

Usage of Twitter for Brand Building: The Case of Los Angeles Lakers

Brand communication provides an important role in the sports industry. It lies at the heart of it and takes on many different forms with varying stakeholders. In sports organizations, there are many mediums to reach their stakeholders including television, radio, publications, and online efforts. About over 79% of online adults using social networking sites, social media has unprecedentedly grown in usage across variety industries, and has become an especially popular medium in the sports industry (Greenwood & Duggan, 2016). Sports teams are now utilizing an increasing number of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, live chats, Foursquare, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube to interact and engage their fans and followers. Social media are really useful in reaching many stakeholders with speed, carrying ample amounts of information, and with the capability of interaction (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). These elements directly apply to uses in sports communication to connect with the public, build a brand, conduct customer relationship management, and manage reputations.

In the past, public relations practitioners relied on television and other media such as press briefings and releases to achieve these objectives of branding and communication, unlike in today's world where the rapidly growing popularity and usage of social media has taken over this role. Social media has changed how sports teams represent and disseminate brand information to the audience and fans.

The purpose of this study is to identify how Twitter is being utilized by NBA teams and in particular by the Los Angeles Lakers which is the team with the greatest following on the platform. It focuses on how the club used Twitter to build professional, personal, and community relationships through a content of tweets on their official Twitter sites. The study also analyzes the secondary sources from the NBA teams' official Twitter sites, and interviews with NBA

social media specialists to evaluate current social media efforts in the NBA. In analyzing current social media strengths and struggles of NBA teams, the study addresses the following research questions;

1. How does NBA teams (Los Angeles Lakers) use Twitter to build brand awareness and loyalty?

2. How does the Lakers interact with fans and followers during Game day?

3. In what ways does using Twitter to interact with fans benefit sports teams such as the Los Angeles Lakers?

In this paper, the importance of ~~Social media (twitter)~~ to branding and brand communication for sports teams (Los Angeles Lakers) will be discussed. In addition, there is presented a literature review section and lastly the methodology to be used by the researcher in answering the listed research questions will also be highlighted.

Literature Review

Branding & Brand Equity

Aaker define brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities connected to a brand name or symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or standard of service (Aaker, 2013). Building a strong brand equity is important for teams in the sports industry because the sector is highly competitive and saturated with outfits offering almost similar intangible and tangible value to their customers (Giroux et al, 2017).

In a recent study, the researchers were sought to establish the congruence between brand personality and marketing promotional activities through an online survey. The sample

considered included 2,400 respondents on the internet who provided the data needed for the enquiry. Once collected, the data were then analyzed using structural equation model and the results indicated that there is congruence between brand personality and promotional activities (Giroux et al, 2017). The study also revealed that fans of sports teams value the team's financial strength and this is also linked to congruence regarding the promotional activities.

The importance of this source to our own study that it provides ample background on the significance of branding in sports. Importantly, the value placed by fans on a team's brand has been shown to differ from team to another thereby implying that special efforts are required to set apart best performers. Indeed as illustrated, the sports industry is highly competitive and therefore managers need special marketing strategies to beat the competition and be profitable. One way to achieve this innovatively is through the use of social media (Twitter) to build the brand and also interact with the fans at a personal level. The methodology applied also can be tailored and adopted in this study effectively.

one study is not ample

SM does not equal Twitter.
Why is Twitter chosen?

Brand equity enhances the ability of the customer to process and interpret information when faced with choice and this gives them confidence in making a purchase decision (Aaker, 2013). A brand essentially solve the dilemma of choice for the customer because it signifies what he/she is looking for in a product service.

⁽²⁰⁰⁸⁾ Quirk observes the changing trends affecting sports teams in the twenty first century and this include the development of satellite and internet technologies. He says that today, sports teams cannot merely rely on their home markets alone for mobilization of fans and sponsorship capital (Quirk, 2008). Sports teams need to take advantage of these technologies to essentially build a worldwide fan base and as a result they are able to raise enormous sponsorship capital as well as a global audience and following.

In modern times sports teams have grown into huge businesses with large amounts of capital and employees as well as international operations across borders. They have to remain financially viable and satisfy all the stakeholders involved much like the corporate businesses in other sectors of the economy. This means that the aspect of building the brand for sports teams follows the same imperatives as those in the corporate businesses. Sports teams managers therefore need to draw parallels that can help achieve the objectives better.

Source?

The key difference between sports teams and businesses in other sectors is that fans chose to follow a specific team in a league for what can be termed as “irrational reasons”. This is because there are no tangible stakes for them in the success of the team but rather the association is purely emotional and thus dependent on loyalty (Quirk, 2008). This is crucial for managers to grasp because unlike conventional businesses, sports teams must maintain this loyalty by convincing the fans that they are worthy of such following. Mostly this is achieved by winning championships as well as having strong personalities in the players’ roster. Social media has an important and valuable place in achieving this objective and this is why it is useful to study the impact of twitter on sports teams’ brands.

which one? SM wouldn't have effect on personalities, and your study design cannot measure it either.

Sports teams are bankable names in today’s world because of the internet and satellite technologies which enable the mobilization of vast masses without the limitation of physical geography and borders (Quirk, 2008). Major sports bodies in the world such as the National Basketball Association, (NBA) have realized the value of such international exposure, thus through initiative, they have been able to tap global capital into their franchises.

Source?

International “superstars” are basically players whose brand resonates with fans across the globe such as the just retired Kobe Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers. Players like Kobe, inspire global followings with the accompanying financial benefits and thus represent a brand of

only one (Quirk) source for all of this information

Source
immeasurable value to the franchise. A player like him ^{according to what Luke?} can mobilize resources for a team like no marketing campaign could ever achieve. Through tools such as Twitter and other social media platforms, such a player can keep in touch with fans from anywhere in the world and this ^{→ for the most it helps the player's own brand...} sustains brand loyalty for a sports team. Indeed as mentioned, sports teams and businesses depend on customer or fan loyalty to thrive and thus social media becomes an invaluable tool at their disposal.

3
Social media including Twitter is very significant in branching out and capturing new audiences and fans for sports teams. It also plays a key role in maintaining brand loyalty, which is ^{you have hardly seen on state of this} a crucial pillar in sustaining sports franchises and keeping them profitable.

Usage of Twitter for Brand Building in the NBA

In the sporting world including the NBA, it is more important for the sports teams to build a focused, strong and independent brand way from performance because in the league it is ¹¹ difficult to win every time (Quirk, 2008). Team performances vary from year to year, unlike the ^{can be argued otherwise --- subjective too} quality of say an iPad or smartphone. For instance, while the Golden State Warriors are currently enjoying the form of their life, in 2016 they lost the championships to the Cavaliers but the fan loyalty has ^{Source 11} increased instead of diminishing. It is therefore important to sustain fan loyalty and social media provides invaluable input towards this agenda.

Amx
Engellenner inform which the development of new media sources has revolutionized public relations in sports such as the popular social media (Engellenner, 2016). Public relations for sports teams aims at developing and maintaining a strong brand image, as well as forging a good relationship with stakeholders of the organization. In addition, it is the role of public relations to manage communications regarding the team and in general maintaining the brand

and image of the outfit. Traditionally, public relations practitioners have relied on television and other media such as press briefings and releases to achieve these objectives. In modern times, this has significantly changed because of the rapidly growing popularity and usage of social media. Social media has changed how sports teams represent and disseminate information to the audience and fans who demand concise and timely updates of developments regarding their favorite sportsmen and women. Twitter has stepped in to fill in this demand very effectively because it allows multiple channels of conversation to be set up thereby enabling almost instantaneous dissemination of news and information to the fans (Engellenner, 2016).

Twitter provides a concise means of disseminating information in only 140 characters and in addition, there are opportunities to incorporate pictures, emoji and video messages. Twitter as a medium is fast and through the live updating feature, newsfeed information can be quickly updated when it happens and it automatically appears as the latest.

According to statistics, the Twitter presence of the NBA stood at 24.6 million fans and the league's team with the most number of follower on Twitter as of March 2017 was the Los Angeles Lakers, with over six million fans (Statista.com, 2017). The Miami Heat was ranked as second and the third is the Chicago Bulls with around 3 million followers recorded for both.

The Los Angeles Lakers runs an social media platform called the Lakers Nation with the twitter handle @Lakers Nation and also the OFFICIAL Twitter at <http://LakersNation.com>. This account has over 149,000 followers as of 10th May 2017, (Airstadium, 2017).

Research design/Method

Data collection

In answering the listed research questions, the researcher proposes to use a

Why specifically
Twitter and not the
other platforms which
provide more space and
other opportunities
for exchange?

combination of both quantitative and qualitative techniques. First is the aspect of data collection and sampling. Through a mathematical formula, the researcher will establish the adequate and relevant sample size of respondents. In identifying how twitter is being used by the Los Angeles Lakers, the researcher will obtain a sample from fans with an online presence such as sampling the comments posted by a given number of followers in the teams official twitter account. Data will also be collected through interviewing the executives at Los Angeles Lakers to get a first-hand account of how significant the usage of Twitter has been to the franchise in terms of branding and brand equity. Secondary sources include the Laker's Official twitter sites and other social media platforms relevant to the subject under study. In addition, records from the past may be used in case they are needed. This will help in answering how the team used Twitter to build professional, personal, and community relationships through a content of tweets on their official Twitter sites.

Questionnaires will be administered to key officials at Los Angeles Lakers offices as well as other experts on NBA social media use to provide data on twitter use in terms of significance to the brand. Questions to be answered in the questionnaire will reflect those listed in the introduction as the research questions.

Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed quantitatively through statistical methods to identify trends and patterns. Numerical data generated may involve the numbers on traffic in the twitter accounts of the team and players. By use of measures of central tendency (mean, mode and median), the researcher can identify meaningful trends in the data. Measures of dispersion such as standard deviation and variance will help identify correlation among factors.

Qualitatively, the researcher will identify aspects from the data that are useful to the

You will sample fans of their comment?

What mixed approach is it?

→ All?

How do you know how many there are in order to sample?

? how feasible is this

i.e., three questions?

What would this tell?

enquiry. For example, one can tell the type of conversation online by analyzing the views and contributions made by fans on the twitter accounts. One can also identify popular players or opinions from the same source through qualitative analysis as well

In the literature review, the methodology applied in one related study was identified as relevant to this particular study. In it the sampled respondents were 2,400 in number and analysis of the data so collected was done through structural equation model. This could provide a rough indication of the required sample for this study.

Significance and Conclusion

The significance of this study is to identify and understand how social media such as Twitter is being utilized by sports teams including the NBA teams, in building and sustaining brand. Past studies have neglected to significantly show how managers can use Twitter in particular to build brand awareness and loyalty especially in the sports industry. Social media is varied and not all the platforms are as successful as twitter in building brands which is a good reason to study the phenomenon to identify the underlying factors to this success. In addition, this research aims at closely examining the interaction on Twitter concerning the players, the fans and the franchise in general. This is important in identifying means and ways of maximizing the derivative benefits of the medium for the sports teams involved. Lastly, other benefits for using the social media platform besides financial will be evaluated.

In conclusion, building a strong brand equity is important for teams in the sports industry because the sector is highly competitive and saturated with outfits offering almost similar intangible and tangible value to their customers. In today's sporting world including the NBA, it is more important for the sports teams to build a focused, strong and

→ 2400 players?
in the NBA
there are no
more than
500 players, let
alone 2400. If
you mean administ not
this would
not be
a sample,

source?

What
benefits have
been identified
in the literature
outside
branding?

independent brand away from performance because in the league it is difficult to win every time. It is therefore important to sustain fan loyalty and social media provides invaluable input towards this objective. The development of new media sources has revolutionized public relations in sports such as the popular social medium that is called Twitter.

The lit. review is largely incomplete. For example, what of the literature that outlines the impact of SM on the sports brand, or other aspects of the sport industry? Where do the Lakers stand right now terms of brand equity?

The method section is highly unfocused, lack many details, and presents no clear rationale. Why Twitter, what is the timeline, what kind of official will you interview, etc.?

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