
'FANDOM & FOLLOWERS': AN ENQUIRY INTO SOCIAL MEDIA TRIBES AND THEIR FAN ENGAGEMENTS WITH SPORTS PROPERTIES'

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Abstract

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Overview

Following research of fan involvement conducted for Northampton Saints Rugby Club by Seymour & Thompson (2011), this paper builds on that study. This study 'Fandom & Followers' investigates the social media and tribal affiliations with sports properties & fans via social media and in particular Twitter. The study will focus on two key constructs namely a) Fan behaviours and associations with new media and technologies that support sports club marketing and b) The involvement of research processes for sports clubs, as well as some interesting observations and techniques for future researchers in sports studies. The changing Sporting Landscape and Culture will be investigated within the above contexts and environs of sports brand association, loyalty and patronage. The purpose of the paper is to enlighten both practitioners & academics of the power of social media in enabling the fan experience to enhance the future prosperity of sports brands and properties against competing pursuits in the very competitive sports business markets. Further, the growing importance of fan inputs on sports properties and their dialogue with fans, is essential for sports events and leisure pursuits to continue to increase their identities and engagements with all fan tribes & participants.

Review of the Literature

The literature review will reflect some emerging issues in, albeit as yet a limited academic landscape, this discipline. Social-media technologies are clearly important players in sport communication (Sanderson, 2011), but more significantly the prevalence of much online and micro blogging

evidence presents a rich arena for this study. This will be reflected in the contexts and conceptual frameworks of this paper. Twitter is exploding in use and in February 2012 exceeded 500 million users (Dugan2012). A more telling statistic also is that while Facebook currently boast 900 million users, “if Twitter keeps growing at this rate, it will reach 1 billion users in about a year and a half—but it might even be sooner than that, as its growth continues to accelerate”(Dugan, 2012). Twitter’s emergence corresponds to increased attention from Scholars, Sport Communication and Sport Media researchers. (Browning & Sanderson, 2012, Sanderson & Kassing, 2011).

Methodology

The paper and study will be conducted using a mixed methods triangulated approach featuring a series of online studies of fans behaviours against targeted sports properties and their fans. It will also be supplemented with structured interviews & focus groups with sports owners, executives, key stakeholders and fan bases. Timeframes and sampling points will also be set against this study to include opportunity for revisiting the research results with all participants, within an agreed future development timescale to add to the research amplification to all vested interest groups.

Summary and Objectives

In summary, as Paul Booth illuminates in his seminal work on Digital fandom (2010), this paper aims to add to the debate on describing fan culture in in a new digital environment as well as explaining and adding to the academic landscape with new explanations for media conceptions, as demonstrated by the fans on Twitter and similar micro blogging platforms.

References

References

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