Sporting Facebook: The NCAA & Big 12 Experience

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Many NCAA teams have encountered issues with student-athletes and teams using Facebook (Butts, 2008). Student-athletes have been instructed to ‘shut-down’ personal sites during the season (Giglio, 2010) or have resulted in disciplinary actions from content uploaded to social media sites (Butts, 2008). Team administrators have been penalized for violating the NCAA recruiting policies by illegally contacting potential recruits using Facebook (der Horst, 2009; NCAA, 2010). The prevalence of athletes and teams utilizing Facebook is growing with strength in the market. On Facebook alone, the NCAA manages fan pages with the titles such as NCAA Women’s College World Series, Lacrosse, Volleyball, Men’s Basketball and many more sport specific accounts. In addition, NCAA President Mark Emmert opened up his professional Facebook page to communicate the issues related to the NCAA organization. It is clear that the Facebook is being utilized at the student-athlete, team and NCAA organizational level.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the uses of Facebook in the NCAA organization. A content analysis will determine how the NCAA Organization and athletic departments are utilizing Facebook, and the implications surrounding their usage and online behavior. A review of literature and policies currently in place by the NCAA will be included and analyzed in conjunction with the analysis of content.

The analysis of content will involve 10 Official NCAA Facebook pages (i.e. Women’s Softball World Series, Women’s Volleyball, Men’s Basketball), and the Big 12 Conference Athletic departments Facebook pages (i.e. Oklahoma State University, Baylor University, Texas Longhorns) during a 30 day period. The content was then examined relative to the brand association factors identified in the sport brand management literature (Funk & James, 2006; Lee, 2010; Miloch, 2010; Richelieu & Pons, 2006; Ross, 2006; Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006, Ross, Russsell, & Bang, 2008). The 11 dimensions of brand association are broadly labeled as keywords such as; brand mark, rivalry, concessions, social interaction, team history, commitment, organizational attributes, non-player personnel, stadium community, team success, and team play (Ross, 2006; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008). The brand association factors outline specific topics sport companies can leverage to increase brand equity.

Based on the examination of content, the following forms of brand communication were identified: video, status updates, notes, and images/pictures. Types of consumer involvement were identified as fan interaction via comments and clicking “like” in response to team status updates or news feeds. The brand image may affect the spectators’ beliefs and attitudes toward a sport team (Funk, Haugtvedt, & Howard, 2000) thus, a determining factor in a fan’s response.

From the content examined in the designated time period, it appears these teams primarily used their respective pages to drive traffic to their official websites and affiliated web links. This allows sport organizations to directly communicate a specific brand image by an interactive and unfiltered mode of communication (Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). The teams in this case study utilized Facebook in a variety of ways, but each appeared to use the social medium to further their brand and directly communicate with consumers. Based on the examination, it is recommended that sport franchises increase the use this social medium to communicate special events, promotions, and appropriate information to fans. Research has suggested that this social medium should be integrated into marketing and brand management strategies (Coyle, 2010; Mickle, 2009).