

Chapter 19

Creating a Fan Community for Sport Teams Through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

With so many people using social media, it is no surprise that sports team at all levels are looking to use social media to increase interactions with the spectators. Consumers appear to choose to use social media to connect with the team, other fans, and feel a sense of belonging to a community. There are many articles that discuss the relationship between social media and sport; however, many of them are not supported with empirical data, nor do they address the gap between fan communities and behavior. This study uses empirical data to try to prove that there is a relationship between social media and creating a brand community for teams in the National Basketball Association (NBA). It adds to the literature by providing empirical evidence between fan communities and fan behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about building brand communities through social media; this paper looks at how social media can be used to create a fan community for sports teams. In most industries today, engaging customers through social media has become an important part of the promotion strategy (Rufer, 2014). With so many people using social media, it is no surprise that sport teams at all levels are looking to use social media to increase interactions with their fans. Consumers choose to use social media to connect with the team, other fans, and feel a sense of belonging to a community. One of the main reasons that most organizations use social media channels is that they are scalable and interactive with consumers no matter their location or industry (Ang, 2011).

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Web 2.0 platforms are those technologies that are easy to use, provide for social interaction and include several platforms including Facebook, Twitter, blogs and YouTube. These technologies can be used to create brand communities that are either member-initiated, third-party managed, or firm-hosted (Claffey & Brady, 2017). Relationship building is one of the benefits that firms gain from firm-hosted social media technologies. Claffey and Brady (2017) cite examples of how Starbucks and Dell Computer have created a brand community by the sharing of information and social engagement through Web 2.0 technologies. This same benefit has been seen in the sports industry.

Social media is being used by sport teams in order to create their strong brand communities: it has become a common practice to connect with fans through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Witkemper et al., 2012). Dolan et al. (2015) provided evidence of the importance of Facebook when connecting with sports teams. Korzynski and Paniagua (2016) provides evidence that twitter is a commonly used technology for athletes to connect with fans. Williams and Chin (2010) discuss how both of the Web 2.0 platforms are frequently used by sports teams as part of their brand relationship strategy.

Using a variety of social media platforms addresses the diversity of the fan base (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). Stewert et al. (2003) assert that diversity in the sport and the sport fan results in a need for different motivational elements in the sport organization's marketing mix including the benefits derived from different Web 2.0 technologies. Facebook is recognized as a venue for comments and even contests that keep fans engaged. Whereas, YouTube allows the fan to relive the experience and Twitter provides for quick information and a reminder about their fan status (Witkemper et al., 2012).

Information has been reported to be one of important elements for engaging fans (Dolan et al., 2015). In an integrated marketing communication strategy, different social media Web 2.0 platforms provide the fan with a different source of information, meeting the diverse needs of the fan base. What is now needed is the connection between social media channels and its influence in purchase decisions or behavior for sport organizations (Pronschinske et al., 2012). One of the objectives in this study is to empirically support this relationship through observation using secondary data. This study focuses on the use of Facebook to create brand communities and the relationship between brand communities and purchase behavior.

BACKGROUND

Relationship Marketing

Building and sustaining relationships is the foundation of a relationship marketing strategy. For a long time (since 1980), it has been recognized that strong relationships are connected to brand allegiance, making the cultivation of these relationships vital to many firms' long-term success (Watson et al., 2015). A relationship marketing strategy is one in which firms purposefully create pathways to support these relationships. Previous studies have recognized the importance of creating brand communities through digital media for supporting a customer relationship marketing strategy (Aaker 2015; Chiang et al., 2019). Aaker (2015) found that digital media affects the brand in four ways: it supports the offering by providing additional information about our product; it amplifies other brand building platforms; it augments the product offering by making the purchase of related goods easier; and encourages relationships through continual engagement with the customer. Chiang et al. (2019) provided empirical evidence that a relationship marketing strategy through social media creates brand association, brand knowledge,

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