

# **A Social Media-based Methodology for Recruiting Non-Fans of Rugby**

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## **Aim**

This research aims to test whether Facebook could be used as a sampling frame for studying non-fans of sports teams. The research question we seek to find an answer for is, “Can Facebook be used to recruit non-fans of a sporting team to participate in a research project?”

## **Literature Review**

The high profile of sporting teams warrants sports marketers to go beyond promoting the games, merchandise and securing sponsorship to brand the team favourable in the minds of the public (Richelieu & Pons 2008). To this effect, sporting teams participate in cause-related marketing within the community. The focus so far has been on fans, however, including non-fans in branding offer the opportunity to broaden the scope of sports teams. Non-fans, have high expectations (Roy & Graeff 2003) that must be matched to secure their support and are different to fans regarding behaviour, motivations, and preferences (Cooper & Tang 2012). Hence, there is a need to study non-fans to secure their contribution to the brand equity. However, as scholarly investigation requires full disclosure of the study before requesting participation, approaching individuals with a request to participate in a study on a sport that they are not interested could experience low response rate. There is, therefore, a need to develop a methodology for recruiting non-fans, which this study addressed.

## **Theoretical Background**

Facebook is gaining recognition as a research platform and due to its broad reach allows cost-effective sampling of human subjects compared to the traditional method (Chu & Snider 2013; Ramo & Prochaska 2012). Of interest is Facebook’s ability to sample subjects with specific characters. For example, one study successfully selected people belonging to the Catholic faith (Bhutta 2012). Sporting events and teams use Facebook to communicate their activities to fans. As such, Facebook can identify users based on the team they support. For example, there are 9,185,430 million people interested in Super Rugby on Facebook. Thus, Facebook could be used as a sampling frame for non-fans by excluding people who comment, like and follow Facebook pages relating to a sport or sporting team.

## **Methodology**

The study tested a method to use Facebook to recruit non-fan of the Highlanders, a rugby team of the Otago region in New Zealand to participate in qualitative research. The study used four "call for participation" (CfP) made as Facebook postings. The postings used themes that included 1) offering an incentive to participate 2) appealing to emotion 3) appealing to goodwill, and 4) emphasising value to the community. Using Facebook advertising, the study disseminated the CfPs as news feeds to non-fans. The CfPs were kept separate by targeting non-fans in separate areas demarcated by postal codes within Dunedin. Non-fans responded to the CfPs by clicking through to a short online survey. The survey first presented the information about the qualitative research planned for the Highlanders and a consent form that respondents had to sign. After signing the consent form, respondents provided their details to be contacted later.

## Results

The Highlanders' qualitative research required 21 willing participants for conducting three focus group interviews (7 participants x 3 focus group interviews). This study recruited 34 participants. In total, 210 individuals responded to the CfPs and clicked through to the survey. The response rate based on those who responded was 16%  $((34/210)*100)$ . The most effective CfP was the one with the 'value to the community' theme (Click through rate = 74; Reach = 3008; Impression = 11,451), followed by 'goodwill' (Click through rate = 51; Reach = 2600; Impression = 12,780), 'emotional appeal' (Click through rate = 46; Reach = 3736; Impression = 17,046) and 'incentive' (Click through rate = 39; Reach = 2123; Impressions 14,777).

## Discussion

As Facebook has access to the contents and engagement of users, it can segment users by specific keywords, in this case, 'rugby' and 'Highlanders'. This study showed Facebook could serve as a sampling frame for recruiting non-fans by eliminating individuals that had any association with the two keywords. The response rate of 16% produced in this study was higher than that reported by Ramo and Prochaska (2012) for a smoking study (11%). The results showed that Facebook is a suitable sampling frame for studying non-fans of rugby teams, in this case, of the Highlanders.

The study also tested which appeal was most useful to attract participants. The metadata from the four Facebook postings for the CfPs revealed that the value to the community approach theme was the most effective. This finding is worth noting, as non-fans could be encouraged to engage with a sporting team when they are promoted as offering value to the community.

## Conclusion

The study showed Facebook could serve as a sampling frame for recruiting non-fans for sports research. The most effective CfP was the one with the value to the community theme.

## References

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