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HASHTAG MARKETING: EXAMINING CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SPORT MEGA-EVENTS

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Synopsis:
Examined consumer engagement through hashtag usage by organizations that advertise during a mega-sport event, specifically the Super Bowl

Abstract:
BACKGROUND
The internet and social media radically changed the way brands and consumers communicate (Spotts, Purvis, & Patniak, 2007). Hashtags have become somewhat of a phenomenon in the sport industry over the last few years as various fans, teams, and leagues have incorporated these tools to engage consumers regarding games, races, and hallmark events (Favorito, 2011). Hashtags mainly apply to twitter, however are used over other social media sites, including Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Facebook. Previous research has examined hashtag effects on fans for mega sporting events (Blaszka, Burch, Frederick, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012); and this study extends this line of research to discover the effects of advertisements inclusion of hashtags during a mega sporting event.
OBJECTIVE
The primary purpose of this study examined hashtags from the most recent National Football League Super Bowl. Individuals from 228 countries combined for almost 14 million tweets during the 2015 Super Bowl. The popularity of utilizing hashtags has continually increased over the past several years during Super Bowl commercials which are some of the most watched advertisements during sporting events. This study examined what the primary purpose of the hashtag was and how consumers interacted with it. Of particular interest to this study was how consumer engaged with the hashtag. In total, there were 28 hashtags promoted during commercials with usage numbers climbing towards 1 million mentions, which occurs when an individual uses the hashtag in their personal tweet.
METHOD

A content analysis was employed to discover how hashtags were being utilized by consumers during the Super Bowl. Considering this study was primarily interested in understanding how consumers used the promoted hashtags, researchers eliminated hashtags that promoted television shows and public service announcements. It was beyond the scope of this study to examine every tweet that utilized a promoted hashtag. Therefore, random sampling of each hashtag will occur until theoretical saturation has been reached. Gender and user data will be analyzed to investigate trends which could be valuable to promoting organizations. Data was collected with NVivo10 software. Intercoder reliability was achieved by first analyzing a single hashtag mentions n=100 not used in this study. Coders analyzed each tweet to determine the uniqueness of each hashtag, the nature of the mention, gender, and who was engaging with the hashtag. Further data collection included time the advertisement aired and industry the company operated within. The following research questions were considered:

RQ1: What was the nature of the consumers' responses utilizing a promoted hashtag during this mega-sporting event?

RQ2: How was the hashtag received by those utilizing it?

RQ3: Who was using the hashtags promoted?

RESULTS

Throughout the game hashtags were continually being engaged with by consumers involving the brands slogan or purpose. Always (#LikeAGirl) received the most mentions during the Super Bowl at 428,585. Coca-Cola followed with 172,946 mentions of their hashtag #MakeItHappy and Budweiser had 84,976 to round out the top three hashtags mentioned during the Super Bowl. Final analysis will examine all 28 hashtags and engagement will be measured by examining number of mentions and company replies and retweets of consumer mentions. For example, #eataSNICKERS received 2112 mentions and early analysis indicates Snickers equates to roughly 60% of mentions retweeting and replying to consumers using their hashtag. Further statistical analysis will compare timing of commercial, hashtag response comparisons, and uniqueness (e.g. #MakeItHappy or #GoDaddy) to determine implications this data presents upon complete analysis.

CONCLUSION

While this study examined commercials aired during the mega-sporting event of the Super Bowl, the findings have potential to impact other sporting events. Preliminary findings suggest the commercial can have a major impact on a consumer's choice to engage with a brand. Of all the hashtags promoted during the Super Bowl, the two receiving the most attention from consumers both involved a message for society. Additional early findings suggest a layperson and the originating company of the hashtag were most likely to get engaged. Companies could learn from the two most popular hashtags if the primary goal of the advertisement is to engage with consumers. The hashtag creates an opportunity for a company to extend to millions over an extended period of time rather than a 30 second investment once a year. Upon complete analysis additional findings could lead to more implications for organizations that choose to advertise during mege-sport events.

Further conclusion and findings will be discussed in more detail after the full analysis of the data which are guaranteed to be completed prior to the conference.

References:
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