

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING FAN ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

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Synopsis:

This study proposes a conceptual framework for understanding the components of fan engagement through social network sites and its role on fan loyalty towards the teams.

Abstract:

AIM OF THE STUDY

There is a growing interest in the concept of engagement, and social network sites (SNS; e.g., Facebook, Twitter and Websites) have been suggested as a vital aspect for understanding consumer engagement due its role in establishing valuable interactions between organizations and target costumers (van Doorn et al., 2010). Previous studies suggested that sport organizations that interact with their fans through SNS often increase engagement levels (Carlson & O´Cass, 2012). Despite the concept of engagement through SNS is well rooted in the literature, little has been studied about this concept in the sport scenario and its predictive role on fans’ loyalty towards the team. Based on interdisciplinary literature the purpose of this study is to propose a conceptual framework for understanding fan engagement through SNS and its predictive role on fans’ loyalty.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The content shared by consumers in SNS aids to understand how engaged they are with an organization, and how significant their interactions with that organization are (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). These interactions can supply information about consumers’ expectations and needs and help the organization to develop and advertise new products or services. In the sport context, SNS allows fans to obtain information about the team, and to participate in interactive processes that generate value for them. Also, the features of SNS provide several incentives for engaging fans with their favorite teams. Fan engagement can be described as a consumer’s spontaneous, interactive, and co-creative behaviors with the sport organization and/or other

consumers to achieve individual or social purposes (Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, & Biscaia 2014). From the sport organizations' perspective, SNS allows to better communicate with fans and to identify their needs (Carlson & O'Cass, 2012). Ioakimidis (2010) refers that the increased sophistication of SNS could favor fans' engagement with the clubs, and it could lead to advantages such as enhanced levels of loyalty towards the team. Consistently, SNS are increasingly becoming an important investment allowing teams to share information with fans about events, products, services and promotions. Thus, understanding how to conceptualize fan engagement through SNS may represent a way to strengthen the interactions among fans and to contribute to a better team-related experience.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed framework is focused on the the components of fan engagement through SNS and its subsequent role on fans' loyalty. Based on interdisciplinary literature (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014; Yoshida et al., 2014), we propose the following components of fan engagement: team-to-fan (i.e., fans' behaviors arising from the actions of the sport organization), fan-to-fan (i.e., interactions among fans who share a common interest in the team), fan co-creation (i.e., interactions among fans aimed at increasing the value of the sport organization for them), and team community (i.e., sense of belonging and identification with a group of fans who share the connection with the team). These components can lead to a deeper understanding of fan engagement through SNS and its impact on team loyalty. It is expected that a positive evaluation of the interactions with the sport organization and/or other fans via SNS will contribute to strengthen a fan's link with the team (Ioakimidis, 2010). This will be expressed in positive actions such as repeated attendance to live games, referrals and increased purchase of merchandise (Yoshida et al., 2014). On the other hand, it seems reasonable to expect that negative evaluations of these interactions via SNS will likely have the opposite effect leading fans to decrease their intentions to attend future games and to recommend them others, as well as to reduce the intentions to purchase team merchandise.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE REVIEW

Limited attention has been devoted to the conceptualization of fan engagement (Yoshida et al., 2014), and this gap is particularly evident in the context of SNS. Despite the fact that several studies encourage organizations to prioritize engagement via SNS, there is still a lack of theory applied to sports organizations. Thus, the development of a conceptual framework including the components of fan engagement through SNS and its role on fans' loyalty represents an important asset to aid sports managers understanding the importance of SNS and planning their e-marketing strategies. It will also aid at reinforcing the fan-fan and fan-team relationships. This conceptual framework represents an initial step for understanding how to measure fan engagement via SNS, and provides important clues for future empirical research.

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