Managing the Micromedia Monster: An Analysis of Model Categorizations and Practical Strategic Implications for Sport Properties

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss micromedia management as a branding/marketing strategy for sport properties by analyzing and comparing three media categorization models from Hendricks and Shelton (2016), Herold and Salamunovic (2019), and Kuno Creative (n. d.). The paper will then offer specific tactics to help sport properties strategically utilize their micromedia to achieve organizational marketing and brand management objectives, as well as make recommendations for future research.

Keywords: branding, communication, marketing, media, networks

THE MODERN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Modern media audiences now access news and other information from a plethora of sources in ways that simultaneously exists as mobile and social (Adornato, 2018). Hendricks and Shelton (2016) define this as *micromedia*, or "literally every individual, business, and organization" (p. 3). Prior to this phenomenon, news editors, directors, producers, and reporters served as media gatekeepers on a macro level, controlling content consumed by audiences. However, once-passive audiences now greatly influence content selection and distribution as active, influential consumers *and* producers (Adornato, 2018; Hendricks & Shelton, 2016). Citing opportunities, benefits, risks, and consequences of such social constructs as a nervous center of modern society, van Dijk (2012) maintains, "With little exaggeration, we may call the 21st Century the age of networks."

Such interconnected access brings direct strategic implications to media management for marketing purposes. Fogg (1999) claimed that computers as sensory media can influence people as persuasive computing technologies that bring about constructive changes in many domains, modeling attitudes or behaviors, or leveraging social rules and dynamics, much like those advocated by Kirby (2016) regarding digital marketing and conversion optimization for live entertainment/sport event marketing, and for the same reasons cited by Schaefer (2014) when comparing traits of the highly persuasive nature of the social web with those of commerce conducted in European marketplaces of 1,000 A.D.: highly personal and interactive; immediate; dependent upon word-of-mouth recommendations; and inclusive of the primal need to connect.

Accordingly, researchers have advocated for a fundamental shift in sport marketing from a traditional exchange paradigm to a relationship paradigm (Kim & Trail, 2011). Research to date in this area has been limited to understanding and measuring the success of sponsorship, and exploring the motivators of fan behavior (Frederick, 2012; Seo & Green, 2008; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999). As a result, the application of relationship marketing in a sporting context has been largely overlooked (McCarthy, Pioch, Rowley, & Ashworth, 2011; Stavros, Pope, & Winzar, 2008). Relationship marketing focuses on achieving long-term relationships with customers, ultimately leading to customer retention (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013).

These relational outcomes can be supported by communication and dialogue between organizations and customers, since social media linguistics can convey important information about brands and marketing efforts (Lee & Kahle, 2016). Lee and Kahle (2016) examined the linguistic makeup of social media content, specifically the relationship between the values and emotions a company propagates within its social media. Their findings indicate that sport properties do not necessarily communicate both values and emotions mutually well in their social media and must make concerted efforts along both fronts. This finding underscores the strategic importance of social network sites as ways to reach new and foster existing fan relationships, per Pronschinske, Groza, and Walker (2012).

Hutchins and Rowe (2009) state that a major factor in the rise of property-created and fan-created sport media content is a function of changing media technology and low barriers of entry into the space. With a rapid rise in and full-blown utilization of such networked media, entities of sport communication, management, marketing, and media face challenges and opportunities inside and outside of sport properties and traditional media channels (Boyle & Haynes, 2014). This social web enables corporate sport to remove barriers between them and consumers, thereby creating more tangible, vibrant relationships with consumers while shaping the practices of journalists, broadcasters, and public relations professionals (Lewis & Kitchin, 2011). Corporate sponsors also benefit from such highly engaged influence, which continues to grow substantially over time (McAllister, 2010; Newman, Peck, Harris, & Wilhide, 2013).

Even the most tangible of elements in sport can now be considered forms of communication and therefore designed with a mobile/digital-first strategic approach, as noted in 2012 by National Football League (NFL) San Francisco 49ers primary franchise owner Jed York when discussing plans for his team's new stadium that would open two years later. York stated that the facility must be equipped for modern fans who wanted to do more than watch the game, e.g., share content, make comments, monitor fantasy teams, make bets, or pacify children (Shortt, 2012). Vogel (2014) believes "technological advances provide the saving grace" because these advancements make it easier and less costly to create profound works of entertainment.

WHEN COMMUNICATIONS BECOMES BRANDING & MARKETING

Whiteside (2014) contends that while the deployment of effective communication strategy may be a function of overall brand management goals by sport properties (e.g., intercollegiate athletic departments), such a motive has created a fundamental shift in media production methods, evolving the roles of information specialists (e.g., intercollegiate sports information/athletics communications directors) to strategic messengers, i.e., individuals who play fundamental roles in selling athletic brands to both media and fans. Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, and Blaszka (2013) call social media platforms "unique setting[s] for fan consumption and interaction which can be stimulated by the brand or organization" (p. 221) and expose users to brand-messaging via property posts. Therefore, as Clampitt (2018) postulates, this approach makes them a vital part of the organization's brand management and places marketing responsibilities upon them and their work, including connection, persuasion, and analysis/tracking.

Formulating a Brand Personality

Aaker's (1997) groundbreaking work defines *brand personality* as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347). In postulating a conceptual framework for understanding spectator-based brand equity for sport properties, Ross (2006) suggested that a positive impact on brand personality would aid in the creation of positive brand equity. Cialdini (2008) broadly extended that principle to micromedia by stating that coupling hypertargeting strategies with the immeasurable pervasive power of social media to persuade can and should create an expected increase in customer loyalty and revenue when properly planned and integrated into a property's business objectives and other marketing strategies (Cialdini, 2008). Expressly in sport marketing literature, a landmark study in 2013 by Walsh et al. reinforced this principle for sport properties (specifically events), suggesting that use of social media by sport events may be a contributing factor in influencing brand personality.

Connecting Brand Personality to Strategic Business Objectives

Consequently, Eyal (2014) claims, these newly evolved brand managers must create operational communications tactics with a strategic business mindset, i.e., to grow future revenues/profits by increasing income and/or decreasing expenses. Eyal (2014) continues that these brand managers must think in terms of driving higher customer lifetime value (CLTV), i.e., the amount of money made from a customer before that customer switches to a competitor, stops using the product, or dies. Hendricks and Shelton (2016) postulate that such a philosophy in micromedia is dependent upon the value of the outlet's content and how well it entertains and informs its users, who receive value from the content and exchange for it the ever-important commodity of their attention. This postulation builds upon general advertising research findings by Cacioppo and Petty (1979) and Yoo, Bang, and Kim (2009), which stated that more frequent exposures to brand personality items cause individuals to recall those brand personality items and formulate brand images in their minds.

Like Eyal (2014), Hendricks and Shelton (2016) emphasize that the true challenge in modern democratized micromedia spaces is not attracting user attention but rather retaining it while staying true to the brand and its image. This places a premium on relationship-building for the achievement of marketing goals in sport business, per Williams and Chinn (2010).

Research has identified at least three specific sport business objective outcomes that can be spurred by strategic use of micromedia to build brand personality for sport properties. First, Ross (2006) indicates that higher degrees of consumer interaction with controlled micromedia brand-image exposures could create more positive impacts on brand personality than traditional media exposures, thereby leading to enhanced abilities to grow revenue streams such as ticket and merchandise sales. Second, building brand personality via micromedia could be used to identify and target more suitable sport property sponsors (Walsh et al., 2013). Such an initiative could be a vital factor in developing brand equity in sponsor relationships, as suggested by Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard (2001) in research on the impact of sponsorship on brand equity. A third important impact of developing brand personality via micromedia relates to engagement of female sport consumers, who appear to exhibit different levels and types of motives in their sport consumptive behaviors than males (Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000; Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Ridiger & Funk, 2006; Walsh et al., 2013). Walsh et al. (2013) emphatically state, "For brands interested in engaging female fans and consumers, social media engagement may be a necessary area of emphasis" (p. 222).

Building Relationships

According to Hendricks and Shelton (2016), while relationship-fostering with followers and "dream followers" (p. 28) becomes the most likely driving force behind marketing opportunities in micromedia, all micromedia relationship-building opportunities are not created equally. Therefore, Hendricks and Shelton (2016) offer a three-part descriptive model that greatly enhances understanding of methodologies for creating brand-building strategies with micromedia and key connection points for relationship-building with consumers. However, Kuno Creative (n. d.) evolves the concepts of the Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model by reorganizing it into four parts for further distinction and strategic planning.

MEDIA MODELS FOR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

While the three micromedia models examined in this article share commonalities and differences, all three employ two common approaches. One is the practice of categorization according to the source of the medium ownership. The other is a strong emphasis on the need for strategic categorization of micromedia to maximize its effectiveness.

Hendricks & Shelton's Three-Part Micromedia Model

Hendricks and Shelton (2016) identify three categories in the new media landscape:

- *Earned media*, which consists of any channel(s) owned by another entity that create(s) controlled exposure opportunities by allowing guests to utilize their platform(s) (e.g., interviews, podcasts, etc.), thereby at least indirectly endorsing guests' content
- *Rented media*, which consists of a presence and content controlled by the user but that reside on a platform(s) owned by another entity (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- *Owned media*, which consists of any channel(s) that are fully possessed and completely controlled by the content producer (e.g., websites, blogs, email lists, etc.) and which are ideally fed in organic fashion by calls-to-action on earned and rented media channels

Hendricks and Shelton (2016) contend that each category carries importance and should be utilized as part of an integrated communications strategy. They further emphasize these principles:

- Earned media can be challenging to obtain, since access to it rests with gatekeepers who constantly receive requests for access and ultimately control many message deliverables.
- Owned media serves as a place to fully and directly connect with audiences, but it requires time to grow substantially and must be carefully managed and monitored.
- Rented media often becomes the place where the communications/marketing battle is won or lost, because this is the primary media category in which relationships can be most readily built due to prevailing traffic patterns. To optimize it, activity and outreaches from users/followers must be gauged carefully with big data surrounding its platforms to indicate relationships that can possibly be created or built. The nature of each medium must be clearly understood and practiced in terms of the medium being a relationship-starter and/or a relationship-sustainer, with the ultimate goal of moving the user from rented media platforms to owned media platforms.

Herold & Salamunovic's Digital Marketing Trifecta

Herold and Salamunovic (2019) propose a Digital Marketing Trifecta model with three primary types of media that every business can utilize to draw attention to their products and services, with some to greater effect than others:

- *Paid media*, or advertising, which can refer to anything from billboards to commercials to banners to pay-per-click ads on social media sites
- *Owned media*, which refers to channels under the brand's jurisdiction or that are owned by the brand, including its website and social media channels, whereupon the brand controls its own messaging
- *Earned media*, which encompasses articles or stories online and in print media, influencer channels, television, radio, and podcasts; this category is also known as word-of-mouth

Herold and Salamunovic (2019) note that earned media is the category upon which a brand should focus its PR efforts. They further emphasize the following principles:

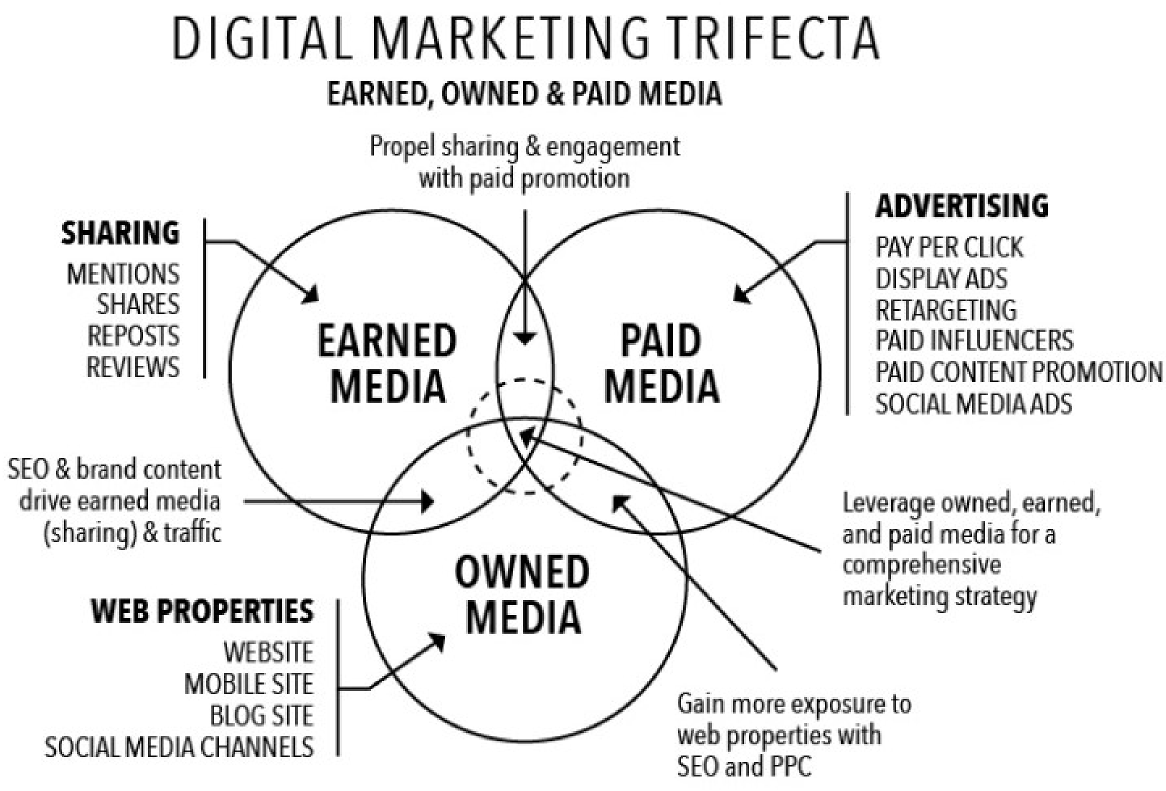
- The obvious primary issue with paid media its tremendous expense. Additionally, they contend that its message will be ignored by consumers 80 percent of the time, thereby wasting large sums of money while fiercely competing with stronger brands that can leverage even larger ad budgets. Herold and Salamunovic (2019) also note the issue of consumer savvy and the often-intrusive nature of most paid media relative to the media-consuming experience.

- Owned media functions well for messaging, but because it lacks disruptions, it may or may not be seen by the targeted audience(s). Nevertheless, they note a powerful function for owned media: spreading earned media hits even further.
- Whereas paid advertising is usually disruptive, earned media becomes engaging as consumers actively choose to digest the information contained in earned media channels and are drawn to content, context, and/or value.

Herold and Salamunovic (2019) further offer strategic micromedia management approaches by illustrating their three micromedia categories with a Venn diagram (see Figure 1) that offers insight into overlapping tactical methods between categories, including:

- Propelling sharing and engagement with paid promotion (Earned + Paid)
- Using search engine optimization (SEO) and brand content to drive earned media (sharing) and traffic (Earned + Owned)
- Gaining more exposure to web properties with SEO and pay-per-click (PPC) (Owned + Paid)
- Leveraging owned, earned, and paid media for a comprehensive marketing strategy (Owned + Earned + Paid)

FIGURE 1
HEROLD & SALAMUNOVIC'S DIGITAL MARKETING TRIFECTA MODEL



The Four-Part Kuno Creative Media Model

The Kuno Creative (n. d.) model expands micromedia into four categories beyond those offered by Hendricks and Shelton (2016) and Herold and Salamunovic (2019).

- *Earned media*, or content that another party creates (e.g., word-of-mouth reputation or articles written about a company by another party, guest blogs, etc.)

- *Paid media*, or content a channel is paid to promote (e.g., paid advertising in traditional media, display ads, paid search, native advertising, etc.)
- *Owned media*, or content created and entirely controlled by the company (e.g., the company website, blog, etc.)
- *Shared media*, or content co-created through social interaction (e.g., user reviews on Yelp, a conversation on a Facebook post, a series of retweets on Twitter, etc.)

Kuno Creative (n. d.) argues that positive attention can only be garnered from shared media if the organization first concentrates on and creates a strong content marketing strategy for its owned, earned, and paid media, but it agrees with the Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model by emphasizing shared media as a vital place to build relationships, just as Hendricks and Shelton emphasized about rented media. Numerous other scholars (Dittmore & McCarthy, 2014; Eyal, 2014; Newman et al., 2013; and Schaefer, 2014) concurred in findings on shared/rented media within the realm of sport marketing.

ANALYSIS OF THE MODELS

Similarities

As might be expected, numerous similarities exist among the three models. Strategically, all models state their existences as rubrics for thought and management, and they advocate the direct connection of their model categories to overall organizational marketing and media strategies.

Additionally, all three models offer an "Earned" category that essentially remains constant in definition (channels belonging to other parties). While the Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model lacks a "Paid" category, both the Herold and Salamunovic (2019) and Kuno (n.d.) models include and define it as advertising. The function of advertising appears in the Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model but receives different treatment than given in the other two (as discussed in the next section).

Furthermore, each of the models include an "Owned" category, yet their strategic treatments of that category differ (as discussed in the following section). However, all three models unanimously agree that micromedia in the Owned category:

- Are difficult to capitalize
- Have difficulty capturing audiences
- Are difficult to grow audience-wise
- Are not disruptive (and therefore have difficulty generating attention)
- Are extremely important as a basis for capitalizing on other micromedia categories

Differences

One obvious slight difference between the three models relates to the number of categories each one contains. Two of the models (Hendricks & Shelton, 2016; Herold & Salamunovic, 2019) include three categories, while one (Kuno Model, n.d.) offers four categories. Our analysis finds no substantial advantage or disadvantage to either category formatting, although one might insipidly argue that a four-category model includes the additional burden of another category to manage and strategize.

Perhaps the most substantial difference between the three models involves their treatment and categorization of social media. The Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model places it in the "Rented" category, since the organization maintains a presence and controls content on social media platforms, although those platforms are owned by other entities. The Herold and Salamunovic (2019) model places social media into the "Owned" category, based on the logic that communications on those channels remain directly under the brand's jurisdiction, allowing it to directly control its own messaging. The Kuno Model (n.d.) places social media into the "Shared" category, since content on these channels is uniquely co-created via social interaction. Although our analysis supports the approaches by Hendricks and Shelton (2016) and Kuno (n.d.), we cannot see a distinct advantage to either treatment, and we affirm the logic that both of those models use. However, a slight edge in strategic and tactical thought regarding social media might be gained via the Kuno Model (n.d.) because of its treatment of social media content as a co-created work; this approach emphasizes to organizations the critical importance of mutual/reciprocated communications within this vital category.

Another important difference between the models relates to the treatment of the "Owned" category. Although all three models use this label for one of its micromedia categories, an important deviation can be found within one model. The Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model and the Kuno model (n.d.) align well in their definitions and illustrations of this category, as they both essentially include any channel fully controlled by the content producer (e.g., websites, blogs, email lists, etc.). However, although the Herold and Salamunovic (2019) model similarly defines "Owned" media as channels under the brand's jurisdiction/ownership, it also includes social media channels as a type of micromedia in which the brand controls its own messaging. Although this assertion is true *per se*, social media operate on algorithms driven by a myriad of dynamic factors that dominantly manage content exposure to end-users, not to mention censorship/disabling of certain social media accounts in extreme cases. Accordingly, our analysis of this category shows a clear weakness in the Herold and Salamunovic (2019) model.

Still another disparity between the models includes differing treatments of the micromedia function of advertising. Both the Herold and Salamunovic (2019) and the Kuno (n.d.) models use it to define their "Paid" categories. However, the Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model includes no treatment whatsoever of advertising. If forcing it into that model, the best fit for advertising in the Hendricks and Shelton (2016) model would likely be within the "Rented" category which the authors define as channels belonging to others. Although our analysis cannot definitively label it as an explicit advantage, we believe that the Kuno Model's (n.d.) treatment of advertising as its own unique category ("Paid") might offer a clearer management perspective by creating stronger strategic approaches to other micromedia that will not dilute them nor cause them to be inappropriately supported by paid promotional tactics.

STRATEGIES FOR PRACTITIONERS

Scholars and marketing/media practitioners offer a number of research-based and best-practice tactics to help those in sport branding, communications, and marketing roles devise effective micromedia strategies utilizing the three models analyzed in this paper.

Bergström and Bäckman (2013) contend that the vital first strategic micromedia management step is to identify a target audience, including its commonly held traits, likes, attributes, hobbies, etc. Stratifying the audience by similar characteristics can aid in developing a digital media community in which users feel a sense of belonging and in which targeted content can aid in building a deeper connection in property/fan and fan/fan relationships. As a community is built, Motameni and Nordstrom (2014) recommend that properties encourage fans to begin interacting, both with the property and with each another. This will harness micromedia's capacity to foster a sense of belonging and enhance marketing efforts organically.

This study further offers an amalgamation of micromedia management strategies for sport business practitioners from both academic researchers and industry practitioners as follows:

- *A balanced approach to all micromedia* (Hendricks & Shelton, 2016; Kuno Creative, n. d.; Thompson, Martin, Gee, & Eagleman, 2014)
  Although a property may have particular strength/success and/or have a particularly large following in select micromedia, it must strategically manage across many of them, since most of them likely contain current or potential target-market consumers.
- *The power of providing insider content* (Thompson et al., 2014; Whiteside, 2014)
  As previously noted with Herold and Salamunovic (2019), consumers are drawn to content, context, or value; insider content exists as perhaps the epitome of all three qualities.
- *Avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach, both for organizational strategies and for specific media strategies* (Herold & Salamunovic, 2019; Thompson et al., 2014)
  All micromedia are not created equally, nor do they operate the same, optimally use the same content, nor reach audiences of similar sizes, demographics, or psychographics. Accordingly,

each micromedium needs its own unique strategic approach, though each of the approaches should be driven by bigger-picture marketing/media strategies.

- *Application of relationship-marketing principles* (McCarthy, Pioch, Rowley, & Ashworth, 2011; Stavros, Pope, & Winzar, 2008)
  With consumers becoming an active part of marketing, word-of-mouth marketing has expanded to social media networks. Customers can relate their own experiences with those of others on social media and create more memorable messages. With around 70% of all sales generated through recommendations, marketers need to ensure their content is discussed not only by the marketing team, but also by property fans (Bergström, T., & Bäckman, L., 2013).
- *Clear alignment with overall organizational strategies and goals* (Thompson et al. 2014)
  As mentioned earlier in this section, micromedia should be strategically aligned with bigger-picture organizational values, philosophies, visions, and missions.
- *A clear management plan* (Hendricks & Shelton, 2016; Herold & Salamunovic, 2019; Kuno Creative, n. d.; Thompson et al., 2014)
  Specific goals with who/what/when/where/why/how details and step-by-step objectives should be employed for each medium to govern operations on various periodic bases (daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, seasonally, off-seasonally, yearly, etc).
- *The power of conversation with users to engage and to determine user expectations* (Hendricks & Herold & Salamunovic, 2019; Shelton, 2016; Kuno Creative, n. d.; Thompson et al., 2014)
  The Four I model introduced by Bergström, and Bäckman (2013) explains the importance of integration, individualization, involvement and initiative in social media marketing. By engaging users via these 4 I's, sport properties can produce more effective marketing campaigns. Thus, with increased engagement and interaction, a more intimate relationship is cultivated (Motameni & Nordstrom 2014). By creating communities, marketers can help fans feel a sense of belonging. Fans will then tend to share their own experiences and opinions, which will lead to greater brand loyalty and trust (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013).
- *The power of promotions* (Thompson et al., 2014; Kerpen, 2019)
  In a study that examined the development of a social media strategy for a national sport organization, Thompson et al. (2014) found that promotions increased traffic outside competition periods and encouraged likes of the organization's Facebook page, thereby raising awareness and exposure levels, as suggested by Kerpen (2019).
- *Emphasis of the unique, uncommon, or rare traits of a property's products, services, and/or experiences* (Cialdini, 2008)
  Scholars (Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015; Pawle & Cooper, 2006) contend that achieving deep levels of brand intimacy is an essential component for a consumer-brand relationship and can be accomplished by adding relevance to consumers and making them feel more closely tied with the brand. Thus, unveiling some of the finer details about a sport property can help deepen ties with fans.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The topic of micromedia management appears to lend itself well for future exploration along a number of possible fronts.

First, as new micromedia (e.g., TikTok), digital devices (e.g., Apple Watch), and delivery methods emerge, (re)examining, revising, and reinventing the models assessed in this study and others like it will be a regularly recurring necessity.

Second, other/new digital-/social-/micromedia management models may exist and merit inclusion in a future analysis. However, based upon the analysis of these three models and their numerous common threads, finding one(s) that differ(s) substantially from them seems unlikely.

Third, future research might seek to analyze and compare traditional media management models from past media periods with modern micromedia management models. Such research could distinguish which past strategic approaches to media management retain applicability to micromedia and which are now irrelevant.

Fourth, a consensus method of research (e.g., the Delphi Model) could be utilized to derive a similar model based on the perspectives of practicing sport businesspeople, including those in marketing/sales, communications/public relations, and community relations. Studies could be done across each of these employment categories individually or collectively. Consensus methods are utilized to solve and define levels of agreement on controversial subjects and can create structured environments in which experts' solutions to problems become more justifiable and credible than otherwise (Fink, Kosecoff, Chassin, & Book, 1991).

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