Chapter 14
Social Media and Motivational Complexities Associated in Promoting Professional Soccer Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine and determine factors that lead to increased television ratings for soccer in the U.S. Undoubtedly, the topic of fantasy sports and the various roles it plays with types of fan involvement and their need for enhanced engagement with a complex social media landscape has intrigued scholars from a number of disciplines. How the various motivational factors, both intrinsically and extrinsically, impact the degree of fan involvement and loyalty have been investigated several times. The overall results have been mixed to say the least. The current chapter primarily focuses on fantasy soccer participation, involvement in soccer, presence of a local professional team, and social media interaction. After providing a brief history of soccer television ratings in the U.S., a conceptual model based on these factors is developed and explained. The factors of this conceptual model are tested through statistical analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Growth of Soccer in the U.S.

There is little doubt that when Major League Soccer (MLS) played its initial 1996 season, it could not expect in the short-term to compete with the advertising budget and player-related expenses with its big business professional football. As the 2014 World Cup games played on, many spectators hope for a strong competitive showing of the young U.S. soccer team. During this time, the Internet was taking a foothold in the general public and allowed an avenue or communication channel for sport organizations to directly create relationships and influence the hearts and minds of its potential fan base. The MLS handles the initial contracts for individual players to help owners take on a lesser financial burden that had crippled previous attempts at professional sport organizations such as the North American Soccer League (NASL) and the USA Football League. These organizations mainly failed due to an excessive expenditure in the largest markets (Zimmerman, Clavio, & Lim, 2011). This study explores a few areas, from fantasy sports to involvement in sports, which may or may not contribute to increased television ratings in the soccer market. By understanding these aspects, decision makers can increase their e-commerce approaches or target specific viewers to increase television ratings in the U.S. Increasing television ratings can generate many forms of increased revenues, including online streaming and advertisement revenue.

When discussing television ratings, within a 6-year span from 2007-2012, MLS grew over 50% from 12 teams to 19 teams. This period of expansion is shown in Table 1. Expansion in recent years has been well executed into popular markets and helped improve everything league-wide from global exposure to a bigger salary cap to superb attendance figures. With MLS's young age and the recent upswing overall of soccer in the U.S., very little research has been done on why Americans are now tuning into soccer at a higher rate than ever before. With the domestic league now spanning so many large cities and the increased availability for Americans to watch foreign soccer, research on how and why television ratings increase for soccer is vital to decision makers in the global marketplace.

MLS has a niche market in the U.S. with per-game attendance figures surpassing both the National Hockey League (NHL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA). These 2 leagues are generally referred to as the arena leagues because they are played indoors with smaller capacity stadiums. None of these three leagues (e.g.; MLS, NBA, or NHL) play in venues nearly as big as Major League Baseball (MLB) or the National Football League (NFL). With proper expansion, MLS broke above the arena leagues and sits nicely in the middle of the pack in per-game attendance. Most recent per-game season attendance figures are listed below in Table 2. Although these numbers are great for soccer in the U.S.,

Table 1. Expansion 2007-12 in MLS

Year	Expansion Team(s)
2007	Toronto FC
2008	San Jose Earthquakes
2009	Seattle Sounders FC
2010	Philadelphia Union
2011	Portland Timbers, Vancouver Whitecaps
2012	Montreal Impact

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