Chapter 4
Exploring the Relationship Between Sport Fan Identification and Addiction to Digital Sports Media

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ABSTRACT

Social media has proved to be a constant source of information and entertainment for sport fans. These social media sites allow sport organizations to provide news about the organizations and the athletes that play for them, as well as serving as a means of communication between the organization and fans, or between the fans themselves. Smartphones have enabled this communication to be nearly constant, allowing sport fans to access information around the clock. Anecdotal evidence suggests this on-demand access to information about a fan's favorite team will increase the avidity by which the fan consumes the sport product. In a parallel development, researchers have investigated the detrimental effects devoting too much time to social media has on consumers. This research bridges these lines of inquiry and examines the relationship between social media addiction and highly identified and committed sport fans. Data were collected from college students, and a multiple regression analysis was performed which resulted in no statistically significant relationship between addiction to social media and high levels of sport identification and commitment. The results suggest that for sport organizations, social media is not a one-size-fits-all approach to reaching a segmented (based on identification and commitment) market.

INTRODUCTION

According to a 2014 Pew Research Center study, people falling between the ages of 18-29 use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest) most frequently (Duggan & Smith, 2014). The use of these social media sites has eclipsed solely personal communication, with certain of these sites becoming sources of news for users. For instance, 8% of U.S. adults obtain at least some news from Twitter, and 30% obtain at least some news from Facebook; however, approximately 45% of those who obtain news on Twitter, and 34% of those who obtain at least some news on Facebook are between the ages of 18-29 (Pew Research Center, 2013). With 45% of American adults owning smartphones, the ease of access to these sites and the information they provide coupled with the mobility of internet access, often results in a constant reliance on access to and interaction with their smartphone (Smith, 2012). In fact, owners of smartphones report being more likely to sleep next to their smartphones or check their phone for messages despite not hearing a notification than non-smartphone owners (Smith, 2012). This behavior may be considered negative or perhaps even harmful.

Users seeking sport content are also turning to the internet for on-demand access to news and information. ESPN Digital Media reports reaching 72.7 million unique visitors across computers, smartphones and tablets in September 2013 (http://espnmediazone.com/us/press-releases/2013/10/espn-digital-media-sets-sports-category-record-in-september/). The sports media giant offers several reasons for this boost in visitors. While these reasons include broader levels of content and better product experiences, one of the greatest influencers is the rapid increase in fans' reliance on mobile platforms (e.g., mobile web and applications).

In 2011, 56% of people reported they consumed sports content online (Sports Media Consumption Report, 2013). Just two years later, this number grew to 63%. Similarly, in 2011, 21% of consumers of sport content reported they received sport information via mobile applications. This number is now 35% (Sports Media Consumption Report, 2013). Finally, Twitter potentially has had the most pronounced effect on sport information consumption. In 2013, sporting events comprised a mere 1.2% of all television programming in the Unites States; yet, approximately 50% of all tweets relating to a televised event were about sports (Year in Sports Media Report, 2013). Twitter use among sport teams, athletes, and leagues has increased and is at an all-time high. It seems fans using digital sports media are voracious consumers of sports content. Does this voracity lead to addiction?

In this paper, we explore the relationship between sport fan involvement (operationalized as identification) and addiction to digital sports media. This exploration will shed light on our understanding of how digital sports media usage may lead to addiction and contribute to greater levels of identification and commitment to a team (i.e., positive sports marketing outcomes).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Addiction

The clinical definition of addiction is "a dysfunction in brain reward, motivation, memory, and related circuitry that leads to biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations" (American Psychological Association, 2000). It is characterized by an individual's inability to abstain from behaviors that are directed toward some form of reward or relief and can be compulsive in nature (O'Guinn & Faber,

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