

FACTORS INFLUENCING FACEBOOK PAGE POSTS' LIKES, SHARES, AND COMMENTS IN SPORT MARKETING

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Abstract

Social media has turned into a showcasing instrument through the synergy of conventional advertising and innovation. Prior studies in social media literature have examined posting time as a predictor of online engagement based on consumer behavior. However, posting time, from the perspective of page administrators is usually taken for granted and has not been identified completely. The key purpose of this paper is to bridge a research gap in sports related online marketing literature by investigating the impact of content categories, posting time, and types of media on online engagement. Data from a total of 2,499 posts was collected; each Facebook post being coded, and the number of likes, shares, and comments recoded as measurements of online engagement. The findings demonstrate that the effects of content categories, posting time and media types on online engagement were significant in a few cases. Player promotional content obtained the greatest number of likes, and team information received the greatest number of shares and comments. These findings have several practical implications for Facebook page administrators as well as online entrepreneurs.

Keywords: online engagement, Facebook pages, social media marketing, sports marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has recently become a marketing tool that can be integrated with technological and traditional marketing platforms. Also, social media provides opportunities to attract customer engagement, and build long-term relationships between organizations and

customers in a business context (Achen, 2016). Apart from its ability to strengthen the relationship between a company and its customers, social media can also offer organizations a way to build social bonds through information sharing and interaction through two-way communication (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). Customers or fans can gather in social

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media sites to communicate, seek and offer suggestions on various topics, and meet others with similar interests including products and services, brands, causes and foundations, politics, careers, and the like (Singh & Cullinane, 2010).

Facebook is one of the most popular platforms for business, and communities by more than 1.49 billion accounts and more than 968 million active users (Raktham, 2017). Facebook enables business owners, and organizations to create their own pages where they can interact with consumers or fans, who have clicked to follow or like the page (Achen, 2016). Facebook features are categorized by their association to the related response to content, review of content, or uploading of content (Wallace et al., 2011). The core values of the Facebook community don't only facilitate communication, but also bring people with similar attributes together (Laoroche, Habibi, and Richard, 2013).

Sports organizations can create Facebook pages, in order to share information and build their relationship with fans. Sports teams also obtain a competitive advantage, by adopting a relationship strategy on social media to cultivate these loyal fans. This is because these strategies focus on building and maintaining relationships between organizations and consumers (Buhler & Nufer, 2010). Most professional teams, such as the National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball, and National Hockey League, communicate with their fans on Facebook, and embrace Facebook as a way to strengthen the relationship (Kim et al, 2011). Moreover, these professional

teams would obtain further mechanism opportunities through page followers, providing sports teams or organizations with a means for leveraging income (Williams and Chinn, 2010). However, little is known about what effectively engages followers or fans on Facebook posts, which social media has the strongest outcome, or when a Facebook post shows its effectiveness to customers or fans (Schultz & Peltier, 2013; Achen, 2015).

Prior studies in Facebook engagement literature have examined the relationship between content category, number of Facebook fans, and post media type, and have found a strong positive impact on Facebook engagement (e.g. like, comment, share). Specifically, Achen (2015) examined the effects of Facebook fans, market size, and content categories on Facebook engagement across more than 5,000 posts collected from NBA team Facebook pages. Jayasingh and Venkatesh (2015) conducted a study with 10 brands of consumer product Facebook pages to determine the effects of different types of post (e.g. status, video, picture, link) on post interactions, consequently finding that pictures had the greatest number of post interactions. Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) examined the role of media types and content types. Their study revealed that both media type, and content type influence consumer engagement, with customers more likely to share posts with a higher level of media vividness with their friends, compared to plain text. However, to the best of our knowledge there is no Facebook research specifically examining whether differences in posting periods have any role to play in their

ability to leverage fan engagement associated with a football match, in encouraging fan participation.

Although there is a long list of posting time in social media associated with online engagement, most of the studies examine posting time based on consumer behavior. Rutz and Bucklin (2008) examined the differences of click-through rates (CTR) between the weekend and weekdays. Similarly, the study of Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) investigated the effects of workday and peak hours on consumer engagement, based on the active time of Facebook fans. Therefore, this study addresses this important research gap by focusing on the posting time based on the page administrator's perspective in order to find the relationship between posting time and consumer engagement on Facebook.

In this regard, the main aims of this study are to further understand the nature of social engagement behavior on Facebook pages and to examine whether categories of content, time of posting, and the types of media posted by teams, on the Thai premier league Facebook page, impact the level of fan engagement. Additionally, the influence of posting periods and media types are examined. Social engagement level is measured through the number of likes, number of comments, and number of shares, for the post created by the team. Therefore, this research aims to make two key contributions to better understanding fan engagement with sports social media, and with other brand Facebook pages more generally. The research extends the existing literature by emphasizing the impact of time periods on engagement in the rapidly growing sport's industry in

Thailand. From a practitioner's perspective, the findings will suggest managerial implementations, for page administrators and online entrepreneurs, to attain the participation of their current and new fans.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Facebook as A Platform for Social Media Tool

Today, a Facebook page is one of the most required platforms for online business. In order to build the relationship between organizations and customers, it is important to be concerned with the quality of the posted content (Pronschinske et al., 2012). Previous studies in various industries have suggested that specific content is a vital driver of customer or fan engagement and relationship strengthening. However, there are few studies existing, in which the impacts of content on customer engagement were studied in the business context (Pronschinske et al., 2012; Rishika et al., 2013). Walsh et al. (2013) suggested that in order to build relationships, content should be created to encourage discussion, conversations, and engagements in two-way communication.

The Facebook page has been part of the Facebook platform since 2007. The features given as tools on the page provide organizations, brands, or other people a means to participate with their fans and become connected in a social community. Basically, the Facebook page has various ways to provide communication such as posting status, sharing pictures, uploading videos, or creating events. In order to build the relationship between page

administrators and followers, Facebook allows followers to send private messages directly to page administrators, and the Facebook page is widely used as a key role in enhanced business performance by providing word-of-mouth communication regarding brands, products or services (Brodie et al. 2011).

Chung and Cho (2017) examined the underlying mechanisms, through which the platform of social media affects endorser effectiveness. The results revealed that followers' social interactions with celebrities through social media, have a significant effect on celebrity endorsement. Also, their findings indicate that social media engagement influences parasocial relationships via self-disclosure and trustworthiness, and has a significant impact on brand, and in turn, purchase intentions.

2.2 Social Media in Sports Marketing

Many social media platforms have been used in sports marketing, especially Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Mostly, studies in sports marketing have been concerned with how social media is used by sports teams, organizations and famous athletes. Achen (2015) conducted research that investigated the impact factors of Facebook engagement with NBA teams using five categories, including player promotion, organization promotion, team information, fan interactivity, and external commerce. The results revealed that player and personnel promotional content obtained the greatest number of likes and comments, while fan interactivity content obtained the most shares. Similarly, Hambrick et al. (2010)

studied professional athletes' use of Twitter categorizing into seven different areas of content, including interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, fan-ship, and promotions; interactivity content received the most Tweets, while promotional content received the fewest Tweets.

In a study of NFL teams in the US, Waters et al. (2011) investigated Facebook pages for businesses using reciprocity, responsibility, relationship-nurturing, and reporting to build relationships between the page administrator and fans. The results expressed that reciprocity and relationship-nurturing content were used most often by NFL teams to increase fan engagement. Pronschinske et al. (2012) carried out a content analysis of 114 Facebook pages of teams in Major League Baseball, National Basketball Association, National Football League, and National Hockey League. Four predictors that consisted of authenticity, disclosure, dissemination, and engagement, were used to investigate what led to more likes on Facebook engagements. Engagement has been recognized as a key metric, dividing engagement into different stages, starting with clicking and liking, followed by commenting, continuing with re-tweeting, hash-tagging, and sharing, and finally becoming a social advocate (Paine, 2011).

2.3 Online Engagement

The concept of customer engagement is defined as "the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind

characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011). Customer engagement in social media is a new phenomenon, as social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, has only relatively recently become such a particularly vital platform. (Jayasingh & Venkatesh, 2015). Social engagement is considered as an important key of social media use; social media was built for interaction and engaging encouragement between organizations and customers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social engagement on social media channels has been found to strengthen the customer relationship when the level of engagement increases (Rishika et al., 2013). When consumers have more engagements on social media, they will share more Facebook posts. Hence, this generates the number of Facebook pages reached (Peters et al., 2013).

On online platforms, social engagement is generally recognized as online engagement, and is addressed in the context of measuring actions undertaken, such as page views, video views, and click-through rates (CTR), with various measures being employed depending on the functions provided by the platform (Lehmann et al., 2012). Most Facebook pages express very low engagement values, and the total number of fans does not influence social engagement (Huber et. al, 2011), except in the fashion industry (Allen, 2012).

According to previous social media studies, different categories of posted content could lead to higher numbers of daily engagements on a Facebook page (Park et al., 2009; Cvijikj and

Michahelles, 2013; Achen, 2015). Online entrepreneurs or page administrators have various ways to attract consumers with content marketing, such as the use of coupons, premiums, or contests and sweepstakes, (Jaensirisak and Tassawa, 2017). Moreover, different media types have a significant influence on customer engagement. Photos increase the credibility of content, and are more often shared by users when they touch fans on an emotional level (Huber et al., 2011). Posting time is also widely used to predict customer engagement in social media studies. Facebook users have more interactions on Facebook in the evening, while the fewest interactions occur during the morning and early afternoon (Golder et al., 2007).

2.4 Post Categories

Previous studies of brand communities and social media showed that fans or customers are mostly involved with entertainment, or informative content on brand communication (Dholakia et al. 2004). Entertainment, and informative content were identified to be among the motivations for social engagement over brand-related content. However, entertaining content has been found to have a greater effect (Park et al., 2009). In addition, Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) revealed that if users are motivated by the content of posts, they are more likely to engage in posts. Based on their findings, entertaining content was found to be the most significant factor in increasing the like, comment, and share ratios; rather than remuneration or informative content. Facebook page administrators can use various levels of

interactivity to publicize information, creating contests, quizzes or questions, or using voting or calls to act (De Vries et al., 2012).

In sporting communities, Achen (2015) coded the online content into five categories, namely external commerce, organizational promotion, player promotion, team information, and fan interaction. Data was collected from the Facebook pages of NBA teams. The results indicated that player promotional content received the greatest number of likes and comments, while fan interactivity content received the most shares. Posts enriched with entertainment features, commonly positively attracted receivers and lead to a higher intent to revisit an online site than posts without entertaining contents (Raney et al. 2003). The findings indicated that fans on Facebook are likely to encourage other fans through interactions with a variety of content.

H1: Post categories have a direct effect on Facebook engagement.

2.5 Post Media Types

Post media types correspond to the actual posting action undertaken by the page administrator. The Page administrator is able to share messages or status; photos, or an album of photos; or video clips. These media types express different levels of content vividness and interactivity (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013). Leung (2012) examined the media types used by 12 hotels on their Facebook pages, showing that the most generally used media types are post format (37.9%), images (30.5%), text status (28.7%), and video (2.9%). The impact of different

media types is shown, as photos lead to a higher number of daily active fans than status, and link wall posts (Jayasingh & Venkatesh, 2015).

In online marketing studies, the most common post is one containing a text message combined with a web-link (Chauhan and Pillai, 2013), but there is posted content with a higher level of vividness, which shows a positive effect on online engagement. Videos are the media type with the highest vividness, and have a higher level of Facebook engagement (likes, comments, and shares) when compared with status posts (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013). According to previous research of website attraction, a high degree of vividness appears to be most attractive in enhancing attitudes toward a website, in turn increasing click-through rates (Fortin and Dholakia, 2005; Pin et al., 2015). Therefore, the effects of vividness of posts on Facebook pages doesn't differ from traditional platforms, which consist of messages, pictures and videos. In this study, post media types which contain a high level of vividness, lead to a higher level of Facebook engagement.

H2: Post media types have a direct effect on Facebook engagement.

2.6 Posting Time

Posting time considers the aspect of scheduling, which is recognized as a crucial factor of marketing strategies (Kumar et al. 2006). TrackMaven (2014) investigated Instagram posts of 123 companies that are on the list of the US Fortune 500 companies. The results showed that Sunday is the most effective day of the week for posting, while the

time of day doesn't show a significant impact on the number of fan engagements. For Facebook brand communities, posted content is revealed on the personal walls of fans' pages. The Personal wall is full of content coming from various sources, such as posts from friends, groups, and fan pages, where it is possible to get "lost in the pile" without being seen interactively (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013). Moreover, Facebook fans in different segments have various periods of social media use.

The study of Rutz and Buckling (2008) indicated that most Facebook user activity is during workdays, with the volume of the click-through rates dropping notably on weekends. Generally, people have more interaction on Facebook in the evening, while least interaction occurs during the morning and early afternoon (Golder et al., 2007). Therefore, the posting period must be concerned with the fans' activity schedule, to generate a greater engagement and potential possibility to be seen on the personal wall. This study proposes that Facebook fans are likely to be encouraged to perform fan interactions by appropriate posting time.

H3: Posting time has a direct effect on Facebook engagement.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology literature suggests that in order to examine the issues involved in this research, a descriptive cross-sectional study should be created using the largest social media platform, Facebook. In order to collect the data and test the hypotheses needed for conducting this empirical investigation,

the 5 most liked football team Facebook pages from the 2018 Thai League 1st season, were selected, including Muangthong United FC (>2,000,000 likes), Buriram United (>1,500,000 likes), Chonburi Football Club (>1,000,000 likes), Chiang Rai United FC (>700,000 likes), and True Bangkok United (>380,000 likes). A total of 2,499 posts were collected during the months of February and October 2018, with the associated engagement criteria calculated based on the number of likes, shares, and comments. All posts were nested within Football team pages, and likes, shares, and comments were nested within each post. Each post also contains details of the content, posting time, and post media type, which are relevant for the investigation.

The content of each post was categorized into organization promotion, external commerce, player promotion, team information, or fan interactivity; based on the coding scheme conducted by Clavio and Metz (2014). A post was categorized as organization promotion if it included any promotion of team products, brands, stadiums, or games. Any information on sponsors or business partners was coded as external commerce. A post was coded as personal promotion, if it consisted of personal promotion, player information, behind-the-scenes pictures, and transfer news. Match scheduling, team formation, and game results were included in team information. Lastly, fan interactivity included posts asking for fan participation, contests, polls, and fan activities. The first predictor variable, the content category, consists of a series of dummy variables for organization

promotion, external commerce, player promotion, and fan interactivity, with team information as a reference group.

To distinguish the different types of media, it was coded into three different types based on a previous study (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013). Facebook enables the possibility to post messages, photos or video. These media types express different levels of media richness and vividness (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013). Messages consist of status posts in a written form, made up of a short piece of text, and represent no vividness. Pictures represent medium vividness, as these consist of both text and images, while high vividness is represented by videos which contain more media richness and append sound. The media type consists of dummy variables for photo and video, with message as a reference group.

Scheduling has been emphasized as an important element of online marketing strategies, and usually assumes having a time and space slot on an online platform (Kumar et al, 2006). Each sports team's posting time was determined as being before, during, or after a football match, based on the football match schedule set by the Football Association of Thailand. *Before the match* posts were counted upto three days before a match day. *During the match* is defined as the peak period of football team activities. In this study, during the match was defined as on match day. *After the match* posts were counted upto three days after the match

ended. It was noticed that page administrators were most likely to post on match day, and the day after the match ended; these three categories are compiled to form the variable used as a basis for deriving the legitimacy of hypothesis 3. The last independent variable, posting time, consists of a series of dummy variables including before the match and during the match, with after the match as a reference group.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To empirically investigate whether literature-based factors influence social engagement on Facebook pages, descriptive results were obtained from 2,499 posts as presented in Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the content categories showed that posts providing player promotion were most liked and shared by page fans (3,940 likes, 140 shares); these were followed by posts containing team information which also received the most comments (55.2 comments). Regarding media types, posts in the form of videos were the most liked, shared, and commented on (3,524 likes, 148 shares, 55.85 comments), followed by photo posts and lastly message status. In terms of posting time, posts created after the match were most liked and shared (3,067 likes, 113 shares), while posts created during the match were most commented on by Facebook page fans (57 comments).

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for content category, media type, and posting time

Variables	Likes		Shares		Comments	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Content category</i>						
Organization promotion	2,958.44	2,304	77.7	192	46.44	85
External commerce	2,230.39	2,225	140	444	40	128
Player promotion	3,940.1	3,546	70.87	130	42.8	78
Fan interactivity	2,440.62	2,875	74	145	51.29	110
Team information	3,098.14	3,168	99.4	256	55.2	104
<i>Media type</i>						
Video	3,524.52	3,374	148	285	55.85	87
Photo	3,014.32	3,009	97	290	49.82	115
Message	2,307.51	2,166	42.9	82	33.5	65
<i>Posting time</i>						
Before the match	2,977.4	2,772	70	155	36.1	49
During the match	2,774.67	2,962	97	240	57	116
After the match	3,067	3,057	113	361	48.6	128

During data analysis, the content category was found to be a significant predictor for all outcomes of Facebook fan engagement. Fan interactivity was found to be the most influential content type, influencing the like ratio ($B = 1.234$, $p < 0.001$) and share ratio ($B = .643$, $p < 0.001$), compared to team information, but no significant effect was found regarding the comment ratio. Meanwhile, external commerce was found to be a significant factor for the comment ratio ($B = 3.629$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, the results shown in Table 2 support hypothesis H1 only for external commerce, player promotion, and fan interactivity; while organization promotion doesn't have any significant main effect on Facebook fan engagement.

The significance of the second hypothesis was also tested in the current research. The results of the analysis in Table 2 indicate that media type was found to be a significant predictor in the model for all types of Facebook engagement. Video was found to be a significant factor which influences the like ratio ($B = 1.435$, $p < 0.001$), share ratio ($B = .753$, $p < 0.001$), and comment ratio ($B = .852$, $p < 0.05$), compared to messages. The results for photos also found a significant influence for two outcomes of Facebook engagement, including the share ratio ($B = .726$, $p < 0.001$) and comment ratio ($B = .719$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Table 2. Estimation results for Facebook fan engagement

Variables	Likes		Shares		Comments	
	<i>B</i>	Std. error	<i>B</i>	Std. error	<i>B</i>	Std. error
(Constant)	4.852**	.178	1.809**	0.96	6.772**	.372
Content category						
Organization promotion	-.026	.142	.011	.076	-.056	.296
External commerce	1.084**	.214	.428**	.115	3.629**	.447
Player promotion	.174	.155	.188*	.083	1.346**	.323
Fan interactivity	1.234**	.186	.643**	.100	2.202	.389
Team information (reference group)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Media type						
Video	1.435**	.188	.753**	.101	.852*	.392
Photo	.107	.152	.726**	.082	.719*	.317
Message (reference group)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Posting time						
Before the match	.459*	.135	.354**	.072	2.272**	.283
During the match	.283*	.133	.625**	.073	.970**	.278
After the match (reference group)	-	-	-	-	-	-

Unstandardized coefficients are reported in the Table 2

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$

Posting time was found to be a significant predictor for all measurements of Facebook fan engagement. Before the match was indicated to be a significant predictor, influencing the like ratio ($B = .459$, $p < 0.05$), share ratio ($B = .354$, $p < 0.001$), and comment ratio ($B = 2.272$, $p < 0.001$), compared with after the match. During the match results were also found to be significant for all measurements of engagement, including the like ratio ($B = .283$, $p < 0.05$), share ratio ($B = .625$, $p < 0.001$), and comment ratio ($B = .970$, $p < 0.001$). To summarize these results, the investigations support hypothesis 3.

The results revealed that the content category of the post had a significant impact on Facebook engagement regarding external commerce, player promotion, and fan interactivity. The effect was greatest on the like, and share ratio for fan interactivity, but player promotion showed the greatest effect on comments. These results appear to share similarities to the findings of Achen (2015), whose analysis demonstrated that fan interactivity, organizational promotion, personnel promotion, and team information can be recognized as predictors of Facebook engagement. In contrast, external commerce wasn't found to have a significant effect on engagement

in Achen's study (2015).

In the current study, the effect of media type on the number of likes, shares, and comments was greatest for video. This result can be explained by the very nature of vividness for attraction, the media types with higher vividness had a higher level of Facebook engagement (likes, comments, and shares) when compared with status posts (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013). Thus, it supports other research studies that emphasize the predictors of customer engagement online. Previous research on Facebook brand pages focused on posting time. Posts created in the form of a video attract the participation and attention of Facebook followers for longer (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013).

Finally, the effect of posting time on likes and comments was greatest for before the match. However, share interaction of posts created during the match lasted longer and expressed the greatest effect on shares. This is probably explained by the spurious nature of Facebook users who usually have more interaction on Facebook in a specific period (Golder et al., 2007). This study fills a research gap by examining relationships between posting time and Facebook engagement in a sports community.

5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

These findings have several direct implications for Facebook page administrators, and online entrepreneurs. The results show that different content influences fan engagement on Facebook. This finding suggests a guide for Facebook page administrators, to

emphasize the type of fan engagement they want to encourage. For example, player promotion posts can increase fan engagement in liking, but fan interactivity and team information are more likely to increase the level of commenting and sharing. Second, teams or companies using Facebook pages as an online marketing platform for disseminating news and information should continuously monitor the actions undertaken and respond to fans' interactivity for generating an advocating community. Finally, a successful marketing campaign is created by a page administrator who creates interesting and attracting content for consumers, and who maintains a good relationship with their customers. The results provide a suggestion for online marketing practitioners, regarding which categories or content to contain in online posts.

6. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this research has several practical implications for online marketing and social media studies, there are a few limitations that emerge from the study, also offering opportunities for future research. The main limitation of this research was that data collection was conducted through online monitoring and therefore participants in the study would not be able to express their opinion regarding specific details. This leads to the recommendation that future studies re-examine the opinions of fans, analyzing the comments by employing a content analysis method, in order to understand fans' needs and expectations. Another limitation stems from the variety

of content of Facebook pages, which may result in unique interest and engagement with content. As this study focused only on sports marketing, future studies should emphasize the motivations associated with different brand pages. Finally, using the sum of likes might not be the best measurement for Facebook engagement, because 'Like' is expanded to express other emotions, including, love, funny, wow, sad, and angry. Therefore, future research should consider using these emotions in order to measure the feelings behind fan interactions.

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