

Using the Revised Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) to Examine the Role of Twitter in Allegiance to an NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Team

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The term "allegiance" refers to a commitment to a particular team that shapes sports fans' desires and cognitive thoughts through behavioral and attitudinal factors (Funk & James, 2006). Most research to date has focused on how sports teams can elevate fans' current allegiance (Backman & Crompton, 2001; Funk & James, 2006; Reichheld, 1993), yet very little research has been conducted to determine how team allegiance develops.

Funk, Haugtvedt, and Howard (2000) proposed that team allegiance be measured by one's personal commitments. As suggested by Haugtvedt and Petty (1992), personal commitments can be examined using three steps in the process of changing cognition and belief: (a) initial beliefs, (b) post initial persuasive messages, and (c) post second persuasive messages. Funk and colleagues reflected the three-step process in their research by focusing on individual factors instead of social situational factors such as parents, media, and peers (Funk & James, 2006). They also argued that allegiance is conceptualized by an individual's distinct attitudinal properties, such as intensity, personal relevance, and direct experience. In previous research, fan loyalty has been examined in terms of the perspectives of both attitudinal and behavioral components. Regarding team loyalty, James and Funk (2006) emphasized that team loyalty has utilized both factors based upon attributes and benefits, attachment properties, and loyalty.

Funk and James (2001) first conceptualized the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) as a platform for understanding an individual's hierarchy through four stages of psychological progression: (a) awareness, (b) attraction, (c) attachment, and (d) allegiance. The revised PCM, developed by Funk and James (2006), added specific inputs, processes, and outputs to the previous PCM framework. These provide understanding of the effects of individuals working on a vertical continuum in four stages and illustrate how each step helps the individual move to the next level (Funk & James, 2006). The revised PCM describes a sport consumer's psychological and behavioral perspective toward sports teams. Although the revised PCM focuses more on studying the psychology and behavior of sport fans when they choose and evaluate their favorite teams or brands, more research is needed to complement this model in order to better grasp sport-consumer behavior. Some studies have researched areas such as online activity, music, and consumer trends, starting with the sport fan's exposure (Lee, Park, Kim, Kim, & Moon, 2011).

Within the past decade, with the advent of Web 2.0, social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have revitalized the online marketplace. Such social networking sites (SNSs) are currently one of the most popular trends in the world, and Twitter is one of the more popular sites among both consumers and organizations (Clavio & Kian, 2010). Social media, especially Twitter, provide two-way communication tools to reach users in an innovative and unique way through images, videos, and followers (Zhang, Sung, & Lee, 2010). The usage of social media by adult Internet users in the United States increased from 5% in 2005 to 65% in 2011 (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011). In the context of sports today, such media are rapidly increasing in popularity as users share their interests and information about their favorite teams or brands (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). One recent focus of modern sport research is sport fan behavior related to satisfaction, commitment, and allegiance. Twitter offers a beneficial platform as a strategic marketing tool, enabling fans to elevate team allegiance within the sports context.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of Twitter on the formation of team allegiance toward a team through the revised PCM. The primary focus will be to analyze how individuals interact with a sports team via Twitter and how those interactions form allegiance. This research will be conducted using the following research questions:

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RQ1. How is the use of Twitter related to fan allegiance? Fans who highly identify with their favorite team are likely to use Twitter more.

RQ2. Who do they communicate with, how often, and how do they use Twitter?

RQ3. If there is a moderating effect from Twitter that positively correlates with the attachment and allegiance stage of the revised PCM?

RQ4. What relationships exist between team allegiance and Twitter usage?

The data will be collected at nine home basketball games at Clemson University, using a random sampling method design during the spring 2013 season. The researchers are college students who are enrolled in parks, recreation, and tourism management classes. Researchers will request participation from fans attending the home games, and participants will be randomly selected using a guide developed by the researchers. After agreeing to participate in the study, participants will be handed a self-administered questionnaire by a researcher. They will be asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the researcher after the first half of the game. The survey instrument will be derived from existing literature (Blaszka, & Matthew, 2011, Gladden & Funk, 2002, Davis-Sramek, Droge, Mentzer, & Myers, 2009). The questions will focus on attributes and benefits, attachment properties, and loyalty. Each of the items will ask the respondent how often he or she engages in each activity based on a scale ranging from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree).

The data will be analyzed using SPSS 19.0. A reliability analysis will be conducted using Cronbach's alpha. To answer RQ1 and RQ4, a correlation analysis will investigate the relationship among the independent (attraction and attachment) and dependent variables (attachment and allegiance) in the formation of PCM and examine which variable(s) influence Twitter usage. For RQ2, the analysis will examine descriptive statistics to identify the frequency table by means and standard deviations for the seven motives and actual usage. Finally, for RQ3, the researchers will utilize multiple regression analyses to examine the effect of the applications used by the respondents.

The results of this study remain to be seen, as we have not yet collected any survey data; however, results will be included in the conference presentation. This study will contribute to the literature by establishing the relationship between the spectator's team allegiance and Twitter usage. The rapid popularity of Twitter usage could be improved by identifying the motives shown to be important in this study. This study will also specifically determine whether observing people's interactions on Twitter is an effective way to study the developing relationship between individuals' awareness and emotions related to watching sports games and their allegiance toward specific sports team. This research will also help sports marketers learn about sports consumers' behaviors, needs, and motivations online, which will help shape internet marketing communication.