

Chapter 14

The Effects of ICT on Sports Fan Management

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ABSTRACT

This contribution studies the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the fan engagement process and the role ITC can play in enabling the reconfiguration of a sports organization. This approach combines social enterprise, sports context, and ICT theories in discussing the concepts of fan quantity, feedback, and involvement. The study highlights the value of fans as relevant stakeholders in sports organizations and as key players in the creation of value. Sport organizations as social enterprises simultaneously seek sporting, economic as well as social results. ICT can increase the value of fans as assets, reinforcing the integration of these three forms of results. Three emblematic case histories describe and exemplify the theoretical argument presented in this chapter and offer stimuli for the discussion of both theoretical and managerial implications.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the representative organizations of sporting activities have faced increasing pressure to become more business oriented (Chadwick, 2009). Notwithstanding the relevance of economic resources, the sustainability of sports

organizations can only be achieved through integrating the sporting, economic and social results delivered to the different stakeholders (Ruta and Guenzi, 2012). As concerns the social dimension, sports organizations provide entertainment for fans and sustain the sporting values that include ethics, fair play and honesty, health, excellence

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in performance, teamwork, commitment, respect for rules for self and other participants, courage (Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton, 2007).

A specific challenge of social enterprises is the involvement and engagement of multiple stakeholders, which renders governance very complex (Di Domenico, Tracey & Haugh 2009).

In this chapter, we analyze the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a potential managerial tool to sustain and develop the relationship between sports organizations and their primary stakeholders, namely, their fans.

This relationship is characterized by the organization's ability to stimulate fan participation in the functioning of the organization. Participating in a sports organization is not just one of the many activities that fans do to spend time but becomes a central opportunity for personal growth, contamination, learning and satisfying social needs, where people can discover themselves and their own values and ideas, in part through comparison with, and recognition of, others.

The chapter is organized as follows. In the first part, we present our research framework combining sports literature, the social enterprise perspective, stakeholder theory and the ICT approach. Our contribution assumes the prerequisite of managing and developing three key fan variables: fan quantity, fan feedback and fan involvement in order to achieve a high level of engagement and to support the proactive role of the club in generating social value. In the second part, according with the descriptive nature of our study, we propose three successful case histories in the sports domain that exemplify the impact of three web-based initiatives on fan engagement. The cases enable us, in the third part of the chapter, to support our theoretical framework and discuss both the theoretical and practical implications. Conclusions and future research complete the chapter.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sports as a Business and Social Domain

Sports organizations have traditionally been managed by sports enthusiasts with a passion for the sport, where measures of success are related to on-field success and participant numbers rather than operational effectiveness. Sports organization management perpetuated this distinction by drawing heavily on a committed volunteer workforce. Pressure to formalize management practices was hence juxtaposed with the challenge imposed by scarce human and financial resources, reliance on volunteers and the long history of informal planning, control and administrative systems (Taylor and McGraw, 2006).

Professional sports have variously developed across the world as a ceremony, a celebration, a physical pursuit, a leisure activity and now, increasingly, a business (Chadwick, 2009). Recent years have witnessed the growing complexity of the world of sport and the birth of the so-called sports business. Increasing volumes of business generated by sports associations, clubs, leagues and federations, the investments and returns obtained by firms offering products and sports services - primarily in the media, technical clothing and event organization arena - now characterize the sports business (Rosner & Shropshire, 2004). Among the factors causing these sudden increases in economic interests are first and foremost TV rights, thereafter merchandising, licensing, sponsorship, facility management and other sports marketing initiatives facilitated by developments in communication technology and the globalization logic that today regulates most markets (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2007).

The sports industry has great impact when considering its economic dimension, creating a global phenomenon in its own right worth billions

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