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Communication Strategies of Social Media and New Technologies for Enhancing the Loyalty of the Sports Fan Base

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Abstract: Based on the rapid development of social media platforms and new broadcast technologies in the new media era, this paper summarised the research works on audience motivation and participation in the past sports media communication process, and pointed out the lack of communication strategies for consolidating and maintaining the love and stickiness of sports social media in today's sports social media. Four sports media communication strategies were designed to meet the communication environment of modern social media platforms and the expectations of fans, so as to give full play to the unique experience and communication efficiency advantages of media platforms and new broadcast technologies. At the same time, this paper discussed the possibility and necessity of two research directions: 'media communication strategies of non-profit sports organisations' and 'analysis and solutions of hidden moral hazards in existing media communication strategies'.

Keywords: New Media Platforms, Communication Strategies, Sports Media, Fan Stickiness, Moral Hazards

1. Introduction

With the advancement of science and technology and the rapid development and continuous iteration of new media platforms, the transformation of media communication methods has brought great changes to the participants, audiences and user experience of the event. In the past, many studies have analysed the relationship between audience motivation and engagement intensity in media platforms, and also explained the driving force of different motivations on fan behaviour, but there is no specific method on how to maintain high fan engagement and better experience through social media platforms. The purpose of this paper is to list the specific methods of how to use social media platforms and new communication technologies to improve audience engagement and experience through the theory of audience motivation and engagement, and further briefly think about the communication strategies of non-profit sports organisations in the future, and the ethical issues that may arise in the communication process of media platforms.

2. Historical evolution of media in sports communication

The interaction between sports and the media can be traced back to the 18th century, when the Boston Gazette reported on a local boxing match in 1733, which was the beginning of sports journalism. With the introduction of the telegraph at the end of the 19th century, sports reporting achieved

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immediacy [1]. At the beginning of the 20th century, the broadcast of events began to use radio as a medium, which greatly enhanced the sense of participation of remote viewers [1]. The experimental broadcast of the 1936 Berlin Olympics and the live broadcasts of the BBC's tennis matches in 1937 were important milestones in the broadcast of television sports. Live broadcast increased the slow-motion, replay, close-up and other shots of the event, increased the dramatisation and personalisation of sports events, and made sports a 'performance business' [1]. The application of satellite transmission technology and colour television have made sports communication begin to gradually globalise and become a huge industry.

3. Social media in sports marketing

We can borrow Vale and Fernandes' 2018 idea of using the 'Utilisation and Gratification Method' (U&G) to analyse the audience's motivations. Then we can apply the Brand Campaign Framework (COBRA) to classify the audience's reactions and behaviours [2]. This method allows us to target the campaign layout and content planning. Generally, the audience has seven key motivations, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Fan engagement motivation [2]

Motivations	
Information	Fans seek first-hand information about their favourite teams in real time, such as transfer news, matchday updates, player and match stats, etc., and fans' thirst for information is actually a desire to stay informed about their favourite teams.
Entertainment	Fans crave entertaining content to connect with the team through a relaxed mindset, such as funny highlights, behind-the-scenes footage, interactive games, etc., and this motivation for entertainment can sometimes evolve into pan-emotional, such as exciting game highlights or touching heartwarming clips.
Personal Identity	Fans are eager to use social media to express their relationship with the club and strengthen their sense of identity and identity by posting content about the club, the players, and more.
Social interaction	Fans are eager to share their feelings, thoughts and emotions with other fan groups, and social platforms give them the possibility to make such connections, and through this process of sharing and discussion, the fan base reinforces their sense of community and belonging in social media.
Empowerment	Some fans believe that their opinions may influence the club's decision-making or public opinion, such as voting in opinion polls, creating opinions or commenting on posts about the club and its players, which can give fans a sense of agency.
Remuneration and Feedback	Fans are also hungry for rewards of real value, such as club-related merchandise, exclusive content or opportunities to get close to the club, and this kind of timely and tangible reward feedback can be effective in motivating fans to engage with the club more actively.
Brand love	Fans often have a deep emotional attachment to a club or a player as an individual, which is their lowest motivation – passion and loyalty to the brand.

The intensity of engagement in fan behaviours can also be divided into three levels, as summarised in Table 2

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Table 2: Fan engagement intensity [2]

Levels	
Consumption	Consumption is the most passive form of participation of fan groups, and activities such as reading posts, viewing photos, and watching videos only require fans to pay a simple time cost, which is the simplest and most implicit activity behaviour, which is mainly affected by the demand for information motivation. Fans consume content to keep information about the club or player up to date, not to be an active participant.
Contribution	The more active level, which includes liking, commenting or sharing posts and content, is strongly influenced by the motivation of empowerment, as fans generally believe that their behaviour or subjective perception can effectively influence the club or other fans, and at this level, the two motivations of integration and social interaction also have a greater impact. They all make the fan base willing to invest more time and experience to build new connections with the club or the players.
Creation	At the highest level of engagement, fans create their own content, such as videos, blogs, or personal IPs, through their own personal reflections, which is largely driven by Brand Love's motivation, which inspires fans to invest a lot of time and energy into creating content, reflecting the deep emotional connection involved.

However, competition on media platforms is increasingly fierce, and viewing resources are becoming saturated. In today's homogeneous content, an urgent issue we need to solve is how to effectively use social media platform resources to maintain and enhance the fan base stickiness.

4. Enhancement of fan base stickiness

4.1. Enhance the uniqueness and topicality of the content and improve audience engagement

Sports content creators on social media platforms or professional clubs themselves often publish homogeneous content, such as creators posting comments or viewing feelings based on the same hot spots. Different clubs often publish videos of players training and matches, which makes the audience often only pay attention to well-known creators and more influential clubs or players. These well-known creators, players and clubs will also lose the continuous attention of some online fan groups after posting content with a high repetition rate and similarity for a long time. At the same time, a long-term single content type will reduce the audience's desire to participate, fail to trigger large-scale discussions, and fail to cause topicality [3]. On today's social media platforms, fans are driven by information to get real first-hand information or the dynamics of players and teams outside of games. They are willing to spend more energy and time on discussions, arguments and even conflicts of opinion on the theme of their favourite teams and players. Today's club officials expect fans to 'unconsciously spend time in online social spaces' [3], and unique or topical content will be more likely to be discussed by audiences in cookie-cutter pieces and posts. In the long run, it will become a unique style or label for a club or creator to be remembered by the fans.

4.2. Offline events enhance the authenticity of the content

Although social media platforms are the main channel for fan groups to participate in events, both platform creators and clubs themselves can try to combine online media communication with offline event participation to expand their influence, such as community events organised by clubs, charity

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running festivals or fan carnivals [4]; or campus tours. Internet celebrity reality shows and other content are organised by the platform creators themselves. Such offline events can be publicised and promoted through social media platforms, and live event highlights can be broadcast on platforms such as Facebook. At the same time, after the event ends, the live broadcast and recorded materials can be used as slices and content to continue to upload to the platform to expand the influence, such as sharing the participant's story or creating hashtags to encourage the audience or the participants themselves to recreate the event content, thereby further expanding the scope and influence of the event. By combining participation in offline events and social media, clubs can create synergies that enhance the authenticity and liveliness of the content, increase the interest of the audience and consolidate the love of the fan base.

4.3. New broadcasting technology improves the audience's viewing experience

In today's technological breakthroughs, the 'immediacy' required by sports media has gradually shifted its purpose from 'information acquisition' to a more immersive "experience of the event", taking extreme sports such as skateboarding and surfing, for example, these projects use equipment and technology such as social media and GoPro cameras to capture the first-person view of athletes' content to attract the attention of audiences. On the other hand, drone technology has provided a broader aerial perspective for sports broadcasting, and has been widely used in the broadcast of winter events and the World Surfing League. Thus, the audience can more intuitively feel the process of the competition and the technical movements of athletes [5]. At the same time, portable GPS devices, data recording devices and other technologies digitise and visualise athletes' performance, and even link with media platforms to achieve some data sharing with fan groups, which greatly improves the audience's viewing experience, and at the same time, these data can help the coaching team find problems, optimise training content, and have the opportunity to make athletes' performance go further, so as to present better competition content for the audience. At the level of broadcast strategy, the addition of algorithms and big data analysis enables the platform to customise content according to the preferences of different users. It is expected that with the continuous optimisation of broadcasting technology, sports events will be able to further expand their influence and connect audiences from multiple countries, cultures and backgrounds on the premise of ensuring immediacy, so that the audience is not limited to simply 'watching' the game, but more importantly, 'experience', which includes culture, conflict, unique perspectives and visual data.

4.4. Balance the involvement of clubs or tournament officials in the communication process

Although the media participation behaviour of the fan base stems from the love of the club, we also need to pay attention to avoid the influence of the club's excessive involvement in the media platform, the most typical example is Red Bull's monopoly on the ownership of media resources [5], which greatly limits the initiative of athletes, and sports clubs must strike a balance between the involvement of social media platforms and attracting real fans to participate, so as to avoid the 'mirage' and 'false prosperity' brought by fake traffic and fake fans, and be too 'indifferent' The interactive performance or unreal traffic data will alienate the real fan base, because the communication process of sports media relies heavily on emotional value. The audience's brand love motivation comes from this, and the sports media will amplify emotions such as fan group identity and patriotism in the communication process. However, excessive commercialisation will dilute these emotional bonds, which means that clubs and content creators need to continue to communicate with the fan base transparently, openly and honestly to ensure that social media platforms remain a playground designed to truly connect with the fan base, rather than just a marketing tool.

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5. Notable aspects of future sports media communication strategies

5.1. Strategies for non-profit sports organisations

We have noticed that non-profit sports organisations also hope to attract audiences through social media platforms, promote the organisation's IP, and generate revenue to achieve self-haematopoiesis and sustainable development, but because they are very different from professional sports clubs in terms of operating environment, goals, and audiences, they cannot fully follow the communication strategies of professional sports clubs, otherwise there is a risk of 'following the example of the East'. Non-profit sports organisations are aimed at a broad, community-based audience, and most of these participants are for the purpose of experiencing hobbies or leisure, with more emphasis on personal health benefits, social relationships and activity experience, which makes non-profit sports organisations unable to use brand awareness to attract global audiences like professional clubs, nor can they afford excessive publicity budgets, and need to pursue low-cost and high-efficiency communication strategies. At the same time, since the main motivation of non-profit organisations is altruism and more emphasis on humanistic care [4], which is also the factor that can attract the most attention of this kind of sports organisation itself, we imagine that non-profit sports organisations in the new media era should have a collective or product IP awareness under the premise that the essence of altruism remains unchanged, and it is an imperative step for non-profit organisations that are the cornerstone of the social sports system to improve their communication strategies and seek a sustainable development methodology of self-haematopoiesis.

5.2. Ethical issues related to privacy, security, and fairness

The iterative advancement and ubiquitous adoption of media and technology bring countless opportunities, but also raise ethical issues related to privacy, security and fairness, and practitioners should be responsible and inclusive, improve the overall structure, and reduce the risk of participation. Today's big data information collation enables a personalised user experience, but user privacy is at risk if this data is used for a purpose other than its intended purpose without informed consent or authorisation. These threats not only plague audiences, but also affect athletes and participants, the aforementioned GPS tracking technology, satellite technology, etc., can capture detailed personal data including the athlete's location, physical condition, and social media sharing blurs the line between the public and private spheres, and the person who records the data may unknowingly share sensitive data with unknown third parties. Whether the user fully understand how their data is being used? Where is this data stored? Who will it be shared with? These issues have become the 'dark side' of today's sports media operations. The greater dependence of new media propaganda methods on the Internet will also lead to many problems, such as hackers on the official homepage, account and even user data held, and the exposure of sensitive footage due to hackers using connected devices, which will directly affect the physical and mental safety of athletes and the reputation and reputation of the organisation itself. In terms of equity, the technological divide in the digital age remains unignorable, with athletes from lower socioeconomic backgrounds struggling to use cutting-edge technology to empower themselves, leading to technological bottlenecks and even being 'marginalised' on the field, as well as many grassroots players lacking similar opportunities. Professional clubs' social media-based communication strategies require a stable use of smart electronic devices and a reliable internet connection to the fan base, which virtually excludes fans in areas where digital infrastructure has lagged behind, leaving opportunities for engagement permanently unequal. Sports asset owners often prioritise profits over societal interests, a trend that persists in social media, where big data algorithms favour high-engagement content, and obscure clubs or unpopular sports are easily marginalised. This is also one of the pain points in the publicity

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process of non-profit sports organisations. In the future, when we talk about communication strategies, the moral hazards of such concurrency cannot be ignored.

6. Conclusions

Generally speaking, in the new media era, the motivation and participation methods of the fan groups on which the media communication strategy of sports organisations is based have not changed significantly. However, due to the gradual and thorough transfer of the communication scene from traditional media to the network and online, and the continuous iteration of broadcast technology, the basic communication strategy for the emotion and loyalty of the fan group still needs to be adjusted accordingly. This paper summarised four new media communication methods to enhance user stickiness, mainly starting from de-homogenisation, improving the topicality, realism and experience. It briefly describes the new strategies suitable for the new media platform as the main application environment, and also provides an outlook for future developments. Furthermore, this paper analysed the analysis and solution of the hidden moral hazards in the existing media communication strategies. Both these areas have the possibility and necessity of further research, and will be an important direction in future research on the communication strategies of sports organisations.

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