

St. John Fisher College

Fisher Digital Publications

Sport Management Undergraduate

Sport Management Department

Summer 2012

Understanding Social Media Use and Its Marketing Implications

David Malerk

St. John Fisher College

Follow this and additional works at: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/sport_undergrad



Part of the Sports Management Commons

[How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?](#)

Recommended Citation

Malerk, David, "Understanding Social Media Use and Its Marketing Implications" (2012). *Sport Management Undergraduate*. Paper 48.

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit <http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations>.

This document is posted at https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/sport_undergrad/48 and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjfc.edu.

Understanding Social Media Use and Its Marketing Implications

Abstract

Social media has become an integral part in the communication process in today's society. Research has found that social media's unique characteristics allow sport organizations to meet the many wants of their fans. Eight total professional organizations from the professional and collegiate level were interviewed to answer the research question, to what extent are organizations utilizing social media? This study shows that organizations use social media more specific to their professional level. Professional sport organizations use social media more for their marketing efforts, as collegiate organizations primarily use it for public relations.

Document Type

Undergraduate Project

Professor's Name

Emily Dane-Staples

Subject Categories

Sports Management

Understanding Social Media Use and Its Marketing Implications

David Malerk

SPST 495: Senior Seminar

St. John Fisher College

Abstract

Social media has become an integral part in the communication process in today's society. Research has found that social media's unique characteristics allow sport organizations to meet the many wants of their fans. Eight total professional organizations from the professional and collegiate level were interviewed to answer the research question, to what extent are organizations utilizing social media? This study shows that organizations use social media more specific to their professional level. Professional sport organizations use social media more for their marketing efforts, as collegiate organizations primarily use it for public relations.

Understanding Social Media Use and Its Marketing Implications

“According to the comedy duo of H.G. Nelson and Roy Slaven, ‘too much sport is never enough’” (Zion, Spaaij, & Nicholson, 2011, p. 80). The persistent interest has allowed sports to take on different forms in which it can be consumed and used. Sports receive separate sections in every newspaper; stadiums and arenas around the world are constantly filled with people who root, often maniacally, for their favorite teams; they occupy the weekends and evenings of parents and children; they are indulged upon weekly commercial radio and television air time with extraordinary advertising revenues (Washington & Karen, 2001). All of these facets are entwined with daily conversations and debates ranging from favorite players to breaking news stories.

Sport has increased its visibility and as a result sports fans are finding new ways to become engaged with the industry (Sparre, 2007). For the more avid fan, they want to remain as close to their favorite sport/team as possible, focusing with an emphasis on receiving constant updates and breaking news revolving around their favorite players, teams, and any other of the facets that are associated with sports. As their closeness to the facets increase, so may the urge to use multiple methods to feed their fanaticism.

When sports’ news was first distributed, it consisted more of the traditional reporting methodologies, newspaper/ magazine distribution, and programs from live sporting events (Jackson, 2009). As time has shifted into the 21st Century, technology has allowed the original methods of reporting to evolve in a way that is easier and more beneficial for consumers; it is more beneficial because fans have more ways to consume. The outlets that have become prevalent today include the various forms of social media outlets, having a heavy emphasis on Facebook and Twitter (McDonnell, 2011).

With the emergence of social media, fans have now been given the chance to further immerse themselves in the sport industry. Unlike other previous outlets used before, social media builds upon key characteristics that prior outlets may not have had. Components of social media, including increased opportunities with interactivity and asynchronicity, allow fans to feel more connected with those in the sports. Because of social media's unique traits it gives sources like Twitter the ability to "become a crucial, up-to-the-second ancillary means of information delivery for hardcore fans" (Grossman, 2011, p. 1). Sports have always held an important characteristic in which they are a real time event where results are difficult to be manipulated; the actions and outcomes during the event aren't scripted.

"Sports--real-time events with undetermined outcomes and passionate followers-- is singularly well-suited for social media. The barroom has moved to our pockets. During Super Bowl XLV there were as many as 4,064 tweets per second, a record until last month's Champions League final topped out at more than 6,300 per second. Innumerable fans have become conditioned to the "second screen" experience, checking out their mobile feed while watching the game" (Wertheim, 2009, p. 21).

Because of these factors social media can be seen as news outlet that allows for more of an opportunistic approach in acquiring information as it allows fans to seek what they want to seek. Because TV's run time is complicated, fans are using outlets, like Twitter, to acquire information at a faster rate rather than waiting for the announcers (Grossman, 2011).

Characteristics of social media, such as interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity, allows its users to personalize the ways they connect and communicate with one and another (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010). While doing so, social media has allowed fans to interact with athletes and sport organizations on a more personal level. The purpose of this research paper is to focus on how social media has led the way for a more personalized news distribution system for sport fans while developing an opportunity for sport

marketers to use it to their advantage. Have marketers started to realize, because of the opportunities social media brings for sport fans, that social media can also benefit them in which they can build consumer retention and relationships? This research paper will help determine whether or not organizations have completely realized social media's potential as a marketing tool and begun to adjust their efforts.

Literature Review

As stated before sport consumers acquired information about the industry through traditional reporting methodologies, but these earlier and more traditional outlets did have significance; these outlets allowed for sports to become prevalent within society. If it hadn't been for the emergence of sports coverage in England's newspaper around the late 1800's, soccer may not have become a main fixture in England's cultural as fast as it did, as the sport "has become as much a part of the cultural scene as the gas lamp and the fish and chip shop" (Jackson, 2009, p. 63). The sports coverage in the English circulation helped nationalize the sport throughout the country and this significance of this can be pointed to the beginning of sports impacting culture. Social media helps build from the traditional methods in terms of bringing about new ways of publishing content in which it allows for a faster pace of distribution and ways to bring people closer (Grossman, 2010). Relating back to the importance of the English newspaper, social media does indeed build off of what these outlets began to do by taking it a step further; instead of just affecting a country and because of its ability to personalize information, social media can impact the individuals and vice versa.

Social media and its users partake in a special relationship. Because of the interactive nature of social media versus the passive use of traditional media, social media creates more opportunities for engagement (Hambrick, et al., 2010). One of the newer and prevalent social

media platforms is Twitter, which started in 2006 (Hambrick et al., 2010). Users of this social network can post messages ("tweets") of 140 or fewer characters on their personal Twitter pages. They can also follow the tweets of others. Tweet content can range from insignificant to influential. Users can select other users they want to communicate with; if they want to communicate directly with a particular user they can use what's known as an 'at-mention'. An 'at-mention' is a way Twitter helps you include the username of the person you want to contact into your tweet. If one user likes a comment someone "tweeted" they can 're-tweet' or re-post the comment made by that user. Users can also create trends of topics by using hash tags in front of the key words.

The social media platforms available have improved upon the ways news is delivered, but also the way it is created. Referring back to the newspaper, in order to distribute a news story one had to be a professional reporter; social media allows amateurs to be the authors of any breaking news story. For instance, since Twitter's maximum output is only 140 characters, the main points of stories become the focus of the tweets rather than related information; if one is interested in the full details of the story, then the user can access any links of full articles, blog entries, videos, pictures or podcasts, that are linked within the messages (Copeland, 2011).

One of the reasons why social media has become a popular outlet amongst its users is because of who actually uses the service; users can consist of sports teams and the players. Sport organizations have started to use "social media outlets to provide game information, sell tickets, and increase brand awareness and product sales," "while players use them to use them to discuss their playing performances and interact with teammates and fans" (Hambrick, et al., 2010, p. 455).

Social media and internet use provides benefits for the users who use it. In their study, authors Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, and Greenwell applied uses and gratifications theory to explain those benefits. The theory was derived from the communications field in which it focuses on how users engage in different activities and the motives for doing so. The motives help understand what the users stand to gain for their participation (Hambrick, et al., 2010). The benefits from using social media and online use include interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity.

“The Internet facilitates interactivity, giving users the opportunity to correspond with other users, share information, and form personal relationships. With demassification, users can pick and choose activities of interest to them. They can also select with whom they interact, custom fitting the Internet to their specific needs. Finally, the Internet's asynchronicity provides users with more flexible communications. They can post messages for other users and read and respond to messages when it is most convenient for them” (Hambrick, et al., 2010, pg. 457).

Essentially the goal of their participation is focused on finding outlets for entertainment and diversion (Hambrick, et al., 2010). Fans want to further immerse themselves into the sporting industry by wanting to become closer to their favorite teams and players (Hambrick, et al., 2010). If organizations can figure how to specifically fill their needs and wants of through the usage of social media, fans will feel as if they have a stronger connection to them.

Professional Athletes' Use of Social Media

Athletes use social media for different reasons as well including as a means to escape the media in order to voice their opinions more frequently. "It's a way of getting your voice out there, your personality across, where in the past, you had other people speaking for you," says Cleveland Cavaliers guard Baron Davis, "It's all you, so there's no manipulating the message” (Wertheim, 2009, p. 21). Social media allows athletes to have more power and control they have never really been accustomed to in terms of communication. To better understand why athletes

use social networks like Twitter the a case study was performed where Twitter use by athletes was studied through a content analysis; the results were broken down into six different categories – interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, fanship, and promotional (Hambrick, et al, 2010). Interactivity was a category for where there was direct communication from athletes to fellow athletes or fans. Diversion was any non-sport related information provided by the athletes. Informational sharing is any insight into a player’s team, event, sport, or teammate. Content is when an athlete included links to videos, pictures, or any type of website. Category five, fanship, is when an athlete engages in a conversation discussing sports other than their own teams. The last category, promotional, is when an athlete discusses sponsorships, upcoming games, and related promotions (Hambrick, et al, 2010). Based upon their analysis 34% of tweets were determined to be in the interactivity category and the next highest category was diversion at 28% (Hambrick, et al, 2010).

“The results suggest that that this new medium provides a more personalized, unfiltered method of communication not often found in mainstream media. In the past, athletes transmitted their messages via public relations personnel or through media outlets such as television broadcasts or newspaper and magazine articles now athletes can reach their fans in a more direct manner” (Hambrick, et al, 2010, p. 463).

Better understanding athletes’ use of social networks allows fans to believe athletes are more relatable people and therefore helps create more interactivity. The interactivity helps gives fans an inside look into their favorite athletes’ personal conversations, which is an experience they wouldn’t been a part of unless they were right in front of the athletes. Through athletes’ use of social networks, fans may start to develop a notion that athletes aren’t as glorified as they are made out to be because they come off as being more relatable people. This allows fans to feel more comfortable in connecting with them and reaching out to them; in essence it serves as good platform in building closer relationships between athletes/organizations and fans. If players use

social media appropriately and relationships are formed, athletes can gain improved public images for themselves and their organizations. Improved public images will increase the brand equity associated with the sport organizations.

In early 2009, Amy Martin founded her own digital branding agency, Digital Royalty, which was designed to help brands expose and evolve their personalities digitally through social networks. Authors Khalil Ballouli and Michael Hutchinson performed an interview with Ms. Martin to better understand the aspects of the digital branding and social media strategies for professional teams, athletes, and leagues. Through her company, she was able to effectively create relationships between fans and the athletes with one athlete in particular, Shaquille O'Neal (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). As one of her clients, Martin's strategy with Shaquille focused on tying his endorsements into his online and social marketing presence; she was able to do this by coming up with the concept known as the Random Acts of Shaqness (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). The created concept allowed them to visualize different tactics of implementation.

Some of the different tactics that were created included "a game of "Twitter Tag," in which Shaquille O'Neal would tweet his exact whereabouts and give game tickets to the fan who found him first. We would also randomly identify a fan for him to talk to over the phone in a pure "surprise and delight" fashion. We would record the conversation and repurpose the audio and video back over Twitter..." (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010, p. 398).

By creating these few examples and distributing the playbacks back onto his account allowed for Shaq's identity to be authenticated. Ms. Martin said that the results of the Shaq related campaign were "tremendous, not only for Shaquille's brand but also for every brand tied Shaquille....Shaquille has definitely set the bar very high in terms of celebrity genuineness, and his model should be considered a best practice for social media presence"(Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010, p 398). Amy Martin's plan for Shaq's social media interactions required a lot of effort from the athlete's perspective, but the athlete can do more simplified things to become a

more relatable individual. “The relationship is created especially when athletes reach out to fans and reply back to their comments; it almost creates a high for the fans because “when they get a response, it's the modern equivalent of an autograph” (Wertheim, 2009, p. 21).

However social media does have its downfalls. It questions the depth of relationships people have with each other which allows the word ‘friend’ to become misleading. When Friendster, a site similar to Facebook, was created “the designers of the site expected that people would only list their ‘actual’ friends. Instead they chose to connect to a wide range of people, including acquaintances and others that they thought might be interesting” (McDonnell, 2011, p. 4). The people who users are connected with on Facebook and Twitter may not necessarily be real life friends or acquaintances, but just total strangers. Another risk of social media amongst professional athletes is how vulnerable and susceptible they can become on the internet. Because social media platforms are so open, athletes who are not cautious with their usage may receive backlash. “There are definitely consequences when social media is misused. Athletes who are not careful with how they use these tools might put something out there for the public to see that might not necessarily be viewed positively” (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2011, p. 398). It’s hard to tell if real relationships are formed between professional athletes and fans; some athletes use social networks for certain purposes like promoting charities or causes, some use them sparingly (ex. out of season), some don’t pay attention to certain aspects of the networks, and others stop using their accounts because of fan harassment (Merkin, 2011). When discussing ‘at-mentions’ from Twitter, Chicago White Sox third baseman Gordon Beckham stated he stopped paying attention to them – “There is some positive stuff in there, but looking at it would be more of a detriment than a positive” (Merkin, 2011, p. 1). Gordon Beckham addressed, from his own personal situation, that paying attention to ‘at-mentions’ can be very distracting especially if a

players is underperforming (Merkin, 2011). To avoid these potential problems, digital branding agency's like Amy Martin's created social media education programs. These programs help train athletes on the benefits, risks, ethics, and tactics that are involved with social media usage and communication (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2011).

In observing how athletes use their social media accounts, organizations can utilize their social media accounts to create relationships with their fans. If organizations can mimic ways in which athletes positively use social media for their own purposes or how they communicate with others, they will be able to create an effective marketing strategy. Sport organizations also need to be aware of how their players are using social media because it is a part of the overall brand image of the team. The organizations can even use athletes as 'middle men' and have them perform duties of the necessary parts that go into their overall interactive marketing campaigns. Organizations don't have to do have extreme methods to reach out to fans. If professional teams can simply reply or 're-tweet' what fans say, as Wertheim explained, they are creating ways to give themselves a chance to become closer to their fan base.

Professional Sport Organizations Use of Social Media

Shifting the focus onto sport organizations, they are using it to build customer retention and to initially increase their profits. Using the themes discovered in the Hambrick et al. study (2010), teams should use social media to increase interactivity and accessibility. Interactivity helps play roles with the marketers' approach. Accessibility can be an important outcome for sports organizations as highly identified sports fans engage in supportive, or loyal, behaviors directed toward the team. Such behaviors include greater frequency of game attendance, more time and money invested in the team, and greater intentions to purchase a team sponsor's products (Hambrick et al, 2010).

Organizations have noticed the impact social media has and are starting to use that to their advantage. If organizations use its social media outlets effectively it'll pay off, whether it is to sell tickets or to help causes. When a situation arose in 2008 at the University of Utah where they needed to sell 500 additional football tickets they experimented with the use of social networking. Instead of staying with traditional press releases and fliers, the ticket department posted a notice about availability of the tickets on the "Utah Athletics Facebook page and by the time the press release even reached traditional media outlets two hours later, all 500 seats had been sold" (Steinbach, 2010, pg. 58). Zack Lassiter, Utah's Assistant Athletics Director for Corporate Sales and Ticket Operations, still believes that press releases play an integral role in their sales communication, but after that experience the department "realized that in Facebook, Twitter and other social media, we had really powerful ways of getting the word out and letting others spread the word" (Steinbach, 2010, p. 59). Other numerous instances include "when the Chargers faced a possible TV blackout last season, the team took to Twitter and sold the seats. Other teams use Twitter for everything from letting fans vote on the music played during games to holding draft parties. During a recent game, the White Sox and the Indians hosted a #hashtag battle, donating \$1 to cancer research each time a fan used either #GoTribe or #GoWhiteSox" (Wertheim, 2009, p. 21). Social media allows professional sport teams another way to conveniently market to their consumers.

For those teams not involved with social media, they give two reasons for not being involved with it: "Either they're afraid that fans/consumers will say bad things about them, or they're not convinced social media will pay off" (Coyle, 2010, p. 8). Organizations shouldn't necessarily have to worry about what their fans say, in the end if they are a fan, they will remain loyal to the organization despite any type of complication that arises. If a mishap occurs, then

organizations have the power to right those wrongs whether it'd be through customer service or through a PR movement. Social media will pay off for organizations because it is becoming the behavior that fans/consumers are taking to now and organizations need to adjust to their consumers usages and needs (Coyle, 2010). Social media will become a crucial part to a team's success. If the logic Coyle presented stated prior holds true, teams with a strong and passionate fan base will benefit. Because they have these strong fan bases they are able to offer value to potential sponsors. Another reason, in which teams will benefit from social media, is the idea behind the social graph; the social graph is another term for referring to a consumer's network of connections (Coyle, 2010). Fans go to live events with some combination of their peers, but without social media sport organizations may not be able to find out who these other people are.

“But in a world where (already) 73 percent of Americans regularly use social media (Razorfish Feed 2009), there is an increasing likelihood that those friends are linked to the ticket buyer through Facebook or LinkedIn or Twitter. And if the ticket buyer is registered into the team's online community, then the team has a way to reach the friends through the social graph. No CRM software, expensive hardware or data analysis necessary. When teams invest in building their own social networks, they are building both a ticket sales channel as well as a sponsor activation channel” (Coyle, 2010, p. 8).

The last reason why Coyle believes social media will be crucial for sports teams is because social media builds brand equity for the teams (2010). Social media allows for people to connect, and if there is value added to that experience, then there is a greater chance fans will feel more connected. If that loyalty is there, then team will have a greater success rate in pulling off customer retention.

Before the creation of her company, Amy Martin began her professional involvement with digital marketing as the director of digital media and research with the Phoenix Suns; she played an integral part in developing their strategy development of digital initiatives (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2011). Because of her past experiences and

new responsibilities, Martin's comments during the conducted interview are reinforced.

She believes that social media is a tool that every sports brand should utilize.

“There's no doubt about it – every sports team should be involved in social media marketing in some form or another. Consider, for example, two pro sports teams both vying for the loyalty of a major market. If I'm a loyal fan of one, but the other has an amazing social-media campaign that everyone is talking about, it is likely that I might start to develop a stronger affinity for the latter because of the relationship I aspire to have with the team. The point is that your competition could be developing relationships with your tipping-point fans if you don't have your own voice on the internet” (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2011, p. 401).

Amy Martin's answer helps reinforce the growth that social media is having in the sporting industry. Social media allows fans/consumers, athletes, and sport organizations to become interactive with each other while also forming a means of direct communication between the parties.

“Within the next 12 months, we will enter what Jeremiah Owyang calls the “Era of Social Commerce,” in which online communities will define the future of products and services...social media will be linked to marketing ROI”(Coyle, 2010, p. 8). If the marketing attention is indeed shifted towards online communities within the next twelve months, more attention will be commanded to it by the brands that sponsor sports. One idea that seems to be unanswered is what sport organizations are doing with their social media accounts? Are organizations just using their accounts for quick teasers to bring in traffic to their websites, a faster means of releasing the team's information, or are they starting to use their accounts to enhance their marketing efforts? If organizations are not necessarily using their accounts to enhance their marketing campaign, they should (Coyle, 2008). If players are able to create relationships, organizations are able to do the same especially given the motivation to bring in revenue. Social media has created a change for the selling technique. The selling game used to be a one way means of connecting with consumer, but social media allows for marketers to “communicate *with* consumers rather than *to*

them” (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010, p. 397). The success of a social media marketing plan depends on the marketer/organization. It is based on “the marketer’s capacity and desire to live the brand and deliver value *when, where, and how the fans want to receive it*” (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012, p. 396). If that desire is there, an organization can make it work through a high rate of effort and work.

Another communications professional who shares the same viewpoint as Amy Martin does about the importance of social media is Mike Stevens; Stevens has been the Chief Marketing Officer of the New York Giants since the 2006 season. After the team won the Super Bowl in 2012, author Jason Del Rey conducted an interview with the Giants’ employee to discuss the use of social media by the team for their interactive marketing campaign. Throughout his tenure with the team, Stevens has helped the Giants revamp their content offerings by building a mini-media business that aims to intimately connect the fans with the actual players; the focus of this mini-media business was to actively utilize social media initiatives. Some examples of the initiatives include:

“Integrating fan tweets into the telecast of preseason games and onto the big screen inside the stadium during home games. And the team also threw a social-media night before the Super Bowl, in which a few players hosted Google+ hangouts with some lucky fans and streamed a Twitter Q&A session on their website” (Del Rey, 2012, p 15).

Other initiatives that Stevens implemented included having fans choosing Halloween costumes for the team’s rookies as they were visiting local children’s hospitals. The team videotaped the whole process and posted the content on Facebook in hopes spreading word out into the community about the hospitals needing help and funding. Stevens concluded that the idea “worked all around” (Del Rey, 2012, p. 15). During the lockout the Giants hosted a contest where fans who won, were given the chance to have their picture formatted onto real game

tickets. The organization felt that their fan base wasn't getting the attention it deserved so they decided to recognize fans in a way that's never been done before. The voting for the winners was done through their Facebook account (Del Rey, 2012). "The number of votes was fantastic and the commentary in social media from other fans was incredible. It connected fans in a way we never imagined. The tentacles running off of that campaign go way beyond the sheer number of votes" (Del Rey, 2012, p. 15).

Since the inception of the Giant's interactive marketing campaign, the organization has more than 260,000 people that follow the team on Twitter and 2 million fans on Facebook (Del Rey, 2012).

"We now have true two-way communication that allows fans to touch the Giants brand in ways they were never able to do before. People are seeking out ways to get more involved with us and we are trying to give them that, which is a great thing" (Del Rey, 2012, p.15).

As a result from incorporating social media usage into their marketing campaign, the Giants' organization has received for attention from prospective sponsors. "We have a lot of people calling right now, but it's more people wanting to sell us stuff than working with us" (Del Rey, 2012, p. 15). Regardless of the motives of the prospective sponsors have the interest has increased and stayed consistent since winning the Super Bowl. If teams decided to use social media they will create a better marketing campaign. Using social media effectively will allow organizations to feed the fans' interest while establishing stronger relationships with them, ultimately giving them increased opportunities to bring in business through different consumers and business partners (Coyle, 2010).

Social media has become an integral part in the communication process in today's society. Research has found that fans use social media to indulge themselves further within the sports world, athletes use it as an outlet to express their voice by interacting with other players and fans, while the organizations perspective focuses on increasing brand awareness and sales. This research aims to solve one question: to what extent have sport organizations utilized social media? This study will consist of case studies of four Rochester based sport organizations and interviews with those within the professional industry surrounding the integration of social media. With the results found, the reasons for social media use will hopefully become clearer for younger generations of marketers and fans.

As some professional and collegiate organizations are realizing the impact social media is starting to have, they have begun to utilize it to their advantage. If one is to understand how relationships are formed between the athletes and fans, organizations can learn from that trend and utilize it in a way in which their relationship with fans strengthens, resulting in stronger customer retention occurrences.

Method

Participant Selection

The primary research of this paper was conducted through interviews. Those involved with the interviews were professionals who were already established within the sporting industry. All of the participants in the interview process were all from the upstate region of New York. To see if there were differences in how social media was used between sport organizations, professional sport organizations and sport information directors of academic institutions were considered for this study. Within the professional organizations, officials with

prior experience within the communications or marketing departments were sought out. The final participants of the interviews are listed on Table 1.

Data Collection Procedure

To realize if organizations have started to apply social media within their marketing and communications strategies, interviews were conducted with numerous sport organizations located within the Rochester area. Interviews with either marketing or communications professionals will allow one to see how sport organizations, first hand are using their social media platforms and how they are adapting their usage of it to meet the consumers' needs. Visiting these organizations will allow the research to be proven upon being applied to a professional, real-life setting.

The plan of this procedure is to contact the communications department of each sport organization. The email will be sent out to ask for their participation of an interview. A sample email is outlined in Appendix A. If they are able to meet the demands of performing an interview, another email will be sent out to figure out how it will be conducted – direct contact or indirect contact (email, phone call, etc.). Once those parameters are determined, the interview will be conducted. The interview questions will reflect questions that were used during the interview Ballouli and Hutchinson had with Amy Martin (2010). Examples of interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

Interview Interpretations

The goal of the interviews is determine how some sport organizations are using their social network accounts. If they are not focused on using it for expanding their marketing plan, reasons why they don't will be addressed. With variety of professional organizations located in the area, one will be able to understand how each different sport/organization uses their social

media platform, if they have one. Exploration within these organizations would allow one to find out if the organizations operate in a particular manner; do the organizations only use social media for publicly related terms or more so for their marketing campaign? One concern to be addressed is to see if the organizations thought about following their fans/consumers back on their social network platforms. This idea would be suggested to the organizations based off future implications it would bring about it; if organizations 'friended' their fans back there would be potential increases in customer retention as well brand awareness. Upon reviewing the results of the interviews, specific themes will be looked for; this will help spot potential trends that organizations hold in terms of their approach. Understanding what these organizations see as important will benefit this research because they are trying to build effective and beneficial relationships with their communities and consumers. The meetings will serve as purpose of seeing how professional organizations perceive the importance, of any, of their usage with social media and whether these new outlets have allowed for effective ways in increasing business and retention.

In order to obtain the results necessary to answer the research question of this paper, plans had to be formulated in order to address four face-to-face interviews and four interviews done by telephone. All answers for face-to-face interviews were all recorded; each interview was then listened to and written onto note sheets. All phone interviews were recorded onto note sheets during the time of each meeting. A series of 11 questions were asked in each interview. Some questions were altered in order to fit the type of organization being interviewed. Once all of the interviews were completed, the note sheets were organized into a professional organization and school note sheet. In order to create the two sheets, each answer was analyzed in order to find key words and common trends between the two groupings. If there multiple occurrences of

key words or phrases for a particular answer, they were marked for each time they occurred to show how many organizations shared the same belief. In the case that there were unique answers, answers with extreme detail or opposing beliefs to each answer, they were all recorded onto the appropriate note sheet.

Data Analysis

Social media is relatively a new movement for organizations as most have only been using it for two years. All interviews occurred within a month's timeframe starting in mid-June, which was considered every team's offseason, excluding the Red Wings. The importance the offseason provided for the answers to each question allows one to see what most recent platforms as well trends from their usage were. Within those two years organizations have been to identify which platforms are most effective for them to use. In all eight cases, Facebook and Twitter were being utilized; YouTube was the second most used outlet within three organizations. Other social media platforms that were used included Instagram, Yelp, and Foursquare, but they were not as frequent as the top three.

When asked why these particular platforms were chosen to be used, all organizations believed that Facebook and Twitter were the best ways to "reach" people. All of the SID account holders believed this because those platforms were the ones they were most familiar with, while all of the professional sport organizations stated it was because of the number of users using these particular outlets. Two particular organizations, the Knighthawks and Razorsharks, indicated use of these particular social media platforms because it was a cost-effective method of reaching fans.

When asked if social media was important for their organization, all cases answered yes. There were four cases in which the interviewees believed it was important because social media

provided direct and effective communication with their followers. Lyndsay Dimeo (Lancers) was the only person to mention it was important for their organization because she believed print media is “dying” and is less effective compared to digital media. Norm Kieffer (SJFC) believed social media is important because “if you don’t keep up with it, you’re not going to be really relevant at all.”

The interviewees were then asked how important social media was for their sport’s industry. Each organization believed that social media was important for their industry. Ben Cerow’s statement spoke to the importance of social media’s presence in indoor lacrosse as it provides the league with a “more personable image.” Since the National Lacrosse League (NLL) is much smaller compared to other major sport leagues, the presence of social media allows the league and its team to be more intimate with its fans. He also stated that it is able to provide an equal footing for the league with other leagues like the MLB or NFL. For a sport as large as the MLB, Mark Rogoff (Red Wings) believes that social media is important for the industry if its “used correctly.” If the team were to tweet about a player being called up/sent down “you have to make sure the player knows before you tweet it, the major league club have to know, and the minor league affiliate knows it before you tweet it.” Mark stated that he had seen this particular problem happen before.

For representatives from colleges were asked the same question, three of the interviewees stated that even though it is important, social media communication is not the main priority to keep track off. Joseph Seil (Nazareth) provided the occurrence of how social media allows colleges to take a “hard look” at traditional media and if it will still be effective for them to distribute news.

When asked about measuring the success of their social media platforms; there were differing techniques amongst the organizations. Two organizations stated that simply judging the success based on the number of views and ‘re-tweets’ isn’t effective while four other organizations believed it could be an effective method. Three organizations stated that they were special analytical tools to measure the reach and engagement their platforms had. The Razorsharks had a special system in place on how they could track their tickets; this system allowed to see if the tickets came from a Group-on deal or from Twitter. Lyndsay stated that the Lancers had a tool called Facebook Deals that was able to show the user how many people read a particular post, how many clicked on a particular deal, and even how many shares a post received between fans. All four SIDs stated they weren’t overly concerned about the success of their platforms at this point because they were just learning on how to perfect their usage because their social media existence was relatively new.

All organizations indicated that they used social media to help with public relations and to provide game updates. Professional organizations added that they also used social media for marketing, promotions, and advertising. All SIDs mentioned they used social media for providing updates on Alumni and current students competing at different levels within professional sports and game updates for their respective teams and competition.

When asked if they were planning on expanding their social media usage/techniques, all four of the professional sport organizations said they were planning to expand their usage. Two of the organizations were planning on just adding new social media accounts while the others were going to implement live video updates and promotions using their current accounts and smart phones. Out of the four schools, only Cornell reported that they were planning on expanding their social media presence by implementing a live commenting system for game

updates. This commenting system would help enhance followers experience by adding descriptive notes to explain plays.

When asked about the importance in following their fans, all organizations described the importance that their fan base had and how social media provided a way of getting closer to their fan base. Three organizations talked about how, with social media, they are able to receive fans' feedback and comments much faster and more frequently. Though social has improved relationships between teams and their fans, three organizations stated that social media is a "double-edged sword". Though fans can provide useful feedback, they are also going to provide many criticisms. When asked, Mr. Rogoff replied saying that fans "are of the most importance to the Red Wings. They are what drives the team because without the fans, there would be no product on the field."

Though they all spoke highly about the importance of their fans, only two professional sport organizations stated they followed not just the sponsors, but "anybody and everybody." Two of all cases stated there wasn't a real conscience effort to follow fans; they were more concerned about fans following them. All SIDs reported they followed no student athletes, only media, alumni, and other schools.

All SIDs were then asked if they had any concerns about student athletes using social media and replied with having concerns. Two colleges reported of their being recent incidents occurring with student athletes misusing their personal and school's accounts. Nazareth's Joseph Seil, said that the athletics department preaches every fall on how to use social media accounts correctly. Fisher's Norm Keiffer explained most of the incidents happen because

"They are very young, not really thinking about what they are going to post in general. Sometimes young people rush to do something rather than taking a second to think it through... It is what it is, but I think sometimes young people

are just in their own world not thinking that if something gets out there, how is it going to look and what the ramifications would be for their comments.”

Both interviewees stated they had to take action against some student athletes, but didn't go into full detail about specific actions taken. Mr. Keiffer simply offered “why would you want to provide motivation for your opponent if they get wind of the comment?” He also stated that all schools should implement a social media class so that “all” students would learn how to properly use and follow a code of conduct when they use social media.

When asked out of all of the sport organizations, only the Razorsharks reported into acquiring new sponsors because of their social media existence. However the representatives from the Knighthawks and Red Wings acknowledge that they could see that changing in the future as specific sponsorships packages are created for social media.

All sport organizations confirmed that their players were actively using social media; all four professional organizations stated that more than half of the team were using. Three of the four stated they use their athletes in some way when it came to using social media and their marketing campaigns. Mark Rogoff was the only person to state that his organization had guidelines and rules in place for athletes' usage; he wouldn't disclose the information. however. Ben Cerow stated because the NLL is a much smaller league, that the players get away with smaller mishaps including the language that they used.

To conclude the interview all were asked if they believed social media is an effective marketing tool to which all answered yes. One organization stated that it is currently the most effective tool, while one said that it wasn't the only piece to the puzzle; two organizations stated since social media is ever changing, that if it is used

correctly, they would see it as the most effective tool. Four of the organizations stated one reason it was effective because it was a great way to get the message out to fans and improved method of communication. Five organizations stated it was because it created better relationships.

Discussion

This study was one of the first attempts to examine social media content as it relates to the sports industry and understand this growing phenomenon. Social media represents an opportunity for sport marketers to reach a large audience. In the past, news was first distributed through traditional means including news reporting, newspaper/magazine distribution and programs from live events. With the emergence of social media, fans have been given the chance to submerge themselves into the sporting industry. The research has shown that social media as allowed its users to personalize the ways they connect and communicate with one another and those within the sport industry based on its characteristics of demassification, interactivity, and asynchronicity.

The results show that sport organizations are aware of the importance their fans have and because of social media's trait, that they are able to format their material to meet fans needs whether its game updates or purchasing tickets. However, only two organizations from this study stated they followed their fans back. If fans are held in regard to sport organizations, why is it that two organizations stated they made "no real conscience effort" to follow back their fans; four additional organizations simply stated they did not follow their fans. Though sport organizations may interact with their followers, organizations should expand their presence and provide their followers with a follow back. Following back their followers will allow organizations to come off more

personable, as they are showing an increased effort to become more intimate with their fans. This effort will benefit sport organizations because they will be able to partake in a two-way communication channel. Becoming closer with their fans in a two-way channel will allow for organizations to receive feedback, good or bad, on a more frequent basis; this will aid them in adjusting and improving their organizational goals in how they accommodate their fans. The more opportunities fans have to connect with the team the more likely it is they will continue identifying with the organization which means increased customer retention and profits.

Because organizations can control their own content, there were differences on how social media platforms were used between professional sport organizations and at educational institutions. Though game updates were used within all the organizations in this study, business usage in social media including marketing and promoting were more relevant in professional sport organizations than in schools. Sport organizations' business revolves around their product and fans so they have a higher commitment in earning a profit as with schools, they can make profits for their athletics department, but their focus is on the institution as a whole. Because updates were more of an importance for schools, they focused on providing additional updates on alumni who were succeeding at the higher level and other schools they competed with. However, both types of organizations are wary about their athletes using these accounts as it reflects the image of the organization.

The results show that sport organizations believe social media is an effective marketing tool. Because social media is relatively new, sport marketers have not reached the potential it has as they are learning about all the platforms and how to use them

correctly. Professional sport organizations' usage of social media is more developed as they have the necessary resources to utilize in hopes of earning revenue; schools have more priorities outside of their athletics department which allows them settle with underutilized social media platforms. Though the results show most organizations haven't been able to acquire new sponsors, social media does provide a more cost effective alternative to selling sponsorships and making a profit. Organizations would generally have to create marketing campaigns for television, radio, and/or print and pay the costs in order to utilize those methods. Especially for those methods, run-time of team's ads would be limited for a small amount of time. With social media, organizations can cut their costs almost down to nothing, as well as making it available to consumers to any time they want to access it.

Limitations

There were several limitations with the current study. First the content analysis focused on a very small and localized amount of sport organizations. The eight organizations questioned may not represent the same beliefs as other organizations outside the Rochester area or the entire sport industry. In addition the size of the organizations may also be a factor. The league and team sizes of the organizations used in this study don't necessarily compare with the bigger money making leagues and teams like that of the NFL, MLB, NBA, and etc. Those organizations have more resources to their advantage and bigger popularity amongst the masses. As for the academic institutions, there was only one college that ranked in Division I. This doesn't reflect the same outlook that the remaining Division I schools; more prominent and successful academic institutions for example like the University of Miami, LSU, and Alabama may

have more resources to utilize than smaller size and less successful Division I schools. These bigger schools may have the opportunity to be more creative with their social media initiatives as they are able to draw in higher revenues. Other limitations from this study were miscommunication and scheduling conflicts with interview subjects. The sample size of this study would have been larger than eight participants because some of the potential interviewees were unable to be reached as well as not being available to be interviewed between the specified timeline. There could have also been miscommunication between the interviewer and interviewee during the meeting and the misunderstandings were never brought up; this could have affected how answers were made to all of the questions asked.

This study provides insight on to how sport organizations are utilizing social media. Because social media's content can be edited, organizations are tailoring their content to fit the needs and wants of their consumers. The data analysis shows that different leveled organizations, professional sports compared to amateur/collegiate sports, use their social media platforms for different purposes. This study shows social media can be used by any type of organization within the sporting industry, especially for teams that may not have the major resources available to market their product to their consumers. Because social media is a cost effective alternative, smaller organizations and leagues can create themselves more of an equal playing field with organizations that more resources at hand. If one wanted to compare how all sport organizations are using social media, further research would need to be done on how more prominent and popular leagues like the NFL, NBA, and MLB are using their social media accounts. Because these leagues are prominent, they have more resources to utilize allowing them

experiment and use their social media more freely than other teams with less financial resources to work with. A study into these leagues will allow one to see if there are more options for teams to use in relation to their social media presence and as well as seeing if social media allows for equaling playing field for all organizations.

References

- Ballouli, K., & Hutchinson, M. (2010). Digital-branding and social-media strategies for professional athletes, sports teams, and leagues: An interview with digital royalty's Amy Martin. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(4), 395-401.
- Copeland, R. (2011). Tweet all about it. *Metro*, 1(169), 96-100. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Coyle, P. (2010). Teams active in social media build a strategic advantage. *Street & Smith's Sportbusiness Journal*, 12(35), 18.
- Del Rey, J. (2012). Inside the NY Giants' marketing playbook. *Advertising Age*, 83(8), 15.
- Grossman, B. (2011). How sports producers are becoming twits. *Broadcasting & Cable*, 141(28), 33. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Hambrick, M. E., Simmons, J. M., Greenhalgh, G. P., & Greenwell, T. (2010). Understanding professional athletes' use of twitter: A content analysis of athlete tweets. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(4), 454-471. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Jackson, A. (2009). Football coverage in the papers of the Sheffield Telegraph, c.1890-1915. *International Journal of Regional & Local Studies*, 5(1), 63-84. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Merkin, S. (2011). White sox stay connected via social media. MLB Advanced Media. Retrieved from <http://mlb.com/>
- McDonnell, J. (2011). Only connect: social relations in an online world. *Media Development*, 58(1), 3-7. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Sparre, K. (2007). Digital media could boost smaller sports. *Play the Game 2007: Creating Coalitions for Food Governance in Sport*, 22.
- Steinbach, P. (2010). Facebook value. *Athletic Business*, 34(8), 58-60.

Washington, R., & Karen, D. (2001). Sport and society. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 187-

212. Annual Reviews. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2678619>

Wertheim, L. (2011). Tweet smell of #success. *Sports Illustrated*, 115(1), 20-21.

Zion, L., Spaaij, R., & Nicholson, M. (2011). Sport media and journalism: No

introduction needed. *Media International Australia*, (141), 76-83.

Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

*Appendix A**Sample Initiation Emails*

[Date]

[Interviewee Name]

[Address]

Dear [Interviewee Name]:

My name is David Malerk and I am currently a senior at St. John Fisher College majoring in Sport Management. I am currently researching how sport organizations are using their social media accounts for my Senior Seminar class. Given your experience as [Name of Position Title] for [Name of Sports Organization], I figured you would be an excellent source to assist me.

I hope that you can find 30 minute to meet with me before the end of the month. I will contact you the week of [Date] to set up an appointment. If you have any questions, please contact me by phone at [Phone Number] or by e-mail [E-mail address]. I appreciate your time in considering my request.

Sincerely,

David Malerk

*Appendix B**Sample Interview Questions*

- Do you have any social media accounts?
 - o If so, which ones?
 - o If no, why do you not have any?
- Why is social media so important?
- Is social media a tool every organization should utilize?
- How do you measure the success of your accounts?
- How do you specifically use your social media accounts?
- How do you plan to extend the execution of your social media outlets?
- How do the organizations choose their followers?
- What is the importance in following your fans?
- Do you now have new, prospective sponsors since implementing social media as a marketing tool?

Table 1

Participant List

Name	Job Title	Organization	League/Division	Sport
Ben Cerow	Account Executive	Rochester Knighthawks	National Lacrosse League	Indoor Lacrosse
Mark Rogoff	Director of Communications	Rochester Red Wings	Minor League Baseball (AAA)	Baseball
Adam House	Co-Owner & CEO	Rochester Razorsharks	Premier Basketball League	Basketball
Lyndsay Demeo	Director of Communications	Rochester Lancers	Major Indoor Soccer League	Indoor Soccer
Julie Greco	SID	Cornell University	Division I	Athletics Department
Norm Kieffer	SID	St. John Fisher College	Division III	Athletics Department
Joseph Seil	SID	Nazareth	Division III	Athletics Department
Stephen Jaymes	SID	Rochester Institute of Technology	Division III	Athletics Department