

EXAMINING SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPORT AND IMPLICATIONS TO MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: MOTIVATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS INFLUENCING SPORT RELATED TWITTER CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

Background

With the rise of social media, outlets like Twitter are being used frequently by sports organizations and athletes to communicate with fans. The growth of Twitter has been noticed in the sport industry as it is becoming more commonplace to hear about athletes who tweet or read an article where the story broke from someone's Twitter account. Newcastle defender Jose Enrique angered manager Alan Pardew by using Twitter before a match at Tottenham revealing that he would be out injured (thesoccerroom, 2010), Liverpool star Steven Gerrard not traveling to the EuropaLeague match (Fialkiewicz, 2011), and whether or not Brett Favre would start during the Vikings-Giants game broke through Twitter (Bennett, 2010).

Reports show Twitter grew exponentially from February 2008 - February 2009, from 475,000 to over seven million users. By 2010, Twitter users increased by 100 million during 2010. In terms of percentages, this was 1,400% growth each year. Why this medium has been growing in popularity in sport has mostly been ignored by empirical research.

Objective

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between Sport Twitter Consumption and motivation and constraints factors that affect consumption. The study was based on constraint theory which is used to understand why people do not participate in a particular activity while others will get engaged in it. If a participant chooses to not follow athletes on Twitter, it is likely because a factor is holding them back from engaging in the behavior. Primarily, this study used the work of Crawford and Godbey (1987). Further, motivation research

by Seo and Green (2008), suggest there are specific motivations for online sport consumption which can be used to help discover what is driving users to consume Twitter, attempting to connect with athletes. Thus, subjects were surveyed to determine their motivations and constraints for using Twitter as a medium for sport consumption.

H1: Motivations to follow athletes through Twitter will have a positive effect on individual's Twitter usage for Sport Twitter Consumption.

H2: Constraints to follow athletes through Twitter will have a negative effect on individual's Twitter usage for Sport Twitter Consumption.

Method

Data for this study came from 1121 usable surveys collected from individuals between the ages of 17-40. Subjects recruited from sport management classes and business school classes at a Midwestern university were provided a link to the online survey. Variables from the Motivation Scale for Sport Online Consumption were used to measure motivational factors (Seo & Green, 2008), while constraint variables from Crawford and Godbey's work were used (1987).

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis and Structural Equation Modeling were employed to test the hypotheses. The proposed model suggests that motivations and constraints have a direct effect on Twitter consumption for sport purposes. Specific subscales of motivation and constraints provided a better picture of which variables were actually influencing the relationship with Twitter. The measurement model attained an acceptable level of S-B χ^2/df ratio (i.e., $1552.7/224 = 6.04$, $p < .05$) and fit indices suggested satisfactory fit for the data (CFI = .93; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .05).

The structural model achieved acceptable fit for the data (CFI = .94; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .06; S-B χ^2/df ratio; i.e., $1590.1/265 = 6.00$, $p < .05$). In the proposed model all paths were significant ($p < .05$). The final model indicated that there are four primary motivations that effect Twitter as a means to connect with sport (Information, Entertainment, Pass Time, Fanship). Additionally, there were four primary constraint factors that influence Twitter consumption (Skills, Social, Accessibility, Economic).

Conclusion

There has been a growing trend for sport organizations to use social media. Often you hear of breaking news based off an athlete tweet. The model proposed by this study shows that there is a relationship between Twitter use for sport and specific constraints and motivations. If sport organizations want to capture this growing medium and bring it to their organization, than this model will be a valuable asset. It shows that those who manage sport organizations will need to discover ways to make their athletes more easily accessible to their fans through Twitter and identify ways to promote a healthy social environment for their fans to get involved. Further implications show that Twitter is a medium in which sport organizations can further build on their relationships with their fans as they look to Twitter, for entertainment and information, as a medium to interact with their favorite player/team.

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