

2017 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XV)

The Madness of it all: Examining the brand personality of the official sponsors of the NCAA during March Madness

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25-minute oral presentation

(including questions)

Introduction

One of the biggest sport events in the U.S. takes place over a three week period in March every year. The event, more commonly known as March Madness, is the second largest sports event in the U.S.A. In 2011, Turner Sports and CBS paid the NCAA \$11 billion (\$771 million annually) to broadcast the three week tournament (Shactman, 2011). This deal was recently extended to go through 2032. While Turner Sports and CBS have exclusive rights to the tournament, there are also three Official NCAA Corporate Champions and 15 Official NCAA Corporate Partners that are placed into 11 different categories (i.e. soft drink, shipping service, etc.) (Broughton, 2016; NCAA Corporate Champions and Partners, 2017). It should be noted that these sponsorship agreements are not limited to just the NCAA Division I Men's basketball championship, but it are tied to all 90 NCAA Championships.

The Corporate Champions spend roughly twice as much as the companies that are designated Corporate partners (Broughton, 2016). Last year, the 12 corporate sponsors across the 11 product categories each sponsor saw an increase in awareness levels (Broughton, 2016) For example, Coca-Cola, one of the three Corporate Champions, noted that 46% of surveyed fans knew Coca-Cola was an NCAA Sponsor (Broughton, 2016). It was the third consecutive year that awareness levels increased for Coca-Cola. However, little is known as to the effect social media use has on other brand related measures for official sponsors such as their brand personality – which is the symbolic process of ascribing human characteristics to brands (Aaker, 1997). Previous research has determined that the use of social media can have a positive effect on sport brands (Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, & Blaszkę, 2013), yet it is not known how social media can be utilized to impact the brand personality of corporate sponsors of major events. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine the brand personality characteristics of the three Official NCAA Corporate Champions (AT&T, Capital One, and Coca Cola) and the 15 Official NCAA Corporate Partners (Allstate, Amazon Echo, etc.) on Twitter during the Men's NCAA Division I Basketball Tournament.

Literature Review

Since its inception in 2006, Twitter's growth cannot be understated. Twitter has over 320 million monthly active users (About Twitter, 2016) which is behind just Facebook for largest social media site. The dearth of the literature within social media and Twitter has grown tremendously over the last seven years. Literature within the sport communication and Twitter has examined athlete usage (Sauder & Blaszkę, 2017; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010), events (Blaszkę, Burch, Frederick, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Delia & Armstrong, 2015; Hull, 2014; Reichart-Smith & Smith, 2012; Walsh et al., 2013) and consumer usage (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2014). To date, researchers have not examined event sponsors usage of social media and their brand personality characteristics displayed during on social media during the event.

One such event which could impact a brand's personality is The NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament. Initial research by Aaker (1997) identified five brand personality dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. Previous research has suggested that brands which elicit similar attributes to the consumer are preferred over less congruent brands (Aaker, 1997). Within sport, research on brand personality has attempted to develop and test scales in an effort to measure brand personality for sport teams and events (e.g.,

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Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Lee & Cho, 2012; Ross, 2008). Additional research within brand personality has expanded into examining marketer created personalities as opposed to using scales to measure brand personality (Heere, 2010; Walsh et al., 2013). That is, companies are likely to market their products and services (traditionally, digitally, socially, or through corporate sponsorship) to consumers with unique personalities as opposed to some of the brand personality items captured in the scales which have been created. Research has even determined that social media use can have a positive effect on the brand personality of sport events (Walsh et al., 2013), yet it is unclear if the same can be said for the impact social media use may have on the brand personality of event sponsors.

Methodology

In order to examine how NCAA sponsors are displaying brand personality characteristics on Twitter during the NCAA Tournament NVivo10 will be utilized to download all tweets from the official partners of the NCAA. Data will be collected during the three week tournament beginning on March 14th, 2017 and concluding on April 3rd, 2017. Each NCAA Corporate Champion and Partner tweets will be collected during this time frame. Once the data is collected, a first round of coding, known as descriptive coding will be employed to give the Twitter message an initial brand personality code (Saldana, 2009). A thematic analysis will take place to categorize the post into brand personality categories. Upon completion of this exercise, a second cycle of coding will consist of more focused and axial coding (Saldana, 2009). In the second round of coding, themes and frames will emerge from the descriptive codes that will be identified.

Themes will be developed after going through the data and reducing the descriptive codes into more focused codes (Saldana, 2009), ultimately allowing for the comparison of the brand personality traits portrayed by all the corporate sponsors.

Discussion

Findings will highlight brand personality characteristics set forth by the NCAA sponsors throughout the tournament. The results will provide practical implications for corporate sponsors by providing insight into successful strategies to highlight their brand personality characteristics.

This research is ongoing.

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