

Lubricant And / Or Glue? The Role Of Social Networking Sites In Sports Clubs

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Aim of the research

Social Networking Sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter are increasingly implemented in voluntary sports clubs in the Netherlands as tools for social interaction. These SNSs, which are often publicly accessible, are important instruments for organizational communication. Although almost all of the nearly 25,000 voluntary sports clubs provide one or several SNSs for internal communication, it is not clear what the impact is on processes and on attitude and behavior of members. This study examines whether presence of members on Social Networking Sites of their sports club (SNSuse) is a factor to the commitment of members to their sports clubs. That commitment can consist of (1) carrying out activities for the sports club, and (2) continuing their membership.

Theoretical background

Organizations have embraced Social Networking Sites (SNSs) for internal communication and social interaction among members (Eurostat, 2016). Rather than functioning as a channel through which communication messages travel, SNSs operate more as platforms upon which social interaction among members occurs (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013). This type of internal communication is often seen as *glue* that holds the members of the organization (Leonardi et al., 2013). Furthermore, SNSs are considered as applications with high media richness, that is the amount of information they allow to be transmitted in a given time interval (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This media richness of SNSs enables members to seek and exchange information rapidly, and that therefore SNSs are seen as more effective than other channels in clear and problem-solving communication, i.e. SNSs as *lubricant* that greases the organization (Leonardi et al., 2013).

Little is known about these roles of SNSs, used for this so-called 'workplace related internal communication', in the field of sports. A study to athletics has indicated that running-related SNSs influence both behavior and satisfaction of involved athletes (Mahan III, Seo, Jordan, & Funk, 2015). However, little research has been done on specific effects of SNSs in context of member-based sports organizations, such as voluntary sports clubs.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

An online survey has been conducted among members of voluntary sports clubs in 17 types of sports, such as soccer, field hockey, athletics, gymnastics, swimming and volleyball, in the southern part of the Netherlands. Participants ($n = 1,009$; male: 472 and female: 537) were mostly young adolescents ($M = 21.4$; $SD = 2.81$).

The survey instrument, based on existing scales of Organizational Commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996) and scales of Impact of Social Networking Sites in context of sports participation (Mahan III et al., 2015) included items related to specific constructs of interest: (a) presence on SNS of sports clubs (SNSuse); (b) sports club involvement, (c1) sports club commitment (doing tasks), and (c2) sports club commitment (continuing membership). The major part of the response sets consisted of four-point Likert scales, which enabled members to fill in the survey on a smartphone.

Mediation analyses were performed to check whether the presence of involved members on Social Networking Sites of their sports clubs (SNSuse) influences the intention to carry out

activities for the sports clubs and to continue the membership.

Results

SNSuse of involved members has a double effect. It affects two intentions: (1) the intention to perform tasks for the sports club (average effect $\kappa^2 = .099$; confidence interval [.0757, .1241] Bca 95% CI) and (2) the intention to continue membership (limited effect $\kappa^2 = .027$; confidence interval [.0037, .0525] Bca 95% CI). And in the case of members who were already active in performing tasks for the sports club, SNSuse also influences the intention to continue as a member (limited effect $\kappa^2 = .026$; confidence interval [.0023, .0540] Bca 95% CI).

Conclusion and discussion

This study demonstrates the theoretical potential of organizational SNSs, that is SNSuse of sports clubs, for activating and retaining members. SNSs can therefore be used as internal communication instruments in order to achieve organizational goals. Further research should provide insights into content type and uses, and further insights in motivations of users of SNSs of voluntary sports clubs.

Literature

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