

Better social media techniques increase fan interest, engagement

April 22 2015

Due to the ever-increasing number of people using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, businesses and organizations, such as professional sports teams, are expanding their marketing and communication efforts to engage people with their brands through those sites. Now, Nicholas Watanabe, an assistant teaching professor at the University of Missouri, along with colleagues from MU and Louisiana State University, analyzed Major League Baseball (MLB) teams' use of Twitter to engage and increase fan interest. They found that the more individual teams released original content from their Twitter accounts, such as score updates or player profiles, the more followers they gained and engagement they initiated. The researchers say their findings could provide guidance for many businesses struggling with how to use social media.

"The common way of thinking for businesses, including [professional sports](#) is that they need to be on [social media](#)," said Brian Soebbing, a coauthor on the study. "However, little research has been done on how businesses and organizations can maximize their consumer engagement and interaction on social media, and thus, very few best practices exist that are backed by research. This study shows what works to drive fan or customer engagement, as well as what is not successful. Business managers know they need to be on social media, yet many do not know how to handle social media metrics to maximize positive outcomes for their businesses. Hopefully this paper is one step toward providing insight into that practice."

For their study published in the *Journal of Sport Management*, Watanabe, Grace Yan, an assistant teaching professor at MU and Brian Soebbing, an assistant professor at Louisiana State University, analyzed the Twitter accounts of all 30 MLB teams over 13 consecutive months. By monitoring the daily rise and fall in the number of followers for each team's account and combining those trends with the amount of activity from each account, the researchers were able to determine which activities led to gaining more Twitter followers.

They found that day-to-day increases in content creation and differences in team success on the field caused little change in the number of Twitter followers. However, they found that larger trends made significant differences in fan engagement and total followers for each account.

"We found that trends such as an increased number of total tweets from an account over a long period of time, as well as long winning streaks, overall winning percentage, and how often teams played on national television all helped increase the number of followers a team had on its Twitter account," said Yan, who is in the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. "On the other hand, long losing streaks and fewer tweets in general correlated with losses in total numbers of followers. This shows that while teams' social media producers can't necessarily control success on the field, they can make a difference in maintaining fans by continuing to create social media content to engage existing fans and potentially bring in new ones."

Watanabe and his colleagues also found that while higher levels of activity on teams' Twitter accounts such as [original content](#) creation led to more followers, that trend did not apply to activities such as "favoriting" or "re-tweeting" messages produced by other people. The researchers say that although this study focuses on MLB teams, the findings can apply to teams in all professional sports, as well as many businesses looking to engage fans with their brands.

Watanabe says the next step in this research is to analyze the rise and fall of MLB teams' followers in economic terms. He says being able to place a monetary value on Twitter [followers](#) and engagement is an important aspect of future research on social media as a business application.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: Better social media techniques increase fan interest, engagement (2015, April 22)
retrieved 4 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2015-04-social-media-techniques-fan-engagement.html>

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