

Chapter 45

What Are Basketball Fans Saying on Twitter? Evidence From Euroleague Basketball's Final Four Event

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ABSTRACT

Social media receives growing interest from sports executives. Yet, very little is known about how to make use of such user-generated, unstructured data. By exploring tweets generated during Turkish Airlines Euroleague's Final Four event, which broadcasted the four tournaments of championship among four finalist teams, the authors studied how fans respond to gains and losses and how engaged they were during games through the course of the event. The authors found that favorable reactions were received when teams won, but the magnitude of unfavorable reaction was larger when teams lost. When it came to the organizer rather than the teams, the organizer of the event received most of the positive feedback. The authors also found that main source of tweets was smartphones while tablets were not among real-time feedback devices.

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INTRODUCTION

Society is connected on a global scale by digital communications. By year 2015, there were 3.5 billion Internet users and over 50% of the adult population around the world are said to be smartphone users (Castells, 2016). By 2017, 31% of the world's population (more than 2.3 billion people) were active social media users (Leaders, 2017).

The global population is consuming media in different ways. For instance, over the past decade the use of computers for internet access has declined rapidly and a shift to instant access through mobile devices like smartphones and tablets has occurred. For this reason, industries are adapting to new distribution channels to keep up with consumer tendencies, including the sports industry. This has led the sports ecosystem to experience dramatic changes, enabling the creation of new communication networks through emerging technologies (De Moragas et al, 2013).

How sport is watched and consumed has been disrupted in the digital era and continues to change due to technology and the emergence of various new direct-to-customer distribution channels. Fans can engage with a sports event without the need to be at venue or even watch it on television. With the advent of live or delayed streaming, instant messaging, the ability to maintain conversations in real time on social media platforms, the opportunity to review large amounts of statistics online and through applications, has created new, more complex multi-directional communication processes. These sports conversations are now happening 'on-the-go' through mobile devices and across geographic borders on a global scale.

Social media channels receive growing interest from sports executives, politicians, and companies where the opinions of fans, voters and investors matter respectively. Given that social media allow users to build networks in an easy and timely way and to share various kinds of information (photos, videos, texts, links etc), they form an excellent platform for real-time feedback, opinion sharing and to observe fan engagement.

Social media channels have become increasingly important for marketing communication because they are instant, have a global reach, are simple to use and require minimal bandwidth and device capability (Abeza et al, 2015). They have become an essential marketing tool in recent years, allowing managers, marketers, and users to interact and share information instantaneously. Advertisers use social media in sport events to generate valuable leads, get immediate feedback, post messages in real time and with the possibility to create viral effects through sharing (Beech et al, 2014). A leading example from sports is the NBA where teams provide information and content through their social media channels, while promoting their team and events, aiming to interact with their fans to receive feedback and increase the probabilities of engagement (Meng, Stavros, & Westberg, 2015).

In collaborative social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or any other social media platform that allow fans to create, publish, edit or share content. Fans become co-creators of the content that is been shared, generating interactivity and increasing fans' involvement in what is happening at around the live event. Interactive content turns the fan into an active user, increasing the capacity to collaborate and manage the flow of information (Beech et al, 2014; De Moragas et al, 2013; Meng et al., 2015).

Among social media platforms, Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that allows its users post real time messages and multimedia content (Kumar & Kalwani, 2012). Since Twitter was created in 2006 it has been increasingly recognized by marketing and advertisement executives as a key tool in social media-based communication campaigns, embracing the use of hashtags to share thematic content and reach diluted groups of fans with common interests (Delia & Armstrong, 2015). Twitter has

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