Understanding Social Media Platform Usage Behaviour: The Case of Balancing Functional Alternatives

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Advancements in technology have fundamentally altered the sport media landscape, resulting in a plethora of mediums sport organizations can use to interact with existing and attract new consumers. Social media (SM), the collection of internet-based applications built and drawing upon Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate the creation and exchange of user generated content, is an example of new technologies shifting the sport communication paradigm (Hambrick et al., 2010). The rapid creation and acceptance of SM platforms for media consumption results in an increased need to comprehend how these mediums are being used and balanced by sport consumers.

Existing sport management scholarship has begun to identify various reasons sport consumers embrace SM. Research has focused on why fans use social media broadly (e.g., Clavio & Frederick, 2014), and by platforms such as Facebook (e.g., Sanderson, 2013) and Twitter (e.g., Gibbs et al., 2014). The large degree of overlap in motives across these studies, such as interactivity and information gathering, suggests SM platforms are functional alternatives, specifically they serve the same needs equally (Katz et al., 1973). This raises the question of why and under what conditions a consumer would select one platform over another if they are largely satisfying similar needs. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to understand how consumers are balancing and integrating the various sport SM available. Thereby, this research will provide important insights to the sport industry that can be leveraged to optimize SM strategies (e.g., when, what, and where to distribute content).

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory (Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1973) offers an appropriate theoretical lens to investigate how consumers are selecting, using, and balancing the various sport SM available to them since it is based on the notion that consumers are active in their media selection. Existing research has identified a range of motives of SM use, summarized as interactivity, information gathering, entertainment, fandom, and camaraderie (Filo et al., 2015), based on the account and platform. The current study seeks to further this line of scholarship by considering SM platforms and accounts collectively as functional alternatives, rather than in isolation as most existing literature has done. It will do so by investigating the impact of accounts and platforms on the media selection process that influences simultaneous consumption of multiple media and satisfaction. Moreover, it will focus on integrating the media selection process across SM accounts, platforms, and contexts, unifying existing conflicting and inconsistent literature.

To investigate the use of SM, a qualitative methodology will be employed. SM users engaging in trending sport conversations will be recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Snowball sampling will be used to reach a variety of activity levels on SM (e.g., passive and active users) until theoretical saturation has been obtained. These interviews will focus on expanding existing work through the lens of U&G Theory by ascertaining how sport fans integrate and balance functionally alternative SM platforms; thereby, providing the sport industry with insights necessary to optimize their SM strategies.