

Media consumption of ticket holders in a Quebec major junior hockey organization

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Abstract 433**

Increased technology and innovation has led to the growth of non-traditional mediums for marketing communication. At the same time, traditional media sources, such as radio, television, and print have become more fragmented (Keller, 2001). This trend has made it difficult for companies to cost-effectively inform audiences about their products (Soberman, 2005). At the same time, consumers have started to develop diverse media habits and preferred communication mediums. By identifying the preferred communication mediums of specific market segments, advertisers become more successful in their advertising pursuits (Soberman), and firms can capitalize on their marketing dollars (Lindsay, 2006). However, media consumption and media preference data are limited, and specific references to the media consumption patterns of sports fans are even more so. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the awareness, consumption, and preferences for promotion and distribution channels among ticket holders of a Major Junior Hockey team. The Halifax Mooseheads Hockey Club in Nova Scotia, Canada, was taken as a case. Preferred media communication channels are investigated for two market segments, i.e. season and non-season ticket holders.

A total of 842 surveys were distributed on four game days, as well as during a two week period at the season ticket holder's office and the merchandise store. 372 Surveys were returned for an overall response rate of 44.2%; of which 224 (or 60.2%) were season ticket holders and 148 (or 39.8%) non-season ticket holders. A 'Fan Information Survey' was developed by the researcher in collaboration with the Chief Operating Officer of the Halifax Mooseheads Hockey Club. A pilot study was executed to fine tune the instrument. The final version of the instrument consisted of five sections: (a) demographics; (b) radio and web-based broad cast; (c) television; (d) website/e-mail; and, (e) sponsorship awareness. It took about five to eight minutes to complete the survey. Data was coded and entered into a Microsoft Excel spread sheet. Data was entered twice independently to correct for input errors and/or inconsistencies. Statistical analysis was performed with SAS. Frequency and chi-square analysis are used to compare and contrast media consumption of season- and non-season ticket holders (labelled STH's and NSTH's hereafter).

Male season ticket holders comprise 47% of the season ticket holders, and 57.9 % of the non-season ticket holders, indicating that the female segment was well represented in the sample. The majority of the respondents are between the ages of 30-39 and 40-49. On average, season-ticket holders are older than non-season ticket holders ($p < .001$). There is no significant difference in annual household income between STH's and NSTH's.

In all areas of media, i.e. radio, television, web cast, internet/e-mail STH's showed higher level of awareness of promotional activities and media channels employed by the Halifax Mooseheads ($p < .001$). However, awareness is generally high among both groups. It seems that strategies currently employed for promotion are relatively successful. Radio broadcasting away games is a valuable tool to connect with STH's. In contrast NSTH do not frequently use the radio as a source of information. Therefore, other promotional strategies and media channels need to be selected to reaching out to the NSTH's. The 'Post Game Show' has the greatest potential of all broad cast components to reach both the frequently tuned in STH's and the not so frequently tuned in NSTH's.

NSTH'S watch televised home games more frequently than STH's. NSTH's also indicate a greater preference for television advertisements. Capitalizing on the NSTH's market through the use of television is therefore suggested as a valid undertaking. It should be noted that the ability of the televised away games to reach STH's should not be ignored. Of the media channels employed by the Halifax Mooseheads, consumption of the internet web cast was the least. Promoting the benefits and value of the web cast to both STH's and NSTH's is highly recommended.

Both market segments are highly aware of the website, are highly engaged in the use of the website, and are satisfied with their ability to locate the information they are looking for. The website is the second most frequent choice for an information source to locate entertainment information after the newspaper. NSTH's indicated a greater desire to receive e-mail from the Halifax Mooseheads regarding game day reminders, special promotions, play-off information, player information and merchandise in comparison to the STH's. Engaging in activities that allow for the development of a NSTH's e-mail data base is therefore highly recommended. It was clear from the findings that print media still predominates when it comes to locating information about upcoming Halifax Moosehead games. The Halifax Mooseheads Game Schedule fridge magnet proved also to be a very popular tool in providing information regarding the game schedule. Strategies to distribute the magnet should be further developed.

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In each of the three trials where sponsorship awareness was evaluated, the major sponsor was overwhelmingly recognized. The presence of other major sponsors in the top 10 rankings indicates that the strategies employed in promoting the sponsors are working.

This study attempted to explore media awareness, consumption and preferences of hockey fans for promotion and distribution strategies within a Major Junior Hockey organization. In short, it is recommended that reaching out to STH's be employed through both radio broadcasts and website. NSTH's should be targeted through televised games and more specifically through e-mail messages. The internet broadcast of home games could potentially become a successful distribution tool. However, this channel needs to be heavily promoted through other currently more highly consumed channels. This study presents some preliminary findings with regard to media consumption of STH's and NSTH's. It clearly illustrates that different communication and promotional strategies need to be employed to target different market segments. In this case, segments were based on 'product usage'. The results confirm that each user group on the escalator (Mullin et al., 2007, p. 269) needs a different marketing communication strategy. Further research that examines the sport market and their media consumption may prove valuable to sport organizations in becoming more cost-effective, and meeting their objectives in reaching the targeted consumer.