SPORT VIEWING AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE: A U.S. MARKET PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

AIM OF STUDY

The increase in digital TV and second screen viewing of sport and the popularity of social networking sites (SNS) have provided sport consumers with new entertainment opportunities. Social media is changing marketing strategies and the way enterprises communicate in the pursuit of brand building and commerce (MarketingSherpa, 2009; Roy, 2012). The aim of this descriptive study was to determine the extent of TV and online viewing of sport and the degree of social media engagement among sport prosumers.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Increased penetration of HDTV and the development of the interactive Web (Web 2.0), including social media for social networking (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) it has facilitated, have dramatically changed the production, distribution, and consumption of sport content (Naone, 2010; Green, 2010). In contrast to the traditional integrated marketing communications paradigm where a high degree of control is present by professional marketers, “the content, timing, and frequency of the social media-based conversations occurring between consumers [fans] are outside managers’ direct control” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p.357). Knowledge of media use by fans can help managers and marketers shape fan discussions in line with the goals of the sport organization to optimize the reach to fans through mobile media and social networks – social media, in particular, plays a huge role in sport marketing (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Clapp, September 16, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

To measure the level of consumption of sport via TV and online platforms and the use of social media a survey to identify and describe the frequency, time, and type of platform and engagement level with social

media was developed and conducted in October 2011-2013. Each year the survey was sent to a nationally representative sample of 3,000 U.S. male and female consumers aged thirteen and over. Face validity was assumed since the survey questions reflected the research questions posed. That is, survey questions were designed to provide direct insight into the current state of consumer/prosumer behavior and demographic trends related to TV and online consumption of sport via platforms such as computers, tablets and smartphones and sport specific usage of social networking sites (SNS) Facebook and Twitter.
Survey data were compiled separately for each of fourteen sports categories: Baseball – Major League Baseball (MLB), Minor League Baseball; Basketball – National Basketball Association (NBA), College Basketball; Football – National Football League (NFL), College Football; Ice Hockey – NHL, Minor League Hockey; Lacrosse (MLL, NLL); Motorsports - Indy Car, NASCAR; Rugby - Non-USA; and Soccer – Major League Soccer (MLS), and Soccer - Non-USA.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS
Approximately 25 percent of all consumers within the 15 sports categories included in the survey viewed sport using one or more digital devices and used social networking sites (SNS) Facebook and Twitter. The percentages ranged from a high of 31 percent among NFL fans to a low of 16 percent among Indy Car fans. In addition, results indicated that a larger percentage of consumers who viewed sport online and followed sport via social media attended games, participated in the sport, and purchased sports logo apparel and/or athletic footwear compared with all consumers within a specific sport category.

Data indicated that among all sport prosumers the number of friends/followers of a specific sport on Facebook was only three times larger than the number of prosumers who followed an athlete or team using Twitter, even though Facebook’s market is approximately eight times larger than Twitter’s market on an overall basis. The relatively high level of sport consumption - attending games and/or viewing games online among consumers who use social media- suggested that the increasing opportunities for viewing sport online using a variety of digital devices, and the ability of sport consumers to access social networking sites (SNS) via these devices appears to have enhanced the overall experience for sport consumers (Jackson, 2012).

Interestingly, for 2011 the survey data suggest that viewing sport online and using SNS has not increased the overall size of the sport consumer market significantly. However, it appears that sport consumers who use social media have increased their level of consumption, involvement and identification with the sport of their choice. This result suggests that continued online viewing and social media usage may lead to increased opportunities for sport logo apparel and footwear marketers to promote their products across multiple digital channels. The extent to which this occurs will depend on the ability of marketing professionals to capitalize on increased prosumer involvement and identification.

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