

Research on the Existing Problems and Optimization Strategies of Social Media Marketing of Sports Clubs

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Abstract. As more people focus on sports, the strategy for clubs to advertise them to the whole world becomes crucial. Using a good marketing strategy on social media can help clubs grow tens of thousands of fans. If not, they might lose their supporter. This paper aims to help to explore good ways to help clubs market effectively. This paper used the case study method and comparative analysis method. First, this paper looked at a previous study about sports clubs and fans. The author found out that there is a blank space on how sports clubs can have better social media strategies to improve their fan base. Second, this research studied how positive and negative social media posts can influence clubs' performance on social media. Finally, this paper analyzed the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful campaigns and suggested how sports clubs can post successful campaigns. This includes but is not limited to using historical figures, revisiting highlights throughout the clubs' history, hosting giveaways, sharing behind-scene stories, posting at the right time, collaborating with influencers, and going live. This paper believes that sports clubs can better engage with fans and create bigger business value by using these methods.

Keywords: Existing Problems; Optimization Strategies; Social Media Marketing; Sports Clubs.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

As the influence of social media keeps increasing, sports clubs have shifted their advertising focus from traditional media like TV to new media like social media. According to 90 min, Real Madrid has 226.22 million followers on social media, followed by FC Barcelona with 215.73 million followers, and Manchester United with 126.57 million followers. On the US market, the LA Lakers have the most 41 million followers, followed by Golden States Warriors with 31.8 million followers [1]. To this degree, social media has become the top advertising and news-sharing platform for sports clubs worldwide. In that case, the strategy of social media advertising becomes crucial. A good advertising strategy can significantly increase fan opinion and the club's influence. Throughout this research, the paper hopes to help sports clubs find a solution for their weaknesses and problems on social media and a long-term plan to reach a stronger influence on the club.

1.2 Literature review

This research team, which includes Nisar, Prabhakar, and Patil, targets to give an insight into social media as an online marketing medium used by sports clubs. The main objective of the research is to understand how social media is used to increase customer interactivity and spectator interest. The paper's finding shows that greater customer interactivity through social media can be deemed attractive and increase spectatorship. Additionally, social media is an effective form of marketing and can be useful in attracting spectators to a sports organization [2].

This research, led by Scelles, Helleu, Durand, Bonnal, and Morrow, investigates the explanatory variables of the number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers for professional sports clubs based on the financial value literature. This paper is based upon a sample of North American major league clubs and the most valuable European soccer clubs evaluated by Forbes over the 2011–2013 period. Its results indicate a range of variables with a significant positive impact on the number of social media fans [3].

This research, led by Val and Fernandez, aims to understand why and how sports fans engage with clubs on social media. Following the Uses and Gratifications approach and the Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities framework, seven motivations and three dimensions of online engagement behaviors were considered in this paper. The team conducted a web-based survey among football club fans of a major UEFA league on Facebook, resulting in 562 responses. And the result contributes to the emerging research on social media use in the sports marketing literature, thus revealing additional opportunities for managers to engage their fan base online [4].

1.3 Research gap

For now, most of the published studies about sports clubs on social media are still in the theory phase. Most research only found the relationship between a sports club and social media followers. Still, little research has focused on and studied clubs' strategies to achieve advertising goals. This paper will mainly focus on the strategy that clubs use and give suggestions to clubs on how to improve their social media advertising strategy.

1.4 Research framework

First, this paper looked at a previous study about sports clubs and fans. The author found out that there is a blank space on how sports clubs can have better social media strategies to improve their fan base.

Second, this research studied how positive and negative social media posts can influence clubs' perforce on social media.

Finally, this paper analyzed the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful campaigns and suggested how sports clubs can post successful campaigns.

2. Methods

2.1 Case study

The case study method is a learning technique in which the student has faced a particular case problem [5]. This paper will study a club's successful and unsuccessful social media posts and analyze what characteristics make it most successful. How can clubs replicate this success? If the team wins a game, overall social media comments and engagement will perform very well; to the same degree, if a team loses a game, its overall social media engagement performance will not be so good. However, no team will win or lose the whole time, so this paper will not look at the post with game results. Take Fc Barcelona as an example. On August 25, Fc Barcelona posted on Instagram about two of its legend, Xavi and Guardiola. This post had 1.3 million likes on August 29, 4 days after the post. Additionally, almost all posts that contain one of the club's legends have more likes than average posts. From this, we can see Fc Barcelona fans like to see things about the club's legends, and the club can post more about all those historical players to perform better on social media.

2.2 Comparative analysis

Comparative analysis is comparing items to one another and distinguishing their similarities and differences [6]. This paper compares two different clubs that are both very famous around the globe, but one club is performing better on social media than the other club. The paper will compare and discuss what makes the two clubs perform differently. Take two newly raised clubs, for example, Paris Saint-Germain(PSG) and Manchester City(Mancity). PSG has almost double the followers that Mancity has. And from the game day post, we can see a difference. For Mancity, most of the focus on the game day post is the players who performed the best. The game versus Palace is a good illustration. Haaland claimed a hat trick during that game and led a comeback for a 4-2 City game. On Mancity's Instagram account, 11 out of 16 game-day post is about Haaland.

On the other hand, PSG had a massive win against Lille; 20 posts about the game were sent. However, unlike Mancity, most of the PSG post is team picture, each player didn't get a lot of single posts, and 5-6 plays got posted at least once. So clearly, the strategy of sending mainly team pictures over one player multiple times works better in this case.

3. Results

With the COVID-19 pandemic improving worldwide, most sports leagues have reopened the stadium to the fans. Even though the pandemic didn't hurt the sports industry as harshly as some other industries, a little pause still happened at the beginning of 2020. Nonetheless, the major league worldwide is going on the right track now. As of 2022, an average of 39,472 people will go to the stadium and watch an English Premier League game. This number is even higher than in 2018/19 when the pandemic didn't exist [7]. It is a fact now that sports club have passed on COVID influence and is on the way to keep growing.

Consumers for sports clubs can be characterized into three different categories. The first group of people is the die-hard fan. This group of people is the most important group out of all fans. As die-hard fans, they will support the team no matter what happens, and the club is one of the biggest parts of their life. Some people can support a team for more than 60 years. This group of people is also the biggest consumer of the club-related product. The die-hard fan will buy jerseys, souvenirs, and game tickets. The second group of people is the normal fan. These fans also follow the news and games of the team, but they don't think the club is that important to their life. Normal fans are also a big part of the club's income. They contribute to jersey sales and ticket sales. The last group of people is the people who watch a game once in a while, and they maybe have one jersey in their closet. The club, to them, is just a little entertainment in their everyday life.

As a business, a sports club should mainly focus on the first two groups of people. They are the group who will spend the most money. And they are also the group who will discuss the team on social media. Most of the two groups will follow every post the team sends out.

Even earlier in the paper, the research excludes all the related game result content when studying social media behaviors. However, this is still a factor that can't be disregarded. If the team is on a winning streak, the engagement rate on social media will be much higher than if the team is on a losing streak. Nonetheless, the content it posts is still the most important part of the engagement rate, after neat research and analysis of some big European soccer teams' social media accounts. This paper will suggest that clubs with a long history, like AC Milan, Fc Barcelona, and Real Madrid, can post some things about their history. For example, they can post today in history (50 years ago, Real Madrid won the first ever champions league). Another factor this paper analysis that will have a big influence on social media is the cooperation with stars. For example, Fc Barcelona invited The Rock to visit camp NUO, home of Fc Barcelona. That post had more than 3 million likes and became one of the most liked sports content recently.

For younger clubs with many superstars on the team, they should try to post content about each player equally because, as a younger club, the fan base isn't as big as those with an old history. People follow the club because they like a certain player on the team. So posting each player equally will make many fans happy. Also, if the team posts many team pictures, more people will like the post because the player they like has a high chance in the picture.

4. Discussion

The mean goal for sports clubs is to improve the engagement rate with the fans on social media, and there are multiple ways clubs can achieve this goal. Here are five different ways to improve the engagement rate with fans.

4.1 Host giveaway

The fans would always want something special. Clubs can give away small gifts like pins, water bottles, or posters that are not for sale. To participate in the giveaway, fans must repost or like the post. This way, clubs will have a higher engagement rate, and fans will get gifts they like from the club. Also, teams can host a big giveaway like a signed jersey or game-used jersey once in a while. These big giveaways will not only help clubs to promote already existing supporters but also to fans around the globe.

4.2 Share the behind-the-scenes story that fans don't see

Fans only see the games open to the public but are also very interested in what the team is like during days without games. Liverpool FC can be a good example. On YouTube, Liverpool averages two uploads per day. Liverpool's first published video had 12 videos with over 10 million views [8]. Of these 12 videos, seven are about things fans don't see. This includes some training footage, community interaction, or vlogs of newly arrived players.

Additionally, Liverpool uploaded a video series called inside Anfield, the home stadium of Liverpool. These videos include what happened on game days to every game played. From the views of the video, this paper concludes that inside Anfield is the top viewing video on an everyday basis.

4.3 Post at the right time

The time when the most engagement happens on social media is right after the game. Fans are very hyped about what they just watched—no matter whether the team performed well or not so great. Fans have much to say about the game when the game just ended. If a team posts a highlight or press conference right after the game, it is more likely that the engagement rate of fans will be much higher than at a random time when there is no game.

4.4 Collaboration with sports influencers

Nowadays, with social media becoming popular, influencers have also become a big part of the internet. Of course, there is an influencer in the sports industry. For this point, the paper will use a football influencer called F2 to be an example. F2 has over 14 million subscribers, the most subscribed influencer in the football category. In the channel, they will collaborate with some football stars or clubs. And most videos produced with stars or clubs will be the top viewing video on the channel. For example, the video made with Neymar, a Brazilian football star, has over 52 million views on the channel's top viewing video [9]. Sports clubs can work with influencers to reach a wider range of audiences.

4.5 Go live

The live show is one of the best ways for clubs to interact with fans. As fans, they have many questions in mind that they want to ask the players. Opening live streams with players chatting with fans in real time can help fans engage. Clubs can invite players to participate in different sections throughout the live show. Clubs can also host giveaways during the show. Using live interaction, fans can speak to the club manager and players to express their idea. And this is the best way for fans to interact with the club.

4.6 The boost of the Star and Tuba is also essential

In front of the BBS, active users not only realize the purpose of the brand communication but also solve the problem of content provided by Weibo users. For example, "wade weekly" is a well-known domestic sports BBS tiger on the net, a fan zone member for Li Ning signing for wade personals. Through the activities launched by the column, Li Ning provides gifts such as the way to sponsor and then puts the column on the website on Weibo.

Furthermore, key opinion leaders (Kols) influence and interaction in relevant fields will undoubtedly help brand communication. Take Sina Weibo as an example. The Kols in the basketball circle on Weibo can be divided into four categories: The first is @Sina.com NBA, @Hupu basketball and other sports media, the second is famous sports media practitioners, the third is famous sports peripheral products practitioners, and the last is fans' spontaneous group and forum accounts.

4.7 Combine offline activities

During the 2013 finals, Li Ning and Peak's official micro-operation would interact with the media from time to time, mainly in brand activities such as "forwarding + lottery" and some funny pictures and jokes.

When Golden State Warriors won the NBA Finals this year, Anta Sports responded quickly on Weibo and WeChat. They launched a series of activities such as lottery, coupons, and Juhuasuan on all of Anta's e-commerce platforms. At the same time, Anta also promoted basketball products nationwide in terminal stores and played Thompson's game videos in offline stores. According to insiders, Anta will also use Thompson's image to package Anta's flagship store in Beijing and turn more than 60 stores nationwide into Thompson's image door stores.

From this series of quick actions, it can be seen that Anta has been expecting Thompson's victory for a long time and has made full preparations and fully combined social media marketing with offline activities.

As social media has grown in influence, it has also become a battleground for sports marketing. Those who can stand out from this battlefield will surely master the market initiative in the future and reap the fruits of the sports industry.

Social media has become an important means of communication, contributing a lot to sports social media marketing. In conclusion, the impact of the pandemic should always be considered, and it will be more important than ever for brands to find and reach the right audience. In the process, brands must continuously improve their ability to present virtual activities on digital social channels, which is the basis for creating the best experience and making themselves stand out. Therefore, sports clubs must understand the open, data-driven content and interaction opportunities available. And sports clubs be prepared to shift their marketing budgets from traditional AD activation to digital methods like streaming and social media while learning to maximize revenue from precise targeting and effects capture [10].

Over the years, social media has been more important to the success of sports clubs' promotional strategies. To the surprise of many sports fans, tapping into social media and athletics have gotten along brilliantly. There wouldn't be any "viral" material from athletic events without the variety of content made accessible to fans through social media platforms. Naturally, expanding one's sphere of influence and gaining more exposure to one's name is among the objectives. The advent of the internet has resulted in significant shifts in society. Sports fans used to have to travel to see their heroes in person, but now they have social media. Playing with a buddy is a part of this tradition.

Consider the time and effort that goes into training, competing, and bringing home the gold as an athlete. As time passes, you could gain a nationwide social media following of sports fans. Money, power, and reputation may all be amassed via participation in online social networks. This is the point at which PR and sports marketing become relevant. People have a soft spot for their favorite athletes and teams. They look up to them as role models and are curious about what it's like to be them. Advertising products and events using digital means like social media is standard practice. Athletes may achieve celebrity status with the help of sports public relations. Take a look at these suggestions for using social media to your advantage, sportspersons and teams.

Sports marketers may increase their fanbases by using strategies such as enlisting the help of well-known athletes to produce engaging content. Because sports lovers continually share material with their social circles, you may tap into the networks of individuals who are already acquainted with those who make up your target demographic. Since more than half of all fans now actively follow their teams online, you may be able to digitally engage your current user base if they are also sports

fanatics. If a large percentage of your sports fans are younger folks, this is a very helpful feature to have.

A target audience is the specific demographic of individuals to whom your marketing efforts are directed. Consider your target market in demographics like location, age, interests, and disposable money. Determining your intended market and the kind of consumers you want to attract requires first identifying who they are. Thanks to social media, watching sports is more like a conversation than a passive spectator activity. You may include live updates in your social media channels by posting tweets as part of your Twitter marketing strategy or using Instagram Stories (or Reels) to display live highlights for your audience.

Athletes use Instagram Stories as the most requested extra from their idols. Followers' FOMO (fear of missing out) may be exploited with this material. With the Stories function, players may share glimpses into their daily lives and development process. No matter how big or well-known your firm is, it will be difficult to attract and keep the kind of customers the players want. Customers, admirers, and users are already active on the social media sites where ads may be placed.

Brands commonly use collaborations as a means to accomplish their objectives. More and more companies are placing a premium on data, so sports teams and marketers are looking for ways to collaborate. Brands are continuously looking for novel approaches to reinvest in their connections. Sponsorships are a great way to get your brand name out there. You've probably seen logos on racecars, soccer shirts, and other sportswear. When backed by a major corporation, even a relatively unknown brand might become a major player on a national or international stage. In other words, that's what happens when business meets athletics.

When people gather to watch a sporting event, they form bonds and find common ground. Sports-related social media accounts are not an exception. It provides a venue where they may share in one other's triumphs and sorrows. To be sure, there's more to it than that. The sites provide a venue for your athletes and their fans to communicate with one another. If you let one of your athletes take over a social media account, your followers will likely remain. One major perk of athletes' social media usage is that it gives them a platform to showcase their individuality. Promoting a team's good impact in their work communities might make them seem more accessible. This includes reporting on local charity events and initiatives that may impact attending fans.

5. Conclusion

The key finding of this paper is mainly about the solution to improve the social media strategy of the sports club. Most clubs can use their players as a key source to improving social media engagement rates. Clubs can use life or behind-the-scenes story to let fans better understand and learn more about the team. This paper has great business value. As the world develops, people have more time and money to consume on relaxing activities such as sports. With the best marketing tool shift from TV to social media, a better advertising strategy will help clubs create more business opportunities with their fans and improve their reputation among fans. This is a key point to help clubs achieve sustainable development.

However, there are still limitations to this paper. First, this paper only focused on the best clubs in the industry. There is still a big need for specific club research. Secondly, all the data this paper used is open to the public. This paper didn't count for any data related to business secrets, which may directly influence the accuracy of the research. This paper highly suggests future rescuer use inside data that clubs don't show to the public to have a neater understanding of the saturation.

5.1 Critique

The current article aims at sharing insight on the existing problems and optimization strategies of social media marketing of sports clubs. There is need to come up with a strategy for sports clubs to advertise worldwide. Using a good marketing strategy can help increase the number of fans. The paper was aiming at exploring the various effective ways to help clubs market their work effectively.

The method used was comparative analysis and case study method. The researchers analyzed previous studies about sports clubs and fans. The discoveries made showed that there was a void of how sports clubs can have better social media strategies hence improving their fan base. The researchers also explored the negative and positive impacts of social media posts and their influence on social media alongside the characteristics of both successful and unsuccessful campaigns. Unfortunately the data is difficult and incomplete hence cannot support the entire article hence the paper is acceptable for publication with major revisions.

First, the data and the methods used for the research and analysis are incomplete. Research should be comprehensive and should be able to give factual information without reasonable doubt. The use of case studies as a method of data collection and analysis is wrong since the world has many clubs that cannot be represented by Fc Barcelona.

The case study should have analyzed over 80 percent if not all of the football clubs in the world and gotten a comprehensive analysis of the successful and unsuccessful social media posts. Also, in the comparative analysis method, the researchers should have obtained data from a reasonable number of clubs instead of two to draw a conclusion. The author also needs to suggest clear methods based on the research alongside statistics to help ensure that the suggestions given are not based on hearsay but practical applications proven with evidence.

In conclusion, the paper unfortunately has more limitations than answers. The data shared and analyzed is based on a few popular teams hence does not qualify to make a general conclusion and recommendation. Moreover, the use of use and Gratitude method and the consumers' online brand – related activities are not practical in some cases hence should be reconsidered. The author needs to conduct extensive research on the various social media approaches to ensure the data collected is accurate and not based on insignificant data. The author should also focus on the smaller teams too that need actual growth of fans and social media presence for practical skills. The existing problems and optimization strategies on social media should be proven by facts and strong data analysis that proves beyond reasonable doubts that the solutions given are practical. Moreover, the solutions and suggestions given should be backed up by data to ensure the paper is precise and straight to the point. Lastly, the paper is acceptable for publication with major revisions.

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