

« New media and sport marketing: fiction or reality ? »

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Mobile phone is a social phenomenon that is radically changing the way people interact nowadays. The rapid growth of 3G mobile technology has allowed lots of new interactive applications in many economic sectors. This article studies the social aspects of such a spread in football. It focuses on the creation of virtual communities of mobile football fans. Mobile marketing communication campaigns in premiership football clubs create social network externalities for fans. Beyond their social value, such externalities increase virtual experience « off the field ».

It is predicted by BWCS (2002) that the total number of mobile subscribers worldwide will rise to more than 1.72 billion by the end of 2007, compared to 950 in 2001, with Asia Pacific likely to retain its dominance with regards to global market share. The 3rd generation of mobile phones (3G) revolution represents an interesting mobilisation of interaction and socialisation processes. Williams et al. (1994) defined new media as those which offer new services or enhancement to old services and included such applications as microelectronics, computers and telecommunications. The concept of “interactivity” has often been construed to be the primary differentiating factor between the Internet and other media. *“Television is a linear, passive, time constrained medium. The television is time-constrained, unless your viewer has carefully videotaped your commercials for playback at a more convenient time. Accessing the World Wide Web can be done at any time”* (Stern, 1995). In that sense, the rapid convergence of telecommunications and computer technologies has expanded the scope and scale of the electronic media. It has enabled them to overcome the constraints of mass media by allowing two-way communication. The mobilisation of interactive interaction radically influences the social context of sports news information through mobile phones. We move from a mass and linear sense of consumption towards an individual and interactive context. Mobile technologies offer flexible possibilities regardless to time, space and relationship. Where traditional mass media has to fix a *rendez-vous* to an audience, mobile operators now allow consumers to get access to whatever sports' news and broadcasts whenever and wherever they want to.

In sport, global wireless and mobile marketing platforms and applications have begun to create the opportunity for fundamental changes in the way clubs and fans can interact. This social and marketing aspect has largely been neglected in literature. Most research on sports fans are focusing on team identification (Laverie & Arnett, 2000), their antecedents or motives (Wann, 1995), and the resultant behaviors (Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000). Some researchers have set up hypotheses regarding the possible motivations of sports fans that led to fan loyalty (Depken, 2000; Jones & Schumann, 2001; Mahony et al., 2000) or identified various level of sport fans' loyalty (Tapp, 2004). However, there is no attention paid to the loyalty construct and specifically for the capacity of new media to enhance fans' loyalty through new media. A football club has a number of likely advantages over other branded products. For example, brand loyalty (football fans rarely switch allegiance between clubs) and also on brand longevity (football appeals to all social classes et age groups) distinguish clubs from other firms.

1. Mobile Marketing Communication (MMC): a virtual experience addressed to fans

Mobile phones represents a virtual hypermedia environment (Long, 1995) incorporating interactivity with people and computers. As such, it allows users of the medium to access an interactive hypermedia content. These unique forms of interactivity have contributed to the rapid diffusion of the Internet as a commercial medium like radio or television before. First of all, consumer capability in the new media age introduces a competency issue which does not exist in the physical world. This issue involves a process of optimal experience achieved when motivated consumers perceive a balance between their skills and the challenge of their interaction with the machine (Ling, 2004). Secondly, within this interactive virtual environment, consumers are actively engaged in the process of network navigation. As an extremely personal channel, 3G mobile phones have special values in being able to offer personalized content and target very specific audience comparing to television. Mobile phones are tied to one specific individual and mobile users carry them all time, wherever they go. This provides marketers with an interesting opportunity to reach the prospects when and where they are the most appropriate for the effectiveness of the marketing campaign while offering easy targeting. Mobile marketing is based on mobile messaging. SMS marketing offers interesting properties: high speed in message delivery, interactivity, great customer

reach and responses rate five times higher than direct mail (Kavassalis & al., 2002). This information wave is shifting market power from hierarchical marketplace to the community networked sports' fans.

By shifting the current perceptions of the marketing mix to these progressive viewpoints, marketers can increase the likelihood of effective mobile marketing communication (MMC) in a direct approach. Mobile marketing brings new opportunities to widen the range of marketing services on markets through innovative means. Allowing a more interactive relationship, MMC can be contrasted with the more passive media experience of television viewing. Active behaviours including both experimental and goal directed compete for fans' attention. These two broad categories of on line behaviours have important implications. Positioning MMC strategies in sport entertainment context clarifies its social and marketing value proposition. Mobile delivers added value by opening an immediate and two way channel of communication between clubs and its fans. This immediacy in timing of service broadcast, consumption and reaction is uniquely attributable to the fact that people carry their mobile phones all time and anywhere. This feature represents a key value attribute that create network externality. This network is already present in the physical world of supporters' groups but can be enhanced when people share some common information about their favourite clubs. This represents a key value attribute that has positive effects for a football clubs' fan base. In order to do so, mobile operators and football clubs are selling subscriptions to « sports alerts » that notify consumers about scores and news on their respective football matches (one of its prime time audience zones).

Mobile marketing options in European football clubs

Football clubs	Text alerts	Ring tones	Wallpapers	Mobile games	Video highlights	Partnership with mobile operators
Manchester United	Half time score, goal, red and yellow cards, team tickets alerts	Crowd chants, MU bands	Players and logo	MU Pinball	MU best classics goals and highlights	Offers from FoneStarz and MU mobile
Liverpool FC	Team sheets, sending offs, goal flashes and full time scores, red cards, tickets alerts	Liverpool adn champions league anthems	Anfield pictures	-	Matches highlights	Exclusive partnerships with orange and LG offers
Arsenal	Match day extra brings you the line up, goal alerts half full-time reports, red	Arsenal ring tones	Players pictures	-		Exclusive partnership with 02

Football clubs	Text alerts	Ring tones	Wallpapers	Mobile games	Video highlights	Partnership with mobile operators
	cards, missed penalties, post match round up and Arsene Wenger comments					
Olympique de Marseille	-	OM ring tones	Logo wall papers	-		
Olympique de Lyon	OL SMS gives access to team sheets, half time scores, flashes	Various ring tones	Logo wall papers	-		
FC Valence	Team sheets, information about football matches	Various ring tones	Logo wall papers	-	Highlights available	

Table n°1

This table shows the different offers of the most innovative football clubs in Europe. Each strategy is based on the social impact of personalized mobile phones for people. They use it to show their belongings to social groups, especially supporters. Many clubs are now turning into branding strategies in order to maintain a certain financial power on their respective markets. Until recently, sports firms did little marketing to fans and to others on the basis that the game represents the basic product in which supporters would be mainly interested.

2. The value of MMC in football

Beyond the growth of the sports entertainment industry, the question of core support in terms of fan loyalty through media consumption (either « old » or « new ») in football branding has been neglected. To form their marketing strategies, football clubs need to understand what motivates supporters to attend or watch games, why sports fans may be loyal to a sport team and, consequently, how they would become more loyal to the clubs. In a global media age, the impact of satellite broadcasting is never denied and the popularity of football means that football clubs are turning into global brand with a much more complex marketing approach.

With a more complex competition among football clubs at the European level, some innovative ones are now exploring the social and economic potential of a successful strategy built around a strong brand. A football brand is an image or identity which is central to the club itself. A small number of clubs have the potential to become global brands with a strong social impact on fans. Certainly, every clubs brand image and its commercial positioning will be tailored to the clubs

potential fan base and history. The MMC proposition seems to be simple: the more people follow and watch a team, the greater the potential sympathetic audience the brand will reach. This is also called a network externality. It has been defined as a change in the benefit, or surplus, that an agent derives from a good when the number of other agents consuming the same kind of good changes. For example, a telephone is of little value if no one else is using it; of moderate value if only a few of one's potential contacts use it; and indispensable if everyone uses it. This network effect has a strong social impact as it creates virtual communities based on the clubs' fans base. Mobile communities are considered to be the natural evolution of virtual communities (Fremaux 2000). They can be seen as virtual communities to which mobile services are added. That means that new media is transferring supporters into a virtual world where they can communicate and share information about their favourite clubs. Along with the advent of MMC services, 3G mobile phones are converted into multimedia sport entertainment centers in the pocket of sports' fans. In the same time, football clubs websites provide free and pay access to scores and informations on teams and players. While selling subscription, football clubs are conducting a loyalty exercise. The diversification of services offered by the different innovative clubs are focusing on virtual communities of supporters that can share interactive added value devices. In doing so, football clubs' MMC strategies aim to use mobile as a social and marketing tool for interactive dialogues with existing fans and coming ones. They aim at enhancing the brand awareness and value of their brands. Fans who have signed up the campaign receive content messages, alerts' reminders and relationship messages. Those forms of social interaction between the clubs and their fans encourage them to reply and continue the interactive relationship with their favourite clubs. Partnerships of football clubs with mobile operators are designed in a complementary approach with three particular objectives: (1) to raise brand names awareness, especially the football fans' base market segments; (2) to increase traffic and sales by promoting specific football clubs products; (3) to build a virtual community from the clubs' fan base.

3. New media devices and social network externalities for football fans

After the seminal article of Rohlfs (1974), and the influential papers of Katz and Shapiro (1985), there has been a plethora of theoretical studies into the nature of network effects and by now network effects theory has reached a rather mature state. The literature on network effects typically distinguishes between two types of network effects: direct network effects and indirect network effects. Direct network effects refer to the case where users directly benefit from other users of the same network. In mobile telecommunications, a direct network effect arises when a user can call a larger set of other users. On the other hand, indirect network effects arise because bigger networks support a larger range of complementary products and services. In 2nd generation mobile networks, indirect network effects are only of second-order significance, but they will play an increasing role after the introduction of 3rd generation networks, where usage will be heavily influenced by the availability of data services. Communications sport's devices studied in this article are network goods in this sense. Network externalities introduce dynamic considerations for both users and producers. For users, the adoption decision must take into account the size of the network in the future to avoid being stranded in an unpopular network. Firms have incentive to invest in building proprietary networks from which they can earn rents. They literally constitute a network, and the value of the network depends on the number of persons (or organizations or other entities) connected to it (Shy 2000 ; Varian 1999). Earlier communications technologies typically came in the form of goods (newspapers, books, magazines) or services (performing-arts events, the conveyance of telegraph messages). By contrast, modern communications technologies typically combine a product (a radio or a computer) and a service (broadcast programming, telephone service, fax transmission, or Internet access). Also typically, the real money is in selling the service (which produces an ongoing revenue stream) rather than the product (which is usually a one-shot purchase); and the value of the service derives from the number of persons on-line, which is to say the positive network externalities. From a sociological perspective, there are other equally important

forms of network externalities, both negative and positive, which may also play a role in the diffusion of new technologies. We define an externality as social when the size or composition of the market for a good or service influences the value of consumption of that good or service as an input into an individual production function, the output of which is social identity. Societal membership as a network externality based on the subscription to 3G mobile phones services is a new phenomenon as it allows people to interact virtually. People need certain goods or services to be full-fledged members of their community (Rainwater 1974). The spread of communications and information technologies extended the scope and changed the nature of relationships between fans of a similar football club. Moreover, certain forms of communication and information technologies are useful in the production of group identities, with their utility increasing with the proportion of group members employing the technology. Goods with this type of externality are similar to what economists have called “club” goods (Foldvary, 1994).

In football, such devices include highlights broadcasting, SMS text alerts of key information, delivering crucial match action shots to supporters phones by multimedia message systems or inviting supporters to submit their matches opinions by text message. This creates a network externalities as people not only want to watch or read sports results, they also want to talk about their favourite team. They also want to show others that they support one team. This identification process is allowed by personalized ring tones of their football team. In sport, people will use these devices to show their allegiance to a club. A product or service possesses network externality if the utility derives from it is a positive function of the number of other people who consume it. The idea relies on the social phenomenon of supporterism. As in a stadium supporters derives their utility of supporting one team from the total number of other supporters of the same team, these new media devices allow them to identify themselves whenever and wherever they want to. These devices show the allegiance of an individual to a team and give him the opportunity to be recognised as such. This creates the opportunity to communicate in the physical (on and off the field) and virtual world (shared information). On match day, fans can use text messages to snap polls such as the selection of stars players. These easy access services are given high profile promotion throughout the event to build awareness of the football clubs while encouraging technological adoption. Underpinning these services is the fact that the mobile phone provides an immediate and interactive delivery and response that no other media can offer. For sports' fans, the opportunity to get up to date with shared information creates the social networking externalities in order to deliver a new value to their supporting experience. Concerning football clubs, 3G mobile marketing brings new opportunities to reach targeted fans on the basis of their loyalty.

Conclusion

Football clubs MMC campaign remain at an experimental stage in Europe. Nevertheless, innovative football clubs strategies show that the mobile channel holds the promise of commanding the immediate attention (reaction) of a considerable part of the targeted loyal fans. It also credibly capture fans' feedback on tastes while creating social network externalities among shared information about the same football clubs. People not only want to consume such services, they also want to show others that they belong to such club's virtual community. The different MMC strategies of football clubs aim at enhancing their fans' loyalty to their respective brands. In doing so, they do more than maximising the fan experience. They create a completely unique sport multimedia environment that goes well beyond this field and can be a destination in itself. Because mobile marketing communication incorporate social network externalities, it has the potential to change the way clubs and fans interact.

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