

GENERATION GAP? INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARKETING SPORT VIA DIGITAL SOCIAL MEDIA TO DIFFERENT AGE COHORTS

Author:
Joe Mahan

email:
joe.mahan@temple.edu

University:
Temple University

Faculty:
Sport and Recreation Management

Abstract

Background & purpose of study

Over the past two decades, emerging technologies have had a profound effect on the sport marketing landscape (Gillentine, 2003). A recent example is a newfound emphasis on the use of digital social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) by sport organizations (and their athletes), sponsors, and media outlets for communicating with consumers. Despite the reticence of some sport organizations to recognize the digital space, social media appears to be largely accepted by as a 'new frontier' of communications and, as such, are becoming more readily integrated into sport marketing strategy.

Despite the proliferation of this phenomenon in practice, however, there is a dearth of scholarly research as to its effectiveness in reaching consumers. While the literature features a growing body of work examining the impact of the Internet in sport marketing, there have been calls for further investigation of the extent to which digital technology is used in sport. Moreover, whereas initial scholarly work in sport marketing has examined media preference differences between age cohorts (i.e., Generation X and Generation Y) (Bennett, Sagas, & Dees, 2006), studies have neglected other consumer segments (e.g., Baby Boomers) as well as digital media.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of social media as a sport marketing platform across generation cohorts; namely, Generation Y (GenY), Generation X (GenX), and Baby Boomer (Boomers). To that end, possible underlying factors of consumer response to sport marketing communications via social media platforms were explored. The current research draws upon existing consumer literature in extending the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM; Davis, 1989) to a sport consumption context to explore predictors of consumer response to the use of social media by sport organizations.

Methodology

A convenience sample (N=272) was recruited from an adult population by Graduate students at a research university in the eastern United States who were trained in marketing research methods. Participants were e-mailed a URL for the survey, which was created using Qualtrics survey software. Scaled measures for TAM constructs (Convenience, Ease of Use, Usefulness, and Enjoyment) as well for assessing other variables of interest were adapted from existing consumer research.

The resultant dataset was split into three groups: Generation Y (n = 130), Generation X (n = 70), and Baby Boomers (n = 72), following existing consumer research (Beldona, 2005). Data were analyzed using a series of hierarchical multiple regressions, using Attitudes toward Social Media (ASM) and Behavioral Intentions (BI) as the dependent variables. Gender was entered on the first step and step two consisted of Personal Involvement with Social Media (PII) and Convenience. Step three included the main TAM constructs (Ease of Use, Usefulness, and Enjoyment).

Results and discussion

Results of hierarchical regression analyses suggested slightly different combinations of variables as explaining variance in response across the three generation groups. Cohort models including all hypothesized predictors accounted for significant amounts of variance explained for ASM (Table 1) as well as BI (Table 2). Significant predictors for GenY included PII, Convenience, and Enjoyment whereas GenX preferences appeared to be influenced by PII, Enjoyment, and Ease of Use. Gender, PII, Enjoyment, and Ease of Use were significant predictors for Boomers.

In general, regression results appear to support existing research showing that TAM constructs have utility in explaining consumer preferences in a social media context. Involvement appeared to be a consistent predictor across generation groups, perhaps indicating that this type of marketing communication may resonate with existing users of social media applications (e.g., Twitter) as opposed to serving as a tool for attracting non-users. The presence of Enjoyment as a significant predictor is also in line with earlier research suggesting this construct to be more influential with online sport content (cf. Kwak et al., 2010).

The current investigation represented an attempt to explore differences between GenY, GenX and Baby Boomers in preferences for sport marketing via digital social media. Based on the results herein, there are some implications for both scholarly inquiry as well as sport marketers. For example, the enjoyment or 'fun' afforded by social media platforms appears to be important for users regardless of generation; perhaps these channels are more suited for promotional content rather than news and information. While this study adds to sport marketing literature, future examination of generational differences in this context could prove fruitful toward understanding how (and why) different consumers respond to certain marketing communications.

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