

Consumer engagement and Social Media: the case of Twitter and its impact on sport participation

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Aim

The aim of this paper is to evaluate how well sport organisations are using Twitter and if using this Social Media application is helping them to achieve an increased number of participants in the sport they stand for.

Theoretical background

Social Media has emerged as both the preferred communication channel by most Internet users (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and a solid source of information and marketing tool (Lukes, 2010). In this context, Twitter stand as one of the strongest and fastest growing Social Media application. As a response to Twitter's public reception, and corresponding with Cahill's (2011) suggestions that delivering online services or information through Social Media in a targeted, meaningful and user-friendly way is critical to remaining relevant to the modern consumer, commercial and noncommercial organisations alike have started to engage with Twitter. Nevertheless, engaging with Twitter is not an easy nor trivial task, as users of this Social Media have particular expectations regarding communication etiquette and content, which differ greatly from traditional communications channels and even other Social Media applications (Cahill, 2010). This way, organisations planning to enter or entering Twitter find themselves doing it while still learning the best and most effective way to engage with it. Furthermore, Chen (2010) finds that Twitter's users engage in it in order to gratify a basic human need to connect with others, further suggesting that users of Twitter need to get something out of their experience in order to keep using the Social Media application. Subsequently, many organisations may encounter trouble obeying to Twitter's rules of communication, thus obtaining results and fitting Twitter usage in their strategies can also be troublesome. Sport organisations are not exempt from experiencing this, as Twitter may be an appealing tool to increase sport consumption for commercial and noncommercial purposes.

Methodology

The research for this paper has been separated in two phases. The first one focused in inspecting the content of the Twitter messages of a selected group of sport organisations. The second phase focused in inspecting the impact of these messages on the organisation's followers' intention to participate in the sport these organisations stand for.

For the first phase, three sport organisations operating in the UK, seeking to increase sport participation in the sport they stand for, with presence on Twitter and at least one year of active participation, were selected. Organisations were also selected on the fact they represent sports with three different levels of participation: low, medium and high. Following this selection, the content of their Twitter messages emitted over the last three months (convenience sample) were coded in order to examine the data and determine the approach these organisations are taking when using Twitter, making possible to contrast their approach with the approach the literature suggest.

In the second phase, a significant number of followers of the selected organisations (convenience sample), who lived in the UK, were asked to fill surveys aimed to identify their intentions to participate in the sport each organisation stand for, and the link between their intentions and the messages they have received from the selected organisations' Twitter accounts. Only surveys from people that have been actively following the selected organisations will be taken into consideration.

Results

With the analysis from the results of the research done for this paper still pending, it is expected for it to show that in some cases the intentions behind sport organisations having Twitter accounts are divorced from either their mission to increase participation or the expectations followers of these organisations have. For these reasons, it is expected most of the evaluated Twitter accounts to have little effect on an increased intention of participation of their followers. The analysis will be already done by the time the EASM Conference is held.

References

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