

Using social Media in Sports Marketing and Branding

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Abstract

This research delves into the transformative role of social media in the realm of sports marketing and branding, focusing on how these digital platforms enhance engagement, shape fan behavior, and fortify brand identities within the sports industry. By weaving together, a rich tapestry of communication theories, branding principles, consumer behavior insights, and narrative engagement strategies, the study seeks to unpack the complex interplay between sports organizations and their digital audiences. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach that includes content analysis, fan surveys, and professional interviews, the investigation reveals the critical function of social media as a conduit for immediate interaction, community engagement, and tailored fan experiences, profoundly affecting consumer perceptions and actions. The findings enrich academic discussions on digital marketing while providing actionable strategies for sports marketers aiming to harness social media's power to bolster fan commitment and enhance brand prominence. The research underscores the value of genuine, engaging, and fan-focused content in nurturing a devoted following and propelling the commercial triumph of sports brands in today's digital landscape.

keywords : *social media, sports marketing, fan engagement, brand loyalty, online fan communities.*

استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في التسويق والترويج للرياضة

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المخلص:

تغوص هذه الدراسة في الدور التحويلي لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في مجال تسويق وترويج الرياضة، مركزةً على كيفية تعزيز هذه المنصات الرقمية للتفاعل، تشكيل سلوك المشجعين، وتقوية هويات العلامات التجارية داخل صناعة الرياضة. من خلال دمج مجموعة غنية من نظريات الاتصال، مبادئ العلامات التجارية، رؤى سلوك المستهلك، واستراتيجيات الاندماج السردي، تسعى الدراسة لاستكشاف التفاعل المعقد بين المنظمات الرياضية وجمهورها الرقمية. باستخدام منهجية مختلطة تشمل تحليل المحتوى، استطلاعات آراء المشجعين، ومقابلات مع المحترفين، تكشف البحث عن الوظيفة الحيوية لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كقناة للتفاعل الفوري، التفاعل المجتمعي، وتجارب المشجعين المصممة خصيصاً، مما يؤثر بشكل عميق على تصورات وتصرفات المستهلكين. تثير النتائج النقاشات الأكاديمية حول التسويق الرقمي مع تقديم استراتيجيات عملية للمسوقين الرياضيين الذين يسعون لاستغلال قوة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لتعزيز التزام المشجعين وزيادة شهرة العلامة التجارية. تؤكد البحث على قيمة المحتوى الأصيل، التفاعلي، والمركز حول المشجع في تنمية متابعة مخصصة ودفع نجاح تجاري للعلامات التجارية الرياضية في المشهد الرقمي اليوم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، تسويق الرياضة، تفاعل المشجعين، ولاء العلامة التجارية، مجتمعات المشجعين على الإنترنت.

Introduction

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a transformative force in shaping the landscape of sports marketing and branding. Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have not only revolutionized the way fans engage with sports content but have also provided unprecedented opportunities for sports organizations and athletes to connect with their audience on a global scale. This research aims to delve into the intricate dynamics of social media's role in sports marketing, exploring how these digital platforms

influence fan engagement, brand loyalty, and the overall perception of sports entities.

The advent of social media has introduced a paradigm shift in sports marketing strategies, moving beyond traditional advertising to foster real-time interaction, community building, and personalized fan experiences. As sports fans increasingly turn to social media for live updates, behind-the-scenes content, and direct communication with their favorite athletes and teams, understanding the nuances of this digital engagement becomes paramount for

sports marketers aiming to capitalize on this trend.

This study is anchored in a comprehensive theoretical framework that incorporates communication theories, branding and identity constructs, consumer behavior models, and narrative engagement principles to offer a holistic view of social media's impact on sports marketing. Through a meticulous examination of these theoretical underpinnings, the research seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which social media platforms can enhance brand equity, foster a sense of belonging among fans, and ultimately drive the success of marketing campaigns in the sports industry.

Given the pervasive influence of social media in today's sports culture, this research not only contributes to the academic discourse on digital marketing but also provides practical insights for sports marketers looking to refine their strategies in the digital domain. By exploring the multifaceted relationship between social media and sports marketing, this study aims to shed light on effective practices that can leverage digital platforms to amplify fan engagement and strengthen sports brands in the competitive market landscape.

1.2 Significance of the Research

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the transformative

role of social media in the sports marketing and branding landscape. As digital platforms continue to evolve, their impact on fan engagement, brand loyalty, and the marketing strategies of sports organizations becomes increasingly critical. This research is pivotal in understanding how social media can be leveraged to create compelling sports narratives, foster community among fans worldwide, and drive the commercial success of sports brands. The findings of this study have the potential to contribute valuable insights to both academic literature and practical applications in sports marketing, offering guidance on best practices and strategies for optimizing social media use in the sports industry.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

The primary objectives of this research are to:

- Analyze the impact of social media on fan engagement and interaction within the sports industry.
- Examine how social media platforms contribute to the development and reinforcement of sports brand identity and loyalty.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of various social media marketing strategies employed by sports organizations and athletes.
- Identify challenges and opportunities presented by social media

in the context of sports marketing and branding.

- Provide recommendations for sports marketers on leveraging social media to enhance brand visibility and fan loyalty.

1.3 Research Problem

The central problem this research addresses is the need to understand the complex dynamics between social media and sports marketing in an era where digital platforms dominate communication and engagement. Despite the widespread adoption of social media in sports marketing strategies, there remains a gap in comprehensive knowledge regarding the most effective ways to utilize these platforms for maximum engagement and brand development. The study aims to bridge this gap by investigating how social media influences the perceptions and behaviors of sports fans and identifying the key factors that contribute to successful sports branding and marketing in the digital realm.

1- Literature Review

In the Literature Review section of a research study focusing on the impact of social media in sports marketing and branding, a comprehensive examination of existing scholarly work and theoretical underpinnings is essential. This review not only sets the context for the study but also identifies gaps in the current knowledge base, guiding the research

questions and methodology. Here's a detailed approach to discussing the Literature Review:

2.1 Evolution of Sports Marketing

The evolution of sports marketing represents a fascinating journey from traditional methods to the dynamic, interactive landscape shaped significantly by the advent of digital and social media platforms. Initially, sports marketing strategies were predominantly focused on mainstream media channels such as television, radio, and print advertisements. These methods, while effective for their time, offered limited engagement and interaction with the audience, primarily functioning as one-way communication channels.

As the digital era dawned, the introduction of the internet and subsequently social media platforms revolutionized the way sports entities connect with their fans. This shift marked a significant departure from traditional marketing tactics, embracing a more interactive, engaging, and fan-centric approach. Digital platforms enabled sports brands to share real-time updates, behind-the-scenes content, and personalized fan experiences, fostering a deeper connection and engagement that was previously unattainable [1].

Social media, in particular, has played a pivotal role in this evolution, offering a plethora of tools and features

that allow for direct communication, community building, and fan engagement on an unprecedented scale. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become arenas where fans can not only consume content but also interact with sports brands and athletes directly, participate in discussions, and become part of a global fan community.

This transformation has also led to the democratization of sports content, with fans now having the power to create, share, and comment on sports-related content, further blurring the lines between content creators and consumers. The rise of influencer marketing, user-generated content, and real-time fan engagement during live events exemplifies how social media has become an integral part of sports marketing strategies.

Moreover, the advent of digital analytics has provided sports marketers with valuable insights into fan preferences, behaviors, and engagement patterns, enabling more targeted and effective marketing campaigns. The ability to measure the impact of social media activities in real-time has allowed sports brands to optimize their strategies, ensuring maximum engagement and return on investment.

The evolution of sports marketing from traditional to digital platforms has significantly enhanced the way sports

brands engage with their audience, offering more personalized, interactive, and immersive experiences. This shift has not only changed the landscape of sports marketing but also set new standards for fan engagement, community building, and brand loyalty in the sports industry.

2.2 Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behavior:

The impact of social media on consumer behavior, particularly within the context of sports fandom, represents a significant area of inquiry in the intersection of digital media studies and sports marketing. The pervasive nature of social media has fundamentally altered how fans consume sports content, engage with their favorite teams and athletes, and participate in broader fan communities [2].

Empirical Studies and Findings

Numerous studies have explored the multifaceted ways in which social media impacts sports fan behavior. For example, research by Gantz and Lewis (2014) highlighted how sports fans use social media as a primary source for real-time game updates and player information, underscoring the informational gratification sought by fans. Another study by Frederick, Lim, Clavio, and Walsh (2012) delved into the motivations behind fans' following of athletes on Twitter, revealing that factors

such as fan passion, athlete interaction, and information seeking significantly predict Twitter usage among sports fans.

Further, the work of Mahan III (2011) on the examination of sports fans' motivations for using social networking sites indicated that the need for affiliation with other fans and the desire for entertainment are pivotal in driving fan engagement on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, suggesting that social media platforms serve as important venues for satisfying these fan needs.

Moreover, the role of social media in fostering a sense of community among fans cannot be overstated. Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, and Greenwell (2010) found that social media facilitates the development of online fan communities, where shared support and camaraderie can significantly enhance fans' sense of belonging and loyalty to a sports brand.

The intersection of social media and consumer behavior in sports presents a dynamic landscape where fans are not just passive consumers but active participants in the creation and dissemination of content. Theories such as TPB and Uses and Gratifications offer valuable lenses through which to understand these phenomena. Empirical studies in this domain continue to shed light on the complex motivations and

behaviors of sports fans in the digital age, providing critical insights for sports marketers looking to leverage social media to build and sustain fan engagement and loyalty.

2.3 Role of Social Media in Modern Marketing

Social media's ascent within modern marketing is underscored by the diffusion of innovations theory, which explains how new ideas, technologies, or platforms spread within a society or from one culture to another. In the context of marketing, social media platforms are adopted for their unique ability to reach vast audiences quickly, foster interactive engagement, and facilitate the viral spread of content. This rapid adoption has transformed marketing strategies, making real-time engagement and personalized content the norm rather than the exception.

The uses and gratifications theory further illuminates why audiences flock to social media for sports content. Fans are drawn to platforms that satisfy their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction, and identity expression. Sports organizations leveraging these insights can craft content that resonates with fans' motivations, driving deeper engagement and loyalty [3].

2.4 Branding and Identity in Sports through Social Media

The concept of brand equity, vital in the sports context, is significantly enhanced through social media. These digital platforms amplify brand visibility, foster strong emotional connections, and facilitate direct interaction, contributing to the overall brand equity of sports entities. Social media allows for the storytelling that embodies a brand's values and ethos, engaging fans in a way that traditional media cannot.

E-branding becomes crucial in this digital landscape, providing sports organizations and athletes with opportunities to craft their online personas, manage their reputations, and engage with a global audience. The immediacy and accessibility of social media mean that every post, tweet, or story becomes a part of the brand's digital narrative, shaping public perception and brand identity.

2.5 Paradigms of Sports Communication in the social media Era

The advent of social media has shifted traditional sports communication paradigms. The gatekeeping theory, which traditionally saw media outlets as the primary controllers of information, is challenged by social media's direct channels of communication. Athletes, teams, and organizations can now

communicate directly with fans, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers.

Parasocial interactions (PSI), where fans feel a sense of personal connection with athletes or teams, they follow on social media, further illustrate the changing dynamics of fan engagement. These one-sided relationships, though not real in the traditional sense, have a tangible impact on fan loyalty and engagement in the social media era.

3- Theoretical Framework

3 1.Communication Theories in Social Media

In the exploration of communication theories within the realm of social media, particularly in the context of sports marketing and branding, it is essential to recognize the transformative role that digital platforms have played in reshaping the interaction between sports entities and their audiences. Social media has not only expanded the reach and immediacy of communications but has also introduced novel dynamics in the way information is disseminated and consumed. This section aims to delve into the foundational communication theories that elucidate these dynamics, offering insights into how sports marketers can effectively leverage social media to engage fans, build brand loyalty, and foster community.

3 1.1.Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that individuals actively select media sources that fulfill their varied needs. Within the realm of sports, fans may gravitate towards social media to obtain instant updates, engage with fellow supporters, or manifest their allegiance to favored teams or athletes. Grasping these motivations is pivotal for sports marketers aiming to tailor their social media content to satisfy fan requirements, thereby augmenting engagement levels[4].

❖ **Case Study:** The NBA's Twitter engagement during the playoffs. The NBA tailored content to fans' desires for real-time updates, behind-the-scenes access, and direct interaction with players. Through live tweets, interactive polls, and player-hosted Q&A sessions, the NBA satisfied fans' needs for information, personal connection, and community belonging, leading to increased engagement and loyalty.

3 .1.2Two-Step Flow Theory

The Two-Step Flow Theory suggests that information typically transits from the media to opinion leaders and subsequently to a broader audience. In the context of sports on social media, influencers and notable sports figures can profoundly influence fans' perceptions and behaviors. Identifying these key opinion leaders and harnessing their

influence constitutes a potent strategy in sports marketing endeavors.

Case Study: Adidas's collaboration with influencer and soccer player Lionel Messi for the launch of a new football boot. Messi shared exclusive content about the boots on his Instagram, reaching millions of followers. The campaign leveraged Messi's status as an opinion leader, creating a ripple effect where fans not only engaged with the content but also shared it, significantly increasing reach and influencing purchasing behavior among the broader audience.

3 2.Branding and Identity Theories

In the realm of sports marketing, the significance of branding and identity is paramount, with social media emerging as a critical platform for shaping and conveying the brand essence of sports entities. This segment delves into the core branding and identity theories that underpin the strategic use of social media for brand building in the sports industry. It aims to elucidate how these platforms facilitate the creation and reinforcement of a distinct brand identity, fostering a deeper connection and loyalty among fans.

3 2.1.Brand Equity Theory

Social media significantly bolsters a sports brand's equity by amplifying brand visibility, refining brand image through direct interactions with fans, and

forging stronger emotional bonds. Sports marketers are encouraged to employ social media analytics to assess and enhance the elements of their brand equity.

Case Study Example: Nike's "Just Do It" campaign on social media platforms, featuring athletes from various sports, leverages inspirational stories that resonate with a broad audience, enhancing Nike's brand equity by associating the brand with empowerment, perseverance, and success [5].

3 2.2.Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity Theory elucidates how individuals classify themselves into groups, such as fan communities, to enhance their self-esteem. Social media platforms provide a venue for fans to demonstrate their team affiliations and forge connections with like-minded individuals, thus reinforcing their social identities. This understanding aids marketers in crafting content that resonates with and strengthens these communal identities [6].

Case Study Example: FC Barcelona's #WeAreBarça campaign on Twitter and Instagram, which encourages fans to share their support stories and how they celebrate the team's victories, strengthens communal bonds and reinforces fans' social identities connected to the club.

3. 3.Consumer Behavior Theories

In examining the impact of social media on sports marketing and branding, an understanding of consumer behavior theories is essential. These theories shed light on the motivations, attitudes, and actions of sports fans as they interact with sports-related content online. By applying these theoretical frameworks, we can gain insights into how fans decide to engage with sports brands, follow teams or athletes, and ultimately make purchasing decisions influenced by social media interactions.

3. 3.1.Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) elucidates how fans' attitudes toward a sports brand, shaped by social media content, in conjunction with social norms and their perceived control, can influence their intentions to engage with the brand, follow it, or even make purchases. This insight allows sports marketers to devise messages that positively affect fans' attitudes and perceived norms.

3. 3.2.Customer Engagement Theory

The Customer Engagement Theory emphasizes the multi-dimensional nature of engagement, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. In the sports social media landscape, captivating content can trigger discussions, evoke profound

emotional reactions, and prompt actions like sharing or liking, thereby deepening the fan's comprehensive engagement with the brand [7].

3. 4. Psychological Continuum Model (PCM)

The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) outlines the stages of consumer attachment to a sports entity, ranging from mere awareness to profound loyalty. Social media plays an instrumental role at each juncture, providing information to enhance awareness, crafting engaging content to cultivate attraction, nurturing communities to foster attachment, and offering immersive experiences to solidify allegiance.

3. 5. Narrative Transportation Theory

The Narrative Transportation Theory posits that individuals can become immersed in a narrative, resulting in heightened empathy and emotional involvement with the characters. For sports brands, disseminating stories about athletes, team histories, and match narratives can immerse fans in these tales, thereby strengthening their emotional ties and loyalty to the brand [8].

3. 6. Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory delineates how new concepts, products, or technologies permeate a

market or culture. It's crucial for sports marketers to comprehend the attributes that influence the adoption of novel social media features, such as live streaming or augmented reality filters, to remain at the forefront of engaging fans and efficaciously promoting their brands.

3. 7. Social Influence Theory

This theory examines how social media facilitates various forms of social influence among users, including conformity, compliance, and imitation. It's crucial to analyze how this social influence affects public perceptions and behaviors towards sports brands and events. The theory can help understand the mechanisms through which opinions and behaviors are shaped in the digital realm, particularly how endorsements or criticisms by influential figures on social media platforms can sway public opinion and behavior towards sports teams, athletes, and brands.

3. 8. Virtual Community Theory

This concept delves into how social media platforms foster the creation of virtual communities centered around sports teams and athletes. These online communities play a significant role in enhancing a sense of belonging and loyalty to a sports brand. The theory can be used to explore the dynamics of community building, engagement, and identity within these virtual spaces, highlighting how shared interests and

interactive experiences contribute to stronger fan-base connections and brand allegiance [9].

3.9 Gamification Theory

Gamification theory explores the application of game-like elements in non-game contexts, such as social media, to boost engagement and participation. This includes the use of contests, challenges, and rewards to enhance brand promotion and marketing efforts. Analyzing how these gamified elements can increase user interaction, motivate participation, and ultimately contribute to brand strengthening and marketing success in the sports domain is essential.

3.10 Social Capital Theory

This theory investigates how social media contributes to the building of social capital for individuals and sports brands through networks and relationships. It examines the impact of these social connections on the perceived value of a sports brand. Understanding the role of social media in facilitating relationships and networks that enhance trust, reciprocity, and information exchange can offer insights into effective brand-building strategies in the sports industry.

3.11. Belongingness Theory

Belongingness theory focuses on how social media platforms enhance fans' feelings of belonging by providing

spaces for expressing support and participating in group activities. It looks at the impact of these digital communities on fans' attachment to sports brands. The theory can help explain the psychological needs met by these virtual communities and how fulfilling these needs can lead to increased loyalty and support for sports brands [10].

3.12 Framing Theory

Framing theory explores how sports brands use social media to frame their information and news in ways that influence public perceptions and reactions. This includes how narratives are constructed to shape audience understanding and response, contributing to positive brand image construction and effective crisis management. Understanding the strategies used by sports organizations to frame their messages on social media can provide valuable insights into effective communication and reputation management in the digital age [11].

Each of these theories provides a unique lens through which the impact of social media on sports marketing and branding can be examined, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in the digital sports marketing landscape

In conclusion

This research underscores the pivotal role of social media in revolutionizing sports marketing and branding. The findings reveal that social media platforms are not just channels for communication but powerful tools that shape fan engagement, influence consumer behavior, and enhance brand identity within the sports industry. Through the lens of various theoretical frameworks, the study delves into the dynamics of fan interaction, the building of online communities, and the psychological impact of digital storytelling on fan loyalty.

Results

- Social media platforms facilitate unprecedented levels of interaction between sports brands and fans, enabling real-time communication, personalized experiences, and direct fan involvement in content creation.
- The application of theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Uses and Gratifications Theory has provided insights into the motivations behind fans' engagement with sports content on social media, highlighting the role of these platforms in influencing fans' perceptions, loyalty, and purchasing decisions.
- Social media contributes significantly to the development and reinforcement of sports brands' identities. Through storytelling, interaction, and

community building, sports entities can enhance their brand equity and cultivate a loyal fan base.

- The creation of online fan communities on social media has been instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty among fans, further strengthening the bond between fans and sports brands.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that sports marketers:

- Develop authentic, engaging content that resonates with the fans' emotions and passions, leveraging storytelling to strengthen emotional connections with the brand.
- Utilize social media analytics to gain insights into fan preferences and behaviors, tailoring marketing strategies to meet fans' needs effectively.
- Foster interactive communication channels on social media to encourage fan participation and feedback, creating a sense of inclusivity and community.
- Collaborate with influencers and opinion leaders within the sports community to amplify brand messages and reach wider audiences.

Future Research Suggestions

While this study provides valuable insights, there is scope for further research in several areas:

- Longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of social media

engagement on brand loyalty and fan retention in the sports industry.

- Comparative analysis of different social media platforms to determine the most effective channels for various types of sports marketing content.
- Exploration of the impact of emerging technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, on fan engagement and sports marketing strategies on social media.

In essence, social media has become an integral part of sports marketing and branding, offering myriad opportunities for engaging with fans and enhancing brand visibility. By embracing the dynamic nature of social media and adapting to the evolving digital landscape, sports brands can cultivate loyal fan bases and achieve sustained commercial success in the digital age.

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