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Titel abstract/symposium: Virtual family, gap holders, toolbox and online club: 4 profiles of virtual communities in organized sports

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TITEL ABSTRACT:

Virtual family, gap holders, toolbox and online club: 4 typologies of virtual communities in organized sports

Aim of the research

Social Networking Sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter are increasingly implemented in voluntary sports clubs (VSCs) as channels for organizational communication. By using SNSs, the sports clubs are, in fact, building virtual, online communities. Although we know that almost all 25,000 Dutch VCSs use these SNSs as communication channels, there is little insight into how these SNSs function together as virtual communities. This study wants to define typologies of online communities (RQ1) and identify key concepts to online community building (RQ2).

Background

Communities create value because members have a feeling of belonging and feel connected (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Nowadays, communities exist both off-line and online, through social networking sites (SNSs). These SNSs together form so called 'virtual or online communities', online spaces with potential of integration of member-generated content and conversations. SNSs are seen as effective (rich)

communication channels, because they offer opportunities to immediate feedback, interpersonal communication and vivid content (Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012).

Methodology

We analyzed argumentative essays from 22 students of the bachelor program Sports Communication, all members of VSCs. After coding, we were able to derive 64 themes. We then interconnected these themes by using a repertory grid and were able to construct profiles (typologies of communities) and to identify key concepts.

Results

The results revealed four demarcated typologies that portray how students perceive the SNSs at their club: the online club, the virtual family, the online toolbox and the gap holders. Furthermore, we identified several key concepts that are important indicators of the four typologies, such as 'identification with the club', 'user generated content', 'empowerment strategy', 'sense of togetherness', 'perceived benefits of SNS'.

Discussion

Although the sample was limited, the results provided insight into aspects of SNSs for building virtual communities in VSCs.

References

McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of community psychology*, 14(1), 6-23.

Vries, L. d., Gensler, S., & Leeflang, P. (2012). Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26, 83-91.