

Social Media Within Basketball Organizations



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Abstract:

This study seeks to understand how social media affects basketball organizations' public relations. Specifically, this study analyzes the Los Angeles Clippers (LAC) and how the National Basketball Association's (NBA) use of social media compares with collegiate basketball social media usage. Different types of social media are used differently for each basketball organization and produce different results from targeted publics. They also use different ways or methods of measuring public relations success. Existing research has been done to analyze social media performance metrics from the number of followers, likes/comments, etc., but there has been minimal research done to analyze and measure effective social media engagement, meaning the targeted publics' responses and interactions with social media. Research also lacks the connection between social media engagement and participation in events such as games, fundraisers, or as simple as support towards a team (clothing, buying tickets, social media posting). To analyze this, I interviewed people affiliated with the LAC and California-based college basketball programs. I also analyzed the Sterling case and "We Are One" campaign from the LAC. Both the case and campaign stress the need for social media usage, especially in today's society, in order to maintain a positive image for an organization. I found that the numbers are only one concept of measuring social media and public relations success. Basketball organizations need to be able to define and track social media strengths, weaknesses, etc. in order to strategize towards improving their outreach and publicity. This can affect media attention, revenue, and overall success in the organization. The collegiate-level basketball programs often lack the resources and staff the NBA has access to carefully analyze interactions on social media and how this affects real-life events/games.

Research Question:

How do different basketball organizations construct, measure and define the success of public relation attempts/publicity?

Methods

Interview Participants

- Seth Burton (Vice President of Communications, Los Angeles Clippers)
- Jana Suko (Associate Director of Marketing, UCLA)
- Ivan Alber (Assistant Athletics Director of Public Relations, Cal Poly Pomona)
- Andria Wenzel (Sports Media Assistant, Cal State Fullerton)

Interview Questions

- How has social media impacted basketball organizations?
- How do you measure public relations success?
- Future goals/expectations for social media growth and engagement with fans?
- What kind of publicity campaigns redeem the best results?

Case Study: We Are One Campaign

- I analyzed how the LAC communication team used social media to their advantage to unite the organization during the difficult Sterling case controversy with his racist comments toward the team and NBA. I selected this case to analyze how the strategic use of social media can have a positive impact on a crisis situation. The Los Angeles Clippers' communication team used social media to maintain their positive image and unity with fans.

Conclusion

Consistency is key with posting on social media platforms and maintaining engagement from target audiences. Frequent posting is important, but it is vital to not over post. Interviewees revealed that it is important to make sure to mix social with informational postings (don't date overload). Social media should be used to engage with fans digitally, but also used as a platform to encourage participation in interpersonal events; get the fans to come out and support the team!

Social media posts should reflect the organization's goals and values. Organizations like the Los Angeles Clippers should not post anything they do not uphold or believe in. It is critical to maintain transparency with fans in order to keep their positive image both in-person and on social media. Public relations attempts and social media should be used to make the fans happy and meet their needs.

A limitation I faced during my research was the lack of availability of individuals from these organizations to provide feedback on this topic. This limitation resulted from a majority of the applicants being busy and unable to talk. It is also a possibility that they would rather keep their social media and public relations strategies discrete with outsiders. For future research, more interviews could be conducted with contacts outside of California, or even the United States. For this study, I took samples solely from California to have a commonality in the comparisons between the three interviewees. A bigger pool to pull from may reveal more information about social media analytics with different types of basketball organizations. Although basketball organizations at different levels have different methods and strategies with social media engagement, all levels agree that social media in public relations is important. Social media is a phenomenon continuously on the rise as well as the need to track and improve it for further growth of these organizations.

Results

Interview Results

- Social media has a strong presence and will grow stronger in time.
- Marketing and public relations departments often have to work closely together; PR helps generate the press necessary to drive sales.
- Positive and closer connection with fans.
- Maintain positive image of organization.
- "I think the social media is a great way to connect with your friends, which leads to everything else... leading to buying tickets, buying the merchandise, it's all connected and relates back to having a positive image of the organization" (Seth Burton, LAC VP Communication).
- Different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) reach different audiences and produce different results for for different organizations.
 - At the collegiate level, the target audience being students, it is easier to reach out via Facebook rather than Instagram.
 - The NBA, having a more global and broad audience, uses the popularity of Instagram to intervene into the daily lives of their fans.
- Common theme for how the CSUs and UC measured PR success, but the Los Angeles Clippers Communication Department had different measuring systems.
 - Cal Poly Pomona, Cal State Fullerton, and UCLA rely on followers and how many likes/comments they receive on their accounts; get the students and faculty involved.
 - NBA focus more on personal engagement and attraction of fans via social media accounts.
- Resources include the finances to properly staff, which is something the collegiate athletic departments PR teams often struggle with.

Case Study Results

- 2014- "We Are One" Campaign.
- Donald Sterling, previous LAC owner, racist comments controversy ; banned from the NBA for life.
- LAC maintains unifying and positive image with "We Are One" slogan blasted over social media accounts i.e. Twitter, Instagram.
 - Hash tags (#WeAreOne) with empowering pictures or the black and white logo.
 - Other NBA teams even changed their social media avatars to the black and white logo.
- Campaign owes much of its success to the social media impact.
- The "We Are One" Campaign was created to not only unite the Los Angeles Clippers faculty, athletes, and the NBA; but more importantly, the LAC fans" (Schiff, 2014).
- Positive feedback from the public allowed the Los Angeles Clippers to keep their fans updated and reassured that the organization was going to stay strong during this issue. The fact that they were able to address the issue and keep their audience informed about their plan further increased credibility to the organization.