

Social Media Strategies: Engaging with rugby union consumers

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The rise and popularity of the Internet and social media has drastically changed the ways in which sport organisations communicate with their key stakeholders (Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). In terms of social media use, sport comprises just a small proportion of television content, yet nearly fifty percent of all Twitter content is related to sports (Nielsen, 2014). Other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram are also extensively used by sport organisations and consumers of sport. It is increasingly important for sport organisations to prioritise these platforms in the overall communication, public relations, and marketing strategies. Social media has changed how consumers get information, what information consumers can now access and a newer phenomenon whereby consumers can interact with their favourite sport organisation or athlete.

Social media has also given sport organisations, athletes, celebrities, and consumers (to name a few) an unfiltered voice in an increasingly cluttered media-marketplace. Traditionally, content was vetted by journalists and producers or editors who decided whether a story would make mainstream media attention. However, the adoption of social media platforms has enabled all users to have complete control over their message (Scott, Hill, & Zakus, 2014). As this relatively new approach to communication with consumers evolves, it is vital for those involved in the management and marketing of sport to understand some of the key issues related to social media. This study seeks to break ground in the area by analysing the social media strategies of a professional sport organisation, the ACT Brumbies and uncover whether consumers' desires are being met by the team's social media content.

The relationship people have with sport teams ranges from the very casual to being an avid fan and organising one's life around the activities of the team. The varying strength of this connectedness has been captured in Funk and James' Psychological Continuum Model (PCM; 2001). Four stages of increasingly deep connection were proposed (Awareness, Attraction, Attachment and Allegiance), and have now been explored thoroughly with Beaton and Funk (2009) developing an algorithm that relies on facets of the involvement construct (Beaton,

Funk, Ridinger & Jordan, 2011) as a staging mechanism for placement along the PCM.

The dataset of this study was an online survey (n = 2155) that was collected over several weeks during the second half of the Brumbies' current Super Rugby Season. In addition to questions that generated demographic and behavioural profile, individuals were also asked to respond to questionnaire items designed to measure the involvement construct (Beaton, et al., 2011) and resistance to change (Pritchard, Havitz & Howard, 1999). The involvement construct dimensions (Hedonic Value, Centrality, Symbolic Value) and resistance to change were measured with three items each. These items were included so that data could be fed into the staging algorithm that was to be used in subsequent analysis. As this study is ongoing, results will be presented at the conference in Hobart.