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A Content Analysis Examining the NFL's Social Media Communications in a Global Market

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Abstract

To better connect with the potential fan base in the United Kingdom, the NFL created another Instagram account, separate from their main “NFL” account, with the username “NFLUK”. In this thesis, I conducted a content analysis comparing a selection of posts made during the 2021 NFL season for each account, “NFL” and “NFLUK” to examine how the NFL modified their posts and communication for their new target audience. The posts were examined through the perspective of two different communication theories: The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion and the Adaptation versus Standardization Model of International Marketing. The goal was to determine if the UK social media posts used more peripheral cues than the US posts, and that the U.K., given its cultural differences with the U.S., used more calmer tones and less excitement than the US posts. It was found that that the UK account did use more peripheral cues and that some of the posts were adapted to meet the standards of the UK market.

With the creation of the International Series, regular season games of the National Football League that were being played in other countries, specifically the London Games, the NFL has had success at gaining popularity internationally. To better connect with the potential fan base in the United Kingdom, the NFL created a new Instagram account, separate from their main “NFL” account, under the username “NFLUK”. The original “NFL” Instagram account was created in August of 2012 and is based in the United States. The “NFLUK” Instagram account was created in May of 2013 and is based in the United Kingdom (*NFL UK (@nfluk)*). In 2023, 63% of “NFLUK”’s followers also follow the “NFL” account. This is public information that was found on each of the Instagram accounts. Due to differences in culture and fan knowledge of the game, the “NFLUK” account allows the NFL to create posts specifically that may resonate more with people in the United Kingdom. I have conducted a content analysis of Instagram posts that the NFL posted on the “NFLUK” Instagram account to promote American football and their league in the United Kingdom. These posts were then compared to those that were made during the same time frame, the 2021 NFL season, on the “NFL” Instagram account. Posts that are made for the “NFL” Instagram account are mainly intended for fans in the United States where American football and the league is already established. I examined some of the differences in social media posts that the NFL is using abroad, through the lens of two communication theories: the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Adaptation versus Standardization model. I hypothesize that posts made on the US account would contain more central cues and that posts made on the UK account would contain more peripheral cues and will also be adapted. This content analysis was done with the goal of examining three specific things: evidence of adaptation in UK posts, evidence of more central cues in US posts, and evidence of more peripheral cues in UK posts.

History of the Globalization of American Sports

Sports are a product of human culture stemming from the instinct for play, which is a basic human characteristic (Lee & Kim, 2016). America's separation from Great Britain in 1776 seemingly influenced one of the most prominent characteristics of American sports: leadership. Unlike European sports which have historically relied on an entire team working equally and harmoniously together, exemplified by European football, American sports have relied on one certain player that acts as the prominent figure of the game and has the job of controlling plays and leading teammates to perform well (Lee & Kim, 2016). In European football, the goalie, the defense, and the offense work together to score goals while defending their own net, without having one main position that dictates the game. In American sports, teamwork is equally as important just with the added specialized position of the game, that of which the other teammates work together to support (Lee & Kim, 2016). For example, in baseball this would be the position of the pitcher that throws each pitch with the goal of trying not to let the batter on the other team hit the baseball (Lee & Kim, 2016). In American football, this would be the position of the quarterback who has the job of deciding what to do with the ball. The quarterback is central to every offensive play on the field with the responsibility of calling the play and throwing or handing off the football. The other players support the quarterback by following the plays, catching the ball, and gaining yards to get closer to the end zone. The defense supports their quarterback by trying to keep the other team from scoring. The two positions of pitcher and quarterback can be considered the most important of the game, and they earn the highest salaries of their respective sport (Lee & Kim, 2016). Another characteristic that is prominent in American sports is that the organizations behind these sports are flexible about changing the rules or regulations if the sport is not gaining enough public interest or media coverage (Lee &

Kim, 2016). This is due to a cultural difference that American sports are viewed at mainly from the business standpoint whereas European sports are viewed at from the traditional standpoint (Lee & Kim, 2016). European sports organizations are more concerned with the culture and the values of the game and American sports organizations are more concerned with profiting from the game (Lee & Kim, 2016).

Nationalism, an ideology that one's nation is better than others, is also intertwined with sports in relationships that are unique and various to each setting (Bairner, 2008). Nationalism can come from international competition, but in some examples like baseball gaining the reputation as "America's national pastime" for instance, nationalism can come from within the nation rather than from international competition (Bairner, 2008). Nationalism is mainly embodied by the fans of these sports expressing their national identity, it can be a prominent reason that sports gain a lot of interest and coverage.

What is Globalization?

Globalization refers to the process of sharing ideas, goods, and services across international borders (Gray, 2017). Additionally, globalization can be defined as the increase in the flow of these (Cote, 2021). Any company that operates, produces, or sells goods in more than one country is considered an international business (Cote, 2021). There are three ways for a company to be considered an international business: producing goods domestically and selling them domestically and internationally, producing goods in a different country and then selling them domestically, or producing goods in a different country and then selling them domestically and internationally (Cote, 2021). For the NFL, this means expanding the league from just being in the United States to playing and existing in other countries around the world. It is important,

however, that certain factors are taken into consideration when doing business abroad such as politics, laws, environment, macroeconomics, human rights, cultural differences, language barriers, and more (Cote, 2021). An advertisement may not be as effective if it cannot be understood by the target audience. Contrarily, if an advertisement is designed for a particular country and takes into consideration those certain factors of that country, it will likely be significantly more effective. Expanding globally creates many new opportunities, access to global talent, and new audiences.

NFL Globalization

One of the main reasons that the NFL is trying to expand globally is to increase revenue (Williams, 2017). The NFL began their effort of globalization in 1986 by hosting a series of preseason games, referred to as the American Bowl, in various cities around the world to promote the sport of American football in other countries. In 1989 the World League of American Football was founded (Fantin, 2019). This league was a professional American football league, backed by the NFL, that consisted of teams from different countries so that more players and spectators could be exposed to and become familiar with the rules of American football. This league was later renamed to NFL Europe (Fantin, 2019). NFL Europe served as a developmental team for the NFL, and the NFL was covering the expenses for the players and coaches that were living in Europe. NFL Europe lasted until 2007, when the NFL decided to end this league due to a reported loss of \$30 million each season and after some of the teams from the league had gone defunct (Fantin, 2019). Before the demise of NFL Europe, in 2005 the American Bowl also ended when NFL Commissioner, Roger Goodell, decided that the new international strategy for expanding the NFL would focus on playing regular season games in

foreign countries, instead of the preseason games (NFL, 2007). This began on October 2nd, 2005, when the first regular season NFL game to be held internationally was played at Estadio Azteca in Mexico City, Mexico. Then on October 8th, 2007, the first regular season game to be held outside of North America took place at Wembley Stadium in London, England. This London game was the beginning of the NFL International Series. The NFL International Series consists of American football games that are played outside of the United States during the NFL regular season. The two sub-series from the NFL International Series are the NFL London Games and the NFL Mexico Games. All NFL International Series games were held in London at Wembley Stadium until 2015. At the beginning of 2016, the series decided to expand to two more stadiums in London. The next stadium they began to use was Twickenham Stadium. Then, in 2019 the series expanded to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium (Williams, 2017). As shown by the increase in stadiums that were used in London, the NFL initially focused the majority of their International Series effort on the London Games.

With NFL Europe, the NFL tried to create another separate league in Europe by training new coaches and players which did not last (Fantin, 2019). With NFL London, two already established teams from the NFL fly to London to play a regular season match. The NFL uses a separate Instagram account, with the username “NFLUK” to make posts specifically for the audience in the United Kingdom. After establishing consistent success in London, the NFL is planning to continue growth in Mexico and to begin expansion into Germany. During the 2022 regular season, the NFL hosted five games as a part of the International Series. Three games were played in London, one game was played in Mexico City at Estadio Azteca, and one game was played in Munich at Allianz Arena. This was the first ever NFL regular season game to be held in Germany. Starting in 2022, the NFL’s plan is to have at least four international games

each season and to have each NFL team take turns hosting an international game once every eight seasons (Baca, 2021). League executives were interested in the idea of expanding the NFL by hosting games in Asia and Australia, but that it would currently be too difficult to execute this idea with the time zone differences and a lack of establishment in those places.

Issues with NFL Globalization

When it comes to the globalization of the NFL, there are some issues that are going to need to be addressed going forward. One issue is whether or not the NFL will decide to add more teams, specifically a team in London, or just continue to have already existing teams play in other countries. The NFL was planning to have a team in London by 2022 (Williams, 2017). Now, the league has said that they are aiming to create a London franchise by around 2025. This could affect scheduling, so the league may need to consider adding two teams or more at once. However, another issue that arises would be finding enough international talent to play on and coach these teams (United Language Group, 2022). Another problem with international games is the visiting team would experience jet lag, which could affect player performance. The NFL is currently avoiding the jet lag problem by scheduling the team's bye week, the week-long break during the season, for the week after an international game. Although, this is only a temporary solution, because bye weeks are only meant to be scheduled between weeks 4 and 13 (United Language Group, 2022). Teams and players that have to play international games are also levied with more taxes from having to pay taxes from their state, and taxes for the country they are playing in (Weiner, 2019). Not only do international games create issues for the teams involved, this also can create some issues for fans watching from the United States. International time zone differences affect when games are going to be played, which causes issues for fans in the United

States that would like to watch in real time (Williams, 2017). With the NFL going international, teams now have to adjust to marketing themselves abroad, after having only ever done business for their team in the familiarity of the United States.

Fan Reactions to Globalization

Many fans in the United States are less enthusiastic about the international expansion of the NFL and are even protesting the proposed expansion. Some believe the NFL, with their 32 teams, already has enough healthy competition, and adding more teams might be too much. Some would prefer a franchise relocation abroad rather than the creation of new teams. Other fans are against the expansion for reasons like nationalism or exceptionalism (Kahiya & Krey, 2017). The NFL kept track of some responses from U.S. fans through comments on their website and fan forums. Some of these comments include: “They’ve got their football, why do they need ours?”, “Over there they call it American Football, so why doesn’t it stay in America?”, “People there don’t understand the game, so why should the NFL give them one? It’s a waste.”, and “They had NFL Europe and it failed, they don’t deserve a second chance.” (NFL, 2012). The NFL counters these comments by saying that in reality the fans that they already have in the UK are limited, but just as passionate and knowledgeable as the U.S. fans. According to the NFL, overseas fans will enthusiastically consume as much information and content about the NFL as they can (NFL, 2012). The NFL also points out how overseas fans that follow the game must stay up late in order to do so. Conversely, when there are games held internationally, US fans do not like waking up at around 8 a.m. to watch them (Gullo, 2022). Another US fan did not like how they announced the international games for 2022 about a week before they announced the rest of the 2022 regular season schedule and thought that all of the games should have been

announced at the same time (Gullo, 2022). Another fan expressed an opinion that it was unfair for a team to have to give up a home game advantage at their own stadium to travel for an international game (Gullo, 2022). Others are just happy that their favorite teams were not playing an international game in 2022 and that international games should just be preseason games or the Pro Bowl game, instead of regular season games (Gullo, 2022).

US and UK Cultural Differences

According to an article from The Up and Coming that is titled, “The Common Differences Between Americans and British in Culture,” British people tend to dress more stylish or formal. Americans tend to dress more comfortably and only dress formal when necessary. Americans tend to be more willing to engage in small talk or friendly conversation about each other’s lives, but also tend to speak more loudly when communicating. The British tend to be more polite but also usually will avoid small talk and they value the privacy of their personal lives. The British are more patient while Americans tend to be hastier. For this reason, Americans prefer games with large scores such as basketball and American football, rather than soccer. Since the British are more patient, they prefer games like cricket and soccer which tend to have lower scores (The Editorial Unit, 2018). The British tend to be more pragmatic and Americans more optimistic. In terms of humor, this means that British humor is usually more witty or sarcastic while American humor tends to be more absurd or slapstick (Ricker, 2022). The U.S. and the U.K. both tend to be individualistic, meaning that individuals of a society tend to be less interdependent on each other. From an early age in the U.K., they are taught to think for themselves and to find their unique purpose. They also believe that personal fulfillment leads to happiness. In the U.S., people are accustomed to being able to do business and interact with

new people often (*Country Comparison, 2023*). Both the U.S. and the U.K. are driven societies and are highly success oriented. They have ambition for good work performance. However, Americans are more straight forward than the British are in displaying this quality (*Country Comparison, 2023*). Americans are relatively accepting of new ideas and trying new things. They also tend to be more tolerant of new ideas and allow the freedom of expression. However, Americans tend to be less emotionally expressive. The British tend to be more comfortable in ambiguous situations. They also are exceptionally creative and desire innovation (*Country Comparison, 2023*). Differences in culture can make it difficult to advertise outside of the domestic market. Organizations may use different theoretical models to help guide them in advertising. One theoretical model for advertising internationally is the Adaptation versus Standardization Model of International Advertising. To help understand how people process certain information, there is the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion.

Adaptation versus Standardization Model

Adaptation and standardization are common concepts that appear often in international business. Standardization generally refers to the process of extending and effectively applying domestic target-market decided standards to foreign markets (Medina & Duffy, 1998). In other words, it is using a common advertisement approach across national borders. This also seems to imply that the circumstances of consumers in the primary market are similar to that of the foreign market. But also due to advancements in society, the global market is becoming more homogenous in nature which allows the standardization method of marketing to be implemented across the globe. Some benefits to standardization are that firms could save money on marketing campaigns by using the same promotional content in multiple markets and also that firms can

establish one solid marketing mix. The marketing mix is a marketing tool that helps in the planning and executing of a successful marketing campaign, and it consists of the product, price, promotion, and place. Adaptation describes the mandatory modification of domestic target-market decided standards so that they are more desirable to foreign markets (Medina & Duffy, 1998). This strategy implies that there is a significant difference in the circumstances of consumers in the primary market in comparison to that of the foreign market. While there have been many arguments for consumer homogeneity, it has also been suggested that instead consumers are actually becoming increasingly more diverse and complex. So, the benefit to the adaptation approach is that it fully allows firms to understand the needs, wants, and preferences of the consumer with different lifestyle values and belief systems. Also, adaptation leads to product differentiation and helps to achieve a competitive advantage for the firm. Each strategy has its own advantages and disadvantages, so there has not been a determined correct answer for navigating the international market. While it is possible to just choose one of the strategies and use it, it is also possible to implement standardization to some degree while also slightly adapting it to better fit the desired target market. By doing this, the brand image can be kept standard across markets while the promotional content can be slightly changed to appeal to different individual markets (Hussain & Khan, 2013). In this content analysis between the posts of the US account and the posts of the UK account viewed in the perspective of the Adaptation versus Standardization Model, I expect to find a variation in emotion due to popular culture differences as well as a variation in educational content due to the level of fan knowledge.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM) is a psychological theory created by two psychologists, Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, in order to describe how a person's perspective is formed and can be changed through persuasive communication. Essentially, this model aims to identify the different ways in which people process stimuli, and consequentially how this changes attitudes and therefore behaviors. Persuasion happens internally, and sometimes even subconsciously. It is impossible to design something with the anticipation of guaranteed success in persuasion. It is only possible to design something with the intent of persuasion since it depends on how the message will be received by an audience or individual. In order to persuade effectively, it is important to understand how certain cues, symbols, or messages will likely be received by an audience. The ELM model attempts to guide people in creating more effective and persuasive systems (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In terms of persuasion, 'elaboration' describes the extent to which a person will consider the relevant arguments presented in a message. The ELM model identifies the two ways in which the brain will subconsciously process a message. The first way is the central route of persuasion. If the person receiving the message has the motivation and the ability to process the message, then they will engage in a higher level of thinking. If advertisers are expecting a high level of elaboration to occur, then they will support their message with relevant facts, information, or statistics in order to make it more appealing to the person's logic and consequentially more persuasive. This results in a cognitive attitude shift.

When advertisers are expecting their audience to lack a certain motivation and ability to process their message with a deeper critical thought, then they will use peripheral cues to make their message seem, and even feel, more legitimate. This is known as the peripheral route of

persuasion. Peripheral cues are meant to associate the underlying message with specific positive feelings so that it seems credible and therefore convincing. This results in a peripheral attitude shift. Examples of peripheral cues can include celebrities, humor, and source attractiveness. Both the central route of persuasion and the peripheral route of persuasion can be equally as persuasive as long as they are applied in the proper context (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In this content analysis through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood model, I expect to find that the US posts contain more central cues than peripheral cues and the UK posts contain more peripheral cues than central cues, due to culture differences and level of fan knowledge. Since London is a market into which the NFL is trying to expand, it is likely that they are less familiar with the sport. Therefore, it is to be expected that the new audience in London would have a low-level of elaboration for the topic of American football, so posts made to the UK account would likely use more cues that appeal more to emotion rather than to reason.

Research Questions

Through the perspective of the two communication theories, I will examine the posts with three research questions. The first question is, will there be evidence of adaptation to the posts on the “NFLUK” account, specifically looking to identify adaptations due to differences in culture between the U.S. and the U.K., differences in tone, and differences in fan knowledge? The second question is, will there be evidence of more central cues in the US posts than the UK posts? The third question is, will there be evidence of more peripheral cues in the UK posts than the US posts?

Methodology

For this content analysis, I examined Instagram posts from the “NFL” account and the “NFLUK” account that were posted throughout the 2021 NFL regular season. The 2021 regular season consisted of 18 weeks from September 9th, 2021, to January 9th, 2022. The 2021 season was the first season to have 18 weeks with each team playing 17 games and having 1 bye week. Throughout the regular season the “NFL” account posted just over 3,000 Instagram posts. During the same time, the “NFLUK” account only posted about 290 Instagram posts. In order to create a sample size that was manageable and representational of the two accounts, I chose to compare the posts that were posted during Weeks 1, 5, 9, 10, 14, and 18. I chose these weeks so that I could compare posts that were made throughout the entire season, from the beginning to the end. Also, by looking at posts from an entire week at a time, I was able to see posts that were made the day before, the day of, and the day after NFL games. I took the first two posts that were made on each day of the chosen week. This allowed me to compare an adequate sample size of 74 US posts with 67 UK posts, due to the fact that on some of the days the U.K. had only made one post or did not post at all.

I examined the Instagram posts through the perspective of two separate models of advertising, the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion, and the Adaptation versus Standardization Model of International Marketing Strategy. First, I created a coding scheme. Then, the first ten posts were coded by two different coders. Next, the similarities and differences between each coder’s results were discussed to modify the code or their definitions as needed, and to ensure that the code was clear. (See Table 1 and Table 2 below). Then, both coders separately completed coding the entire sample. The direct post and its immediate caption were what was taken into consideration for the coding. When the coding was complete,

intercoder reliability was calculated to ensure consistency and validity. The percent to which the two coders agreed on the codes for all of the posts was 91%. Table 1 shows the code names and definitions for the Adaptation versus Standardization model. The expected adaptations between the U.S. and U.K. are in popular culture, tone, and fan knowledge. For differences in popular culture, the codes are Celebrity and Memes. For differences in tone, the codes are Excitement, Calm, and Aggression. For differences in fan knowledge, the code is Educational. Table 2 shows the code names and definitions for the Elaboration Likelihood Model. The codes for central cues are Educational, Informative, Sunday Schedule and Reminders, and Statistics. The codes for peripheral cues are Celebrity, Highlights, Players Outside the Game, Player/Team of the Week/Month, Memes, Sideline Reactions, and Funny.

Table 1*Code Names and Definitions for Adaptation versus Standardization Model*

Code Name	Code Definition
Celebrity	Posts that feature or mention celebrities or athletes (Excluding former or current NFL players).
Memes	Posts that are meant to be humorous regarding football and the NFL. (A meme is a post that uses funny images, captions, or style that is trending.)
Excitement	Posts that elicit a feeling of excitement or thrill.
Calm	Posts that elicit a feeling of calmness or tranquility.
Aggression	Posts that display highlights that are violent or aggressive, and posts that elicit an aggressive feeling.
Educational	Posts that are meant to educate the audience about any aspect of the game or organization.

Table 2*Code Names and Definitions for Elaboration Likelihood Model*

Code Name	Code Definition
Educational	Posts that are meant to educate the audience about any aspect of the game or organization.
Informative	Posts that are meant to inform the audience about any updates regarding the organization (Injuries, trades, etc.) or posts that inform the audience about anything of interest.
Sunday Schedule and Reminders	Posts that include the game schedules for Sunday football, game times for upcoming games, and also game-day reminder posts that are made the day of a game.
Statistics	Posts that are made to share or include either individual player statistics or team statistics.
Celebrity	Posts that feature or mention celebrities or athletes (Excluding former or current NFL players).
Highlights	Posts that include video clips from NFL games or practices.
Players Outside the Game	Posts that involve players not in uniform and not at games or practices, and rather involve players' personal lives.
Player/Team of the Week/Month	Posts that specifically highlight certain players or teams as the best or most outstanding in that week or month.
Memes	Posts that are meant to be humorous regarding football and the NFL. (A meme is a post that uses funny images, captions, or style that is trending.)
Sideline Reactions	Posts that show players that are wearing microphones on the sideline, and also posts that show players' or coaches' reactions to a play during a game.
Funny	Posts that are meant to make the audience laugh but are not memes.

US Content Analysis

After individually coding each of the 74 sample posts from the “NFL” Instagram account, the top code was Sunday Schedule and Reminders accounting for 32.4% of posts. Then 20.3% of posts were coded as Highlights, followed by 11.1% of posts that were coded as Excitement and 9.2% of posts that were coded as Statistics. These were the overall top codes for the US posts. They represent the standard type of posts that one would find on the “NFL” Instagram account for their main audience. Most of the posts were game times and reminders so that fans can know which teams are playing against each other and at what times. It was also very common to see lots of videos posted from games on the day that they are played, to highlight any memorable plays from the games. Not only that, but it was also common to see highlight videos of plays from games in the past to highlight certain players or remember some exciting plays. Many different types of statistics were posted to the “NFL” account including completed passes, passing yards, passing touchdowns, etc. These types of posts include central cues that resonate with the audience because they understand them and are more willing to think deeply about them; it enhances their concept of the game. The posts that were categorized as Funny also were mostly posts that included either funny plays from a game or funny commentary from the players about the game or their lives. For example, one post made on October 9th, 2021, included a video of a conversation from the Cleveland Browns on the sideline of their game. A coach asked Running Back, Nick Chubb when he will get his car back. Chubb responded that he got it back already the previous week, to which the coach asked why he has not driven it yet. Nick responds, “I did. [It is the] Batmobile you can’t see it.” From the posts that were sampled, there were not any ‘meme’ styled posts on the “NFL” this is likely because ‘memes’ are used as a peripheral

cue. There were no posts that were coded as Celebrity, and no posts that were coded as Educational.

Table 3*US Code Distribution*Adaptation versus Standardization

Code Name	US Frequency	US % of Frequency
Celebrity	0	0%
Memes	0	0%
Excitement	12	11.1%
Calm	3	2.8%
Aggression	2	1.8%
Educational	0	0%

ELM Central Cues

Code Name	US Frequency	US % of Frequency
Educational	0	0%
Informative	6	5.6%
Sunday Schedule and Reminders	35	32.4%
Statistics	10	9.2%

ELM Peripheral Cues

Code Name	US Frequency	US % of Frequency
Celebrity	0	0%
Highlights	22	20.3%
Players Outside the Game	4	3.7%
Player/Team of the Week/Month	6	5.6%
Memes	0	0%
Sideline Reactions	3	2.8%
Funny	5	4.6%

UK Content Analysis

After individually coding each of the 67 sample posts from the “NFLUK” Instagram account, the top code was Calm at 18.3%. Following that, 17.2% of posts were coded as Informative, 14.9% of posts were coded as Highlights, and 11.4% of posts were coded as Excitement. Most of the posts were coded as the codes that deal with emotions, which are peripheral cues. This is done so that the audience does not have to think too much about the posts and rather just associates positive emotions with the NFL. Some examples of posts that were coded as Calm included pictures of NFL stadiums from the U.S., and images of players. Statistics that were posted to this account included “Power Rankings” throughout the weeks which highlighted the top teams, win streaks for each team, and top selling jerseys in the U.K. It was unlikely to see statistics that were about yards, passing, etc. There were 4 posts, which was 4.6% of posts that were coded as Celebrities, that featured British celebrities in the context of the NFL. For example, Ed Sheeran performed to kick off the 2021 NFL season and British rapper Aitch was scheduled to perform a halftime show at the London game between the New York Jets and the Atlanta Falcons at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on October 10th, 2021. These types of posts are also examples of peripheral cues. This allows the audience to associate people that they already like, and their own culture, with the NFL.

Other posts included questions or captions to engage the audience such as “The battle of two legendary Tight Ends ... and two 87’s. Who are you voting for? [Pirate Flag Emoji] or [Red Heart Emoji]”, in reference to Rob Gronkowski from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Travis Kelce from the Kansas City Chiefs. Another example was “Which of these ELITE quarterbacks are you choosing? [Buffalo Emoji] or [Lightning emoji]”, in reference to Josh Allen from the Buffalo Bills and Justin Herbert from the Los Angeles Chargers. These posts are also an

engaging way to familiarize the audience with some of the players. It was common to see lots of emojis being used on this account as well.

On the “NFLUK” account there were also posts that were made using the ‘meme’ format. This looks like an image that has a funny picture from a movie or pop culture with a funny caption. For example, there was a post made on December 13th, 2021, that included an image of Woody and Buzz Lightyear from the movie, *Toy Story*, where Woody is making a concerned face and Buzz Lightyear is smiling and gesturing off to the distance. On the picture it says, “F1 FINALE & NFL SUNDAY” then beneath that it says, “DRAMA” “DRAMA EVERYWHERE.” The “F1 FINALE” refers to Formula 1 racing, which is an extremely popular sport in Europe. This is another attempt to associate culture with the NFL. Associating British popular culture with the NFL demonstrates how posts are changed and adapted to fit the target audience. There were no posts that were coded as Aggression, likely because the violence would not resonate well with this audience. Also, there were no posts that featured Players or Teams of the Week or Month, likely because they might not be very familiar with all of the players or teams in the league yet.

Table 4*UK Code Distribution*Adaptation versus Standardization

Code Name	UK Frequency	UK % of Frequency
Celebrity	4	4.6%
Memes	5	5.7%
Excitement	10	11.4%
Calm	16	18.3%
Aggression	0	0%
Educational	1	1.1%

ELM Central Cues

Code Name	UK Frequency	UK % of Frequency
Educational	1	1.1%
Informative	15	17.2%
Sunday Schedule and Reminders	5	5.7%
Statistics	8	9.1%

ELM Peripheral Cues

Code Name	UK Frequency	UK % of Frequency
Celebrity	4	4.6%
Highlights	13	14.9%
Players Outside the Game	3	3.4%
Player/Team of the Week/Month	0	0%
Memes	5	5.7%
Sideline Reactions	1	1.1%
Funny	6	6.8%

US & UK Content Analysis

The “NFL” account is the standard account that the NFL uses. Posts that were made to this account were also sometimes posted to the “NFLUK” account as well. But some of the posts on the “NFLUK” account were different from the standard account, which shows evidence of adaptation for the posts on the second account. The posts that were different on the “NFLUK” account were not also posted on the “NFL” account as well. There were posts on the “NFL” account that were not made to the “NFLUK” account, which further shows evidence of adaptation between posts. For both the U.S. and the U.K. there was a similar percentage of posts that were coded as Excitement. For the U.S. there were few posts that were coded as Calm while for the U.K., many were coded as Calm. While there were some posts that were coded as Aggressive for the U.S., there were none that were coded this way for the U.K.

Most of the posts that were coded from the “NFL” account were coded as central cues, rather than as peripheral cues. This is likely because of the expectation that the audience in the U.S. will be able to process these types of posts with a higher level of understanding and engagement. These posts also included more statistics and information regarding the game schedules, whereas for the U.K., there were few posts from the sample that mentioned schedules or game reminders. It was found that more posts that were made to the UK account featured peripheral cues to promote a positive shift in attitude. This can likely be explained by cultural differences between the United States and the United Kingdom since fans in the United Kingdom are less likely to be receptive to violence within the game. Since the U.S. is considered the domestic market for the NFL and they are already very widespread in the U.S., the NFL does not necessarily need to try to gain more fans from them and the fans tend to already be familiar with every aspect of the game. The United Kingdom is the target market for expansion; for this reason

there is more content on the “NFLUK” account that is educational. There was no content found on the “NFL” account that was educational in terms of aspects or rules of the game.

The UK account featured posts that highlight certain player positions and provide education about their roles in the game. There was also a post that was made on October 7th, that specifically featured the Dallas Cowboys Defensive Line Coach Aden Durde and educated the audience about his life and career. This specific post was made also to recognize Black History Month which is celebrated during the month of October in the United Kingdom. Coach Aden Durde was born in England, and it is also important to note that this post features the NFL logo as well as a ‘UK’ symbol next to it. There was also a post on December 10th educating about a specific player, David Ojabo, with the caption, “[Union Flag emoji] football fans... remember the name @davidojabo” and included the hashtags “#NFL” and “#NFLUK.” This post also had both the NFL logo and the ‘UK’ symbol beside it on the actual post. The sampled posts from the UK account also featured popular celebrities of the U.K. while the U.S. account did not have any posts from the sample that included celebrities. It was also noted in a specific instance in which the “NFLUK” account made a comment on their own post on October 8th. This post was coded as highlights and funny, it showed a game clip of a punt with a cover image of the punter that said, “THE WILDEST PUNT EVER?” and it was captioned, “Michael Dickson is a legend [laughing emoji] #nfl #nfluk @mdcksn.” The comment that the “NFLUK” account said, “The punt was blocked and recovered by the kicking team. The punter kicks the ball again from behind the line of scrimmage. This is a legal kick and the result of the play was the ball was ruled down at the 11 yard line.” A comment like this one explaining a game highlight or clip was not and would not be found on the “NFL” account. This post was not coded as Educational

because the explanation was in the comments and not the actual post or caption, but it is still an effective example of the UK account educating a new audience about the game.

Another interesting difference that I noted was between the sponsored posts for each of the accounts. The sponsored posts on the “NFLUK” account were a paid partnership with Valspar paint. These posts were coded as Sunday schedule since they featured the game time and pictures of the two quarterbacks that were facing off in the game. All paid advertisements posted on Instagram must be disclosed to the audience. They do this using an Instagram header feature which reads, “Paid partnership with ‘valsparpaintuk’.” But at on the top of the post itself it says, “Valspar paint” and underneath that “Official colour partner of the NFL.” The blue border at the top of the post, the white border at the bottom of the post, and the green and red backgrounds behind the quarterbacks also look like paint brush strokes. On the “NFL” account there were paid partnerships with Oakley. These posts consisted of typical game highlight posts with game times in the caption. The Instagram header says, “Paid Partnership with ‘Oakley’,” and the bottom of the actual cover post itself says, “Presented by Oakley.” Without these indications that Oakley was sponsoring this post, there is nothing else in the posts that would indicate to the audience that this post was a paid partnership with them. Unlike the paint brush strokes on the Valspar promotional post for the “NFLUK” account, which make it clear that Valspar paint was promoting on this post. This is also true for posts that Mercedes-Benz sponsored on the “NFL” account. The only indication that those posts were sponsored by Mercedes-Benz was the mandatory Instagram header that read, “Paid partnership with ‘mercedesbenzusa’,” as well as the caption included in the bottom of the post “Presented by MERCEDES-EQ.” The paid promotional posts seem to be more customized, and even created specifically to be posted on the “NFLUK” account. Whereas the paid promotional posts on the “NFL” account seem to be their

normal posts that they would have posted anyways, but with the added written indication of it being a partnership with another brand.

On November 9th, the “NFL” account posted a “Paid partnership with ‘fedex’.” This post was more obvious that it was a sponsored post, likely due to a better arrangement between the NFL and FedEx. The NFL and FedEx created the FedEx Air and Ground player of the week that the audience can vote for online at NFL.com/FedEx. This post was categorized as Player/Team of the Week/Month as well as Highlights, unlike the other paid promotional posts that were just categorized as Highlights and/or Sunday Schedule. There was a whole customized image that was made to present this to the audience, however it was on the last slide of the post, after player images and game highlights. The caption for this post tagged FedEx unlike the other paid promotional posts and it said, “Who should be the @fedex Air & Ground players of the week? [thinking emoji]”

Celebrities on the UK account were English singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran, American singer Ciara, and British rapper Aitch. Posting and having celebrities from the U.K. perform during games helps to associate American football with the culture of the United Kingdom and allows the target audience to resonate more with the content. There were cultural posts that were made to the main NFL account as well, but not in an attempt to associate American culture with American Football, as this is already something that is established. For example, these cultural posts included September 11th, 2001, memorial posts, posts that salute the veterans for Veteran’s Day, and Memorial Day posts. The U.K. mostly posts softer-toned posts with captions that include questions to elicit comments and engagement from followers. Although these posts may have seemed to be more random or out of place, this is a social media marketing tactic that is used in an attempt to increase their Instagram following, and also to increase associations from

the audience with the topic of football. The “NFL” account does not make any posts like this that are specifically posted only with the intention of increasing follower engagement since they already have an established following of about 26 million followers, while the “NFLUK” account currently has about 201 thousand followers.

Conclusion

By following certain advertising models such as the Elaboration Likelihood model and the Standardization versus Adaptation model, the NFL is able to customize their posts and media so that it is better received by the target audience. This has been demonstrated by the differences in content that is posted on the “NFL” and “NFLUK” Instagram accounts. Being able to engage and relate to new audiences helps to gain a stronger presence in the global market which overall is beneficial and crucial for international growth of the organization. Also, the NFL has shown that they are dedicated to their efforts in their international strategic plan by following through with certain ideas that they had proposed for expansion, and by engaging more with their international audience through the use of Instagram. I recorded that the “NFLUK” Instagram account had 179 thousand followers during the 2021 season. Currently, during the 2022 season, the “NFLUK” account is up to 201 thousand followers, which is an increase of 22 thousand followers in a year. In conclusion, I found that it was true the UK account had posts that were adapted for their target market, as well as had posts that featured more peripheral cues rather than central.

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