
SAME, SAME – BUT DIFFERENT! ON CONSUMERS' USE OF CORPORATE PR MEDIA IN SPORTS

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1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Nowadays, organizations around the globe have numerous avenues to share information with their target groups and communicate directly without any intermediate like journalists. Especially professional sport clubs make frequent use of email newsletters, own TV channels, stadium magazines and internet platforms. In addition they frequently share information via social media. Since the way the content is prepared varies by communication channel, the professional use of corporate PR media is a time consuming and challenging task for organizations. Therefore, knowledge about the factors influencing consumers' usage patterns of different PR media is highly relevant and might help in identifying the most preferred media categories for specific consumer groups as well as effectively developing and shaping the content in different outlets.

However, despite its increasing importance, almost nothing is known about the objective factors influencing the consumers' use of different PR media in sports. This paper contributes to the literature as follows: like Clavio (2011) and Emrich, Pierdzioch and Oestmann (2014), we are interested in the effect of socio demographics on the use of PR media. Furthermore, and in line with Pérez (2013) as well as Watanabe et al. (2015), we employ an economics-related approach to study this relationship. However, and in contrast to these studies, this paper is the first to analyze simultaneously the factors associated with the consumers' use of different PR media channels available to sports organizations.

2. METHODS

The paper takes advantage of a unique dataset with information about the members of the German first division soccer club Hamburger Sport-Verein (HSV). Like many other professional sports organizations this club already makes extensive use of the various PR media channels available and is therefore a natural candidate to investigate such patterns.

Between July 23 and August 5 in 2012 all 57,612 members 16 years or older had the chance to take part in the survey by entering their date of birth and membership number on the website of the club. The final adjusted net sample consists of $n=8,654$ respondents and is representative with regard to the geographic distribution of the club members as well as their age and gender.

The data offers detailed information about the club members' personal characteristics (such as age, gender, household size, family status or membership duration) as well the self-reported frequency of media use (to generally inform oneself about the club) for overall 9 different PR media categories (such as Facebook, Twitter, the club's webpage or the club magazine). Given the ordered nature of the dependent (media use) variable(s) and that fact that it is very likely that the decisions on the frequency of using the different media categories are closely related, a multivariate ordered probit model is employed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With more than 70% of club members using this medium often, the HSV's webpage is the most frequent used PR medium while other media such as Facebook and Twitter appear to be less important yet.

The results of the multivariate ordered probit model suggest that the decisions on the frequency of using the different PR media are closely related, though socio-demographic and membership characteristics have a media-specific impact on the frequency of media use. For instance, while female members have (compared to male members) a significant higher probability of using Facebook, the club's webpage, magazine, TV channel, email newsletters, and email information often, the opposite is true for Twitter and the club's forum page. This suggests using gender specific content in different PR media categories. In addition, since the higher the educational background the lower the probability of using all media categories often (except Twitter), editorial content should not be constructed too demandingly. Furthermore, income as proxy for consumer spending capacity indicates the specific marketing capacities of the mobile app. The app might be especially useful for advertising and promoting high priced merchandise or other commodities.

Beside these practical implications, the study also contributes to the academic literature by carrying on the idea of Pérez (2013) as well as Watanabe et al. (2015) of bridging communication- and economics-related research by using large scale data and employing sophisticated econometric methods to improve our understanding of consumer behavior in sports.

While we do not have any reason to believe that our findings do not hold for other clubs and other sports in other countries, clearly, research applying these data gathering and analyzing techniques to other settings would be helpful to further validate the major findings.

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