New Media Management: Supervised Social Media Versus Unsupervised Social Media

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Social networks, a dynamic and pervasive mechanism for mediating distal interactions among people, have become prevalent in the age of the Web (Huberman, Romero, & Wu, 2009). A myriad of corporations and advertising companies are beginning to realize the benefits of social media usage (Tuten, 2008). In particular, social media is emerging in sport and those athletes and sport organizations utilizing these platforms are finding various ways in which social media can enhance their marketability and brand awareness (Pegoraro, 2010). It is important to realize that primarily social media’s function in sport has been fan engagement, however; there are numerous usages for these platforms.

Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook in 2004 at Harvard University. In a little over a year, Facebook had grown to support over 800 college networks (Facebook, 2010). In September 2005, Facebook added a High School network and exactly one year later in September 2006, the network was extended beyond educational institutions to anyone with a registered email address. Today it is the most popular social network site with over 700 million users that spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook (Facebook, 2010). Facebook provides page creators with data that record how many people each day "like" the page, the number of daily postings on the page, and the number of daily and monthly active users (Sanderson, 2008). Facebook began as an outlet strictly for university students, but has expanded to allow people to stay connected with not only friends and family but also sport teams and athletes. Facebook allows athletes and sport teams to post products they endorse to gain more exposure and promote the products to their fans. Staying relevant in the sport industry is a key aspect that Facebook provides. It allows athletes and sport teams to reach millions of people at once by one simple post.

According to Clavio & Kian (2010), Twitter is one of the fastest growing Web 2.0 applications in the new media marketplace. Specifically, Twitter is an online microblogging tool that has seen a lot of growth since it launched in October, 2006 (Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007). According to "tweet-house", as of April 2010 twitter has over 100 million registered users, with 300,000 users being added daily (http://tweet-house.com). Recent research has found that the main types of user intentions are daily chatter, conversations, sharing information, and reporting news. By encouraging smaller posts, it lowers users’ requirement of time and thought investment for content generation (Java et al., 2007). The interface allows users to post messages up to 140 characters that can be read by any other Twitter user, unless the user posting a message has locked his profile from users who do not “follow” him or her. As Twitter continues to grow in popularity, athletes and their representation are beginning to take advantage of the social benefits that the platform offers in terms of engaging with fans, as well as its unique and fun promotional traits.

This case study examines social media and how these outlets are being used by one particular athlete who competes in a niche sport (e.g., skateboarding). Niche sports can be classified as sports that are not mainstream and do not appeal to mass audience (Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006). Because of their popularity and influence, two types of social media are examined in this case study: Facebook and Twitter. These new media outlets are tools that amateur and professional athletes, sport marketing practitioners, and sport organizations have increasingly used to reach their external publics. In particular, social media is allowing athletes and fans to interact in a more social rather than parasocial way. Athletes are allowed to communicate by interacting interpersonally through mediums that transmit information from one to many. This case study provides empirical data of how Tony Hawk utilizes the aforementioned types of social media. Hawk’s presence in social media cannot be understated. His Facebook page has 1.4 million likes while his Twitter page has 2.6 million followers. Preliminary findings suggest that his Facebook page is managed by a representative, while his Twitter page appears to be self-managed. The ways in which these
new trends are emerging will be addressed along with the advantages and disadvantages of supervised versus unsupervised social media.

This survey will utilize a mixed methodology. First, a content analysis will be conducted to examine Tony Hawk's Twitter feed and Facebook page. 200 of his tweets and 200 of his Facebook messages will be collected using the program, DiscoverText. A codebook was created to categorize each tweet and Facebook message using previous communication literature (Clavio, 2008; Funk, Mahoney, & Ridinger, 2002; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Seo & Green, 2008). The coding categories for each tweet and Facebook message are interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, fanship, and promotional. Following data coding and cleaning, descriptive statistics, chi square, and T-tests will be utilized to examine the utilization of the differing feeds, ascertain whether the feeds are indeed being used for different purposes, and quantitatively analyze the types of messages involved. Additionally, a qualitative approach will be utilized to examine whether consistent themes emerge from the messages within each medium. Open, axial coding will be utilized to evaluate the messages present and highlight any emergent themes.

Social media sites have allowed athletes to create a two-way avenue for communication and interactivity among fans. Users of social media sites are able to join fan pages and 'follow' or "like" their favorite athlete's media page to enhance their infinity of the athlete. The way in which an athlete is portrayed on social media sites can have a significant impact on his or her brand equity. Therefore, it is important to understand the use of Facebook and Twitter activity better. Giving the fans what they are looking for on social media pages will increase fan following, brand recognition, and overall loyalty. Social media outlets have become the new way for athletes to relate to fans.

Examining Tony Hawk's social media pages will help encourage sport industry practitioners and athletes to use the tips provided in this case study. The investigation outlines guidelines to manage social media sites more effectively and efficiently when reaching out to intended fans and followers. The differences between Tony Hawk's use of Facebook and Twitter could help better the understanding of social media sites that are supervised and unsupervised by athletes. These findings hold important implications for sport social media and marketing researchers, as well as social media practitioners.