

Sports Clubs' Use of Social Media to Increase Spectator Interest

Abstract

This research aims to give an insight into social media as an online marketing medium used by sports clubs. The research intention is to understand how social media is used to increase customer interactivity and spectator interest. We applied two integrated methods including one new scale to analyse and identify website interactivity and Facebook interactivity of the thirty-two football clubs involved in the 2014-2015 European Champions Cup. Six, seven-point items were used in the scale to measure the degree to which a person believes a website allows a free flow of information. A Pearson correlation of the Facebook pages was used to explore the strength of the relationship between two variables, analysing spectator interactivity. It was found that greater customer interactivity through social media can be deemed attractive and can increase spectatorship. The research also found that the level of website interactivity of a particular football club is not dependent upon their performance within the tournament. Those clubs who perform well, or are in a higher pool in the European Champions, do not appear to engage better with their spectators than the lower pools. The multiple regression results further confirmed these findings. The findings have important implications, which primarily suggest that social media is an effective form of marketing and can be useful in attracting spectators to a sports organization, if used appropriately.

Keywords. Social media; Facebook; Football clubs; Spectator interest;

Customer interactivity.

Introduction

The aim of this research is to understand how social media is employed within sports organizations to increase spectator interest and whether the use of social media as a customer relationship strategy is effective in achieving this goal. Due to the exponential growth in the use and development of technology observed in recent years, there has been increased curiosity about the application of social media to traditional concepts such as brand engagement and customer relationship management (CRM) (Misirlis & Vlachopoulou 2018; Payne & Frow, 2005). Social media is now being used as a popular form of marketing by nearly all organizations wishing to grow their business or appear to be more attractive to their current target market (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2015; Malthouse et al., 2013; Alalwan et al., 2017; Dwivedi, Kapoor, and Chen, 2015). Consequently, this study embraces the following research objectives with the aim of examining the technological development of social media as an Internet based platform whilst understanding its effect as a brand engagement strategy on customer interactivity. We focus on the social media platform Facebook and more specifically the Facebook pages of the thirty-two football teams involved in a major football tournament. The goal is (i) to analyse whether social media-based customer engagement strategy has an impact on increasing spectator interest; and (ii) to understand whether or not a club's online interactivity and spectator interest is determined by its position in a sports tournament. The

study builds upon current research by not only justifying the heavy use of social media as an important customer engagement technique but how social media is increasingly used to engage with customers on a more personal level, encouraging greater interactivity and CRM (Liu & Lopez, 2016; Thorbjonsen, et al., 2002). We thus fill the gap in the literature on how social media as an online marketing medium is employed by sports clubs. Our empirical investigation of the relationship between web interactivity and the sports clubs' positions in a league competition's groups and the use of social media as a customer engagement strategy address some of these issues.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews previous research and literature surrounding the subjects of customer engagement, social media and sports organizations. Section 3 outlines the research hypotheses and describes the methodological approach taken by the study, including the method of data collection. Section 4 sets out the results of the data collected and Section 5 discusses the implications of the findings relating to previous research and the hypotheses of this research.

Literature review

Over the past decade, the marketing environment has been challenged and changed greatly due to the online phenomenon known as Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is

understood by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2013) as being associated with user generated content that has a greater interaction between users of the Internet and the web. The Internet is a tool that allows one to communicate with the rest of the world as being a many-to-many communication channel in comparison to the telephone for example, which is a one-to-one communication channel (Rapp, et al., 2013). According to Boone and Kurtz (2007, p 488), integrated marketing communications or IMC has been defined as: ‘the guiding principle organizations follow to communicate with their target markets. Integrated marketing communications attempts to coordinate and control the various elements of the promotional mix - advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion - to produce a unified customer-focused message and, therefore, achieve various organizational objectives.’ Mangold and Faulds (2009, p. 357) understand social media to be an element of the promotional mix; ‘social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because in a traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to talk directly to one another.’

Social media has proven to be a fast growing online tool and is still continuing to grow along with its users (Malthouse, et al., 2013; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Karami et al., 2018; Kim & Hastak, 2018). It is part of many peoples everyday lives; visiting social media sites and connecting to others from all over the world. Chen, Fay and Wang (2011) believe the phenomenon

of social media is not to be ignored and is becoming a part of everyday marketing operations in all competitive and successful organizations. They believe the power is with the customer when using social media and they believe this power held by the consumer can create limitations in terms of the amount of control a company has over its information. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have a much more technological viewpoint of social media and define social media as; ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.’ Kaplan and Haenlein believe social media to be user generated content, created by the consumer or end-user and is publicly available to the consumer.

Social media technologies have increased the number of communication channels available to the consumer, generating greater access to product information and consequently empowering the 21st century social consumer (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013; Kim & Kim, 2018). Due to direct, real-time consumer access, however, social media channels also offer greater opportunity for relationship development (Malthouse et al., 2013; Payne & Frow, 2005; Nisar, Prabhakar & Strakova, 2018; Nisar & Prabhakar, 2018). Brand engagement or social-CRM has, therefore, been developed to harness these new relationship-development opportunities, and reflect the shift in power from organization to customer (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). Social media enables businesses to engage and persuade prospective customers and

to construct a trusted relationship at actual time and at a fraction of the costs of traditional media. Mangold and Faulds (2009, p. 357) develop this view, recognizing customer engagement to go beyond company-customer interactions by involving the consumers actively: ‘social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because in a traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to talk directly to one another.’

It is evident that with the ever-growing use of online advertising by marketers combined with an increase in consumer usage of the social media platform, marketers are competitive as ever and must use social media on a regular basis to stay up-to-date and current with the changing online environment and changing customer knowledge and skills (Kapoor, et al. 2018; Pee, 2018). Holzner (2009, p. 1) believes that in order to survive in this new online environment with Internet-savvy customers, organizations must ‘provide content and not just ad copy.’ Marketers, to be successful must contribute content into the social networking world continuously in order to remain current and competitive.

Social media and customer engagement

In terms of a customer engagement strategy associated with social media, it is believed to seek to 'engage customers in the online social locations where they naturally spend time' (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Aswani et al., 2018; Aladwani, 2015). Weinberg, et al. (2013) discuss how social media engagement is understood to be ultimately about building an organization's online reputation, attracting more people to the website to buy the products or use the services. There are various consumer attitudes toward social media. Attitude, according to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), is 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor.' Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008) find that a customer's positive attitude toward user-generated online material will generally increase their creation and consumption of that material. Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008, p. 33) further explain that; 'consumers attitudes toward social media should relate positively to their use of the information available on these sites, which in turn could enhance their tendency to join groups and engage in viral messages.' The increased use of interaction within the social media network will potentially create opportunities for companies and increase sales or specifically increase spectators for the football club.

In recent years, marketing, specifically sports marketing for organizations, has been aided by the concept of social media; in particular the use of social networks such as Twitter (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010; Schonfeld, 2009; Roberts, et al., 2016; Capriotti & Ruesja, 2018). Facebook is another

social networking tool. Facebook has 42 million users who are ‘smart, affluent, Internet – savvy people, who marketers can no longer ignore’ (Holzner, 2009 p. 1). More up-to-date statistics gathered by Beukeboom, Kerkhof and de Vries (2015) and Vilnai-Yavetz and Tifferet (2015) show Facebook to have more than 1.06 billion users. Holzner (2009) explains how the consumers are in charge, not the marketers. He understands that the marketing channel has now changed; in fact it has reversed completely; a bottom-up approach, with customers having the ability to give their opinions and thoughts. Facebook users, as well as all social network users, generally have the capability to comment on products, services and organizations specifically (Hardley, 2009; Malthouse et al., 2013). There is limited control of this by the organization themselves. Holzner (2009) believes that it is worth listening to what those customers have to say, understanding their needs and wants that need satisfying; they may well influence your future business decisions and determine the success of the business. If customers are satisfied, they are more likely to be loyal to an organization and allow for an increase in profitability of a company. This is supported by Hallowell (1996) who discusses the relationships of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and profitability. His analysis indicates that if customer satisfaction is improved within an organization then profits will generally increase. It is the same situation in the sporting industry; in relation to increasing spectators in sport, if customer’s wants and needs are satisfied, it is more likely that current fans will continue their support and potential fans will become definite spectators to the

sport, becoming loyal fans. Hallowell (1996) examines the relationships of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and profitability. His findings show that if customer satisfaction is improved within an organization then profits will generally increase. It is the same situation in the sporting industry; in relation to increasing spectators in sport, if customer's wants and needs are satisfied, it is more likely that current fans will continue their support and potential fans will become definite spectators to the sport, becoming loyal fans.

Collaborative projects, a form of social media according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), are information based media such as Wikipedia that allows end users to alter the media content. Collaborative projects can be a useful form of social media in terms of company marketing. Customers who attempt to research companies, or more specifically football clubs, can be informed of the club and receive data and material on that club which may lead the individual to attend more games or simply research the club further via other social media systems such as Twitter and Facebook (Beukeboom, Kerkhof & de Vries, 2015; Wu & Shen, 2015). Similarly, firms such as Cisco and Google rely heavily on these content communities to share various material such as recruitment videos, company speeches as well as press announcements and marketing content. In the sporting industry, content communities are already used on a global scale; communities such as Youtube sharing media coverage of major games and sporting events, news and updates. As suggested previously, if fans are more informed they are potentially more inclined to

become a spectator to the sport. Virtual game and social worlds come under the same social media tool; with users appearing in the form of avatars who interact in a three-dimensional virtual environment. Although Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) believe virtual game and social worlds to be two of the six forms of social media, they do not appear to be a major form of social media marketing specifically, with very limited literature on either form in terms of a marketing tool. However, this shows a gap for marketers to enter into. Lui, Piccoli and Ives (2007) suggest that the 3D virtual worlds are emerging as a form of social media marketing, a way for companies to communicate effectively with their customers.

Winter (2009:11) states businesses are taking advantage of this facility and developing ‘targeted campaigns that reach specific segments and engage their customers’. In terms of the marketing associated with social media, it is believed to seek to engage customers in the online social locations where they naturally spend time. It is in this context that Hennig-Thurau et al. (2013) discuss how social media brand engagement is believed to be ultimately about building an organization’s online reputation, attracting more people to the website to buy the products or use the services. The increased use of interaction within the social media network potentially creates opportunities for marketers and increases sales or specifically increases spectators for a sports club. Malthouse et al. (2013) suggest it is not enough for a company to just have a social media presence; effective consumer engagement demands

the fulfilment of certain requirements resulting in the development of a process where there is a constant need to maintain conversation. They emphasise how businesses can obtain customer viewpoints and new ideas through online communities, and blogs that enable businesses to meet customer satisfaction and expectations. These strategies may help businesses keep their brand at the forefront of consumer's minds, ensuring engagement is upheld offline as well as online, thus driving consumer retention. It is this personal bond and constant engagement that further strengthen company-customer relationships, increasing the likelihood of repeat-purchases.

There appear to be numerous advantages when using social media as a form of marketing for an array of companies across various industries (Beukeboom, Kerkhof & de Vries, 2015; Liu & Lopez, 2016; Kim, Bae & Hastak, 2018). There are, however, many researchers and authors arguing that those metrics that measure social media effectiveness are too ambiguous due to their being very limited solid evidence that can prove the benefits of social media for organizations (Beukeboom, Kerkhof & de Vries, 2015; Han, Min & Lee, 2015). Rothschild (1984) suggests that attracting sports consumers and increasing spectators is a requirement of any sports manager, television network producer, merchandiser, advertiser and corporate sponsor. It is general knowledge that sport does in fact saturate our daily lives and is embedded into most marketing operations. Rothschild (1984, p. 216) defines sport spectatorship as; 'an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest toward a sporting event or associated product that is evoked by

particular motives.’

Understanding sports enthusiasts and how they are motivated is a key element in understanding how to market to those enthusiasts to increase spectatorship to a particular sport (Roberts, et al., 2016). Therefore, it would seem necessary to understand the motivational characteristics of an individual. Hoffman and Novak (1996) discuss extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and explain that they are both important in affecting our focused attention through involvement in an activity. Involvement is understood by Celsi and Olsen (1988, p. 211) as felt involvement, created by ‘intrinsic self-relevance.’ Consequently, those who are intrinsically motivated tend to have more involvement in an activity and thus, they appear to be more focused and engaged. According to Chung and Zhao (2004), if consumers are greatly involved with a stimulus, they tend to have a greater motivation to continue and process that stimulus, searching further into the website, clicking associated hyperlinks. Their attention is greater than those more extrinsically motivated consumers who generally have a lower involvement, who are less motivated to process information and therefore less likely to click associated hyperlinks. Huang (2003) suggests that involvement through interactivity is a key aspect in improving a consumer’s judgement of a website; he suggests the interactivity between a website and its audience can be increased by designing an active and interactive site that represents an ‘online community.’ Chung and Zhao (2004) also believes interactivity to have a positive impact upon a consumer’s motivation to process information within a website. Hoffman and

Novak (2009, p. 24) discuss the concept of ‘flow’ as ‘the complete engagement with and immersion in an activity.’ They understood flow to be a state where consumers are interacting greatly with the web and this is when they are in a mind-set where they are likely to learn more about the organization itself. After reviewing various literatures, it would appear completely necessary for marketers to focus on this concept of ‘flow’ and concentrate upon increasing consumer interactivity within their website in order to motivate consumers to either purchase products or investigate further into the site and continue their search and engagement. An audit can be produced to compare the various football club websites to judge whether in fact the use of interactivity supports the assumption that consumers are more motivated and therefore will investigate further into the site.

Research methodology

In this study, we want to investigate the following two specific questions: (i) whether or not a club’s online interactivity and spectator interest is determined by its position in a sports tournament; and (ii) whether social media as a customer engagement strategy has an impact on increasing spectator interest. Our hypotheses thus state: (H1) there is a positive relationship between web interactivity and the sports clubs’ positions in a league competition’s groups; and (H2) social media as a customer engagement strategy has a positive

impact on increasing spectator interest. The second hypothesis essentially predicts social media interactivity providing impetus for spectators' interests in a club's social media page. The research strategy consists of two interrelated investigations, created and executed with the intention of examining social media whilst understanding its effect as an online marketing concept on customer interactivity. We use six, seven-point items in the scale to measure the degree to which a person believes a website allows a free flow of information. A Pearson correlation of the Facebook pages is employed to explore the strength of the relationship between two variables, analyzing spectator interactivity. Whilst a one-way analysis of variance is produced to analyse and determine the relationship between the particular group positions the football club occupies and their total website interactivity. These hypotheses are then tested using the univariate linear models. The European Champions League is an annual football competition that involves leading clubs from various European countries. A total of thirty-two teams, separated into 8 groups are entered into the competition. Since this research is focussing on spectator interest, it would appear necessary to base the study on a major spectator sport and seen as the European Championships League is regarded as a 'major spectator sport' (UEFA Champions League 2014/15, 2015).

Club websites

Song and Zinkhan (2008) assume that as a marketing tool, websites are important for generating greater customer attraction to an organization with the perception that interactivity is a key feature of effective online marketing (see also Thorbjornson, et al., 2002). An investigation of the thirty-two websites of each club was primarily executed to determine the use of Web 2.0 and customer interactivity and to see whether or not there was any significant relationships between the group in which the football club competed in and their website interactivity. This investigation had the intention of achieving objective two using the scale created by Song and Zinkhan (2008). Each scale item had the goal of measuring customer interactivity, (a key feature of online marketing) in terms of communication between the website user and the website itself. The interactivity scale was produced based upon previous reliable findings created by the studies carried out by Liu (2003), among others. Engagement of participants was a key recommendation; ensuring participants are involved with features of the organization that are of interest to them, with the assumption that ‘interactivity resides in the consumers’ eyes, not in the system itself’ (Song & Zinkhan, 2008, p. 109). This supports the assumption that interactivity is key to a successful webpage in terms of increasing visitors to a page and, therefore, customers to an organization or in the case of this study; supporters to a club.

If one website was found to have more options than another website, the first site is judged to have a higher degree of interactivity (Song & Zinkhan,

2008). The second recommendation was that merely adding content to a website, although is considered interactive does not guarantee high levels of interactivity. The relevance of the features for that participant is important in their perception of interactivity; it is recommended that not only the quantity of features a website has but the quality of those features is considered to ensure maximum interactivity and engagement. Song and Zinkhan (2008) created a scale after reviewing previous literature and data and also after testing the effects the addition of several features to a website and understanding any relationships between these features and levels of customer interactivity to understand what marketers need to do to increase customer interactivity. Six, seven-point questions were used in this scale to measure the degree to which a person believes a website allows a free flow of information from the user as well as to the user (two-way). The questions were devised to analyse each website in terms of its level of interactivity to create a total interactivity score for each football club website. The websites were then compared to see if there were any correlations or patterns in the data; to understand whether or not a clubs online interactivity and spectator interest is determined by its position in a sports tournament was satisfied. Our hypothesis is that a club's online interactivity and spectator interest is determined by its position in a sports tournament. The scale items are as follows;

1. This website facilitates two-way communication.
2. The website gives me the opportunity to talk back.

3. The website facilitates concurrent communication.
4. The website enables conversation.
5. The website does not encourage visitors to talk back.
6. The site is effective in gathering visitors' feedback.

A scale item for a particular website would score 1 if that feature was facilitated well and 7 if that feature was not facilitated well, therefore the website with the lowest score would appear to be the most interactive. Following the audit of the websites, the data were exported into IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22. Descriptive statistics, correlations, univariate linear regression and variance analysis were utilized. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used as an effective tool to compare mean scores on a continuous variable, looking at the impact of one independent variable on the dependent variable. This technique appeared to be the most appropriate for this investigation, the independent variable being the group position the football club occupies and the dependent variable being the total interactivity score of the website.

Facebook pages

A recent social media and networking report illustrates how vast the Internet is and particularly social media and networking sites; the report discusses how Facebook continues to dominate in social network usage with 97% of social

network users visiting Facebook over the three months period (Malthouse et al., 2013). This is immense compared with the next best site, Twitter, with just 46% of social network users visiting the social media page. Facebook is the most popular social networking site with 1.06 billion users (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2015). Just as the European Football Championship was chosen to be examined due to its prestige, enormity and popularity, Facebook was chosen as a suitable social networking site to be examined in this research due to its immense size and popularity as well as its great usage by social networking users.

An investigation of the thirty-two Facebook pages was carried out, analyzing feeds over the eight months, during the entirety of the European Football Championships League – from 28 August 2014 to 6 June 2015. This investigation had the aim of testing H1, to determine the use of Web 2.0, to collect primary data from the social media platform Facebook and to use this data to produce statistics that can be analyzed in order to suggest whether or not social media has an impact on increasing spectator interest. Huang (2003, p. 437) suggests the interactivity between a website and its audience can be increased by designing an active and interactive site that represents an ‘online community.’ Facebook posts are considered to be a form of interaction with the community; more posts therefore are considered a method of increasing interactivity. Every post on each football club’s Facebook page created by the football club itself represented interactivity and so was awarded one point. For every match report, result, news post, photo and video, the page was awarded

one point. An extra five points were given to the club if those posts had more than fifty likes; showing greater interactivity. Five points were also awarded if the posts on the Facebook pages represented 'direct interactivity', competitions, direct questions, events for supporters etc. Direct interactivity was considered to be represented by the Facebook posts that enabled the greatest customer involvement and so was awarded a higher score. A total interactivity score was then measured and compared to the total likes for that Facebook page. The total likes represent total spectators of the football club within this study, thus a relationship between total interactivity and spectator interest can be measured.

Results and analysis

Club websites

A reliability analysis of the website interactivity data was completed and the cronbach's alpha value was calculated. Table 1 presents the results. According to Song and Zinkhan (2008), the website interactivity scale has a cronbach's alpha result of .934; the current study has reported a cronbach's alpha figure of 0.891, which is considered a reliable value generally. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique was carried out to compare mean scores of the total interactivity score of each football website (Table 2). This technique looks at the relationship of the pool in which the football club belongs to and

the total interactivity score of the website. Before the ANOVA was carried out, it was a requirement to reverse all negatives to help prevent response bias, the item; ‘does not encourage visitors to talk back’ was reversed and the scale was now unbiased.

[Insert Table 1 and 2 about here]

A Levene’s test for homogeneity of variance tests was carried out: whether the variance in scores is the same for each group and if the significance result is greater than 0.5. As we find, the assumption of homogeneity of variance has not been violated and the ANOVA can be continued. The significance result for this study is .202, greater than 0.5 and therefore the ANOVA can be continued. On continuation of the analysis of the data using the ANOVA technique, there appeared to be a result that was not statistically significant, with the sig. value in the descriptives table being equal to 0.094, greater than 0.05 and considered to be not statistical (see Table 3). A one-way between-groups ANOVA with planned comparisons was carried out to see if one particular group position of the European Champions League was superior in terms of website interactivity to the other group positions. The significance level was found to be .857, again much greater than .05 and therefore not statistically significant (Table 4).

[Insert Table 3 and 4 about here]

After undertaking a one-way analysis of variance and a one-way between groups ANOVA with planned comparison, it was found that there was no significance between the football clubs' group positions and the mean interactivity scores of the websites. There is no correlation here and there is not a significant difference between one group position and the other remaining group positions in terms of website interactivity. This result indicates that website interactivity is not dependable upon the performance of a football club; those clubs with higher website interactivity are not necessarily in the higher group positions in the European Championships League and those clubs with the least website interactivity are not necessarily in the lower positions of the European Championships League.

Facebook pages

A reliability analysis of the Facebook interactivity data was completed and the cronbach's alpha value was calculated. We conducted the reliability analysis of the data, producing a cronbach's alpha figure of 0.007. Because this scale was self-created, the assumption of a reliable cronbach's alpha value of greater 0.7 must be presumed. Since this data has a cronbach's alpha value of 0.007,

the scale must be considered unreliable. Cortina (1993) notes caution should be taken with the value of alpha, it can be dependent upon the number of items on the scale and therefore although this scale is considered unreliable, may in fact have been greatly affected as there are only two items in the scale; very small in comparison to the majority of scales.

The relationship between the total Facebook interactivity score and the total number of likes for the clubs Facebook page was explored and investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. After analysis of the relationship, there found to be a positive medium correlation. From looking at Table 5 below, the correlation coefficient is positive (.307), indicating a positive correlation between total interactivity score and total likes. The greater the customer interactivity a Facebook page has, the greater the number of likes for that football club and hence represents a greater number of spectators. A coefficient of determination was calculated to create a figure of shared variance. The result produced a coefficient of determination value of 9.424%. This demonstrates a greater shared variance; total interactivity helps to understand almost 10% of total likes. After carrying out a Pearson product moment correlation coefficient to examine the relationship between Facebook interactivity and spectator interest through the comparison of total Facebook likes with the total interactivity score, a positive medium correlation was established. This shows that there is in fact a relationship between Facebook interactivity and total likes to a Facebook page; the greater the interactivity with

the public, the more attractive the club appears, attracting greater spectators through more likes to a Facebook page.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Next, attempting to probe beyond simple correlations, univariate linear models were constructed to regress the website / Facebook interactivity on spectator interests. The results are presented in Table 6. Our first hypothesis predicts a positive relationship between the web interactivity and a club's position in the League's groups. A univariate linear model was utilized to test the hypothesis, regressing the football club's position in its group (independent variable) onto the total interactivity score of the website (dependent variable), controlling for the individual club. The model was significant, $F(15, 764) = 6.58, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.23, R^2_{adj} = 0.19$. After controlling for individual clubs, there was a negative relationship between web interactivity and the clubs' positions in the League's groups ($n^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.07$). Thus, H1 was not supported. The second hypothesis predicts Facebook interactivity providing impetus for spectators' interests in a club's Facebook page. A univariate linear model was utilized to test the hypothesis, regressing the total interactivity score of the Facebook page (dependent variable) onto Facebook likes (dependent variable) and controlling for the individual club. The model was significant, $F(2, 961) = 28.63, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.39, R^2_{adj} = 37$. After controlling for individual clubs,

there was a positive relationship between website interactivity and Facebook likes ($n^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.23$). Thus, H2 was supported. In addition to the hypothesized effects, a post hoc full-factorial model was constructed to assess interaction effects among study variables. The results generally support the earlier findings.

[Insert Table 6 about here]

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that there is limited significance to support the assumption that there is a relationship between a club's sporting performance and spectator interest. The study does however provide some evidence that there is a linear relationship between total interactivity through the use of social media and spectator interest. After performing a one-way analysis of variance and a one-way between groups ANOVA with planned comparison, there appeared to be no correlation in the results. It was revealed that those football clubs performing in the higher pools within the European Champions are not necessarily more interactive with their spectators than those football clubs in the lower pools. This result suggested that greater interactivity with spectators will not necessarily influence the performance of

the sports team but may influence the quantity of spectators that support that sports team. This is a research question that could be discussed in future research.

Due to there being no significant correlation and therefore no significant relationship found between the pool which the football club belongs to and the total number of spectators of that club, it is worth examining the relationship between the total interactivity of a club independently and the total number of spectators to that club. This examination was carried out after auditing of the football clubs interactivity via their Facebook pages; this is discussed further. Social media marketing is ultimately about building an organizations online reputation; attracting more people to your website to buy your products or use your services (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2015; Rydén, Ringberg & Wilke, 2015). To shape that online reputation through attracting more people to your website, marketers must consider how they interact with their customers to gain their interest. The research carried out in this paper had the intention to do this; analyzing football clubs as a representative of all organizations to gain an understanding into how that online reputation was ultimately built, how organizations attract more customer interest. Customer interest is determined by how motivated a customer is to be actively involved with an organization. This research had the aim to understand how social media is used to increase spectator interest and it is, therefore, evident that to understand this statement, we must understand

how a spectator is motivated. What motivates a spectator of sport specifically is involvement through interactivity (Huang, 2003; Chung, 2004). This involvement can be increased through online interactivity via social media and aided by the concept of 'flow', discussed by Hoffman and Novak (2009) where consumers are actively interacting with the web, when they are in the mentality where they are motivated to learn more about the organization itself, more inclined to increase their involvement within that organization. Thus for an organization to be successful in gaining more customers and increasing the potential for maximum profits, an organization must maximise their customer interactivity. As mentioned when reviewing the literature, Huang (2003, p 437) suggests that the interactivity between a website and its audience can be increased by designing an active and interactive site that represents an 'online community.' This online community can be in the form of a Facebook page; the online phenomenon where a social network between users exists.

Greater customer interactivity can be achieved if a customer is more involved with that organization as previously mentioned by Huang (2003) and Chung (2004). Involvement can be in the form of 'interactive promotions' which are online marketing programmes designed to create measurable, prompt results (Launchfire Interactive, 2008). Marketing programmes include social platforms such as competitions, quizzes and surveys, or where the consumer's opinion is requested, when the online user is involved with that marketing programme. All the mentioned platforms are measurable in terms

of interactivity. After auditing the Facebook pages of the thirty-two football clubs, the interactivity that was awarded five points was for direct interactivity. Direct interactivity was considered to be represented by the Facebook posts that enabled the greatest customer involvement and so was awarded a higher score. This included competitions, spectator events, surveys and the requested opinions of spectators. After calculating the total interactivity scores for all thirty-two football teams, those Facebook pages with the higher direct interactivity were found to generally contribute more to the clubs overall interactivity. This indicates the importance of greater customer involvement through direct interactivity as a successful marketing method that increases spectators and customers to an organization.

A Pearson product moment correlation coefficient facilitated in the examination of the relationship between Facebook interactivity and spectator interest through the comparison of total Facebook likes with the total interactivity score. A medium positive correlation and therefore a medium linear relationship was established. The greater the interactivity with the public through the aid of social media and more specifically the use of Facebook, the more spectators a club receives, this is represented through greater likes on the Facebook page (see also Beukeboom, Kerkhof & de Vries, 2015). Greater spectators can be deemed beneficial; more customers generally mean greater ticket sales and higher revenues, something clubs should consider if they are to enable growth and future success. A different organization could potentially be

researched to see if in fact these findings are accurate and flexible. Applying these methods across different organizational sectors to investigate whether greater interactivity via social media increases the customer base to an organization and whether this would be a sensible marketing technique for marketers to employ within their organizations is something that should definitely be measured. It has been found that greater interactivity through Facebook has increased spectators specifically to the clubs involved within the European Champions. It would be worth researching whether driving customer engagement does in fact encourage customer interest to any organization, whether an organizations customer base can be increased through marketing via a social media network such as Facebook and whether this increase in interactivity ultimately will produce greater profits for an organization.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of social media has dramatically changed the way in which brands communicate with their customers and is now adopted in most organizations as a successful form of marketing (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013; He, Zha & Li, 2013; Kamboj, Sarmah, Gupta, & Dwivedi, 2018). This paper built on the current research on social media as a brand engagement strategy and social media within sports organizations (Lipizzi, Iandoli & Marquez,

2015). Furthermore, the study has created new material concerning the benefits of social media and its effects on increasing spectator interest through the collection of data. This has generated the foundations for further investigation into the positive effects of social media as a brand engagement strategy for organizations of any sector to adopt. There is also potential for further research into the discovery of other marketing attributes that increase spectator interest and customer engagement. The research demonstrated a linear relationship between customer interactivity and spectator interest. A positive medium correlation was established between total Facebook interactivity and total likes which signified a relationship. The higher the interactivity with fans that a Facebook page executes, the greater spectator interest that page will attract. Research also discovered that website interactivity is not dependable upon the performance of a football club, but may be dependable upon other factors such as availability of funding for marketing for example, which could be researched further in future studies. It was found that to increase spectators to a football club, or to gain customers to an organization, it is necessary to use social media as a major marketing method. Not solely social media, but the utilization of greater customer interactivity and particularly direct interactivity and engagement with target customers or fans.

As the results indicate that social media can be used to effectively manage customer relationships, with particular success in engaging consumers, the methods of increasing customer interactivity to increase

spectatorship are of interest and value. As such, our findings significantly develop existing literature surrounding brand engagement and social-CRM strategies (Payne & Frow, 2005; Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2015). These findings support the notion that to uphold complete engagement, one must interest the consumer and maintain conversation. This means that successful marketers must contribute content into the social networking world continuously. They must utilize social media and maximize its usage, continually interacting with customers in order to remain current and competitive. Facebook was chosen as the tool to measure customer interactivity due to its enormity. However, there is scope and opportunity to measure customer interactivity further in the virtual world sector, with the number of subscribers to virtual worlds doubling every year, there is a great marketing opportunity here. For further research into this study specifically, it would be recommended to look into other variables that could potentially have affected spectator interest. Variables such as the date the football club was knocked out of the European Football Champions League for example, were the levels of interactivity affected?

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Table 1. Reliability statistics for website interactivity (Item-Total Statistics)

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
The Website facilitates two-way communication	28.500	43.391	.688	.883
The website facilitates concurrent communication	27.250	45.935	.775	.897
The Website gives me the opportunity to talk back	28.666	49.014	.478	.892
The Website enables	27.291	45.868	.783	.885

conversation				
The Website	27.125	73.940	-.298	.891
does not encourage visitors to talk back				
The site is effective in gathering visitors' feedback	28.250	43.674	.743	.898

Table 2. Total website interactivity

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
1	29.500	3.696	24	32
2	17.500	12.369	10	36
3	30.500	7.141	20	35
4	28.750	10.996	13	38
5	35.000	4.830	28	39
6	31.750	4.349	28	38

7	28.833	8.981	10	39
8	30.750	11.865	24	33
Total	29.500	10.576	14	38

Table 3. ANOVA of website interactivity

	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	712.83	142.56	2.24	.094
Within Groups	1142.50	63.47		
Total	1855.33			

Table 4. One-way between groups ANOVA with planned comparisons.

		Contrast Tests					
		Contrast	Value of Contrast	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total website interactivity	Assume equal variances	1	4.000	21.818	.183	18	.857
	Does not assume equal variances	1	4.000	13.311	.300	9.524	.770

Table 5. Correlation table of total Facebook interactivity score

		Total Score	Total Likes
Total score	Pearson correlation	1	307

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.154
Total Likes	Pearson	.307	1
	correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.154	

Table 6. Linear model results

	Model 1 H1	Model 2 H2	Model 3 Full interaction
Club number	0.001*	0.01*	0.001
Club group position	0.07***	-	0.02**
Facebook interaction	-	0.23***	0.28***
N	9056	9056	9056
R ² (adjusted)	0.19	0.37	0.43

Notes: p < 0.05* p < 0.01** p < 0.001***