

Analysis of Sports Fan Economy Marketing Strategy in the Age of Social Media - Taking Chinese Rhythmic Gymnastics as an Example

Jiawen Wang

Department of Arts, Beijing Sport University, Beijing, 100101, China

*Corresponding author: 2019010967@bsu.edu.cn

Abstract. When mobile internet and social network become popular nowadays, social media marketing of the sports fan economy has started to rise as one of the hot topics nowadays. In the era of "Internet+", some researchers have found that social media provides a new way for marketing and development of sports fan economy. Rhythmic gymnastics also known as "ballet on the carpet" has high ornamental value and has a group of loyal fans. However, through searching information and references, we found that the commercialization of rhythmic gymnastics in China is not high, the amount of media coverage is small, not much attention, and the marketing model is a single problem at this stage. Taking the Chinese rhythmic gymnastics team as an example, this paper uses the literature method and comparative analysis method to analyse the relevant concepts and marketing models of sports fan economy, and to analyse and give corresponding suggestions on the marketing strategy of Chinese rhythmic gymnastics team's fan economy in the social media era according to the characteristics of the rhythmic gymnastics program. The study concluded that the athletes of the Chinese rhythmic gymnastics team have the advantages of a good program and an external image. Therefore, it is important to focus on the influence of social media to strengthen the publicity and popularity of the rhythmic gymnastics programme, and to try to have social media accounts operated and planned by professionals to increase exposure, attract fans for word-of-mouth communication on the internet and finally increase the commercial value of the sports team.

Keywords: Rhythmic Gymnastics, Fan Economy, Sport Marketing.

1. Introduction

Social media has changed the way information is disseminated and has brought new opportunities for marketing. This article uses Chinese rhythmic gymnastics as an example to explore the application of social media in sports marketing. The rhythmic gymnastics programme is characterized by high levels of performance, difficulty, thrill and artistry, which can be very helpful in tapping into marketing strategies. Modern rhythmic gymnastics in China was revived after 1979 and has now gone through a journey of more than 40 years. Although it has achieved a good runner-up result in the Beijing Olympic Games, it is still a long way from the world leading level.

A search of the literature on rhythmic gymnastics showed that only 12.24% of the 1250 papers on administration, popularization and development history were relevant. Chinese scholars have conducted more research on sports training and events, but less research has been done on sports marketing under social media, and there is a gap in sports marketing for the characteristics of rhythmic gymnastics [1].

The late start to the development of rhythmic gymnastics and the lack of excellence in international competitions has led to a lack of exposure and attention, which has not been making waves on social media, and this has been one of the obstacles to the commercialization of rhythmic gymnastics. This has been one of the obstacles to the commercialization of rhythmic gymnastics, and under the national system, the development of the sport has been dominated by the government, leading to a loss of dynamism in the market. Currently our country's training for professional athletes is from municipal sports schools, to provincial and then to national level. The speeding development of other popular sports clubs also shows that rhythmic gymnastics clubs are facing many problems. Niche sport is one of the obstacles to development. rhythmic gymnastics is a small category within the larger category of gymnastics, which can make it difficult to distinguish, and with the lack of attention given to the

promotion and marketing of rhythmic gymnastics in China, getting attention is a rare occurrence. Also, there is not yet a localized sporting product for consumers to purchase in China and currently consumers are only able to pay expensive prices for imported equipment, making the loss of resources reduce the audience and fan sentiment.

By analyzing the marketing strategies of Chinese rhythmic gymnastics, this paper finds that Chinese rhythmic gymnastics has a single marketing approach, and the fan economy marketing approach is not widely used. Therefore, this paper aims to enrich the theoretical research on fan economy sports marketing in Chinese rhythmic gymnastics and provide a theoretical basis and practical reference for the social media marketing of Chinese rhythmic gymnastics programmes. It is expected to improve the athletes' competitive level and strengthen the training of reserve talents; strengthen the promotion of the rhythmic gymnastics programme, increase the number of popular rhythmic gymnastics clubs, create local sporting goods and derivatives, and create a commercially developed sporting event and rhythmic gymnastics programme in the Internet era.

2. Case description

In the possible language of contemporary social media, the ubiquity of images enhances the feeling of online communication and is used to shape the perception of personal identity and institutions. Rhythmic gymnastics is a sport in which sets of movements are performed with apparatus in hand to the accompaniment of music, and is part of a difficult aesthetic sports group, and therefore has a high appreciation value. Compared to dance, rhythmic gymnastics as a sport has the intense competitive nature characteristic of sports. A sport that is both ornamental and competitive has significant advantages in terms of commercial promotion and the development of a fan economy.

Rhythmic gymnastics originated in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was only introduced to China from the former Soviet Union in the early 1950s. In 1979, China sent representatives to the United States to attend the plenary session of the International Technical Committee for Rhythmic Gymnastics, which was the first time that China participated in an international meeting for rhythmic gymnastics. It was only in 2002 that the Chinese National Rhythmic Gymnastics Team was officially established at Beijing Sports University [2]. Therefore, Rhythmic gymnastics has not been developed in China for a long time, is still an emerging sport, and its athletic performance is unstable.

The national system is the basic premise for the development of sport in China and also the basic feature for the development of rhythmic gymnastics. China's rhythmic gymnastics competition resources are rich in variety, including material resources, human resources, scientific and technological resources and brand resources. Most of the competition resources come from the government, while a small part comes from the market. China's market resource allocation method belongs to the mixed mechanism allocation mode under the government's leadership, under this mode, China's rhythmic gymnastics competition resources cannot get the maximum reasonable allocation, which affects the marketization process of rhythmic gymnastics program [3]. Through the review of the research literature on the development of rhythmic gymnastics in China, we have summarized and collated the findings, we found that the theoretical research on rhythmic gymnastics in China only accounts for 2% of the theoretical research on sports, which shows that the influence and audience of rhythmic gymnastics has yet to be developed [4].

Its influence in social media is far less than that of long-established and strong sports such as basketball or table tennis. At present, there are more and more rhythmic gymnastics clubs in China, most of which focus on cultivating children's hobbies, have narrow fan coverage and lack a complete business system. Taking Chinese Rhythmic gymnastics as an example, this paper analyzes the problems and proposes improvement solutions, with the aim of strengthening the publicity and popularity of rhythmic gymnastics programs, increasing the number of fans of Chinese Rhythmic gymnastics teams, and promoting the development of the fan economy of Chinese Rhythmic gymnastics programs.

3. Analysis on the problems

3.1 Unsatisfactory sports performance

The national performance of a country in a sport directly affects the country's voice in that sport internationally. Improving the athletic level of athletes and participating in more world competitions can help expand the influence of the athletes and even the country in the sports world.

According to data released by the Chinese Gymnastics Association, as of August 1, 2022, Chinese rhythmic gymnasts have not won an Olympic championship or a world championship [5]. China's best performance in Rhythmic gymnastics appeared in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, when it was runner-up in the collective all-around. Although China's rhythmic gymnastics performance has been depressed for some time, the results in recent years have generally shown a slow upward trend. In the collective all-around final at the Tokyo Olympics, China ranked fourth overall and second in rhythmic points among the eight teams, a result that set the best result for a Chinese rhythmic gymnastics team participating in the Olympics outside of China, second only to the silver medal at the Beijing Olympics.

This result has made a difference to the current unsatisfactory state of Chinese rhythmic gymnastics, although the inconsistency of international results over the last 20 years also represents an inconsistency in the development of China's top athletes. Poor sporting performance affects the media exposure of Chinese sports teams in international competitions and the importance the country attaches to the sport, which is one of the obstacles to attracting investors to invest.

3.2 No industrialized development

A search of references revealed that there is currently less research by scholars on the industrial development of rhythmic gymnastics in China. Russia, with a population of only 143 million, boasts over 300 formal rhythmic gymnastics schools as early as 2014. In the US, 133 rhythmic gymnastics clubs had opened in 26 of the 50 states by the end of 2016. However, rhythmic gymnastics in China still faces a gap in theoretical research on industrial development and a low popularity rate [6].

Research has revealed that a large number of sports and fitness clubs are located throughout the country in China. There are countless football clubs, tennis clubs and aerobics clubs all over the country [7]. This reflects the reality of the situation of rhythmic gymnastics clubs in the market. While fitness clubs are growing and developing, clubs in rhythmic gymnastics are not finding a market for themselves. This phenomenon shows that amateur rhythmic gymnastics clubs have not developed industrially at this stage and reflects the fact that professional rhythmic gymnastics has not taken the lead. The development of professional rhythmic gymnastics and popular rhythmic gymnastics are therefore mutually reinforcing and complementary to each other, as professional rhythmic gymnastics can only be promoted through industrialization and commercialization.

Given the economic uncertainties and the consequences of new management methods following commercialization, sport is a business that competes for scarce consumer resources and requires a commercial approach to management, utilizing professional management techniques. Robinson identifies four factors that have led to the commercialization of sport: the trend towards watching sport, changing technology, increasing competition and the professionalization of sport management [8]. The harmonious development of any sports project is inseparable from industrialization, and only the implementation of industrialization can achieve the integration of resources and structural changes, otherwise it will lose its mass base and market [9].

3.3 Rhythmic gymnastics in China is not very popular, social media type marketing is relatively lacking

At present, the development of Rhythmic gymnastics in China is stuck in the fact that Rhythmic gymnastics belongs to the gymnastics category, without combining popular rhythmic gymnastics with competitive rhythmic gymnastics. During the interviews and surveys, it was found that the respondents generally believe that the relevant authorities in China do not promote rhythmic

gymnastics enough, which makes the public awareness of Rhythmic gymnastics low and most of the events lack the participation of spectators, becoming an event where only coaches, athletes and judges participate [2]. There is still a certain theoretical gap in the popularization and fan economy marketing for Chinese Rhythmic gymnastics. Only with the popularization of popular rhythmic gymnastics will people have a deeper understanding of professional rhythmic gymnastics, so the two have to develop simultaneously and promote each other.

In the age of social media, athletes can use new media technology to add value to themselves and use him as a platform that can promote themselves and the sport that athletes are engaged in. Using social media platforms, athletes can build an authentic relationship with their fans through interaction [10]. Through social media, user data has become a commodity that can be exchanged. Advertisers can use the data to guess users' preferences, personalize their services and market their products, and then earn profits. The biggest difference between the traditional media audience commodity model and the Internet mass media model is that the online users of the Internet media model are not only consumers but also producers of content [11].

An IF who conducts business through social media says that digital communication gives the league the ability to create value on its own and that there are millions of people who enjoy their sport. If we can connect the fan base through social media tools, then this community becomes a valuable commercial product. By engaging with the community, sports organizations can strengthen brand awareness, image and fan loyalty [12].

4. Analysis on the problems

4.1 Unsatisfactory sports performance

The improvement of rhythmic gymnastics level and the achievement of competition results must have a deep mass foundation and strong reserve talents. Start from the selection of materials, scientific training. Due to the high flexibility and high sensitivity characteristics of rhythmic gymnastics, athletes generally have a short athletic life, so it is very important to strengthen injury protection.

Through different sets of style of choreography and music selection to convey the theme of the set of ideas. There are two sets of rhythmic gymnastics collective competition. The thematic ideas and music style of the set choreography directly affect the judges and the audience's impression of the set. The Chinese team chose Chinese traditional music in the five-ball set and made reference to the Dunhuang fresco elements in the movement style and costume style; in the second set, the three-circle two-bar set integrated the elements of martial arts and Beijing opera, which had a strong Chinese style and showed the charm of Chinese culture to the world. But Chinese style alone was not enough. For the 2022 Rhythmic Gymnastics World Cup in Italy in June, the music for the five laps was chosen from the theme music of National Treasures and the costumes were embroidered with bamboo elements, still in the traditional Chinese style; but in the sets of ribbons and balls, the music was chosen from the four themes of Harry Potter, blending them cleverly together; the costumes used the Hogwarts The costumes use the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry motif and, according to the Head Coach's statement, the sets are conceived as follows: the ribbons are fireworks, the sticks are wands and the girls represent the protected students.

These international, story-rich elements allowed foreign spectators and judges to establish an emotional connection with the Chinese athletes, which resonated deeply with each other and attracted many foreign fans. Although finally not a medal but through the superb rhythmic expression, it has gained a large number of fans at home and abroad. It shows that the development of China's rhythmic gymnastics program has very great potential.

4.2 Social media to strengthen the publicity and popularity of Rhythmic gymnastics programs

With the development of the economy, people's income is increasing, and people's consumption level is also increasing. People's consumption demand for sports is no longer as simple as watching TV, watching broadcast and buying sports goods. In addition to the function of fitness, sports should

also pursue the function of entertainment and leisure, enrich the spiritual world, and even provide emotional needs [13].

rhythmic gymnastics can be divided into competitive Rhythmic gymnastics and popular Rhythmic gymnastics according to the different purposes and tasks. Competitive rhythmic gymnastics is to win in the competition for the purpose, while popular rhythmic gymnastics is to exercise the body, cultivate temperament, cultivate sentiment. The main feature that distinguishes Rhythmic gymnastics from other sports is that rhythmic gymnastics is a sport that pursues beauty, not only has the function of sports but also has the function of art.

For example, project promotion can be promoted through enhanced marketing of the event. The success of marathons cannot be achieved without social media marketing. In China, for example, there were just 51 marathons held throughout the country in 2014, with 900,000 participants. With the development of the internet and the popularity of smartphones, social media began to penetrate people's lives, and with their emergence, the marathon sport underwent unprecedented development. 2017 saw a 20-fold increase in the number of marathon events and a more than five-fold increase in the number of participants compared to three years ago, and this development process overlaps highly with the development process of social media, which shows that social social media marketing is essential for marathons [14].

At the time of the London Olympics, CNN Asia published an article calling the London Olympics the first Twitter Olympics; in China, London 2012 was rightly called the first Weibo Olympics, topping the trending topics on Weibo with nearly 400 million views [15].

Therefore, in today's highly developed Internet era, China's rhythmic gymnastics programme can learn from the development experience of China's marathon programme, which can increase the exposure of the event and make the spread of the event larger, thus enhancing the influence of the sport and the event and improving the overall commercial value.

With the popularity of online media, there are more and more opportunities for people to access and learn about rhythmic gymnastics. Social media marketing can enhance the promotion of popular rhythmic gymnastics, bringing rhythmic gymnastics closer to ordinary people and highlighting its function as a showcase for beauty, entertainment and social enlightenment. Therefore, in order to popularize professional rhythmic gymnastics, it is necessary to first popularize popular rhythmic gymnastics, which is closer to life, by reducing the difficulty of movements and simplifying the exercise environment, so that the elderly and children can also have access to it, so that it can truly reach people's hearts.

4.3 Develop rhythmic gymnastics industry based on fan economy

The fan economy of sports is a very popular model of sports consumption, and thanks to the development of the Internet, sports marketing has become experiential, interactive and innovative. According to some scholars, the fan economy is "emotional capital as the main body, fan marketing as a means to make the emotional capital more value-added, mainly based on consumers, with their emotional perspective for sports brands and sports stars to increase the commercial value of the purpose" [16].

By cooperating with famous sports brands, we create sporting goods and cultural peripherals for rhythmic gymnastics with Chinese characteristics. At present, most of the sports brands in rhythmic gymnastics come from Japan and European countries and are in a monopoly position in the world. Domestic brands are at a disadvantage in the market due to technical limitations and lack of marketing. Buying local sporting goods can increase the identity of fans. The consumer identity constructed by identity is a gradual process by which individuals can clearly demonstrate the commonality and differences between themselves and others or a social group through their purchases, and can then classify and position themselves in terms of social roles and classes [17].

Starting with cultural identity, it advocates healthy fan culture and creates a good fan culture atmosphere. For example, design can create logos and slogans with emotional connections [18]. Chinese specific culture can be incorporated into rhythmic gymnastics products by introducing

peripheral products of the country's best athletes, such as signed photos, signed apparatus, posters, dolls and accessories. When local fans are in the unique cultural atmosphere of a sports team, individual fans and other unfamiliar fans will have an emotional resonance and will feel a special sense of group belonging [19]. Partner brands can produce support items for the Chinese team, allowing athletes and fans competing overseas to find their own group, which can create a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging to a group can go a long way in increasing fan stickiness and fan loyalty.

According to the network memory model, brands are divided into two parts, brand awareness and brand image. Consumer-based brand equity occurs when consumers are familiar with the brand and the favourable associations that the brand culture creates in their minds [20]. The premise of sports fan-based marketing is that sports companies should recognize the status of fans, take the satisfaction of fan needs as a starting point, use fan-created, influential and relevant works or products for market development while focusing on intrinsic needs, develop sports star derivatives and improve the sports fan industry chain [21].

Therefore, by creating a unique brand culture and establishing a good brand image can promote fan-based brand equity. When the Chinese rhythmic gymnastics programme has a good equity base, it can have better training conditions and more marketing campaigns to attract investors' attention and promote the commercialization of Chinese rhythmic gymnastics more smoothly.

5. Conclusions

Through research, this paper finds that there are several problems with the current social media marketing of rhythmic gymnastics in China: 1. Limited sporting level. Amongst competitive sports, good or bad results are fundamental to all development, and poor results mean that the country has very little say in the sport. If the level of the sport remains low for a long time it will lead to the government putting money and experience into other superior projects, thus leaving the development of rhythmic gymnastics in the cold; 2. The main reason for the stagnation of the industrial development is the short time of the project development and the lack of professional talents for management. It is possible to learn from the practices of developed countries in rhythmic gymnastics and increase the popularity rate to attract more relevant investors to invest. 3. Lack of social media marketing. Social media is the hottest way to spread information today, and the audience of social media is young people, which is in line with the target group of rhythmic gymnastics projects. Successful social media marketing can bring in huge amounts of traffic, and there are both opportunities and challenges.

The main contribution of this paper is to facilitate the discovery of new ideas for social media marketing for rhythmic gymnastics in China, filling a gap in this field. By creating international sets of music and sets of styles, supporting the development and construction of mass clubs, expanding the fan base to increase the number of fans, promoting a marketing strategy based on fan economy, and ultimately achieving the commercialization of the rhythmic gymnastics industry, achieving a win-win situation for athletes, coaches, fans and investors.

Competitive sport is the guide, mass sport is the foundation and sports industry is the mechanism. We can drive mass sport by strengthening the capacity of professional sport and develop sports industry in the process. The three should promote each other, not exclude each other. The development of the sports industry can respond to the national call for national fitness and is a way to broaden the channels of sports development.

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