
COMPARING SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND EXPECTATIONS FROM FANS IN THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE (NFL) AND THE WORLD WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT (WWE)

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Synopsis:

This project compared social media use, interaction and satisfaction among fans within the National Football League (NFL) and the World Wrestling Entertainment group (WWE).

Abstract:

PURPOSE: The use of social media in sport is now vital to any successful marketing campaigns to both engage the fans and promote awareness. According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre (2011), due to the tremendous exposure of social media in the popular press we are in the midst of an altogether new communication landscape. Understanding social media practices by sport organizations is a new and exciting area of research for sport managers. Social media is broad and evolving and can include a website, Facebook page, Twitter accounts, YouTube, Instagram, blogs and others. This project compared social media use, interaction and satisfaction among fans within the National Football League (NFL) and the World Wrestling Entertainment group (WWE). The NFL is an American football league of 32 teams and one of the four major professional sport leagues in the United States. The NFL is one of the most established and popular sports leagues worldwide with media contracts and rights valued in the billions. The WWE is an entertainment company for professional wrestling with worldwide popularity. The WWE promotes wrestling as sport entertainment rather than legitimate contests. The WWE has approximately 123 million fans/followers on their various forms of social media. This rapid growth and popularity of the WWE rivals that of the NFL and provides an interesting case for social media study. For example, Tom Brady of the New England Patriots has just over 3 million likes on his Facebook page compared to over 30 million likes on professional wrestler John Cena's page. The research will provide insight to both the practitioner and academic audience regarding social media practices from the fan perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW: Social media is different from traditional media-outlets in that the platforms allow users to connect, communicate, and collaborate with other users on a grand scale (Blaszka, Burch, Frederick, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012). Social networking connects millions of people worldwide and it allows fans to connect with sport organizations and the athletes. These media sites allow fans an intimate interaction with the athletes and teams they follow. Marketing research estimates that over 4 billion dollars are spent worldwide by companies to increase involvement and exposure on social media sites with the majority of sport organizations using social media to grow the brand and increase fan loyalty. The majority of sport organizations currently use a variety of social media methods with efforts on increasing fan unity and creating online communities for their fans to interact with one another (Coombs, 2009). Therefore an understanding of fan identification and motives is vital for economic success and overall well-being of the organization (Fink, J., Trail, G., & Anderson, D., 2002). Social media can aid organizations to address fan needs, increase the fan base and to foster a relationship for fan involvement.

METHODOLOGY: The researchers used a quantitative survey based on the Motivation Scale for Sport Online Consumption (MSSOC) to measure fan satisfaction and engagement on social media within the sport organizations. The target audience was identified as fans of the leagues in the study. The surveys were conducted electronically on Facebook after solicitation via paid advertisement on the corresponding page. We examined fan behavior across two major National Sports Franchises, the WWE and the NFL. Specifically we explored differences in fan identification, motivations to be a spectator of each sport, and the impact of these variables on social media usage motivation and consumer behavior.

RESULTS: The surveys were recently completed so analysis is ongoing at this time. There were 598 completed instruments with 212 from NFL fans and 386 from WWE fans. A factor analysis will be employed to examine patterns from the groups. Comparisons between the organizations will also be made. Demographic data was also gathered and will be presented. Results will be complete in time for presentation.

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