

Double Jeopardy Debunked? Athlete Fan Engagement Via Social Media

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One way marketers are able to develop strategies for brand development is by understanding generalized patterns of consumer behavior. Double Jeopardy theory proposes that small market share brands (SMSB) suffer in two ways when compared to high market share brands (HMSB). Double Jeopardy explains that SMSBs have fewer consumers than HMSBs, and also that these consumers also are less loyal than individuals who purchase HMSBs (Ehrenberg, Goodhardt, & Barwise, 1990). Although researchers have hypothesized sport as an area where these laws may not hold true (Gladden & Funk, 2001), Double Jeopardy research in the sport context also demonstrates that attitudinal loyalty (Doyle, Filo, McDonald, & Funk, 2013) and game attendance patterns (Baker, McDonald, & Funk, 2016) largely favor high market share teams.

Addressing a call to test Double Jeopardy in more sport settings (Baker et al., 2016; Doyle et al., 2013), the current research builds on existing literature by examining the effects of Double Jeopardy at the individual athlete level, and also explores if and how such effects influence online fan engagement via social media. At the individual athlete level in the online space, Double Jeopardy would suggest that the athletes with the most amount of followers (HMSB) would also elicit higher engagement rates (i.e., likes and comments per follower), representing behavioral loyalty, from their followers than SMSB athletes. Thus the following two hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1: Athletes with larger market share have higher online fan engagement rates than athletes with smaller market share.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive correlation between an athlete's number of followers on social media and their engagement rate on social media.

This study focused on athletes from Major League Soccer (MLS) who are on the social platform Instagram. MLS athletes differ greatly in their social media following, and thus provide a range of SMSBs and HMSBs to examine. We analyzed 2062 photos from 289 different MLS players over the course of four weeks during October 2015. We noted the athlete's number of followers and the engagement (i.e., the number of likes and comments) they received for each picture. For each post, we divided the engagement (i.e., number of likes and comments) by the number of followers.

We created six groups of athletes, based on their number of followers. Group one consists of 128 athletes with less than 2,500 followers ($M = 1,337$; $SD = 606$), group two consists of 59 athletes with 2,501–5,000 followers ($M = 3,553$; $SD = 632$), group three consists of 38 athletes with 5,001–10,000 followers ($M = 6,727$; $SD = 1,517$), group four consists of 30 athletes with 10,001–25,000 followers ($M = 17,027$; $SD = 4,683$), group five consists of 20 athletes with 25,001–100,000 followers ($M = 48,125$; $SD = 17,154$) and group six consists of 14 athletes with over 100,000 followers ($M = 1,374,071$; $SD = 1,818,830$).

Results show that as the group size increases, the engagement per follower decreases. Group one received 11.532% likes and 0.038% comments per follower; group two received 8.091% likes and 0.021% comments per follower; group three received 6.159% likes and 0.014% comments per follower; group four received 4.021% likes and 0.011% comments per follower; group five received 3.623% likes and 0.009% comments per follower; group six received 3.601% likes and 0.005% comments per follower. Pearson correlations showed a negative relationship between the athlete's number of followers and their likes per follower ($r = -.166$, $p < .001$), as well as between their number of followers and their comments per follower ($r = -.105$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were not supported.

These findings do not support the notion that Double Jeopardy effects influence the behavior of sport consumers on social media. The findings indicate that athletes who possess HMSBs experience less engagement than athletes with SMSBs. These results contrast with existing sport research which has evidenced Double Jeopardy effects at the team level (Baker et al., 2016; Doyle et al., 2013) and posit one area of sport consumption that resists such effects (Gladden & Funk, 2001). Relationship marketing literature offers possible explanations.

SMSB athletes should capitalize on the higher engagement rates they get to attract sponsors interested in consumer engagement rather than brand awareness; and sponsors can gain more return on their investment by partnering with SMSB athletes, as their followers are more likely to engage with the athlete's content than followers of a HMSB athlete.

References

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