Team Identification and Instagram

Nicole Furuiye, University of Northern Colorado
Kerry Fischer, University of Northern Colorado

Communication
Friday, June 3, 2016
20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)
Abstract 2016-202
2:05 PM
(Legacy South 2)

The sport world has embraced the popularity of social media. Teams from the big four professional leagues (National Basketball Association, National Football League, National Hockey League, and Major League Baseball) all have official accounts for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest. In fact, the NBA and NFL were among the 10 most popular brands on Instagram in 2014 (Costill, 2014). Therefore, research investigating just how close the relationship between sports and social media appears is necessary both from an academic and practical standpoint. The limited research into Instagram combined with the growing use of Instagram by sport organizations and fans warrants further study into its uses (Bowles, in press).

It is clear that sport management research on social media’s antecedents and effects is plentiful, but it is still an untapped area of inquiry. Therefore, continued research is necessary to fill in the gaps and to begin to validate the already existing introductory research. Continued research is also necessary when examining social media from the fans’ perspective. It is important for both researchers and sport communication professionals to understand why fans interact with their favorite teams and athletes on social media. This understanding can help sport organizations better tailor their communications and marketing to the fans. Consequently, these tailored plans may lead to a strengthening of the fan-athlete-organization bond.

Despite its popularity among fans and sport organizations, sport management research has been slow to examine this relatively new communication medium. The majority of the research has focused on how athletes use social media, particularly Twitter, (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010) and how social media can be utilized as a branding, marketing, and communication tool (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Wallace, Wilson, & Miloch, 2011; Waters, Burke, Jackson, & Buning, 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010; Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to examine how fans’ team identification with their favorite professional sport teams correlates with their desire to use Instagram to consume sport. In addition, this study is presumed to be the first of its kind to explore Instagram from the consumer perspective, which opens a new avenue for research among sport management and communication scholars. This study can aid teams in developing and posting content that not only builds their individual brand, but also creates deeper engagement with their fans by isolating what fans want from their favorite teams on Instagram.

Review of the sport communication and social media literature reveals that uses and gratifications theory is an acceptable theory in examining how sport fans use Instagram to consume sport. Moreover, this study answers the call from Clavio and Kian (2010) to further investigate what motivates fan interaction through online technology and social media.

The current study used survey methodology, and it contained four sections with a total of 38 items and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (version 21.0). Prior to analyzing the research questions, we first ran a series of Exploratory Factor Analyses using the Principle Components Analysis method with no rotation on the 10 items for current Instagram sport usage and level of interest in using Instagram for sport consumption, as well as the eight items measuring team identification. This initial exploration into the relationship between team identification and sport-related Instagram consumption among fans of professional sport revealed among other elements, that team identification is influential in Instagram consumption. The sample (N=99) was comprised of 49 females (49.5%) and 24 males (24.2%).

From a theoretical standpoint, this study opens the door to further exploration of Instagram and contributes another research channel to the existing sport management literature. Instagram has only been in existence for five years, and sport management scholars have a history of delaying research into new social mediums due to their rapidly changing
nature. However, Instagram has been steadily growing in popularity and more and more sport organizations are creating official accounts to interact with their fans. If sport management scholars can understand why fans gravitate toward this social medium, they can provide other scholars with future research directions as well as provide sport organizations with valuable information for how to interact and market the team to fans of all levels.