baby daughter to prioritize his fitness is not only a "good reason" in the narrative, it is aligned with what fans already know about the Wilson story.

The next premise of the Narrative Paradigm is rationality; specifically, it involves Narrative Coherence and Narrative Fidelity. Narrative Coherence asks if the story makes sense structurally within the sequence of events. Based on what fans know about Wilson, these appear to be believable scenes in his life. The way he talks about his love of football and his family in other examples, this “Devoted” situation is a believable installment in the telling of his everyday activities. The only aspect that may not appear to be believable for parents is the idea of wearing headphones while a baby sleeps. And yet, the headphones are designed to keep sound in, indicating Wilson’s desire not to wake his daughter with pounding workout music. In terms of Narrative Fidelity, or the concern about whether the story rings true, the audience would need to suspend their disbelief to understand that the commercial itself is not actually taking place in Wilson’s home (nor is his daughter in the room). Most fans would believe it to be a “true depiction” based on Wilson’s success on the football field and what they know of his character. It’s certainly not a scene that contradicts the narrative that fans are accustomed to believing. The only question about this chapter of Wilson’s story would relate to the Bose headphones: do they really allow Wilson to be fully devoted to his sport and fully devoted to his family? It certainly doesn’t hurt Bose’s cause that both scenes in this story fit a believable narrative about Wilson, including the notion that he makes for a credible endorser of any product. In turn, the rationale that Bose headphones help Russell Wilson stay dedicated to the most important parts of his life lends Bose credibility as a supporting character. Bose is hoping to sell their ability to balance music and the demands of a hectic life *for anyone*.

The last premise of Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm relates to the idea of the known world being experienced and reinforced with each new narrative. This “Devoted” video

reinforces the existing tale that Wilson is extraordinarily committed to his family and to his work. For those who don't know him as well, the video establishes what they *should* think about this NFL quarterback. For those in the Pacific Northwest, Wilson's work is being their quarterback. He's a source of pride because of that commitment and because he seems to live out what he says he is, both on and off the field. This new narrative installment corresponds with and benefits both his personal brand and Bose's because of the parts of his life that the ad is depicting.

The role of the audience is a vital factor when it comes to Narrative Criticism. As mentioned before, the audience determines the Narrative Coherence and Narrative Fidelity of the story. However, it's also worth noting that the storyteller of this specific narrative likely has a particular audience that he is targeting with this story. James Phelan (1996) defines this as the ideal narrative audience: "the audience that accepts every statement of the narrator as true and reliable" (p.140). From a social media standpoint, Parasocial Interaction would define this audience as the faithful audience: "the audience is expected to benefit by his wisdom, reflect on his advice, sympathize with him in his difficulties, forgive his mistakes, buy the products that he recommends..." (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 38). While Bose is telling the story, it's Russell Wilson that is driving the narrative and helping it connect to the audience. Both Wilson and Bose benefit. Moreover, this is particularly effective because this advertisement is placed on Wilson's personal Instagram account. As of April 7, 2018, Wilson had a total of 3.3 million Instagram followers (dangerusswilson, 2018). By incorporating this advertisement through the channel of social media, Bose can tap into part of their ideal audience with those already "devoted" to Russell Wilson as followers on Instagram. These 3.3 million



followers already have a sense of Wilson's life narrative because of posts about his family, football career, and other activities. This advertisement fits within the narrative frame that they have already been experiencing online. Knowing this helps to answer RQ6: How do advertisements through Instagram reinforce the narrative surrounding Wilson? This video proves that in the case of Russell Wilson, the advertising can reinforce his narrative by incorporating themes in their advertisement that are already displayed and accepted on his social media platform. Although it's sponsored content, it matches the narrative the audience has experienced from Russell Wilson. Thus, as Phelan described, it makes it much more likely for them to accept "every statement of the narrator as true and reliable" (Phelan, 1996, p. 140). The story is consistent with other images and narrative components on Wilson's Instagram.

This effect would be in stark contrast to an audience who might be exposed to the commercial on television. Those outside the Pacific Northwest or those who are less familiar with Wilson's story may miss the layers at work in this ad. More importantly, they may not realize that *this* narrative is part of a larger story for both Wilson and Bose. The element of fatherhood presented in the story has more impact for followers on Instagram because they know that Wilson's dad was his hero. Wilson's baby also becomes more influential in the unfolding Instagram narrative because of his marriage to musical artist Ciara. Although Ciara isn't pictured, the baby in the ad implies that the mother is part of the story. However, others without this background knowledge about his life may only see the ad as the story about a football player who makes time for both his work and his baby. The use of social media to target the ideal and faithful audience for a particular narrative explains why social media endorsements continue to gain in

popularity and use. “Companies have realized that one photo on the Instagram account of someone with over 100,000 followers is reaching more people directly than any traditional ad campaign” (Wu, 2016, p. 313). Of Wilson’s 3.3 million Instagram followers, it’s reasonable to believe a vast majority are fans of his, each with a deeper knowledge of his personal narrative because of how he presents himself on the social media platform. Social media provides a way for a narrative to become more powerful by tapping into the ideal and faithful audience, and it seems that businesses are interested in reaching this audience.

### **Results: INTERVIEW**

An interview with the Chief Operating Officer of West2East Empire was conducted over the phone on Tuesday, May 1, 2018. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes with 11 questions asked, along with one restated question. Although the respondent works for a company owned by Russell Wilson, his responses appeared genuine and not rehearsed. For example, the word “know” was the most common word used throughout the interview, but it often fit within a general speech pattern in using the phrase “you know.” The interview presented an authentic dialogue that gave a more in-depth glimpse into the strategies behind Russell Wilson’s Instagram account. Since the interview was conducted with a single subject, the results section includes a paraphrased answer to each question.

*Question #1: The East2West Empire website states: “Brand Management. Strategic Storytelling.” How do you define strategic storytelling?*

Strategic Storytelling refers to a strategy that West2East incorporates to differentiate their work from other brand management companies. Rather than shoving

messaging or advertising down the consumers' throat, their company's focus is on entertainment coupled with actionable takeaways. "Strategic storytelling from our perspective is the ability for us to be very direct and actionable on the things that we want people to absorb" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). Their goal is to have a high quality product that isn't pushing the consumer away. This approach applies to both their company as a whole and Russell Wilson's social media.

*Question #2: In general, what is the role of social media in regard to brand management and strategic storytelling?*

Social media is the vehicle that allows West2East Empire to show their work and connect with an audience. This applies to Russell Wilson as well. The interviewee mentioned the importance of posts making sense when presented on Wilson's Instagram. It was specifically referenced with regard to endorsing other brands through social media. "We're not gonna... do a deal or agree to something that doesn't make sense for him because his followers see right through that. We understand for the most part who they are, what they do, what the demographic looks like and how they relate to Russell Wilson, the athlete, the father, the entrepreneur, the philanthropist" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). The respondent went on to say that social media use represents the company, and each individual in the company looks at social media as a way to reflect West2East Empire.

*Question #3: Who posts on Russell's social media accounts? Does it vary based on platform or based on message content?*

90-95% of the posts on social media are from Russell Wilson. The other 5-10% is West2East posting with Russell and it is often regarding brand related posts, such as endorsements.

*Question #4: What is the purpose of Russell Wilson's social media accounts? Do the purposes on Instagram differ from other platforms in any way?*

The approach on Instagram is very visual heavy, simply because of the nature of the platform. There are posts by Russell Wilson, such as the Bible verse of the day, which can only be used on a platform that doesn't require images, like Twitter. Anything that highlights images and videos will be placed on Instagram. In many ways, all social media platforms complement each other, and all can be used to push fans towards the TraceMe App, which was launched in 2017. TraceMe is an app that Russell Wilson helped create and allows him to share more in-depth information with his fans.

*Question #5: What strategies have you found to be successful on Russell Wilson's Instagram? How do you measure its success?*

Success is measured by engagement, such as the likes, views, and comments on a particular post. West2East may have different goals depending on a post. Anything football related has proven consistently successful. "That's his main profession and that's why he's become the person in celebrity that he is. It's his success on the field. That's number one. Winning football games is what most people care about" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). Moreover, family posts have also been very successful for Wilson. The respondent noted that he doesn't believe that Wilson has ever responded to any comment or response on social media. This was explained by stating, "He posts those types of things because he wants to give the fans a look into his life and he's going to post what makes him the most comfortable and the things that he's proud of" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). When working with other brands that want Wilson to post about their company or product on his social media platform, West2East gives their input as to how to make that post more successful. They want engagement to

stay high, especially when it relates to another brand. The main motive for collaborating with a brand to maintain high engagement is because they don't want Wilson to lose followers and influence.

*Question #6: Are there any specific posts on Instagram that you would consider examples of success?*

One example of success was a video of Wilson throwing a football on the Great Wall of China during the summer of 2017. Also, images of Wilson's daughter Sienna were referenced as successful posts. The respondent mentioned that the measure of success can vary. For example, they posted about a Fidelity Investment event from the night before. Although this may not receive a large engagement in terms of likes and comments, it benefits their business relationship with Fidelity. That makes it successful from West2East Empire's perspective. Overall, posts related to football and family are the most successful and can gather likes in the hundreds of thousands. This strategy is important to know, but it's more about being a good fit for Russell. Their approach with Wilson is described as "Hey, this is who he is, let's do things that fit naturally. And if people receive them well, great" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018).

*Question #7: How do strategies for social media for Russell Wilson change during the NFL season compared to the off season?*

Off-season posts are more active and the in-season posts are more focused. Wilson will show his travels during the off season, all while working out wherever he goes. In-season posting is dialed back by 75-80% as explained by the respondent. In-season posting is much more strategic and intentional. When the playoffs come around, posting is dialed back even more. The off season is more of a time to show his

personality and who he is, while in season is more focused on football, family and scheduled branded posts.

*Question #8: In general, how would you describe Russell Wilson's story or narrative?*

The respondent described Wilson as underappreciated in many ways. He's also extremely hard working and that can go unnoticed, giving him an underdog persona. More importantly though, Wilson is the real thing and he isn't acting. He really is this nice and happy. "Throughout his career, Russell has proved to everyone the person that he is, and there's never been any circumstance that has showed... the public, otherwise" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). The story of Wilson has also performed well on social media and has made it easy for those working for him. "We never have to lie, we never have to create a story for people to try to gravitate towards because everything is so natural" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). The respondent used the phrase "the real deal" to describe Wilson and it makes him an ideal role model.

*Question #9: How do you develop trust between Russell and fans through social media?*

The phrase organic was mentioned throughout the transcript and comes up again in this question because it's important to post images that make sense based on the life that Wilson is exhibiting. He also mentioned that Wilson is in the top three in terms of followers out of NFL athletes. The respondent points to the importance of content as to why Wilson is so popular. Content must be entertaining and it must fit into his everyday life.

*Question #10: How are endorsements or business interests incorporated into Russell's social media?*

It was explained that Wilson has an unnamed amount of posts that he is required to make each year based on his endorsement contracts. West2East tries to make these

posts as mutually beneficial as possible, and the respondent used his Nike cleat release as an example. West2East Empire also keeps tabs on all the companies they are involved with to coordinate with that company about when it might be a good time for Wilson to make a post about them. The merger of Alaska Airlines and Virgin America was referenced because Wilson will likely make a video congratulating them on the merger since he is the Chief Football Officer for Alaska Airlines. It was mentioned again that West2East Empire works directly with other brands when that outside brand makes a request for a post from Wilson. West2East hopes to collaborate on a plan that will be mutually beneficial for Wilson as well as the company by hitting topics that perform better on social media.

*Question #11: Do you believe commercial interests can impact authenticity? How do you navigate or balance these two aspects with Russell Wilson's account?*

The respondent agreed that commercial interests can impact authenticity on social media. Again, it was mentioned that if a company is pushing for something that doesn't make sense for Russell Wilson, then they normally try to come up with an alternative plan. For the most part, they believe that Wilson has avoided any of these conflicts of authenticity and branding that may arise simply by being selective with the brands he chooses to work with. "When we go through an endorsement deal or he becomes a spokesperson for a particular product or service, not once has he ever done anything that doesn't make sense organically, and we say no and he says no to 99 percent of everything that's presented to him because... it doesn't make sense or he doesn't use it" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). As a company, one of their goals is for branded posts to perform at the highest level possible. The respondent also shared that it is rare but

sometimes they have to concede to what the outside company wants to do because of the contract they agreed to.

### **DISCUSSION: Interview**

Of the 11 questions asked to the Chief Operating Officer of West2East Empire, there were three main themes that emerged from his responses: Organic Posting, Who Russell is, and Successful Posts.

#### *Organic Posting*

The word organic and organically was used 12 times during the interview with West2East Empire. It was used in reference to how posts appear on Russell Wilson's Instagram. An e-mail clarification later confirmed that the word organic was used as a synonym to the word natural, as in posts from Russell Wilson are natural, make sense, or fit who he is as a person and the narrative he has carefully cultivated.

The "organic" theme is referenced in question two when the respondent explains how they try to incorporate branded content onto social media. "Not only does it need to make sense for Russell Wilson, but it also needs to make sense for his followers so that it fits organically into his everyday life" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). Organic is also mentioned in question 8. "Everything has to be organic and everything has to make sense. We never, we never have to lie, we never have to create a story for people to try to gravitate towards because everything is so natural. And if it weren't natural, people would see right through it" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). The repetition of this wording and reference to what "makes sense" or is "natural" to Wilson is one of the chief strategies employed by West2East Empire.



This role of organic posts relates to RQ4 which asks how Russell Wilson builds trust with his audience through social media. With posts that are consistent to the life and image that Wilson represents, West2East Empire believe it develops trust with the audience. Wilson isn't making posts that are inconsistent with his life, or posting an advertisement that doesn't relate to who Wilson is as a person. Trust is developed by making posts that seem normal and natural to how Wilson portrays himself, a cycle of narrative coherence and reinforcement.

This idea also helps answer RQ5: What strategies are used on Instagram to reinforce the media framed narrative of Russell Wilson? As mentioned in the literature review, if the media frames Wilson under such categories as Christian Faith, Entrepreneurship, Fatherly Influence, and Overcoming Adversity, these characteristics of Wilson have become normalized and associated with him. Therefore, posts related to these categories also fit the idea of being organic and reinforcing what is already known about Wilson. An example of such a post is from November 9, 2017.



This post appears natural based on some of the media framed categories of Wilson, such as Fatherly Influence and Overcoming Adversity. Therefore, his Instagram is being used to reinforce parts of the narrative that are out there in the public, especially if it's a narrative that benefits Wilson. In the post above, Russell wrote "Happy Birthday Dad!" on his cleat in tribute to his father Harrison. This move fits Wilson's narrative. At the same time, we can't help but notice that the way the picture is framed, we still see a massive Nike logo and Wilson's personal logo with Nike (dangerusswilson, 2017). This post isn't blatant advertising like the Bose Commercial mentioned in the Narrative Criticism section, however there are certainly elements that echo it.

Furthermore, West2East Empire and Wilson don't just post for the sake of posting. They are strategic and thoughtful in their posts. The goal is to post something that is the most effective on social media. This organic focus is also important when working with specific branded content. They are aware that products or posts that don't fit Russell will be not be received as well as those that are a more natural fit. The idea of matching the brand of Russell Wilson with the brand of a product so that it makes sense relates to similar research on matching brands in the advertising world (Zwilling & Fruchter, 2013). Having a brand fit a more organic or natural action by Wilson gives West2East Empire leeway to work with a company on how to make a post that benefits both the company's brand and Wilson's brand.

So we go for likes and comments and then we'll go back to that particular brand and say this, this post is performing, say 10 percent better than all other branded posts. Here's what we think is best and here's the types of things we can do to improve and here's the types of things that we're going

to keep consistent as we move forward because it works organically for Russell (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018).

An organic, or natural fit, is a post that fits the everyday life of Russell Wilson. It must also fit the persona of Russell Wilson. This can become a bit more challenging when incorporating endorsements and other outside brands. However, that's where West2East Empire comes in to smooth things out and not push followers away with inconsistent content. It's also about being consistent to who Russell Wilson is as a person.

#### *Who Russell Is*

The interview provided a closer look at who Russell Wilson is in regard to social media as well as how he compares to the media narrative around his life. One of the most interesting statements was that it is Russell Wilson who is posting on his social media accounts 90-95% of the time. West2East Empire is still there to give their opinions and thoughts about a post, but it is Wilson's discretion on what to post. He also has final say in all posts that appear on his social media accounts.

The respondent also provided insight into Wilson's responses to social media use, or rather a lack of response. "As far as my knowledge goes, he's never replied to anyone via social because he doesn't look at that stuff... he is quite frankly not too concerned with how many likes or comments he gets. He posts those types of things because he wants to give the fans a look into his life and he's going to post what makes him the most comfortable and the things that he's proud of" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). While the company West2East Empire is very aware of how posts are received,

Wilson apparently is not concerned with this. Although, this statement is a bit ironic since Wilson is the owner of West2East Empire.

Yet, this focus on giving his fans a look into his life is similar to what Wilson has expressed in other interviews (Elliott, 2017). The respondent brought up this idea again later in the interview when speaking about Wilson. “He's very blessed in that perspective and he wants everyone to know how much he appreciates the things that they do for him and the opportunities that are presented to him because of them” (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). This response indicates that Wilson does what he does for the fans enjoyment because he recognizes the role they play in his fame. Would he still be making the same posts on social media if he only had 3,000 followers instead of 3.3 million?

One of the questions in the interview asked the respondent to assess who Russell Wilson is based on the story surrounding his life. His response was direct. “The guy loves football, he works his ass off and he loves his family. He's a man of faith and that's just who he is” (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). The respondent also acknowledged Wilson’s persona of being labeled an underdog and being “the guy that everyone wants to doubt” (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). However, those doubts are countered by his hard work and dedication he shows to his sport. “Throughout his career, Russell has proved to everyone the person that he is, and there's never been any circumstance that has showed, you know, the public, otherwise” (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). This response answers what many have wondered about Wilson: Is his story the real thing? According to one person who works closely with him, Wilson is in fact “the real deal.” It was also mentioned that fans who connect with

Wilson on social media often do because of the layered aspects that he represents. “They relate to Russell Wilson, the athlete, the father, the entrepreneur, the philanthropist” (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). The layers to Wilson offer fans multiple ways to relate and identify with him. It also adds to the story of Wilson being a good man because of all he does outside of football.

West2East Empire also views Wilson as a brand in himself. “We look at him as, as a brand, as a high fashion brand. For lack of better term, the James Bond type look. Simple, clean, elegant and timeless. So we try to create content around the things that we're doing that, that fit well into that category” (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). This view of Russell as a brand matches the findings of other literature that points to athletes as their own brand and self-presentation being a form of brand management (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). If West2East Empire can incorporate his brand in the right way, they can have a more successful posting on social media.

### *Successful Postings*

Although the interviewee expressed that he believes Wilson is not concerned with the response of his posts, clearly that is not the case for West2East Empire. The company doesn't track every individual post, but they are aware of what topics are successful and which ones are less successful. Success is measured through engagements on posts, which for Instagram includes likes, views, and comments. This is an identical measure to what the content analysis of this study used to measure audience response.

Football was cited as a topic related to some of Wilson's most successful posts. Football is linked to successful postings because it is the platform for which Wilson is best known in the public: he is the quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks. The interviewee

also mentioned that it's not just posting about football but especially winning that people care most about and respond to. This matches other literature pointing to winning as one of the key aspects for developing followers for a celebrity athlete (Jai Han, Misuk, & Eunkyong, 2016; Jensen, Ervin, & Dittmore, 2014). It's not simply winning though. An ideal combination is winning mixed with a reaction from Wilson that can only be captured through social media.

If he posts a video after a win that really lets people know how he's feeling, how the team's feeling, something, information that that wouldn't be particularly provided within a media interview, that's obviously gonna perform quite well (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018).

Information from the athlete that wouldn't be captured in a traditional media interview is similar to what Sanderson (2011) mentioned when he discussed how athletes now use social media as media and take control of their narrative. It also presents a more personal display on social media that fans can appreciate and connect with.

Moreover, the respondent mentioned family in the same reference of football as being keys to successful posts. "Football [and] family are the top two that we know are... going to perform well and they're in the... multiple hundred thousands of likes and comments" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). Mentioning football and family as the two most popular themes for social media posts also points to these themes being essential parts of Wilson's narrative. While it helps that his wife is a celebrity as well, family is engrained in the story of Russell Wilson through influences like his father Harrison (Steele, 2014; Tapper, 2014). The importance of showing Wilson connected to football and family also relates to two of the major themes identified on Instagram by

Smith & Sanderson (2015). This understanding helps to answer RQ2 which asked, “Do these themes match specific strategies Russell Wilson is using on Instagram?” Talking about football and family might appear natural for Wilson, but it’s clearly a strategy that West2East Empire knows will be effective. Learning what themes go into a successful post and how they are measured can help us better understand the narrative being reinforced on social media.

## SYNTHESIS OF DISCUSSION

This study incorporated four different methods with the ambitious hope of answering six different research questions. While the previous discussion was used to highlight main points from each method and how they answered the related research questions, this section takes a different form. This section combines the results from the four methods to identify the three major findings from the research: Creating Posts to Benefit Both Brands, Organic Posts Relate to Fisher's Narrative Fidelity and Coherence, and In-Season Posts Have a Larger Influence.

### **Creating Posts that Benefit Both Brands**

During the interview with West2East Empire, the Chief Operating Officer acknowledged that authenticity on social media can be impacted by commercial interests. If Russell Wilson is always promoting other companies and advertising to his followers, it can turn people away. Therefore, West2East Empire strives to make posts that benefit the outside company's brand as well as Russell Wilson's brand. This idea was acknowledged multiple times by the respondent when using the language of "organic" or "natural" to describe posts by Wilson. "If we have say a specific brand that is included in his contract that he has to post for, not only does it need to make sense for Russell Wilson, but it also needs to make sense for his followers so that it fits organically into his everyday life" (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). The fear would be pushing his audience away with advertising and losing the social capital of 3.3 million followers on Instagram. In turn, West2East Empire takes on the role of creative control when



working with other brands to help develop content that will achieve the goals of the company while fitting Russell Wilson's narrative and brand on social media.

Although West2East Empire wasn't asked specifically about the Bose advertisement posted on Russell Wilson's Instagram account on November 10, 2017, this post is a prime example of making branded content appear to arise naturally out of the everyday narrative of Wilson's life. The video reveals itself as an advertisement in the final four seconds when it spotlights the Bose headphones. However, the first 26 seconds of the video fit the themes of Family Driven and Dedicated Athlete referenced in the Content Analysis. Both of these themes are vital to Wilson's narrative. He's devoted towards football and devoted to his family. In fact, West2East Empire confirmed the importance of these two aspects of Wilson's life by stating that football and family are the two themes that consistently perform well on his social media accounts. Bose is tapping into that knowledge by illustrating Wilson's role as a devoted father and football player.

This idea is strengthened even more when we compare it to the findings from the Content Analysis. Overall, the theme of Endorser was the most common for posts on Instagram. Yet, its likes, views, and comments were much lower than any other theme. Conversely, Family Driven received the highest response from the audience on Instagram. Compared to Endorser, Family Driven received three-times as many likes, twice as many views, and four-times as many comments on average in 2017. If Family Driven receives such a favorable response on Instagram, it is logical for West2East Empire to tap into this theme when posting branded content for endorsements.

The strategy of using themes related to family and football to promote a particular non-family, non-football product seems central to the various methods used in this study. Wilson blurs the line between personal brand narrative and advertising promotion. This information helps acknowledge that, from an advertising perspective, someone can be more influential and marketable when their life is consistent with the personal narrative they represent (or “re-present.”). Furthermore, it is equally important that the audience is made aware of the fact that someone’s personal narrative may create financial gain and commercial influence. In essence, the person they follow on social media may only be a commercially constructed narrative and not the authentic person. While we have a chance to connect with those elevated in society like never before because of social media, giving our attention to their personal narratives gives them even more power and influence over us. In a capitalistic society, this influence is often manifested in advertising and other endorsements. Russell Wilson’s public persona is a unique example of how narratives presented on social media align with commercial interests even as they promote his personal brand.

### **West2East’s Idea of Organic Fits Fisher’s Narrative Fidelity and Coherence**

The use of the word organic or organically was a reoccurring theme throughout the interview with West2East Empire. As mentioned earlier, the wording relates to posts by Wilson that were deemed a natural fit to who he is. In essence, if what is posted doesn’t match who Russell Wilson is then the audience isn’t going to believe it. The way West2East Empire described this strategy presented many similarities to Walter Fisher’s work, specifically with Narrative Coherence and Narrative Fidelity. While West2East

Empire doesn't refer to it as coherence and fidelity, their description of being "organic" and "natural" touches on the same idea. In essence, this is a test they do as a company to see if they believe a post will work because it matches Wilson's story. It underscores the importance of narrative when using social media and creating a consistent image that matches the narrative. Simply put: will the audience believe it?

Narrative Coherence relates to whether the structure of the narrative makes sense. The audience following Russell Wilson's Instagram is asking whether this story resembles others they've either heard about Wilson or seen on his social media. It also asks whether the character involved is credible. If the posting is consistent to who he is as a persona, the character must be credible.

Narrative Fidelity looks at whether the story presented is true. This is where truth can appear a bit gray. For example, the Bose advertisement illustrated that the story was believable and made sense, although it clearly wasn't in Wilson's actual home and it wasn't Wilson's daughter Sienna in the crib. However, it's believable as a truthful event because of the narrative. When Wilson posts on Instagram, especially with branded content from other companies, it's the goal of West2East Empire to make the post appear at least like it could be true. More importantly, it's necessary that the audience not evaluate the post to be false. Fisher described Narrative Fidelity as a way that the audience is testing "whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (1984, p. 8). The audience on social media is doing the same thing. Is the image or video they are seeing ringing true to them? West2East Empire recognizes this concern and that's why they strive to make all posts appear normal and natural. "I think if we... diverted away from that and started to take a different approach,

you would see a negative impact from this social following because people would see right through it and it wouldn't fit him organically” (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018).

In part, Narrative Coherence and Narrative Fidelity put the focus on the audience. Will the audience believe this? Russell Wilson and West2East Empire are asking themselves the same question. If they lose the audience, they lose the power of influence. “Once you stop getting engagement for them, that becomes, not a red flag but it becomes an instance where brands are like, oh, then we might want to rethink how we take this approach, and obviously that's not that good for him” (West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018). Losing social capital and influence would be a step in the wrong direction for a brand like Russell Wilson.

This view not only connects the vital nature of having a rational story, it's the same tools that brands are using for social media. “Strategic Storytellers” is mentioned on the website of West2East Empire. One of their key strategies is following Fisher's view towards storytelling, and although their terminology differs, their main goal is ensuring that each post is filled with Narrative Coherence and Narrative Fidelity.

### **In-Season Posts Have a Larger Influence**

The Content Analysis compared posts that were made in-season with those that were made in the offseason. From comparing the two, it was discovered five of the six themes saw an increase in likes, views, and comments for in-season compared to out of season. The theme socialite was the only one that saw a decrease. We might have

assumed that posts made during the season would be more successful, but now this study provided the proof.

This finding is particularly noteworthy for athletes using social media. It doesn't discount the importance of posting year-round, but it does show that posting while the sport is in-season will yield an increased response from the audience. It's worth noting as well that the 2017 season was the first time Russell Wilson missed the playoffs as a member of the Seahawks. Even in a relatively down year, Wilson's in-season posts still experienced an increase for likes and views.

With this knowledge it's no surprise that Russell Wilson waited until the start of the 2017 NFL regular season to announce the launch of his own social media platform, the TraceMe App. When interviewing West2East Empire, they mentioned TraceMe started in the spring of 2017. However, it wasn't promoted on Russell Wilson's Instagram until September (dangerusswilson, 2017) and shortly after it was picked up by the national media (Huddleston, 2017). Of the 127 posts on Instagram for the in-season data set, 30 (24%) of those posts mentioned the TraceMe App. While there isn't any out of season data that includes the TraceMe App as a comparison, it still shows an intentional focus of an athlete to market a new product during the height of his audience's attentiveness.

One of the questions to West2East Empire targeted this role of in-season versus out of season. The off season focuses on where Russell has been traveling and what he's been up to, whether that's preparing for the season or going to Disneyland. However, once the NFL season starts, West2East acknowledged a change in how Wilson treats social media.

Then when it comes to season, it's time to go to work. His mindset is we're going to dial it back a lot. Eliminate any distraction. We're going to showcase a few things here and there that makes sense, whether it be football, family or brands, but it's toned down at least 75, 80 percent. He's much more strategic and what he does post and when.

(West2East Empire, Interview, May 1, 2018).

The response makes it seem like in-season posting is even more intentional and purposeful. Wilson doesn't have as much free-time to post because the season is going on, so what is presented on Instagram has a specific reason for being there.

## CONCLUSION

The overall goal of this study was to better understand the intersection of athletes, social media, and commercial interest. In this case study involving Russell Wilson, the role of narrative was the chief instrument that guided his self-presentation on social media, all while incorporating endorsements and business interests on the same platform. While this thesis has taken great strides in better understanding social media use by athletes, it is only one case study. The following conclusion is subdivided in three sections: The Research Process, Limitations and Future Research, and Closing Remarks.

### **The Research Process**

When tackling a subject matter that is as broad as social media and athletes, it's hard to know where to start. Thankfully for this study, the work of Dr. Jimmy Sanderson provided a great starting point and was truly foundational to this research. For one, his book *It's a Whole New Ballgame: How Social Media is Changing Sports* (Sanderson, 2011) gave my research a baseline for understanding social media's use and impact in the sports world. The book also pointed to other research areas to explore, such as Fan Identification, Parasocial Interaction, Narrative, and Media Framing.

Additionally, it was Sanderson's work with Dr. Lauren Smith in the research study *I'm Going to Instagram It! An Analysis of Athlete Self-Presentation on Instagram* (2015) that became a guide for putting this research together. Specific references in this study to the work of Smith and Sanderson (2015) include: choosing Instagram rather than Facebook or Twitter as a social media platform to study, using the themes in their study

as a coding framework for my Content Analysis, using a mixed methods approach, and improving on their limitations, such as including video, incorporating interviews, and gauging audience response. Any researcher is impacted by the work of those who went before us. While many researchers were included in the formation of this thesis, Smith and Sanderson were especially influential.

While conducting the research itself, I was struck by how each method continued to reveal more and more to the study. The first step I took was incorporating Narrative Criticism and Close Textual Analysis to study a lone post on Russell Wilson's Instagram feed. While this first exploration revealed the way Wilson's narrative was being reinforced through advertisements, it took a very narrow and specific focus. That's what led to incorporating Content Analysis and taking a broad view of Instagram to see what themes emerged and how they might relate to Wilson's narrative. As expected from studying the Bose commercial, themes like Endorser, Family Driven, and Dedicated Athlete were among the most commonly used. However, Endorser consistently received the fewest number of likes, views, and comments. Although there appeared to be a relationship between the three methods, it still felt speculative. We were only basing the results on observational patterns and rhetorical analysis linked to the audience's view of Wilson's Instagram account. There was a need to know how Wilson was working from the inside and what specific strategies he was using on Instagram. This thought led to the interview with West2East Empire. The insight received about the branding strategies incorporated by Russell Wilson's social media accounts was only possible from conducting this interview.



Using multiple methods in this study allowed for triangulation and comparison of multiple findings. While multiple methods made for a longer investigation, the findings represented in the discussion sections are much more secure and meaningful because of the detail and relationship amongst the methods. All the methods pointed to the importance of family and football as it relates to Wilson's narrative. As noted by West2East Empire, these are the two themes that they know will be received well by Wilson's audience. It's also the two themes that create the most identification for Russell's fans. When aspects of an athlete's life fit their narrative and it is relatable to their audience, it makes for a successful post on social media.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study, like many, is not without a handful of limitations that impacted the overall product. One of the main limitations was that due to time coding of the Content Analysis was performed by only one person, the researcher. Adding an additional coder would have allowed for a more collaborative process in determining what posts fit what theme, rather than solely a single perspective; inter-coder reliability would have helped to create a stronger set of findings. Although incorporating the caption and the image allowed for an improved categorization process, an additional coder would have made the findings even more reliable. It could have helped minimize the number of outlier posts as well, although there were only four outliers out of a total of 302 posts from 2017.

An additional limitation was not being able to interview Russell Wilson. As mentioned in the interview, Russell Wilson does 90-95% of the posts on social media,

and has final say on all posts throughout his social media platforms. Had this study had more time and Wilson had the availability to be interviewed, the perspective of the athlete would be better represented, making the interview data even more compelling. However, the Chief Operating Officer of West2East Empire was still a major benefit to this research by sharing an informative perspective that didn't appear to be too scripted or rehearsed. It's also worth noting that going through the Internal Review Board required this study to help maintain the anonymity of the interview subject. Had the interview been with Russell Wilson, it would have been nearly impossible to maintain his anonymity.

There are many steps that future research can take in the continual study of social media use by professional athletes. This research was a case study of one specific quarterback. While Wilson provided a unique point of view, it would be worthwhile to broaden the study and compare multiple athletes. Perhaps a comparison of multiple quarterbacks in the National Football League would extend the research in new and unexpected ways. A comparison might allow for deeper quantitative analysis, rather than simple averages and percentages for each category. Moreover, Instagram was selected in this research because there had been so few studies involving the platform. However, there is still a need to explore other social media platforms. In 2017, Russell Wilson launched his own platform, an app called TraceMe, to help fans better connect with him. This unique endeavor would be worth further research because of how it differs from the traditional social media platforms of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Researching TraceMe is also a compelling topic because of what was revealed in this study: Wilson does not respond to fans on social media. Yet, he has responded to fans who interact with

him on *his* social media platform, TraceMe. Lastly, the use of interviews with those working closely with athletes provided some of the most compelling insight and information for this research. Future studies could use interviews to compare multiple branding perspectives for a more comprehensive understanding of the best practices for representing athletes on social media.

While this study focused on Wilson's narrative structured around his personal life and football, it's important to realize that there are other factors that impact his narrative. One such factor is the role of race, and this should be explored in much greater detail for future studies. Perhaps, a similar study could do a comparison of Wilson's social media posts with another African-American NFL quarterback, such as Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton, to see what similarities or differences emerge. As mentioned in the Literature Review, Wilson has received criticism for not being "black enough" (Boren, 2014; Freeman, 2014), so race is certainly a warranted issue to explore as it relates to his narrative.

Moreover, Russell Wilson is a unique case because his wife Ciara is more popular than he is on social media. Ciara has over 18 million followers on Instagram compared to Wilson's 3.3 million followers (ciara, 2018; dangerrusswilson, 2018). Future research might also consider the role a spouse plays in one's influence on social media, and the overall narrative of the perfect marriage. Other athletes for comparison include New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady and his supermodel wife Gisele, or Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry and his wife Ayesha Curry.

## **Closing Remarks**

As this thesis reaches its conclusion, it is remarkable to think that scrolling through Instagram one day sparked so much writing and research. For many like me, social media is a tool that helps us stay connected with my family and friends, especially those who we don't live near. For those with societal power and influence, like a Russell Wilson, it's also a tool to connect and influence their fans. The study serves as a reminder to think about the media we're consuming and the motives of those who engage us with compelling narratives. Russell Wilson is staying true to his narrative and to who he is as a person, yet there are still strategies he's using to integrate outside commercial interest to entice his followers. With television ratings dropping and a rise in social media use, there is reason to believe that companies will increasingly look to the social capital of high-profile figures in society to help to sell their products. It's a win-win. The rich get richer. The endorser makes more money, while the company taps into an ideal audience to share their product.

Moreover, we should seriously question if following someone on social media warrants being considered a relationship. For Russell Wilson, he has 3.3 million followers on Instagram, yet he only follows 26 other users (dangerrusswilson, 2018). Most of those 26 users are family members and companies he owns or endorses. Our connection to athletes and celebrities on social media is extremely one-sided, in a parasocial sense, with the athlete or celebrity holding all the influence and power. The bottom line is that although fans have more access to athletes than they ever have in history, it is still just as difficult to really know that person. We see Russell Wilson through social media, but we don't really know the real Russell Wilson. Even people who

have interacted with him in a social setting, such as at a Seattle Mariners baseball game, have had to sign a non-disclosure form (Wickersham, 2017). It's a curious move for someone who is so apparently open about his life on social media.

Relating to my personal story mentioned in the introduction, I wondered if this point in history was the best time to be a fan. It seemed like social media made it an even more personal and interactive connection than what I experienced in receiving a letter back in the mail from Grant Hill. From the research conducted on this particular case study, it doesn't appear to be a better fan experience. At least I received a response. Wilson's fans don't receive any interaction with him through social media, unless they download and promote his personal social media platform, TraceMe. While fans are receiving more information about their favorite athlete, it still fits the parasocial nature of being one sided (Frederick, et. al., 2012) and giving the illusion of a face-to-face relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Fans will never know the real Russell Wilson.

While the fan perspective is vital to understand, this research also brought to light the importance of understanding the business perspective of social media. For those marketing athletes, such as branding companies like West2East Empire, it is vital to know what works and is successful on social media. For Russell Wilson, posts about football and family are the most engaging to his audience, and thus deemed successful. These are the themes that fit in well with and reinforce his narrative. This taps into a fans ability to identify with him, either as the quarterback of their favorite team, or as a spouse and parent trying to balance work and family. Fans become followers to get to know their favorite athletes and see indicators of celebrity personality. For athletes, it's vital to learn how to navigate and incorporate the tensions between business and financial interests

without losing at least the perception of authenticity. It's unrealistic for fans to know an athlete on a personal level, but social media can help an athlete influence the world.

The challenge with studying social media is that it is still such a recent development in the field of communication, and it is constantly adapting and changing. For these reasons, social media use, whether by athletes or the rest of us, will continue to be a hot research topic worthy of studying. As Fisher (1984) said, "humans are essentially storytellers." Now more than any other time before, we have in social media a platform to broadcast our stories. It's worth studying how these stories are expressed and how identification with a story continues to have a powerful influence on the way we structure our lives.

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## APPENDIX 1: Interview Transcript

## Interview With Chief Operating Officer of West2East Empire

**Interview Date: May 1, 2018**

John Collett: 01:02 Hello, my name is John Collett I'm a graduate student at Eastern Washington University. As part of my thesis, I'm interviewing you today to learn more from your experience working with Russell Wilson at West2East Empire. Now specifically, we'll be speaking about the role of social media and brand management and narratives for Russell Wilson. A reminder that at the end of the interview I'll be sending you a typed transcript of our conversation. You will have the opportunity to removed or attract any parts of the interview that you would prefer to not be used in my research. Sound good?

West2East: 01:35 Cool. Alright man...

John Collett: 01:57 Question number one here. The East2West Empire website states, or I should say West2East, excuse me, a brand management. Strategic storytelling. So how do you define strategic storytelling?

West2East: 02:26 I think that's really an open ended, definition really that could be described as, as many different ways from many different people many different perspectives, but from West2East Empire's standpoint, and you can just call us West2East that's fine, from West2East's standpoint strategic storytelling is, um, our, our approach at looking at the work that we do from an aspect of what do people really care about and cutting out all the fluff and cutting out all the, um, I don't know, the direct in your face advertising if you will. We want to entertain. We want to, we want people to think about the products that we create as something that, that are either fun, engaging or um, the quality of work is really high. Sometimes brands and companies think too much into the things that they

do and they try to incorporate too much into their messaging. They try to jam in too many offers or they try to jam in too many messages about their products or their service and it just becomes diluted. So you don't really take away anything. Strategic storytelling from our perspective is the ability for us to be very direct and actionable on the things that we want people to absorb and you know, we'll leave it at that. So a lot of our work is very short and concise and that that is our desire and our approach to working with Russell's brand partners and also other brand partners that we deal with outside of Russell Wilson. In being very direct and hoping that the audience who is absorbing the message and the context, uh, comes with at least one takeaway as to what that product or offering is

- John Collett: 04:24 Question 2 here. Kind of related. But so in general, what is the role of social media in regards to this idea of brand management and strategic storytelling?
- West2East: 04:34 Social media really is, is our avenue of, of sharing, sharing that video, that story, that, that post, that picture or whatever the case may be. You know, when it comes to our social media following in and more specifically Russell Wilson's social media following, we have to be very strategic in our approach as to what we share, how we share it and when. So if we have say a specific brand that is included in his contract that he has to post for, not only does it need to make sense for Russell Wilson, but it also needs to make sense for his followers so that it fits organically into his everyday life. We're not gonna, we're not gonna do a deal or agree to something that doesn't make sense for him because his followers see right through that we understand for the most part who they are, what they do, what the demographic looks like and how they relate to Russell Wilson, the athlete, the father, the entrepreneur, the philanthropist. We do all that we

can to make sure that content is organic within his world or within West2East's world. We have a pretty good social following as well. And we try to create a personality for, for our company so that when people look us up and try to do some research on us, they know what type of organization we are and how we carry ourselves and that that all trickles down to our personal accounts as well. So social media plays a big role into what we do on an everyday basis, both personally and professionally. That starts at the top with Russell and it goes all the way down to our interns and we set a standard as to how we carry ourselves on social media so that those we deal with have a very good understanding as to the people we are, the things that we do and the things that we're passionate about.

- John Collett: 06:37 So who posts on Russell's social media account? Does it vary based on classroom or based on message content. Like does he do it? Do you guys, is it a mix? What's it look like?
- West2East: 06:51 For the most part, it's him posting. Now there are opportunities that present themselves through different brands that we work with where they will approach us and say, will you guys retweet this or will you guys share this link? Or he's got a, obviously a great network of friends and family who he supports profoundly. 90 percent of it is, is Russell posting himself. Then the other 10 percent is us posting with Russell, meaning if we have that brand posts, we work on making sure that the language is correct, the messaging is correct. So that makes sense for him to be talking about whatever it is that they'd like him to share. A lot of times we do say no to those requests because we just don't want his social channels diluted with messages for other brands and other companies. Uh, you know, social media is meant to be an outlet for someone to express themselves. And we make sure to be very selective in how we approach our posts for Russell. But there are some things that he is more than comfortable with talking about. Specifically

speaking, there's one announcement today that he's the Chief Football Officer for Alaska Airlines and they, they're announcing the official merger with Virgin Airlines and that, that process was Alaska merging internally with Virgin is happening today. Obviously Russell is very close to that and is very proud of Alaska for their involvement in this process and how easily a mainstream it's been, so he plans to post and support there. Um, that's just an opportunity for him to show support for the Alaska and Virgin employees. So, there are instances where it makes sense and then there are instances where Russell comes to us and say, hey, there's three or four pictures from event that we got that we executed today. Can you send me those? And we will help pick his top picture or his video and then we will work together to craft or help him with a caption every now and then. But for the most part he, he runs his social media, which obviously is a big job. We don't, we don't have like a community manager that runs that for him. He's the primary lead and nothing is posted without his official approval and consent. Long winded way of saying you're, you're looking at 90 to 95 percent him, and then five to ten percent, um, Daniel Mogg, who's his director of production, head of production and myself. Then we have on some occasions we'll bring in a team, another team member, but for the most part it's the three of us who kind of helped craft the message and provide feedback or at least a different point of view to make sure that everything makes sense. And there aren't any red flags.

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| John Collett: | 10:09 | Next one here, with this in mind with Russell doing 95 percent of posting. But what is the purpose of Russell Wilson's social media accounts and do the purposes on Instagram differ based on other platforms or what's your take on that? |
| West2East:    | 10:35 | Instagram is, for obvious reasons, the approach there is visual heavy. For twitter it's much different.  |

You can tweet out, say for instance, this weekend when the Griffin brothers, we're obviously kind of a headline was the draft. When he was drafted to Seattle and he posted out his support and congratulatory message to the brothers about being able to play together again and welcome to Seattle, that was a great platform to be used on Twitter because there was no image necessary to be used. Now he couldn't do that without something, a video or a picture on Instagram. So, you know, we, there are two totally different approaches there. He has a Bible verse of the day that he tweets out on occasion when he feels the need and then when he feels inspired. So Twitter is obviously a great venue for that. We try to use Instagram a little more sparingly given, you know, you don't want to flood people's feed with pictures and video because at the end of that, you know, people will get tired or the message will get diluted. So unless there's a special occasion, like with QB2QB in our partnership with ESPN, we utilized Instagram and Twitter kind of as counterparts and then working together with those platforms, but more heavily on Instagram because of the ability to use stories and then swipe up for a link to download the TraceMe App or swipe up to go and directly watch an episode of QB2QB on ESPN. The more visual heavy things that we can do are focused on Instagram and some of the quick hitter, you know 140 characters or less type things, we encourage to be used on Twitter. Then there's also Facebook where we utilize that for the Russell Wilson Passing Academy and Russell Wilson Quarterback Academy. Those are just two to name a few. Then, obviously, with the Why Not You Foundation, we're able to dive a little deeper into what the foundation does or what Russ does for the foundation and the Facebook world where you're able to share an album of pictures from an event. For instance, the Wilson Celebrity Invitational, which is a weekend long charity event that raises over 1.5 Million Dollars for Strong Against Cancer. Those are the types of situations where we've put together an album and then a description within

each picture to help people who are not able to be there and experience the event firsthand. They have a little better understanding of what that event entails and who benefits, who was in attendance, and what that event looks like. And also there's TraceMe, which is a social platform that Russell and West2East started last spring. That's a channel that he utilizes to put exclusive content, kind of behind the scenes type content on. And he's got the ability to really customize the message and customize the length and what type of content has been included within one particular post or story. You can talk more extensively about, say for instance, baby Sienna's birthday and post a video pictures and then maybe a short written piece that is addressed to her. So TraceMe is used to kind of compliment all the other social channels and then take another step and a deeper dive into his point of view on a certain subject, events or a person on our team that we want to showcase in a way that contributes to his success on and off the field.

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| John Collett: | 15:01 | Looking at and Instagram specifically, I know you mentioned a bit earlier you know who that target audiences is or what's successful. This question is, what strategies have you found to be successful on Russell Wilson's Instagram? And then how do you measure that success? What does that look like?   |
| West2East:    | 15:17 | Sure. Obviously engagement is the ultimate gauge of success. He's got, let's say 400,000 likes and a couple thousand comments, then obviously we've done our job. He's got just over 3,000,000 followers on Instagram, so we try to look at engagement levels as to how many people are liking and commenting. Sometimes we're simply looking for impressions because with a video, some people will "like" that video and some people will watch the full video but not like it. So when we look at views when it comes to a video and then we also look at the type of messaging around it, like what's the goal |

for a certain post? Is it impressions? Is it views? is it likes or comments? It depends on whether or not it's football related. If it is football related, it is usually performs quite well. Obviously, that's his main profession and that's why he's become the person in celebrity that he is. It's his success on the field. That's number one. Winning football games is what most people care about. When it comes to winning, if he posts a video of the family after a win, those are the types of content that, they performed quite well. If he posts a video after a win that really lets people know how he's feeling, how the team's feeling, something, information that that wouldn't be particularly provided within a media interview, that that's obviously gonna perform quite well. Even in a loss, those types of things are engaged well or because of the audience that follows him. Family posts obviously post very well and we look at when it comes to the family, we look at likes just because of the reach and people share, or people comment, or send those types of posts to other media outlets. There's fan pages that put those types of posts up, and that's what brings traffic towards or eyes towards these types of posts that we were definitely engage likes through that type of thing. And then there's things like training videos, that get a lot of comments. Now, like I said, we don't have a community manager that looks at comments or Russ's page and really goes through everything with a fine tooth comb to make sure that Russ has the opportunity to reply to anyone who comments. I don't think he's replied to anyone, and I can't say for certain ever, but as far as my knowledge goes, he's never replied to anyone via social because he doesn't look at that stuff. What he posts on social is very natural to him and he is quite frankly not too concerned with how many likes or comments he gets. He posts those types of things because he wants to give the fans a look into his life and he's going to post what makes him the most comfortable and the things that he's proud of. We look at, on a general perspective, likes and comments and shares, if you will, or retweets when it comes to Twitter.

For the most part, the most important thing for us is when we work with a brand that wants a particular post, we want to make sure that it gets the most eyes possible because that's ultimately the goal. So we go for likes and comments and then we'll go back to that particular brand and say this, this post is performing, say 10 percent better than all other branded posts. Here's what we think it's best and here's the types of things we can do to improve and here's the types of things that we're going to keep consistent as we move forward because it works organically for Russell and it works organically for, you said brand. Um, so there's a lot that goes into it. Sometimes, and to be quite honest, we don't even look at likes or comments because it's something that Russell wants to post and that's personally what he wants to do. And that's perfectly fine. But there are some times that we need to know, as far as performance was, what's gonna work, what's not gonna work because we don't want to continue doing something that isn't working or is received badly because obviously that's when people start unfollowing or unliking your page. Once you stop getting engagement for them, that becomes, not a red flag but it comes an instance where brands are like, oh, when we might want to rethink how we take this approach, and obviously that's not that good for him.

- John Collett: 20:31 You already mentioned kind of some examples of, you know, maybe categories of posts that work well. So if you feel you already touched on this you're welcome to skip it, but the other question was, are there any specific posts on Instagram for Russell that you would consider examples of success?
- West2East: 20:50 Let's see here. I know one for a fact was the quote unquote trick throw that he had in China last year on the Great Wall. That performed really, really well. It was shared a lot. It got picked up on a



number of different websites and that video saw a lot of action. That's the type of thing that I would deem an ultimate success. Recently there's been some pictures of baby Sienna. When they showed her for the first time, those are obviously the highest performing types of content. There's been some posts with the Seahawks, and after some of their victories, or, with different Seahawks players and Russell supporting them, that performed quite well. We don't, like I said, we don't look at every single post and say, okay, that was success, we do stuff more like this because of the approach we take it's more, "Hey, let's just, hey, this seems great. Let's throw it up there." Or he takes that approach, hey, this seems great. Let me throw it up there, or I'm really happy with how this turned out, or I had this appearance and I thought it went well and I'm excited about it. I want to show some love to, one particular post was last night. I want to show some love for Fidelity after an event we had last night. We're not going to go back and really dive into the numbers. How many people engaged, how many people commented? But we think that's success, because the Fidelity team reached out to us and said thank you guys so much, and the posts added an additive to the success of that event particularly. So it might not get the most likes within his page, but for the most part it's received well because the folks at Fidelity thought that is a kind of a one up into the appearance. I guess a long winded way of saying football, family are the top two that we know are gonna we know are going to perform well and they're in the, you know, multiple hundred thousands of likes and comments and sometimes even into the millions. When you have three and a half million followers and you have a million likes, that's a hell of a number. You know, a third of your following. That means you definitely got the right content posted. So we'll definitely take learnings. But we don't use that as a Bible because you know, every, every day is different. Every day people's mindsets are different. And I think sometimes brands and other athletes and entertainers and

celebrities put too much time and effort and thought into what they think is best to post. We take the more laid back approach like, "Hey, this is who he is, let's do things that fit naturally." And if people receive them well, great. If not then that's okay. Then maybe we rethink that approach, but at least we're getting enough and we know what's working and what isn't.

- John Collett: 24:13 I have five more questions. I guess I just wanted to check in out of respect for your time and make sure you're alright and you don't have to go anywhere.
- West2East: 24:13 Yeah, I'm good. Go ahead.
- John Collett: 24:26 Cool. So do strategies for social media for Russell, do they change at all during the NFL season? Say compared to the off season? Like is there anything that you know that that's noticeable in terms of what maybe an area you focus on or just anything that would be different because of those?
- West2East: 24:42 Yeah, naturally off-season is much more active for him. He's bouncing around to appearances. He's traveling with the family, he's engaged more with some of his brand partners. He's on commercial shoots. He's hosting award shows, or he's attending award shows. He's going to different concerts and things like that. Now that's an opportunity for him to kind of show of what he's doing and, and being proud of the blessings that he's been presented with. So social media for him this time of year, during the off-season is very important for him to kind of show his travels and that's important to him. Then when it comes to season, it's time to go to work. His mindset is we're going to dial it back a lot. Eliminate any distraction. We're going to showcase a few things here and there that makes sense, whether it be football, family or brands, but it's toned down at least 75, 80 percent. He's much more strategic and what he does post and when. He

spends a lot less time and we spend a lot less time posting on social, or thinking about social concepts that we can execute at that point. It's really the more high level important things that he needs to share, and then football and family. So those are the most important aspects when it comes to in-season. Sometimes the Seahawks will ask them to post a few things here and there. Most times he'll oblige and do that for them because it's their request. But then when it gets into playoff time, when they're in the playoffs, he pretty much goes silent and focuses 100 percent on football and winning games. That's not to say he doesn't do that during the season, but you know, during the season he's got a little bit more leeway when it comes to what's going on that week. It also depends on his state of mind and his physical health as to what he's doing on and off the field, too. So there are a lot of variables that go into his use of social media during the season. We take a step back and really defer to his best judgment on what we do and what we don't do. That doesn't mean we don't present him with ideas or present him with opportunities, but we ultimately leave the decision up to him as to what he thinks is best. Now we'll offer an opinion for sure, but that's his decision. During the off season, kind of the gloves come off and we do as much as we can for our brands. We try and get creative. We get fun. We show his personality. We show his travels, and that's his opportunity to really let people know what type of person he is. And I think that's important. Then we also use it as an opportunity to show the world that he's out there training. He's out there no matter where in the world he is. He's getting the work in because that's what's most important. And you know, I hate to say this, but sometimes fans forget, like you can only work out and play football so much every day before it starts to deteriorate your body. So of course he's going to be working out, but he can't be throwing football for eight hours a day. So he finds ways and he finds passionate things that really hit home in his heart that he wants to be involved with and those are the types of things

he'll post on social during the off season. I think those, for the most part are very well received.

- John Collett: 28:36 Going back to narrative in general, like how would you describe Russell Wilson's story? What's, what's his narrative from your view?
- West2East: 28:47 A day-to-day look in the life of Russell Wilson and we really don't overthink it. It's simple, you know. If he's doing something then he wants to post about it, we get it up. Our team is very, very efficient in the way we operate. So Daniel, on the production team are creating content real time. We're getting pictures at events, we're getting videos, we're going into these types of things very prepared as to what we think will one, resonate with his audience, and two, that really fit the eye and the quality of product that Russell Wilson wants to create. So we look at him as, as a brand, as a high fashion brand. For lack of better term, the James Bond type look. Simple, clean, elegant and timeless. So we try to create content around the things that we're doing that, that fit well into that category. And for the most part, 99 percent of the time, when we take a step back after the event or even at the event and he looks at some of the pictures or videos that we create, he wants to post them immediately.
- West2East: 30:03 We obviously have the capability to provide him with that. So we'll send him a couple of pictures and he'll post immediately, or he'll tweet, or he'll get a video put on Instagram. Like I said, he moves very, very quickly. So he gives us direction. We go out and we try to execute to the best of our abilities. And sometimes it's a recap video. Sometimes it's a still image. But for the most part our team gives him a few options, for which to, you know, to post. So that stuff's real time. Obviously, if he's at date night with Ciara and he wants to break out his phone and post then he's got that capability. So everything is pretty much real time as, as you see it posted. Now

for the brand specific stuff, sometimes those are more planned out, but like I said, we make sure that everything that he posts is an organic fit. So say he's not at home and they want to post a picture of him at home shaving with a Braun Shaver, then we make sure that it's an organic fit as to where he is and what day and what time. And I think our audience appreciates that because not every celebrity athlete, entertainer takes that approach and being very strategic with what's shared and when. Sometimes they just kind of post things out just to get them off the checklist. We're much more detailed in the approach like, "okay, well tonight's date night, so here's what we could do." Or we try to present brands with an opportunity or a look into the schedule so that they know when we can and can't post things. And where there's no flexibility there with dealing with anyone no matter what brand it is, day or time, because at the end if it doesn't make sense for them then people are going to look right through it. So, every post is a timely manner and it shows a direct look into what, what he does and what he's doing at the time.

- John Collett: 32:18 Outside of social media. I feel like one thing I'm kind of asking about it, I feel like the media, how they would name Russell Wilson, like what his narrative is you know, maybe someone you know has been overlooked and outworks his opponent, and has overcome his size or at least that was his story early in the NFL. Do you hit on some of those scenes, I guess like even outside of media, like what, what do you see as like, this is Russell's story, you know, how would you describe that?
- West2East: 32:49 Oh man, that's a good one. If I'm looking at him personally at his story, he's the guy that everyone wants to doubt. He's the guy that every year is under appreciated from a leadership standpoint, from a team player, from a quarterback, and his physical abilities to throw the ball and his ability to lead a

team to victory. No matter what, the circumstance is always under appreciated. And he's the hardest worker on the field. He's the first one in, the last one out. He's the guy that's always encouraging others to be better and lead by example. And a lot of times that goes unnoticed because that persona has been created for him as the underdog. And he's a hard worker. He is the, he is a sharp, educated guy who, he can't be that nice. There's no way that that's the real him. There's no way he's that happy all the time and that hard work, and that he smiles all the time, you know. And I, I just don't understand why, because that's the person that he is. And, you know there's some great actors in the world, but the people who aren't the type of person they try to perceive themselves as usually get, you know, circumstances that shows the real person they are. And throughout his career, Russell has proved to everyone the person that he is, and there's never been any circumstance that has showed, you know, the public, otherwise. You know, the comments that we get a lot are he can't be that nice or you can't work that hard or something's, something's not right. Well, to be honest, the guy loves football, he works his ass off and he loves his family. He's a man of faith and that's just who he is. And I think that reflects well within social media because of the approach that he takes and we take on everything has to be organic and everything has to make sense. We never, we never have to lie, we never have to create a story for people to try to gravitate towards because everything is so natural. And if it weren't natural, people would see right through it. It's a little frustrating sometimes to see people doubting who he is and the successes that he's had on the field and off the field because he just continues to be successful. And at some point, at what point do people take a step back and say, okay, well this guy, this guy's for real, this guy's legit. Maybe we should, we should jump on board or actually believes that type of person he is and follow his lead and you know, different people take different approaches and that's fine. But if I were an innocent

bystander looking into this, his world, I would be, naturally, be a fan because of the way he treats people. I personally feel like we need more Russell Wilsons in the world. We'd definitely be way better off. That's for sure. Whether that's personally or professionally. So he's a role model to look up to, and I would just hope that people, as he becomes more and more successful on and off the field and everything that he does, that people give him a chance and actually understand the fact that what he says and does is, is the real deal.

- John Collett: 36:29 And on these last few here, some might touch on topics we've already talked about or that you brought up in discussion, so feel free to add any time to be like, I feel like we already covered that. Or if there's anything that like I would just add this. You can feel free to do that. The next question, so how do you develop trust, this idea of like trust between Russell and his fans through social media.
- West2East:: 36:52 A lot of that goes back to what we've talked about thus far about being organic and not trying to push something that doesn't make sense. I'm not trying to be overly branded all the time. And encouraging him to, oh, you've got this event and make sure you're thinking about any social media that you could see that you could throw up. Or, Hey Russ, we just left the event. Here's, here's a couple of pictures that you could post. He gives our team a whole lot more access than he would anyone else. So we've got the ability to get in there and show those more intimate moments. Because of that, Russ at the ability to share those more intimate moments with his social following. I think that's why you see so many people following him as an athlete. As an NFL player, he's at the top three, I believe as far as social following and that goes to show that the content that he posts it is not only entertaining, but it's a natural fit into his everyday life and his professional career and his life as a father and as a

husband. So I think if we, we diverted away from that and started to take a different approach, you would see a negative impact from this social following because people would see right through it and it wouldn't fit him organically.

- John Collett: 38:27 How are endorsements or business interests incorporated into Russell's social media. You kind of mentioned that earlier as well, but do they approach you or it's part of the contracts they have set up with endorsements. How, how does that content relate to his social media?
- West2East: 38:45 There are aspects of this contract and we need to execute that are you know X amount of social posts a year. Now those we planned for and a lot of times that they are beneficial to him obviously because maybe it's about his cleat release or maybe it's about a commercial that he's in or maybe it's about a product that he's helping us sell that makes sense for him because he uses it. Those are the types of things that we're able to incorporate pretty easily because it's mutually beneficial for Russell and for that brand. Now there are also opportunities where our team is always in the news. We're always speaking to the different brands that we work with, almost on a daily basis. So we know what's going on in their world. We know what's important to them. And if we see, say, a news story that Russell wants to show support specifically speaking the Alaska Virgin example that we mentioned earlier, that's the stuff that we can present to the brand. Hey, are you guys comfortable with us posting about this? And then we'll talk about timing to make sure that the timing is right and it compliments what they're doing and that's an opportunity for us to build value with our brands and our relationships. Not every celebrity, entertainer, athlete does that type of thing, but we feel it's very important because Russell is with that brand because it fits naturally for him. It only makes sense for him to show support when the opportunity is right. We try to find as many of those as we can. But it also has to fit well with everything else that



we're doing. So well sometimes it works out and sometimes the brands will come to us directly and say, Hey, we'd love for you to do x, y, and z, and then a lot of times we give them feedback of here's what we're willing to do, here's what we're able to do and here's what makes sense. Or we'll say, okay, we can do that, but how about we do x, y, and z instead, and here's why it'll perform better. Or we can do more for you because of our production capability. Why not do a video instead of a picture, and a we'll leverage some of our contacts as well to try to help elevate the quality of the content so that it's not as branded. And those are the types of situations, obviously, the brands appreciate because they get more bang for their buck. Obviously, for Russell it makes more sense because it's a natural organic fit. We've got the ability to make sure that it's the absolute top tier product that is shared.

- John Collett: 41:28 Last one here, and again, I can't express how much I appreciate your perspective and taking this time to help me out. On the home stretch here, the last one. Kind of on that note of, you know, commercial interests. Do you believe that commercial interests can impact authenticity? So how do you navigate or balance those two aspects within Russell Wilson's, Instagram account. You know, authentic Russell, but also this business interests, do you feel like that can be a conflict or impact authenticity at all?
- West2East: 41:58 Yeah, I think it can definitely be a conflict if he were ever in a situation where he's working with a brand that say was a product that he would never use, and they're trying to push a post about something or a storyline or an instance or a situation that doesn't make sense for Russell. Now if he were in that situation and he had the post and it went up, then people would see right through it. But when we go through an endorsement deal or he becomes a spokesperson for a particular product or service, not once has he ever done anything that doesn't make

sense organically, and we say no and he says no to 99 percent of everything that's presented to him because if it doesn't make sense or he doesn't use it or you know. We look at those types of things because we know those types of requests are coming. So we don't put ourselves in a situation where a brand is dictating what he does or how he posts because of a contract that we're legally bonded to. We work with brands, initially that fit well within his everyday lifestyle and fit well within the constraints of the things that he is willing and not willing to do. Now, once the contract is signed, that's a whole different story. So we take a very careful approach to who he works with, who we work with and how, because at the end of the day we have to work together with these brands as a team and they have business goals and they have metrics, KPIs that they need to hit, and as do we, and how do we make those two marry up. And if we're working with, say, I'll use Alaska Airlines as an example. If we're working with Alaska Airlines, the type of company they are fits so well with the type of person that Russell Wilson is that the things that they want to do fit naturally within the things that he's already doing. So, uh, it's so easy for us to sit down at the table with them and plan things out because that's just what he does normally. The commercials that he would do for them or the social posts of a compliment, those commercials are a natural fit and he loves them and he gets excited about them because he loves the finished product. So those branded type posts are fun for him and they're fun for Alaska, and they help drive business for them and everyone's, you know, it's, it's a mutually beneficial situation. Now if we were in a position where a brand was pushing something that we didn't agree with and it would be a more difficult conversation to have. But luckily for us, we don't take deals just to take deals. He doesn't take deals for that particular reason. We do stuff that really makes sense and we also aren't going to jump into something and we know we can't deliver on. So he's not going to take a deal or an endorsement for a

particular brand just because he wants to work with them. And then they'll back end know that we can't execute for them. We do our due diligence to make sure that we can execute on everything 100 percent of the time and not just at a C, B+ level. We're looking at A+ only to make sure that the brand is over the moon with what we provide and what he provides. But to answer your question, yes, commercial interests can impact authenticity, absolutely. That's a situation where you've got to work around their constraints and you have a lot of leeway because it's Russell Wilson, but at the end of the day, if they're paying the bills, you really have to concede to the things that they want to do. So they might have an opinion and you have another opinion and then Russell has another opinion, so it can get a little hairy at times. But luckily we don't put ourselves in that situation so that we don't have to deal with that too often.

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|---------------|-------|--|
| John Collett: | 46:14 | Man, I just can't thank you enough for your time and the detail in your answers, too. I really appreciate you helping me with my research. Do you have any questions for me or anything or before we go?   |
| West2East:    | 46:28 | No, I don't mind helping at all. Man, I appreciate you reaching out. Hopefully, I was able to give you some insight to how we handle his accounts.   |
| John Collett: | 46:41 | I think he's just really interesting for a lot of reasons and it feels like he does things differently than other people, so that's why I chose to study him a little bit more, so I appreciate your insight though. It certainly provides a lot to me.            |
| West2East:    | 46:55 | He definitely does things differently. We as a team do things differently because we feel like if you put the added time and intention into things like social media so that everything that, if you look at his feed, everything's a nice organic fit. Everything |

makes sense from a timeline perspective. Everything flows with his life and his family, his points of view. Then people actually enjoy following along. Now if it were just random and spotted and you're like, what, that doesn't make any sense? People really, they don't have the patience for that because the ability to absorb so much content with so many people, it's almost, well it is a compliment to be followed or liked someone. For him to have so many followers, we do our due diligence to make sure they're entertained because they don't have to like or follow him. They don't have to listen to his point of view or the things in his life and um, you know, he's very blessed in that perspective and he wants everyone to know how much he appreciates the things that they do for him and the opportunities that are presented to him because of them. We go above and beyond to not wow them, but keep them entertained, if you will.

## VITA

## JOHN COLLETT

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**M.S., Communication****Fall 2016 – Spring 2018**

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

- Master of Science in Communication Program
- Emphasis: Cultural Communication and Instructional Communication
- Thesis Topic: Reinforcing Narrative to Benefit the Brand: An Instagram Case Study of Seattle Seahawks Quarterback Russell Wilson
- Thesis Advisor: Dr. Patricia Chantrill

Relevant Courses Taken:

*CMST 450: Rhetorical Theory and Criticism**CMST 501: Advanced Communication Theory**CMST 530: Communication in Organizations**CMST 570: Communication and Cultural Studies**COIN 571: Survey Post-Secondary Education**COIN 572: Strategies for Teaching Adults**PHED 506: Socio-Cultural Studies in Physical Activity**PSYC 544: Counseling Theory and Techniques***B.A., Telecommunications: Broadcast News Sequence Fall 2006 – Spring 2010**

Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA

- Outside Concentration: Coaching and Education
- Studied abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the fall semester of 2007

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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**Adjunct Instructor****Fall 2018 & Spring 2019**

BRCO 303: Intermediate Television Production

Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA

- Teaching storytelling through video production
- Core of instruction centered around videography along with audio and video editing

**Independent Instructor****Fall 2016 – Present**

CMST 200: Introduction to Speech Communication

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

- Created detailed course syllabus along with original lesson plans
- Developed and evaluated three tests and three student speeches throughout the quarter
- Communicated with students through canvas, e-mail, and consistent office hours

**Guest Lecturer****Spring 2018**

CMST 490: Senior Capstone in Public Relations

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

Instructor: Jessica Boyer

- Shared stories and presentation focused on my professional experience gained from working in public relations for a sports franchise

**Teacher's Assistant****Winter 2018**

CMST 396 Sports Communication

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

Instructor: Otto Klein

- Assisted in designing inaugural sports communication course with instructor
- Drafted course syllabus, all assignments, and projects prior to collaboration with instructor for final edits
- Provided feedback to instructor with initial grading on all assignments
- Supported students online through the design of course page on the Learning Management System (Canvas) and quick responses to messages

**Guest Lecturer****Spring 2017**

CMST 490: Senior Capstone in Sports Communication

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

Instructor: Steve Stewart

- Created a 90-minute lesson on the role of sports media in communication
- Shared experiences from professional career and designed sports producer activity to generate discussion

**Teacher's Assistant****Spring 2017 & Fall 2017**

CMST 330 Communication Integrated Research Methods

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

Instructor: Steve Stewart

- Met as a large group once a week with Senior Lecturer Steve Stewart
- Led the remaining two sections throughout the week, which aided students in studying for exams and working through the details of their final project
- Graded online coursework and tests throughout the quarter

**Guest Lecturer****Fall 2016**

BRCO 469: Advanced Television Production and Programming

Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA

Instructor: Dan Garrity

- Instructed single class as a substitute for instructor
- Developed a quiz and graded coursework
- Shared stories and led discussion based on professional experience working in local television news

**Guest Lecturer****Spring 2016**

JMC 396: Sports Communication

Whitworth University, Spokane, WA

Instructor: Dr. Erica Salkin

- Led storytelling workshop through video, focusing on character development and identification
- Incorporated news stories from KHQ-TV to lead discussion on what makes for a good story

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**CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS**


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**Student Presenter****Spring 2018**Research Topic: *Russell Wilson's Life Narrative in a Bose Advertisement*

Northwest Communication Association Conference, Coeur d'Alene, ID

- Presented research paper as part of the Media and Cultural Studies Division
- Incorporated the methods of Close Textual Analysis and Narrative Criticism

**Oral Presenter and Poster Presenter****Spring 2018**Research Topic: *Reinforcing Narrative Through Instagram: A Casey Study of Seattle Seahawks Quarterback Russell Wilson*

Eastern Washington University Research Symposium, Cheney, WA

- Oral presentation developed from thesis research on how the narrative surrounding Russell Wilson's life is consistently presented through his social media, with a specific focus on Instagram
- Poster presentation on Five Attributes of Hegemonic Masculinity (Trujillo, 1991) applied to Russell Wilson's Instagram Posts during the 2017 NFL season

**Poster Presenter****Spring 2017**Research Topic: *Gender Equality in Sports Television*

Eastern Washington University Research Symposium, Cheney, WA

- Poster created from literature review focused on gender equality and the representation of women's sports on television

**Public Speaking Consultant****Winter 2017**

Panhandle Health District, Hayden, ID

- Led 90-minute workshop with over 30 staff members to help improve public speaking skills
- Crafted workshop content adapted from CMST 200 course materials and related research

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE

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**Director of Public Relations****2017 – Present**

Spokane Indians Baseball Club, Spokane, WA

- Manage all social media accounts for the Spokane Indians (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) with original video and image content to promote the baseball club in season and out of season
- Responsible for daily content on SpokaneIndians.com, including game stories and posts to support game promotions and ticket sales
- Daily interaction with domestic and international players as well as coaches to help with team and game operations
- Write stories and conduct interviews for game day programs released every home series
- Prepare press box with game notes, rosters, and lineups for every home game
- Joined Senior Vice President Otto Klein to present on the team's relationship for the Spokane Tribe of Indians for Steve Stewart's Intercultural Communication course at Eastern Washington University

**Television Freelancer****2016 – Present SWX-**

TV Live Game Production, Spokane, WA

- Assists in producing live sporting events for colleges and high schools across the Inland Northwest
- Roles include play-by-play and analyst commentary, as well as replay operator and camera operator

**Sports Anchor and Reporter****2012 – 2016**

KHQ-TV/SWX, Spokane, WA

- Anchored live, daily newscasts for #1-ranked local TV station
- Announced play-by-play commentary and analysis during live game broadcasts
- Conducted live interviews with high-profile players, coaches and officials
- Traveled on assignment and conducted remote live shots for such events as Super Bowl XLIX, the 2015 U.S. Open, and the 2015 West Coast Conference Basketball Tournament
- Daily posts on Twitter and Facebook accounts for SWX, along with swxrightnow.com
- Worked as a team to consistently meet tight newscast deadlines



**Weekend Sports Anchor and News Reporter** **2010 – 2012**

KEPR-TV, Pasco, WA

- Anchored and produced weekend sportscasts
  - Conceptualized, organized and reported hard news content under tight deadlines
  - Wrote and edited scripts for daily newscasts
  - Shot video and edited with Final Cut Pro for both sports and news stories
- Consistently wrote stories and posted video to keprtv.com

**VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE****Christian Life Community (CLC) Leader** **2017 – Present**

Gonzaga University Young Life

- Mentoring and meeting weekly with 8 freshmen students at Gonzaga
- Creating support and community through sharing life experiences, exploring Spokane, and studying scripture

**Student Mentor****2015 – Present**

Communities in Schools

- Meeting weekly during the school year for lunch with student in need of positive adult support
- Develop mentoring relationship through conversations, games, and consistently showing up in student's life

**AWARDS****SKILLS**

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2015 NATAS Northwest Emmy Award for Sports Feature/Segment, KHQ-TV</li> <li>▪ 2013 NATAS Northwest Emmy Award for Sports Single Story or Series, KHQ-TV</li> <li>▪ 2009-2010 Pepperdine's Best Sports Broadcaster</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student mentoring</li> <li>▪ Creative presentations</li> <li>▪ Proficient in database software, video editing software and Microsoft Office Suite</li> <li>▪ Conversational in Spanish</li> </ul> |
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