Segmentation Of "Prosumers" Based on Social Media Usage in a Non-Profit Sports Organization: Algorithm Development and between-Group Differences

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Non-profit sports organizations (NPSOs) play an important role in providing opportunities for participation in sports and physical activity. To encourage and maintain membership, many organizations offer support services that increase the perceived value of the core product (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 1991). Grönroos (2000) suggests that the existence of a relationship between a service provider and a consumer creates value additional to that of the service itself. Thus, offering members a platform through which they can interact with the NPSO, and with one another, can encourage the development of value-creating relationships. Social media platforms offer a cost-effective and user-friendly means through which this can be achieved (e.g., NPSO Facebook page, Twitter feed, etc.).

The use of social media as a relationship marketing tool has received considerable scholarly attention (e.g., Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009), and its potential for mutual value creation between organizations and their members is particularly pertinent in the present context. To this end, Williams and Chinn (2010) introduce the concept of the prosumer – the proactive consumer. This is a development of Toffler's (1984) prediction that the increased influence of customers in the design and production of goods would lead to a blending of the roles of producer and consumer. Williams and Chinn state that the “new challenge” for the sport industry is to understand the value of prosumers; however, to date, no study in the field of Sport Management has attempted to segment and examine prosumers. If organizations are to better understand how to leverage prosumers, they must develop means by which they can be differentiated from other consumers (based on behaviors), and find out how they differ psychographically.

The following study used members’ use of NPSO social media platforms to segment prosumers (who posted user-generated content), consumers (who engaged in passive social media activities, such as reading others’ posts), and non-consumers (who did not use NPSO social media platforms). Three defining criteria were used to operationalize user-generated content: 1) be published on a public or social network platform; 2) demonstrate a degree of creative effort; and 3) be created outside of professional routines and practices (OECD, 2007).

Methods

Procedure: A survey research design was used to gather data from a sample of members of a NPSO, which operates over 70 running groups nationwide. Groups meet regularly, and participate in several national running events each year. An online survey instrument was distributed by the NPSO via email to a total of 63,013 members. A total of 19,574 members opened the email, and 741 valid responses were received. Although the response rate was low, this sample size ensures that the population mean is within ± 2% of the mean calculated from the research sample with 99% accuracy. Additional analysis revealed that the responses received were representative of the NPSO’s membership based on demographic variables. Measures: Usage of the NPSO’s social media platforms were measured by asking participants how often they performed specific actions on those platforms. First, participants were asked whether or not they used each of the available NPSO platforms. Those indicating that they did were asked how often they engaged in passive behaviors (e.g., reading others’ posts), and then in a separate set of questions, how often they create user-generated content (e.g., writing posts that can be seen by others). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, anchored from “almost never” (1) to “very often” (5). To assess psychographic differences between participants in each group, participants were also asked to report psychological involvement with the NPSO and with running (Psychological Continuum Model: Funk & James, 2001), and consumer-perceived value of membership to the NPSO (items adapted from Eggert & Ulaga, 2002). Staging Mechanism: Participants were assigned to one of four groups based on their use of the social media platforms provided by the NPSO. Those who reported that they did not use any of the NPSO social media platforms were assigned to the “Non-Consumer” (NC) group. Those who indicated that they created user-generated content on any
of the NPSO’s social media platforms either “often” or “very often” were assigned to the “Prosumer” (PS) group. The decision to count those who may create content often on a single platform was made based on the finding that many users who were highly active were not using all platforms. The unassigned participants were assigned to either the “Low Consumer” (LC) or “High Consumer” (HC) groups based on a composite mean score of their consumption behaviors on platforms they reported to use. Data Analysis: Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess whether significant differences existed between the four groups in terms of NPSO involvement, running involvement, or perceived value. Homogeneity of variance was not assumed, so Tamhane’s T2 post-hoc test was conducted to confirm between-group differences for each dependent variable.

Results
MANOVA revealed significant differences between groups in terms of NPSO involvement, running involvement, and perceived value of NPSO membership, with a medium effect size according to the guidelines of Cohen (1992) (Wilk’s Λ = .656; F (9, 1703.767.000) = 35.8, p < .001, η² = .27). Comparisons between PCM stages using Tamhane’s T2 post-hoc test revealed significant (p < .05) differences between groups for NPSO involvement (NC = LC < HC < PS), and perceived value of membership (NC < LC < HC < PS). Fewer between-group differences were observed for running involvement, although prosumers were significantly (p < .05) higher than other groups (NC = LC = HC < PS).

Discussion & Conclusion
The results indicate that segmentation of NPSO members according to their consumption (or prosumption) behaviors provides groups with distinct psychographic characteristics. Prosumers are found to display higher perceived value of membership than other members, as well as increased psychological involvement with the organization and with running. The level of (passive) consumption of NPSO social media also distinguished members in terms of NPSO involvement and perceived value of membership. These results do not infer causality; however, managers/directors of NPSO can track social media usage, and target members with different types of communication based on their psychographic characteristics. The segmentation algorithm offers a practical means by which this can be achieved. Understanding prosumers is important for these types of managerial actions, and future research should continue to investigate other important dependent variables.