Chapter 13

Getting Brand Commitment through Internet and Mobile Sports Marketing: An Insight on Real Madrid Football Team

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a better understanding of the impact that the Internet and mobile sports marketing are having on a business’s ability to achieve customer engagement. To achieve this goal, the case of Real Madrid football team is analyzed, as it is calculated to have over 200 million supporters worldwide. Information about Real Madrid was gathered from September 2012 to March 2013 by repeatedly browsing the team’s Website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and apps. Data from interviews of Real Madrid’s marketing department published in business press and posts was also compiled. Additionally, a focus group was conducted to discuss the customer engagement of Real Madrid’s fans. The findings offer new opportunities to get customer engagement. They also highlight the important role of social media to gain insight about the fans.

INTRODUCTION

“Consumers love events, corporations love consumers – this is a match made in heaven” (D’Alessandro, 1993, p. 507). Although this statement originates from 1993 it is still true, maybe more than ever.

Marketers know that brands are a strategic choice for companies that operate in markets where technological innovation is a basic premise (Jensen and Beckmann, 2009). This is especially relevant in the 21st century, as due to the globalization of the economy, companies have nowadays the possibility to consider the entire market instead of focusing only on their local region (Ratten and Ratten, 2011). To do so, every organization needs to have a strong brand.

According to the above discussion, brands can be considered as a strategic choice for companies that operate in markets where technological inno-
vation is a basic premise (Jensen and Beckmann, 2009). The goal is getting customer engagement, which drives brand loyalty. In this sense, literature highlights the role of a company’s brand community as it has the power to influence the strength of the relationships between community participants and the firm’s brand (Hur, Ahn and Kim, 2011). Moreover, when customers are affectively committed to a company, they identify themselves with the firm’s vision and values, and in turn, they are interested in the growth of the company. In addition, interaction among members may influence the choice of brands and enhance the company’s brand loyalty, making this issue very relevant for both academics and practitioners (Sicilia and Palazón, 2008). For instance, committed customers show proactive behaviors such as positive word-of-mouth (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011).

The above discussion is especially relevant in the sports sector, as it has become increasingly commercialized and internationalized over the past decades. Specifically, sports marketers have to consider what benefits the team could provide to their fans to get customers’ support. In particular, strategies such as finely tuned communications through a variety of media (e.g., e-mail, and special limited access events) are able to boost and reinforce the degree to which committed fans feel they are receiving special treatment and are truly part of a team (Kaynak, Gultekin and Tatoglu, 2008). Furthermore, the advance of the Internet, including also social media and mobile phone, offers marketers and immense variety of new possibility to communicate with the customers, but also fans and fans. That’s why professional sports is one of the sectors of activity that most uses interactive marketing mediums to contact their followers in real time. In short, cell phones, iPads and iPhones have enabled marketing to be more interactive (Cooke and Buckley, 2008), which helps professional sports to attract new followers and collect fan feedback through Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, among others (Ratten and Ratten, 2011).

Besides, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011) predicted the sports market to grow from almost $120 billion in 2011 to over $145 billion in 2015. Specifically, over a third ($50 billion) of the 2015 sports market revenue will be generated in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The growing importance of this market gave the impulse to focus on the sports business in this research. That is, to get customer commitment sports marketers need to make consumers feel as a part of the team, and discover ways to keep them by highlighting the importance of the team in their lives.

Moreover, the internationalization of the global economy has meant that many sports marketers now look to the global market instead of one region in their marketing efforts. Specifically, as noted by Ratten and Ratten (2011), entrepreneurial sport ventures that adopt an international focus are likely to achieve success in the competitive marketplace. This implies, however, that successful sports brands have to transcend their cultural origins to develop strong relationships with consumers across different countries and cultures (Hollis, 2008). In alignment with the to the above arguments, adopting marketing strategies that allow the sports team to contact their followers without physical restrictions is crucial to achieving customer engagement and loyalty. For instance, of six billion people living on earth; about 5 billion have a mobile device and interact between 40 and 80 minutes with the device every day. Therefore, sports managers have to be up-to-date with the latest trends and developments of digital and mobile marketing. In other words, implementing branding strategies through Internet and mobile phone applications is not an option for sport marketers; it’s a must.

Even though prior studies proved emotional relationships of customers towards brands in the consumer goods market (Keller, 2001), the feeling of brand commitment in sports is still little explored. That is, despite the growing importance