

How marketers can shape customer sentiment during events

September 12 2019, by Matt Weingarden

Researchers from University of Tennessee, IESEG School of Management, and Georgia State University published a new paper in the *Journal of Marketing* that investigates the role of firms' customer engagement initiatives in social media and analyzes how firms seek to influence digital sentiment by shaping customers' experiential interactions.

The study, forthcoming in the November issue of the *Journal of Marketing*, is titled "The Role of Marketer-Generated Content in Customer Engagement Marketing" and is authored by Matthijs Meire, Kelly Hewett, Michel Ballings, V. Kumar, and Dirk Van den Poel.

Marketers of experiential events, such as concerts, sports competitions, and other sponsored events, often post informational or emotional social media to drive engagement or influence customers' perceptions of their event experiences. For example, during an extensive delay before the first-ever concert at the Mercedes Benz stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, performed by Garth Brooks, the venue's management used social media to keep fans informed of efforts to resolve sound issues in the stadium in an attempt to reduce negative [sentiment](#) being expressed by attendees about their disappointing experience.

Hewett explains that "Our study attempts to answer these questions: Following a [poor performance](#), can a marketer effectively engage customers and enhance the sentiment of customers' social media contributions based on the firm's own posts, and if so, what should those

posts say? After a disappointing experience, should the firm's posts appeal to customers' emotions, such as the concert venue sharing images of a stadium packed with excited fans, or instead offer informational content such as the venue's efforts to address sound quality issues? Similarly, after a positive experience, should the firm post on social media and should the content be emotional, such as images of elated fans, or informational, such as details regarding upcoming events?"

Many firms track buyers' offline interactions with the goal of improving customers' reactions to their experiences. For example, customer contact centers track the speed of response, problem resolution, and wait times. Similarly, firms commonly design online content to coincide with customers' experiences, and face varied performance levels during customer interactions, enabling them to modify social media posts to correspond to those interactions.

Using evidence from a European soccer team's Facebook fan page, the researchers find that, if a firm's performance during customer interactions is held constant, the firm's own social media posts surrounding customers' experiences can influence the sentiment of customers' digital engagement. Informational, more so than emotional, content offers a substantial means to improve customer sentiment in the case of negative interaction event outcomes. For the team used in the study, an increase of roughly four informational posts from the team after a disappointing performance can increase positive sentiment by nearly 20 percent. Such increases in sentiment are shown to be valuable based on their ability to influence customers' purchase behavior.

Based on these findings, firms may also be able to influence customer sentiment surrounding firm or brand-related interactions by using personalized communications post-purchase. For instance, the beauty products chain Sephora sends recommendations and educational content to customers starting immediately after they make a purchase. Such

mechanisms for responding to customers in a customized manner may help to further enhance the sentiment of customers' digital engagement and subsequent purchase behaviors.

In cases where purchase frequency is low, regularly tracking customers' digital engagement in social media can provide more frequent opportunities to impact customer sentiment and, ultimately, purchase behavior. Meire emphasizes that "Based on estimates that 40 percent of consumers follow their favorite brands on social media, there appears to be a sizable opportunity for firms to influence the sentiment of digital engagement."

The study's results should encourage firms to develop customer engagement marketing programs that involve customizing social [media](#) strategies based on their own performance during customers' interactions. They should post more informational content in [social media](#) surrounding poor performances and in general increase the volume of posts when performance is good.

More information: Matthijs Meire et al, The Role of Marketer-Generated Content in Customer Engagement Marketing, *Journal of Marketing* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0022242919873903](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242919873903)

Provided by American Marketing Association

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