

Study of Social Media Platforms Influencing Communication between Sports Fans and Sports Teams

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Abstract. In this paper, the purpose of this study is to discover the types of interaction between fans and sports teams on social media and the impact of social media on fans and sports teams. The study suggests that people should interact with sports teams in a positive way, which will benefit both sides. Besides, the research also suggests that people should avoid negative interactions with sports teams, which can be detrimental to both sides.

Keywords: social media, sports fans, sports teams.

1. Introduction

The interaction between fans and sports teams has always been an important link (Gascó, Moreno, Sanz, Pomar, and Hervás, 2017). In the past, the two could only interact by writing letters, but now the emergence of social media has broken this tradition (Marilou, 2010). Fans can communicate with the team anytime, anywhere through the Internet, which greatly increases the opportunities for fans to interact with sports teams.

Most research seems to agree that sports teams build their brand image through social platforms is the mainstream in the future. Videos on social media will also become more common, including UGC and MGC content (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos & Chadwick, 2015). User-Generated Content (UGC), the meaning is any form of Content, such as images, videos, text, and audio, that has been posted by users on online platforms such as social media and wikis. Marketers-Generated Content, meaning Content produced by marketers and sellers to introduce and promote their goods and to engage consumer activity on official websites or third-party platforms. According to one study on the issue (Marilou, 2010), on YouTube, the most popular type of video currently is the high-quality videos officially produced by sports teams, while the low-quality fan-made videos are the least viewed. As a result, the interaction between fans and sports teams now and in the future will show an upward trend. Although more frequent online interactions between fans and sports teams may bring opportunities on platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and other forms of social media.

The purpose of this study is to discover the types of interaction between fans and sports teams on social media and the impact of social media on fans and sports teams. Moreover, my research question is: Will the interaction between sports fans and sports teams on social media benefit both parties? Furthermore, my paper comprises three themes. First of all, is Fan Outreach and Sports Team Use of Social Media. Secondly, the theme is Types of Fan-Team Interactions on Social Media. Thirdly theme is the Impact of Social Media on Fan Perception on Sports Teams and Athletes [1-5].

2. Methods

Past research has shown that social media plays an essential role in team interactions with fans. Considering this, knowing what fans and players perspective about using social media is valuable. The study was conducted using two questionnaires, one for sports fans and one for college athletes. The surveys were all made with Google forms and filled in online via the Internet. Table 1 shows the information of the respondents. There are total of 15 participants responded to the fan questionnaire, of which 8 were men, 9 were women, 10 were sports fans, and 5 were not enthusiastic about sports. A total of 19 participants responded to the college athletes' questionnaire, of which 12 were men, 7 were women, 16 were sports fans, and 3 were not very interested in sports. All respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25, and all were social media users. A full tabulation of participant

demographics is found in table 1 below. The majority of sports fans from survey 1 were residing in the US, while those who were college athletes from survey 2 were in China.

Table. 1: respondent information

| Respondents | Total | Gender (male) | Gender (male) | Age | Real sports fans | Social media user |
|------------------|-------|---------------|---------------|-------|------------------|-------------------|
| Sports fans | 15 | 8 | 9 | 18~25 | 10 | 151 |
| College athletes | 19 | 12 | 7 | 18~25 | 16 | 19 |

3. Results

The research findings were based on an online survey, and the respondents were sports fans and college athletes. To further illustrate, the results were divided into three themes: The first set of questions focuses on the types and frequency of fans and players to use social media. Next, questions were designed regarding the sports team social media strategies that the content sports team post on social media do fans and players like or dislike. The last set of questions was designed in order to evaluate fan and player attitude about the tendency that social media interaction becomes mainstream between sports teams and fandom.

3.1 The preference of types and frequency of social media use between sports fans and college athletes.

First and foremost, it was important to establish that sports fans and college athletes tend to use different types of social media. To that end, respondents were asked about which types of social media do they often use.

As can be seen from table 1 for Sports Fans Survey, ten people chose YouTube (66.67%) as their first choice, and six people chose Facebook (40%) as their second choice, and nine people chose Instagram (60%) as their third choice, and six people chose Twitter (40%) as their fourth choice.

Table. 2: Types of Social Media Sports Fans Prefer to Use

| Social media user | First choice | Second choice | Third choice | Fourth choice | Rank |
|-------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|------|
| user | 10 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 1st |
| Social media user | 1 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2nd |
| user | 1 | 2 | 9 | 40% | 3rd |
| Social media | 3 | 3 | 3 | Fourth choice | 4th |

The result indicates that sports fans are most tend to use the social media platform for online video sharing. As evidenced by their rank choices, YouTube garnered the greatest importance among those in the fan-oriented survey.

As can be seen from table 2 for University Athletes Survey, ten people chose Instagram (52.63%) as their first choice, and seven people chose Twitter (36.84%) as their second choice, and six people chose YouTube (31.58%) as their third choice, and ten people chose Facebook (52.63%) as their fourth choice.

Table. 3: Types of Social Media University Athletes Prefer to Use

| n=19 | First choice | Second choice | Third choice | Fourth choice | Rank |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|------|
| Instagram | 10 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1st |
| Twitter | 2 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 2nd |
| YouTube | 5 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 3rd |
| Facebook | 2 | 3 | 4 | 10 | 4th |
| % | 52.63% | 36.84% | 31.58% | 52.63% | 6 |

The result indicates that university athletes are most tend to use the social media platform for the picture or short video sharing. Instagram, though similar to YouTube in that video content can be posted, it is most often used for sharing and commenting on pictures. It is interesting to speculate why YouTube and Instagram attracted as much attention among those surveyed.

Secondly, it was important to establish that the majority of sports fans and college athletes use social media as a high frequency. To that end, respondents were asked about how often do they use social media apps.

As can be seen from table 4, for Sports Fans Survey, almost 94% of people use social media apps more than four times a week, and around 7% of people use social media apps once a week. For University Athletes Survey, almost 79% of people use social media apps more than four times a week and followed by three times per week (approximately 11%), once a week and four times a week (both nearly 6%).

Table.4 Frequency of Sports Fans and College Athletes to Use Social Media

| | Sports Fans (n=15) | % | College Athletes (n=19) | % |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| Once a week | 1 | 6.7% | 1 | 5.3% |
| Twice a week | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Three times a week | 0 | 0% | 2 | 10.5% |
| Four times a week | 0 | 0% | 1 | 5.3% |
| More than four times a week | 14 | 93.3% | 15 | 78.9% |

Not surprisingly, these tendencies seem to suggest an incredibly frequent level of social media use among these young respondents.

B. Sports fans and college athletes’ assessment on the sports team’s social media posts content.

The next set of questions pertained to fan and player perceptions on professional sports team content posted on social media. Specifically, respondents from both surveyed were asked whether they followed any sports team social media account.

Among those surveyed in the fan-oriented survey, two-thirds reported that they followed a sports team on social media, suggesting relevantly frequent exposure to the sports team’s posted content.

6. Do you follow the social media accounts of sports teams you are interested in?
15 responses

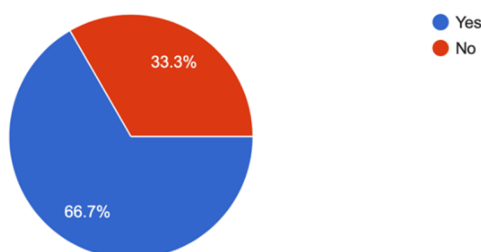


Figure.1: Sports Fans Survey

In that same vein, the data from the player-oriented survey suggested similarly high levels of social media exposure to sports team content. Nearly all the participants in this survey (84.2%) indicated that they followed a sports team on social media. Based on this, it would be fair to say that they are actively interested in sports team activity on this platform.

7. Do you follow the social media accounts of sports teams or athletes you are interested in?
19 responses

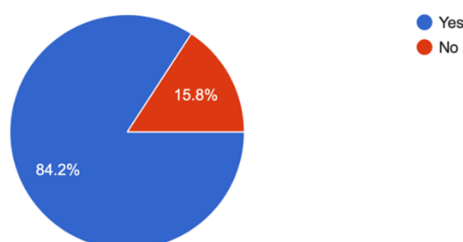


Figure.2: University Athletes Survey

Combined with the result of Figure 1, the results of Figure show the majority of respondents like to follow their favorite sports team's social media accounts, and this phenomenon seems to be a common and prevalent tendency.

When asked questions regarding what content that the sports teams posted on social media can catch sports fans and college athletes' eyes. Table 4 for Sports Fans Survey reveals news report of club and players rank the first position (almost 40%), followed by highlights video of competition (around 27%), official and fan-made funny video (nearly 14%), were what those surveyed generally paid the most attention to. In conclusion, this suggests that the type of content most fans prefer is Marketers-Generated rather than User-Generated Content.

Table. 4 Social Media Content Appeals to Sports Fans

| n=15 | Sports Fans | % | Rank |
|--|-------------|-------|------|
| news report of club and players | 6 | 40% | 1st |
| highlights video of competition | 4 | 26.7% | 2nd |
| official and fan- made funny video | 2 | 13.3% | 3rd |
| sports products that sports team recommended | 0 | 0% | |
| others | 3 | 20.1% | |

Generally consistent with that of the previous survey, table 5 reveals that respondents from the player-oriented survey reported the greatest interest in highlights of sports content (95%), followed by a news report of club and players and official and fan-made funny video both rank the second position (nearly 74%). However, sports products that the sports team recommended also list the last place around 43%. Besides, approximately 6% of interviewee add another option that life outside the game and training.

Table.5: Social Media Content Appeals to University athletes

| n=19 | College Athletes | 9% | Rank |
|--|------------------|-------|------|
| news report of club and players | 18 | 94.7% | 1st |
| highlights video of competition | 14 | 73.7% | 2nd |
| official and fan- made funny video | 14 | 73.7% | 3rd |
| sports products that sports team recommended | 8 | 42.1% | 4th |
| others | 1 | 5.3% | |

According to both tables, sports fans and college athletes often focus on the content about the sports team itself, such as the newly released club or player information and the information related to a sports match. However, they are not as positive about the surrounding information on the sports team. For example, they generally have interested in the funny videos that sports teams post on social media and have little enthusiasm for the sports products the sports team recommends.

3.2 Attitudes toward sports teams' use of social media between sports fans and college athletes.

Past research has indicated that most people believe social media plays a positive role in the interaction between sports teams and sports fans. To investigate this issue further, respondents were asked about whether social media plays an irreplaceable role in the interaction between fans and sports teams.

Positive Attitudes

As can be seen from Figure 3 for Sports Fans Survey, the majority of respondents believe that social media plays an irreplaceable role in the interaction between fans and sports teams. In sports fans survey, almost 74% of people believe social media played a unique position in the sports team's interactions with sports fans. On the contrary, almost 27% of respondents believe social media is not irreplaceable in communication between sports teams and sports fans. In conclusion, the majority of

sports fans believe that social media is a crucial medium for fandoms to communicate with sports teams.

8.Social media plays an irreplaceable role in the interaction between fans and sports teams
15 responses

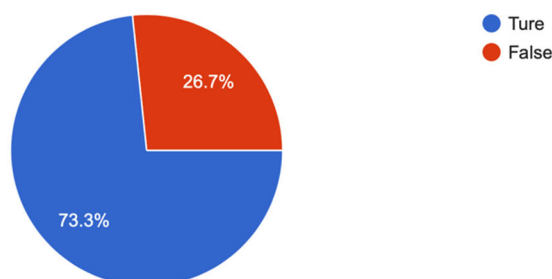


Figure. 3 Sports Fans Survey

As can be seen from Figure 4 for University Athletes Survey, the majority of respondents believe that social media plays an irreplaceable role in the interaction between fans and sports teams. In university athletes survey, around 95% of people believe social media played an irreplaceable role in the sports team's interactions with sports fans. On the contrary, in university athletes survey, around 6% of respondents believe that social media is not irreplaceable in communication between sports teams and sports fans.

9.Social media plays an irreplaceable role in the interaction between fans and sports teams
19 responses

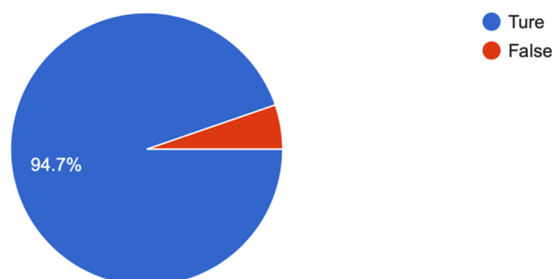


Figure.4 University Athletes Survey

According to both Figures, the results indicate that the vast majority of sports fans and university athletes have a positive attitude toward the sports team utilize social media as a way to interact with sports fans. To some extent, social media plays essential and irreplaceable roles for both sports fans and sports teams.

From the fan perspective, asked whether fan comments on social media influence the reputation and image of sports teams. Figure 5 for Sports Fans Survey reveals that almost 67% of people agree with this opinion, and around 20% of people strongly agree with this opinion. In conclusion, this suggests that most sports fans believe their attitudes and behavior on social media have a direct impact on sports teams.

9.Fan comments on social media influence the reputation and image of sports teams
15 responses

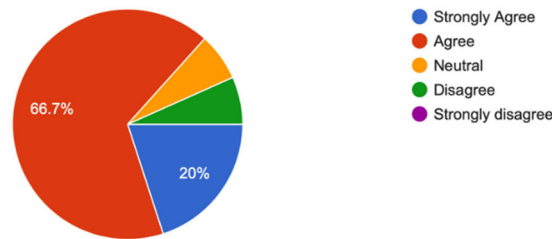


Figure.5 Sports Fans Survey

Turning to the college athlete perspective, figure 6 illustrates that almost 58% of people strongly agree with this opinion, and nearly 22% of people agree with this opinion. However, around 22% of people disagree with this opinion. Besides, 0% of people chose the neutral and strongly disagree options. In conclusion, this suggests that most college athletes also believe that fans' attitudes, behaviors, or habits on social media have a direct impact on sports teams.

10.Fan comments on social media influence the reputation and image of sports teams and athletes
19 responses

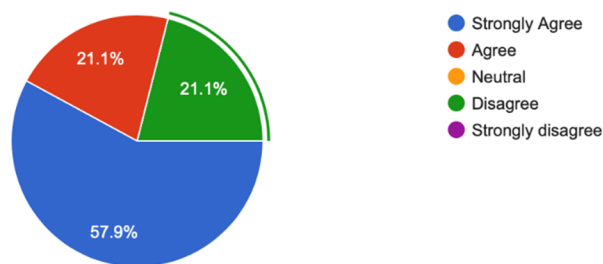


Figure.6: University Athletes Survey

According to both Figures, the results indicate that the vast majority of sports fans and college athletes thought that fan’s attitudes towards the sports team on social media could affect the team’s reputation in society. For Sports Fans Survey, almost 87% of respondents have agreed with the attitude that includes strongly agree and agree. For University Athletes Survey, approximately 80% of respondents have agreed with the attitude that includes strongly agree and agree.

In terms of the benefits that such fan-team interactions can have, respondents were asked rate whether such interaction was positive for both parties. Figure 7 for Sports Fans Survey displays that almost 60% of respondents agree with this opinion, and nearly 34% of respondents strongly agree with this opinion. In conclusion, this suggests that most sports fans believe that the habit of comments sports teams positively will benefit the organization. Thus, fandoms should pay attention to their attitude and behavior towards sports teams on social media.

10. Positive interaction brings mutual benefits to fans and sports teams
15 responses

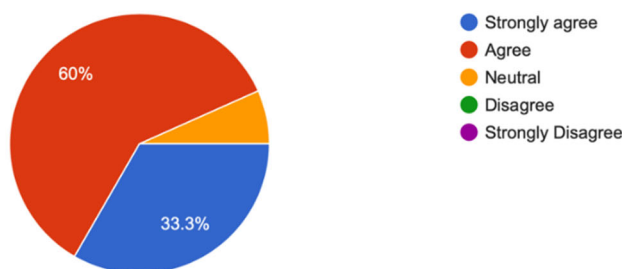


Figure.7 Sports Fans Survey

For point of comparison on this same question, the athletes survey, noted in figure 8 reveals that almost 64% of people strongly agree with this opinion, and around 27% of people agree with this opinion. In conclusion, this suggests that most college athletes believe that fans' good social habits will have a positive impact on sports teams, including good attitudes and behaviors that will benefit the organization.

11. Positive interaction brings mutual benefits to fans and sports teams
19 responses

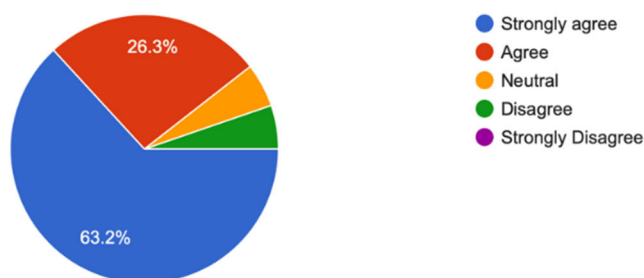


Figure.8 University Athletes Survey

According to both Figures, the results indicate that most sports fans and college athletes believe that positive interaction and communication between sports fans and sports teams on social media platforms will benefit both sides. For Sports Fans Survey, nearly 94% of respondents have agreed with the attitude that includes strongly agree and agree. For University Athletes Survey, around 91% of respondents have agreed with the attitude that includes strongly agree and agree.

Negative Attitudes

In order to investigate the negative aspects of these fan-team interactions, respondents in both surveys were asked to consider whether some fans comment on social media brings disadvantages aspect to sports teams. Figure 9 for Sports Fans Survey illustrates that almost 54% of people agree with this opinion, and nearly 14% of people strongly agree with this opinion. In conclusion, this suggests that most sports fans believe that fans commenting on social media with negative attitudes or behaviors will harm sports teams. Therefore, fans should communicate with sports teams rationally and try to avoid using negative emotions.

11. Some fans comment on social media brings disadvantages aspect to sports teams
15 responses

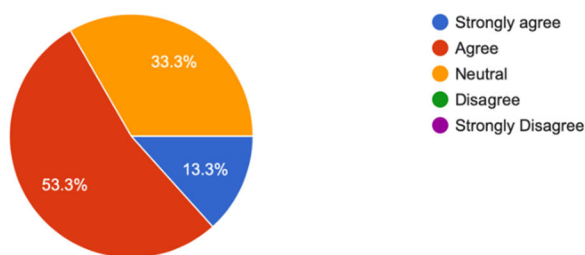


Figure.9 Sports Fans Survey

By comparison, among those surveyed in the athlete-oriented survey, figure 10 shows that almost 48% of people strongly agree with this opinion, and nearly 43% of people agree with this opinion. In conclusion, this suggests that most college athletes think negative comments from sports fans can be bad for sports teams. Therefore, fans should keep positive and objective emotions to communicate with sports teams instead of using negative emotions and behaviors.

12. Some fans comment on social media brings disadvantages aspect to sports teams or athletes
19 responses

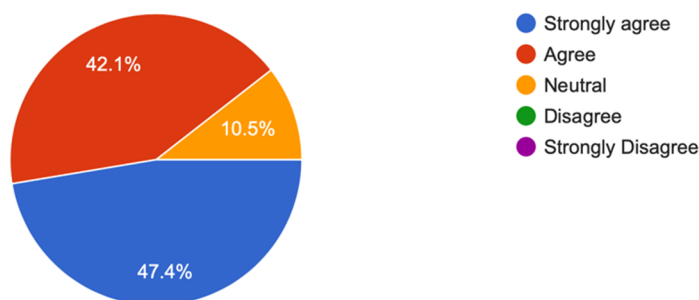


Figure.10 University Athletes Survey

According to both Figures, the results indicate that the majority of sports fans and college athletes believe that fans' negative comments about the sports team on social media platforms will bring some disadvantages to the side to some extent. For Sports Fans Survey, nearly 68% of respondents have agreed with the attitude that includes strongly agree and agree. For University Athletes Survey, around 91% of respondents have agreed with the attitude that includes strongly agree and agree.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

Overall, the purpose of this study is to discover the types of interaction between fans and sports teams on social media and the impact of social media on fans and sports teams.

The result from the survey seems to suggest sports fans and college athletes have different habit of using social media. The content sports team post on social media that attract sports fans and university athletes is also different. From sports teams' perspective, product-related content as more appealing to sports fans. These findings are in with the idea indicated in the past research of Parganas et al. (2015) which believes that most of the tweets were about the sports team, its players, and the manager, including the importance of the stadium, the team's history, tradition, and values, as well as tweets about fans and sponsors. From the sports fans' perspective, the official content released by sports teams that fans are interested in is more attractive. These findings are related to the idea shows

in the past research of Checchinato et al. (2015), which believes that although both User-generated content and Marketer-generated content attracting the fans' attention, users prefer watching videos created by their favorite football clubs. However, sports fans and college athletes both have a positive attitude of the way that sports teams utilize social media platforms to interact and communicate with sports fans. These findings are supported by previous research of Checchinato et al. (2015), in which the authors suggested that the majority of sports teams always provide content that fans appreciate and desire more active interaction with them on social media.

First and foremost, although sports fans and university athletes tend to use different types of social media platforms, they are both high-frequency social media users. Secondly, sports fans and college athletes both have the tendency to follow the sports teams' social media account they interested in. However, they were attracted by the different content that the sports team posted on social media platforms. Lastly, sports fans and university athletes both believe using social media is an effective way for sports fans to interact with sports teams currently, and the positive aspects for both sides (fans and teams) outweigh the negative ones.

This study has some limitations worth mentioning for further research in the future. First of all, the participants of survey2 are college athletes, not professional players. The ideal participants in this research were professional athletes. However, interviewing professional athletes currently is not achievable. Thus, alter the survey participants to college athletes that have the closest level to professional athletes is the optimal choice.

Secondly, the data collection procedure for survey2 was complicated because the participants (college athletes) were all in China, which had no access to foreign networks. Therefore, the method college athletes use to complete the survey have a little special. They took screenshots to complete the questionnaire and submitted them through WeChat or email. Eventually, someone needs to fill in the collected data into the Google Form manually.

Thirdly, the instrument of this research is to conduct two questionnaires, one for sports fans and the other for college athletes. Considering that Chinese college athletes are not native English speakers, if they use the instrument of the interview, they might not fully understand what the interviewer speaks and not able to convey their ideas accurately. Thus, alter the instrument is necessary because it could make the data collected relatively accurate. Besides, the shortcoming of the open-ended question part of the survey is obvious. Because the majority of respondents are unwilling to write long paragraphs to convey their ideas, and almost all of them only answered one short sentence. Therefore, most participants cannot provide some valuable information about the survey.

Considering these findings, both sports fans and college athletes should pay more attention to their comments to sports teams on social media. The study suggests that people should interact with sports teams in a positive way, which will benefit both sides. Besides, the research also suggests that people should avoid negative interactions with sports teams, which can be detrimental to both sides.

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