

Sport Teams, Fans, and Twitter: The Influence of Social Media on Relationships and Branding

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In *Sport Teams, Fans, and Twitter: The Influence of Social Media on Relationships and Branding*, author Brandi Watkins takes the reader through a thoughtful examination of social media as it applies to the world of sport. By focusing on the role of social media, building relationships, and serving as branding tools, a thorough examination of sport teams, fans, and Twitter is broken up into two sections. Section 1 is titled “Twitter for Relationship Building” and includes three chapters. The introduction to the book provides readers a glimpse into the significance of social media and sport, and the first chapter examines “The Fan–Team Relationship” by detailing sound information including theoretical undertones. For example, readers are presented with an examination of social-identification theory and sport fandom framed by the fan perspective. In juxtaposition, examining the team perspective provides details on sport games as friends and making connections to sport teams functioning as service-based brands. The first chapter presents a good underpinning for understanding why fan–team relationships are significant for both fans and their respective teams.

Chapter 2, “Getting Social,” examines social media tools and how they can be used to enhance the fan–team relationship. This chapter covers some foundational information including an overview of social media and popular social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In particular, Twitter is a focal form of social media that is primarily targeted throughout the remainder of this work. By further examining the power of social media to help build relationships, this chapter points out the importance of this while setting up a preview for research-based findings that will enhance the content in the remainder of the book.

Chapter 3, “Online Fan Engagement & Fan–Team Relationships,” concludes Section 1 by detailing how communication is instrumental in the ability of social media to engage with consumers. Being able to build relationships between consumers and brands provides various benefits. When relationships with fans are developed in a sport context, added relationship benefits can materialize. Included in the discussion in this chapter are self–brand connections, loyalty, and engagement. The concept of engagement is detailed by providing its defining characteristics, as well as addressing the benefits of measuring online engagement. By detailing approaches to engagement in the results of survey research, the author gives readers added insight into these important concepts. The findings and analysis presented in this chapter are useful for background knowledge, as well as information in the application of impactful social media strategies. Detailing

results and identifying benefits for sport brands gives valuable information in regard to online engagement, establishing relationships, and brand building.

The second section is titled “Content Strategies & Relationship Marketing” and comprises four chapters (Chapters 4–7). Chapter 4 focuses on brand personality. Brand personality is instrumental in helping to distinguish sport brands. Effective brand-personality application can further fan–team relationship-building efforts. Connections to brand identity, as well as a detailed examination of measuring brand personality, provide solid connection points applicable to the sport industry. Detailing differentiation strategies and fan–team connection points helps provide a better understanding of how sport brands can carry symbolic meanings that resonate with their followers. In particular, Watkins does a great job of integrating how social media is key to helping marketers find effective mediums for distributing and shaping desired messages. By pointing out the value of effective social media in an organization’s integrated marketing communication efforts, she shows readers valuable points of connection.

Related to the notion of connection, Chapter 5 is titled “Connecting with Athletes.” This chapter details athletes and the concept of celebrity. The potential for Twitter to allow connection points between athletes and fans presents various communications and marketing opportunities and considerations. Using parasocial interaction, Watkins examines the celebrity–fan relationship. By specifically focusing on parasocial interaction in a sport context, greater emphasis is placed on the opportunities presented by using Twitter as a means to connect fans with athletes. To further enhance this chapter Watkins details research examining these matters by presenting data analysis revealing that Twitter strategies that can aid in engagement including teams presenting athletes as team ambassadors and using Twitter to disseminate information about athletes. By presenting ways that teams can leverage the celebrity nature of professional athletes, sport properties can meaningfully engage methods to deliver integrated media experiences for their fans through the use of social media, including Twitter.

Chapter 6, “Dialogue,” provides a view into opportunities teams have to create unique online engagement forums with their fans. Whether it is through designated hashtags, “hashflags,” or other strategic measures, teams can generate dialogue that is key in relationship building. Watkins notes that teams can better engage with their followers by disseminating beneficial content, maintaining consumers’ attention, providing quality feedback, and presenting information with relative ease of interface. Moreover, Chapter 6 concludes by expressing the importance of social media and relationship building and the power of dialogue being established among sport properties and their fans. Using strategies and techniques that can build relations can be vastly important for sport entities and meaningful to their passionate fans.

The final chapter, “Recommendations,” is a call for sport brands to strategically implement social media practices that resonate with consumers. Highlighting research presented throughout this work, the final chapter emphasizes the importance of establishing a better understanding of how to use social media—particularly Twitter. Through providing sound theoretical information and research-based analysis, the author presents three practitioner recommendations for implementing social media content: “Be strategic about content creation,” “create content that sparks an emotional connection with the fans,” and use “a comprehensive approach to measuring online engagement” (p. 103).