

CMN 511: Research Report

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FINDINGS

Interviews:

In our research we managed to interview 14 individuals with ages ranging from their 20's-60's. Most people worked in a sports related field and others self identified as a casual fan. When asked about the team, most people were quick to express their disappointment in their performance in recent years, yet did not blame the players, they blamed the management and ownership. Several of the interviewees made it a point to say that the McCaskeys should sell the team to give the players a chance to perform better. Another frequent comment was expressing the frustration in the frequent coaching changes. Regarding the players and team themselves, people acknowledged that the players are giving it their all with the resources they are being given and the recent downturn in success goes beyond what happens on the field.

Another commonality found between the interviewees was their belief of a lack of community outreach. A younger interviewee noted that the college demographic has been missed with the high prices of the tickets and the lack of outreach to that demographic. Many brought up increasing touch points within the community, with one fan suggesting a "fan fest" where all fans can get together as a morale booster.

Regarding the potential move to Arlington Heights many saw the positives and negatives in the situation. Increased parking, less traffic downtown on Sundays, and an upgraded stadium is where people saw opportunity in this move. On the other hand, people mentioned losing the history with the team and Soldier Field.

Overwhelmingly, people expressed that being a Bears fan extended beyond the sport with interviewees noting that being a Bears fan is being a Chicago fan. A common sentiment was the loyalty and camaraderie amongst Bears fans and that's the big quality that draws people to the team and what ensures they stay. The older interviewees bring up fond memories of games at Soldier field and the excitement around the '85 Super Bowl and the excitement of tailgates.

Social Media:

As our team looked over various social media platforms, we have found that most posts about the Bears football team have negative connotations attached to them. Below are examples of online conversations found on Instagram and Twitter.

On Instagram, popular accounts like @BarStoolChicago post memes and updates on the team. In a recent post that stated “Tyson Bagnet will start vs. the Saints this Sunday,” an update highlighting news about the Bear’s third-string quarterback, fans took to the post, with the most liked comments saying things like, “The Tyson Bagnet Show should’ve been canceled after the pilot episode,” and “I hate the bears (2001-current).” However, as you scroll down, there is some positive feedback saying, “he better than fields,” and “ he had great throws, I think he can be polished.” Fans seem to have mixed feelings about the new starting quarterback and concerns regarding their usual starter Justin Fields.

The Chicago Bears’ official Instagram account @ChicagoBears, posted practice photos today that were captioned, “another day on the job.” The top comment read, “You can feel the depression through the caption,” with two crying emojis. The comment got 116 likes followed by a reply that read “lmao fr.” with another crying emoji. The second most liked comment with 59 likes was, “yea I don’t see sweat,” followed by another negative comment that stated, “Eddie just gonna get hurt this week anyways.” The fans seem hopeless when it comes to the upcoming game. The post gained 10,952 likes with no response from the main account to any of the comments.

On Twitter, if you search “Chicago Bears,” the top tweet is a video of a parody song written and sung by a man named Dave Swerski. The caption of the video is, “Need you to win, (prayer hand emoji), - a Chicago Bears fan parody song, (followed by multiple other emojis), Da saga of da season continues with parody No. 21...(beers clanking emoji) #NFL #DaBears.” The video is exactly what it is captioned, a parody song about Bears fans needing a win. The tweet has 14 comments, 46 retweets, 250 likes and 15k views. Some comments read, “love this content, super creative, and big fan as you know,” “you’re the best Dave...(thumbs up emoji)...bear down.” and “I really like these and I really needed a reason to smile today thanks Dave (bear emoji, down arrow emoji). Dave responded to all these comments appreciating their positive feedback. It seems that even though the Bears are having a rough season, Bears fans like to poke fun at the bad, bringing light to the situation at hand.

INSIGHTS

The significant actionable conclusions drawn from the findings including the following:

Desire for change:

Fan's desire for change, particularly at the organizational level, stems from a perception of incompetence and a lack of passion. This desire for change is not just about wanting a different team; it's about wanting a different culture, a fresh approach, and leadership that understands the emotional investment of the fans. The collective pride and fulfillment fueled by wins and competitive spirit are fundamental aspects critically lacking for Bears fans.

Community Touchpoints and Enhanced Engagement:

A recommendation was suggested to increase touchpoints with the community, such as fan fests in parks, to enhance accessibility and foster a stronger connection with fans. Interviewees shared a desire for more inclusive and engaging initiatives beyond traditional game experiences.

Disconnect and Disengagement:

The emotional disconnect expressed by fans reveals an important relationship between emotions and fan involvement. It's not solely about wins; fans disconnect when the team no longer meets their emotional needs or aligns with their expectations. Fans disengage when their experience becomes unfulfilling, showing that the team is failing to connect on a deeper level.

Iconic Brand History:

A common perspective on the Bears as an iconic brand with a resilient fan base was shared. Star players such as Dick Butkis and culture-shifting moments such as the Super Bowl Shuffle still resonate with fans. Despite recent on-field challenges, the historical success of the team and its enduring legacy contribute to unwavering commitment among supporters.

In collating the insights from interviews and netnography done for this research, a resounding theme emerges — the desire for change which goes beyond a mere wish for a different team. Fans are yearning for a cultural shift, a fresh approach, and leadership that resonates with the emotional investment they make. The experience of winning is seen as the foundation of a true community connection, adding to the participation that goes beyond mere inclusion to a source of pride and collective identity.

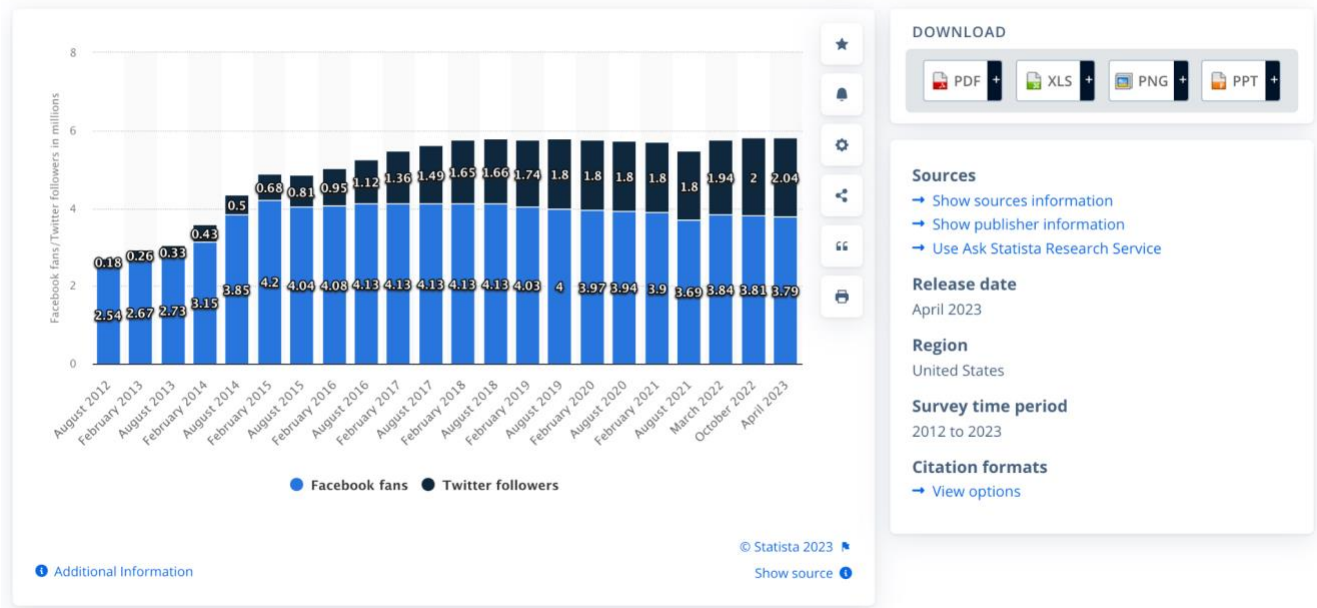
Conversely, fans' emotional disengagement reveals a nuanced link between emotions and fan participation, indicating that the team's inability to satisfy supporters' emotional demands or live up to expectations causes disengagement. However, in spite of these difficulties, there is a strong dedication to the Bears as a legendary franchise. Notwithstanding the team's recent on-field setbacks, its past achievements and long heritage serve as cornerstones, maintaining the devoted fan base's undying commitment. All of these observations highlight how feelings, wins, and community involvement interact in a complex way to form the strong tie that exists between the Chicago Bears and their ardent fans.

TABLES AND CHARTS

Total regular season home attendance of the NFL Chicago Bears franchise from 2006 to 2022



Number of Facebook fans/Twitter followers of the Chicago Bears (NFL) from 2012 to 2023 (in millions)



CONCLUSION:

After analyzing our primary and secondary research and identifying common themes apparent across both social media platforms and interviews with participants, we formed several key insight areas that will help to inform and guide our campaign. Those key areas are: a desire for change on a high level, an opportunity for increased community touchpoints, a disengagement trend among fans, and an iconic brand history to utilize. We plan to use these insights as the foundations of our communications strategy in order to help connect the Chicago Bears to their community.

These insights have helped us to understand the crucial need for fans to feel that their concerns are being heard and addressed by the organization. Social listening of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok has shown that some fans feel underappreciated and that the team is not doing enough to be deserving of such a fiercely loyal fanbase. Because of these findings, it will be imperative to allow for the campaign to create a space for fan feedback and direct interaction- an area that may have been lacking previously.

There were several key points made across interviews such as concerns regarding ownership decisions, the importance of winning, and the desire for enhanced community

engagement. The potential move to Arlington Heights is met with both excitement and reservations, highlighting the significance of this decision for fans.

Overall, our interviews proved that Chicago Bears fans are fiercely loyal despite the team's performance in recent years. Many of the original fans value the Bears for their historical significance and the nostalgia associated with the franchise. On the other hand, there seems to be a consensus among younger fans that on-field success and community outreach are crucial in order to rekindle the team's positive image and increase morale.

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