

Key Factors and Financial Value of Sponsors Integration via Social Media Channels in Professional Sports: An Empirical Analysis

Katharina Schöttl¹ and Florian Kainz²

¹University of Sports & Health, Technology & Arts, Vulkanstr. 1, 10367 Berlin, Germany

²University of Applied Management, Steinheilstr. 6, 85737 Ismaning, Germany

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Sponsors Integration, Financial Value, Success Factors.

Abstract: The study presented here aims to open up the topic of sponsor integration in social media marketing in professional sports. Using a mixed methods design, both the current status in social media and the perspective of the sponsored and sponsors are surveyed. Critical success factors are identified from the results of the sub-studies. A basis for determining the monetary value of these measures was established. This resulted in a suggestion for a new platform for sponsors in the context of digitalization processes.

1 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this abstract is to present a research project, that deals with the subject of sponsors integration via social media channels of professional sport organisations. The project investigates how to use the social network channels of sport organisations as a new advertising space for sponsors integration without losing the character of the social media as service channels for fan communication. The focus here is on working out how companies that act as sports sponsors can benefit from the high digital reach of sport organizations in social networks. The example of the football clubs in the 1st and 2nd Bundesliga in Germany was analysed to establish, which success factors should be considered as a success measure and which activities should be avoided to achieve both the communication goals of the companies and the social media marketing goals of the club.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social networks have established themselves as a tool of communication in today's society. They are characterized primarily by the multimedia content, the high message frequency, as well as various interaction mechanisms. As part of a literature study, Valos et al (2015) identify its flexible and adaptive

nature as one of its unique characteristics. In professional sports the channels are operated to use their advantages for goals like fan communication but also "to benefit from additional marketing and publicity efforts" (Geurin, 2016, p 70). Sport organisations, such as professional football clubs have built their channels into interaction tools that can reach millions of people. Exemplary named here is the facebook channel of the german football club FC Bayern Munich, which has generated nearly 42 Million followers in the end of the year 2017. However, the high-frequency use of these channels also requires personnel resources, why the question of direct sources of refinancing is justified. According to Nufer und Bühler (2013) a permanent goal of sports sponsoring is the increase in awareness about contact quantity and contact quality, the monetization of these digital reaches is close by the sponsor integration in the posts of the specific club. This connection is also emphasized in the "editor's note" (2012) of the Sport Marketing Quarterly concerning the role of social media marketing in professional sports.

As the strengths of these social networks include authentic and non-commercial fan-talk, an empirical study examined whether it is possible to integrate sponsors into social media communication in such a way that the sponsoring goals are achieved and fan interests are also maintained.

3 EMPIRICAL STUDY ON SPONSORS INTEGRATION VIA SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

The overall research objective of the study is to identify success factors for sponsor integration via social media channels and to derive a basis for the monetary value adjustment of these measures

The methodical design combines qualitative and quantitative substudies set as a mixed methods design. This design is recommended if a comprehensive study is to be realized (Bortz and Döring, 2006, p. 185), as it is characterized by its systematic combination and integration of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

As a research object, the professional football clubs of the 1st and 2nd soccer league in Germany were used.

In the first substudy all facebook posts of the German first and second division teams were analyzed over an entire season. In the context of the analysis of these 49.566 posts those 1722 - in which a sponsor was integrated - were recorded and evaluated in detail, based on an sample of 39 quantitative and qualitative criteria.

The data set was evaluated descriptively and via inferential statistics. As dependent variables for the success of a post with sponsor integration, the interaction rate and the proportion of negative comments against the sponsorship integration measure were defined. A high interaction rate ensures a high reach of the post and helps to achieve the social media marketing goals of the clubs as well as the sponsoring goals of the company. A low percentage of negative comments indicates that the sponsors integration is accepted by the fans.

As part of the second sub-study, 13 social media managers of the 36 professional soccer clubs were interviewed. The third part study captures the sponsors' perspective using an online survey.

The process of collection is already completed. For this purpose, the statistical evaluations are currently running, whereby first results can already be shown below.

4 FIRST RESULTS

This section must be in one column and is comprised of the Extended Abstract title, sub-title (Optional) and authors names and affiliations.

4.1 Success Factors

Here the first results of the post analysis and the qualitative interviews are presented. The social media managers of the clubs named the aspects "Call to reaction measures", "Avoidance of obvious advertising", "Direct relation to sporting happenings", "Avoidance of sponsor integration after sporting defeats" and "Low quantity of sponsor integration posts" as crucial success factors for sponsor integration via their social media channels. The statistical analysis of the analyzed posts confirms the aspects avoidance of obvious advertising/smart sponsor integration and as well as activation of the fans and content with direct relation to the sporting happenings as documented below.

Posts with "call to reaction" requests to the user generate higher relative interaction values ($M = 1.5101$, $SD = 2.321$) than those without this requests ($M = 0.7331$, $SD = 1.311$). This difference was found to be significant ($t(117) = 3.519$, $p = 0.000$). At the same time, lower values of the number of negative comments ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.753$) were observed in the group of posts with call to reaction requests than in the group without call to reaction requests ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 9.313$), where the difference was also found to be significant ($t(1706) = -7.740$, $p = 0.000$).

Another statement by 69% of the experts was that publishing of direct advertising posts for the sponsoring company should be avoided. This statement can also be confirmed by the statistical analysis of the dataset. The average of the post-interactions in the group of posts with direct advertising messages ($M = 0.474$, $SD = 1.140$) is below the value of posts without direct advertising messages ($M = 0.837$, $SD = 1.448$). At the same time, the value for the negative comments on posts with direct advertising messages ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 9.158$) is higher than the one for the group of posts without direct messages ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 8.885$). Both differences could be detected as significant (relative interactions: $t(402) = -4.471$, $p = 0.000$, negative comments: $t(338) = 5.976$, $p = 0.000$).

The average of the post-interactions in the group of posts which relate directly to sports topics is significant by $p=0.001$ higher than in those as in those where the post content focuses only on the sponsor. At the same time, the value of negative comments on posts which relate to sports topics is significant by $p=0.001$ lower than the one for the posts with focus on the sponsor.

A comparison of posts with sponsor integration published immediately after sporting successes with those published immediately after sporting defeats

showed no significant difference in the dependent variables, so that this aspect could not be confirmed statistically. Likewise, no significant correlation of the dependent variables with the quantity of posts with sponsor integration could be demonstrated.

4.2 Monetary Valuation

When asked about the criteria for the monetary evaluation of this sponsoring integration measure, 91% of the social media managers of the clubs cited the reach of the posts as the main criterion. This criterion is confirmed by the results of the company survey. Here, the interviewed spokespersons named the reach as the second most important pricing criterion according to the image of the sponsored object.

As part of the sponsor survey, a modified cost per thousand was also derived by providing respondents with posts of different ranges for monetary evaluation. The modified cost per thousand for posts with sponsors integration could be calculated on 14,31 € The cost per thousand is a common figure used to value sponsoring measures and states, which amount of money must be used for an advertising measure, in order to reach 1000 persons of a target group.

5 CONCLUSION

On the basis of the results presented here, it could be shown that not every impression that the social media managers have on the integration of sponsors via the club's social media channels can also be statistically confirmed. One example is the sporting success of the sponsored object at the time of the publication of the post with sponsor integration. From the perspective of the interviewed experts sporty failures influence negatively the success figures of the post, however this thesis could not be statistically confirmed in the context of the status quo analysis.

In terms of the post content, the "call-to-reaction" measures as well as subliminal advertising effects and the direct relation to sporting events could be identified as success factors for sponsor integration via social media channels during the expert interviews and statistically confirmed by the post-analysis.

With regard to the monetary evaluation of the measures, the reach was identified as the most important criterion. As a common tool for reach evaluation, a modified cost per thousand was calculated with 14,31 € The value thus represents a

basis for valuation, on which the responsible persons can orient themselves with the post pricing.

REFERENCES

- Moore, R., Lopes, J., 1999. Paper templates. In *TEMPLATE'06, 1st International Conference on Template Production*. SCITEPRESS.
- Bortz, J. & Döring, N., 2006. *Forschungsmethoden und Evaluation für Human- und Sozialwissenschaftler*. Heidelberg, Germany: Springer.
- Editor's Note. 2012. In *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 21(4), 204-205.
- Geurin, A. N. (2016). Developing a Social Media Strategy Guide for Elite Athletes. In *Sport & Entertainment Review*, 2(3), 70-76.
- Nufer, G., & Bühler, A. 2013. Sponsoring im Sport. In *Marketing im Sport : Grundlagen und Trends des modernen Sportmarketing*. (pp. 264-289). Berlin, Germany: Erich Schmidt Verlag.
- Valos, M., Polonsky, M. J., Mavondo, F., & Lipscomb, J. (2015). Senior marketers' insights into the challenges of social media implementation in large organisations: Assessing generic and electronic orientation models as potential solutions. In *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(7-8), 713.
- Smith, J., 1998. *The book*. The publishing company. London, 2nd edition.