Theory Into Practice: Social Media’s New “Communication Relationship Marketing” (CoRM) Model - Applications in the Sport Business Industry

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Introduction: Social media has created a revolution in traditional marketing communication and is now a game changer for some companies (Ang, 2011; Belch & Belch, 2011; Weber, 2007). It provides an evolutionary concept for people to communicate with friends and customers in cyber space. In merely 6 years, Facebook has grown to over 500 million users: if Facebook were a country, it would be the 3rd largest (Ang, 2011; Blaszka, 2011). The rapid advancement of computer technology has offered various communication platforms to enhance the integration of the new communication process (Belch & Belch, 2011; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Schultz, Caskey, & Esherick, 2010). The platform for social media is with the internet connection Web 2.0 through which people can engage with others who have similar interests, background, and experiences (Fullerton, 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Therefore, by logging into a social media account on a computer, smartphone, or other electronic device (such as the iPad), people can link with their friends, family, groups, business clients, favorite teams, favorite athletes, or favorite stores. Included in this evolving communication is consumer-generated media (Petersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). This type of communication method complements traditional internet information sources.

Because social media offers an inexpensive way to disseminate information to target market and potential customers, sport entities have adopted social media outlets (or social network) such as Facebook and Twitter as additional promotional mix elements and message distribution channels. Even though marketers have been adding social media outlets, they are still not really sure how to formulate effective tactics (Ang, 2011). Although there is much discussion, practical research that examines specific ideas and models has been limited. Such research or the development of conceptual frameworks or models could be beneficial to marketers in developing effective tactics using social media. Therefore, we sought to examine one particular model put forth in marketing, the Communication Relationship Marketing Model (CoRM), and explore its application possibilities for the sport business industry. Toward this, our work involved the following: (a) examine the new Communication Relationship Marketing Model (CoRM), (b) explore its potential applications in the sport business industry, and (c) explore the development of a communication relationship marketing conceptual framework or model (CoRMS) for sport management.

The CoRM Model proposed by Ang (2011) stipulates that there are differences between managing customers and managing a community of online users. Ang argues ‘if an organization wants to manage the connected community, it first needs to understand how SM (social media) facilitates the formation of relationships among users’ (p. 34). As a framework for the CoRM Model to facilitate its application, Ang developed a 4Cs of CoRM – connectivity, conversations, content creation, and collaboration. The company must provide the platform for connecting, create forms of conversations, encourage users to create content, and provide for collaboration among users.

Based on Ang’s model and its 4Cs, we present the CoRMS Model – Communication Relationship Marketing in Sport Model – and provide examples of its application in the sport business industry. The framework of the 4Cs, with application examples, are as follows:

1. Connectivity: As Ang stated, a large community of users need to be created to strengthen social networking. Various sport entities and athletes have created Facebook fan pages to encourage the fan community online. Fans connect with other fans who share similar interests. Furthermore, Facebook will suggest current users invite individuals who have similar interests but are not in their friend’s network. Thus the user’s social network will be expanding.

2. Conversations: The news feed offers the latest information about an individual or a sport organization. The users can easily click “Like”, “Share”, or “Comment” to offer feedback. Through this type of “viral marketing"
on social network, information is spread out very quickly. For example, the US Olympic Team updated the current competitions of Team USA at the regional and national level. Fans who “Like” US Olympic Team will receive news updates and are able to create conservations that follow the team.

3. Content Creation: Successful media offers “user-generated content (Ang, 2011; Pedersen, Miloch & Laucella, 2007). The sport organizations offer the news or conversation topics, users are invited to share their feedback, pictures, or other visual materials. For example, the Mammoth Mountain Ski Resort in California releases their news all year around on social media. Followers are informed of the snow conditions and activities. Also, fans can share their pictures, videos, or comments which can create news buzz. For instance, the University of Southern California Ski/Snowboard Team posts their ski/snowboard Youtube footage on Mammoth Mountain Fan Page which generates more news buzz for the ski resort and the team.

4. Collaboration: One of the most well-known Web 2.0 methods, Wiki, offers a platform for people to contribute on certain topics or projects. For example, the Taiwan Baseball Wikipedia has contributors to edit cooperatively on Taiwan’s baseball history and update the current news.

As Clavio (2010) stated, the evolution of sport media over the past 15 years has been growing rapidly and it has been unpredictable. Many tactics are discussed in the marketplace, but few models or frameworks offer a practical way for sport marketers to conceptualize and organize their social networking marketing efforts. We believe Ang’s CoRM and its 4Cs framework offer a practical beginning for formulating these efforts. Thus, developing the CoRMS Model and providing examples of its application in the sport business industry through the 4Cs framework can be the new paradigm for sport marketers. We hope a new model such as the one presented can offer a roadmap for sport marketing professionals for developing more effective and successful communication strategies with social media.