

SOCIAL MEDIA USED AS A MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL IN TURKISH FOOTBALL TEAMS

Filiz Balta Peltekođlu* - Pelin Hürmeriç**

ABSTRACT

Like any other organization, football teams began to use marketing public relations (MPR) as a marketing tool to interact with their publics and fans. Since the interactivity is an important component of the new marketing approach, social media can play an important role for the football teams to interact, connect and collaborate with their publics and fans. For the same reason, social media also became an important MPR tool for Turkish football teams. In this study, social media usage of the five of the Turkish football teams that have been champions will be discussed according to MPR purposes. After discussing the social media usage of those five football teams that have been champions according to four areas that MPR is practiced, it can be stated that those teams use all social media categories through their Facebook and Twitter accounts for their marketing public relations purposes such as product promotion, sales, marketing and advertising support.

Keywords: Sport marketing, marketing public relations, social media.

TÜRK FUTBOL TAKIMLARINDA PAZARLAMA HALKLA İLİŞKİLERİ ARACI OLARAK SOSYAL MEDYA

ÖZET

Diđer bütün kurumlar gibi, futbol takımları da hedef kitleleri ve taraftarlarıyla etkileşim içerisine girmek için pazarlama amaçlı halkla ilişkilerden yararlanmaktadır. Yeni pazarlama yaklaşımında etkileşim, bağlantı kurma ve işbirliğinin önemli olması nedeniyle futbol takımlarının taraftarları ve diđer hedef kitleleriyle iletişimlerinde sosyal medya büyük bir öneme sahiptir .Bu yaklaşımla, çalışmada, Türk futbol liginde bugüne kadar şampiyon olan beş takımın sosyal medya kullanımları, pazarlama halkla ilişkilerinin uygulama alanları açısından incelenmektedir. Söz konusu futbol takımlarının sosyal medya uygulamalarından ürün tanıtımı, satış desteđi, pazarlama desteđi ve reklam desteđi gibi amaçlarla pazarlama halkla ilişkilerinden yararlandıkları ve sosyal medya uygulamalarını Facebook ve Twitter hesapları aracılığıyla gerçekleştirdikleri görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Spor pazarlaması, pazarlama halkla ilişkileri, sosyal medya.

INTRODUCTION

Since the marketing public relations plays an important role in overall marketing efforts, football teams started to use MPR as a marketing tool. One of the functions of public relations is to adapt the organization to the environmental changes. As a result of this, all communication tools and methods become public relations instruments and it is the same for social media. Interaction, connection and

collaboration are the basic components of social media, as well as, it is for the new public relations approach. Besides these, social media can be an important actor to achieve general purposes of marketing public relations such as; to gain awareness, stimulate sales, facilitate communication, and build relationship between consumers, companies and brands' (Harris and Whales 2006: 7). Football teams use social media as a marketing public relations tool to interact, connect and collaborate with their publics and fans without any boundaries.

* Prof. Dr., Marmara Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi

** Yrd. Doç. Dr., Yeditepe Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi

1. THE CONCEPTS OF SPORT MARKETING AND MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS

Today, both academicians and professionals have assigned different meanings to marketing. In order to understand the sport marketing concept, a widely accepted definition of marketing should be used. According to Schwartz and Hunter (2008), marketing can be simply defined as the functions involved in the transfer of goods and services from the producer to consumer. However, this definition is not efficient enough as it considers that marketing process ends, together with the delivery of goods and services. On the contrary, marketing is a dynamic, ongoing process that continues after the purchase of the products and services.

On the other hand, marketing public relations is defined as 'the use of public relations strategies and tactics to achieve marketing objectives. The purpose of MPR is to gain awareness, stimulate sales, facilitate communication, and build relationship between consumers, companies and brands' (Harris and Whales 2006: 7). According to Webster's New World Dictionary of Media and Communications is 'the use of special events, publicity, other public relations techniques to promote products and services' (Webster in Harris and Whales 2006: 7). They all support marketing efforts such as offering a wide range of products celebrating the championship to become readily available for purchase (Dalakas et al. in Kahle and Riley 2004: 75).

In their study, Harris and Whalen (2006) categorized the uses of marketing public relations into six main categories. Those categories are; product promotion, building markets, advertising support, marketing support, corporate reputation and sales support.

'Sport is a social phenomenon that crosses all social, religious and language barriers. It is a common denominator that appeals to the masses and is thus a very attractive and competitive environment' (Graham et al. 2001: 3). Sport marketing involves playing sport, watching or listening to sport programmes, buying merchandise, collecting memorabilia, buying sporting goods, even surfing a sport

related web site to find out the latest about their favourite team, player or event (Smith A.C.T. 2008: 2). Since sport crosses all social, religious and language barriers, football teams gather fans coming from different backgrounds. It is the same for the social media. As a result of this, it can be stated that social media can be used as a perfect MPR tool to gather and connect, interact and collaborate with all the fans.

Harris (2006: 6) stated that marketing public relations is practiced in six areas. Four out those six areas that are included in this study are explained as they are shown below:

1. Product Promotion:

- Introduce new products
- Revitalize, relaunch or reposition mature products
- Communicate new benefits of old products
- Involve people with products
- Engage customers with products on-line
- Build or maintain interest in a product category

2. Advertising Support:

- Extend the reach of advertising
- Counteract consumer resistance to advertising
- Break through commercial clutter
- Make news before advertising breaks
- Make advertising newsworthy
- Complement advertising by reinforcing messages and legitimizing claims
- Supplement advertising by communicating additional product benefits
- Attract visitors to commercial web sites
- Gain awareness in media where product is not advertised.

3. Marketing Support:

- Test marketing concepts
- Reinforce sales promotion campaigns
- Tailor marketing programs to local audiences
- Raise brand awareness through title sponsorships
- Create new media and new ways to reach consumers

4. Sales Support:

- Gain distribution
- Build store traffic
- Generate sales inquiries

- Motivate the sales force
- Win retailer support

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN EMERGING METHOD FOR MPR IN SPORT MARKETING

Safko (2010: 5) defines social media as a new set of tools, new technology that allows us to connect more efficiently and build relationships with the customers and prospects.

It can be stated that social media are media (from written to visual, to audio to audiovisual) that are designed to share information. Sharing means that it is easy to comment on, that it is easy to send, and that there are no high costs associated with viewing the media. As a result of the connected nature of the Internet, it means that sharing, commenting and viewing can all be tracked down and measured (Stokes 2009: 124).

Stokes (2009) argues that marketing is about conversations, and the Internet has become a hub of conversations. Internet allows us to follow and track these conversations, and provides entry points for all parties.

Stokes (2009), emphasizes that the realm of social media is about collaboration, users generating content, sharing and most of it all, it is about connecting.

Social media, especially most widely used social networking site Facebook and microblogging site Twitter have been an emerging tool for communication in today's digital age. Together with the improvements in technologies, communication between the sport organizations and their supporters became easier. Technology is one example of an environmental factor that has important impacts on us (Kitchin 2007 in Beech and Chadwick ed.)

A social network can be defined as a group of people who interact through newsletters, blogs, comments, telephone, e-mail and instant messages, and who use text, audio, photographs and video for social, professional and educational purposes. The social network's goal is to build trust in a given community (Safko 2010: 24).

According to Safko (2010: 9), social media are analyzed in fifteen categories, such as; social networking, publish, photo, audio, video, microblogging, livecasting, virtual worlds, gaming, productivity applications, aggregators, RSS, search, mobile, interpersonal.

All of these social media categories give opportunity to share information, to connect with fans, receiving feedbacks. Besides these, social media give the football teams a chance to interact with their fans.

It can be argued that, consumers, companies and the brands as the components of MPR, (marketing public relations) can be defined as fans, football teams and the teams' brand itself. Also, the categories of marketing public relations give an insight of the ways of MPR used by the football teams. As a result of this, it can be said that matching those two, shows how companies benefit from MPR. After analyzing how those four categories are used by the football teams on social media, we can claim how social media are used as a MPR tool.

3. RESEARCH

In this study, Turkey's primary football league, Super Toto Super League is selected for the primary research part in order to point out the interactivity, connection and collaboration between the football teams and their publics and fans. Together with the fifteen categories of social media and four out of six areas that MPR is practiced, Turkish football teams' social media usage will be analyzed.

In their study, Harris and Whalen (2006) classified the uses of marketing public relations into six main areas as it pointed out above. Those areas are; product promotion, building markets, advertising support, marketing support, corporate reputation and sales support. Since building markets and building and maintaining corporate reputation are long term process, and require different research techniques, they are not included in this study. It is also hardly possible to make assumptions about the teams' social media efforts concerning these categories through the information on their accounts.

The Turkish football league consists of eighteen teams. Out of eighteen football teams,

only five of those were the champions of the league since 1959. Those football teams are; Galatasaray A.Ş., Fenerbahçe A.Ş., Beşiktaş A.Ş., Trabzonspor A.Ş., Bursaspor A.Ş.

Teams' social media usages are examined according to fifteen categories of social media. The primary research is based on the information given on their social media. Collected data are analyzed in order to show how the teams share information, connect and interact with their publics and fans for the main aims of using social media as MPR tools.

4. FIFTEEN SOCIAL MEDIA CATEGORIES USED BY FIVE TURKISH FOOTBALL TEAMS

GALATASARAY A.Ş.

Social Networking:Galatasaray A.Ş. has an official page on Facebook. According to the data retrieved on the 8th of December 2011, 6.239.151 people liked their official page. According to the sports social media rankings (<http://www.sportsfangraph.com/>), among all sports teams from all over the world, Galatasaray is the thirteenth, with its Facebook and twitter usage.

Publish: The team publishes a magazine that includes the news about Galatasaray sport teams. On their Facebook page, there is a link for the magazine and Galatasaray fans are able to use the link to subscribe to the magazine.

Photo Sharing:Galatasaray shares photos of the team and highlights of the football games. The team uses both its Facebook and Twitter accounts to share those photos.

Audio: The team does not have audio messages in order to communicate with its fans.

Video: Video is a widely used tool for the team. Videos can be viewed on their Facebook page. Youtube is used to share the visual images concerning the team.

Microblogging: Team has an active Twitter account that has 584.340 followers.

Livecasting: Team has a TV channel named GS TV. Both on their web site and Facebook page, there is a link for the channel. It is

possible to watch the channel live. It is also accessible from the devices, ipad and iphone.

Virtual worlds:Virtual worlds is not used by Galatasaray A.Ş.

Gaming: The team has a page for gaming on Facebook. Facebook user fans are able to play the game after accepting the application.

Productivity Applications: Data concerning this category cannot be reached.

Aggregators: It can be stated that team's public and fans are acting as aggregators as they make comments on the team's Facebook and Twitter page.

RSS: RSS is used to give update news about the team. Team has a link for RSS on its Facebook page.

Search: The team's official web site is the first result when the team is searched on Google.

Mobile:Team has an official application for Apple iphone mobile devices. Latest news, photos, videos, players list and fixture can be followed through the application by its fans. Fans can also upload their team's marches to their mobile phones.

Interpersonal:This category is also used by the team as it connects with its fans through messages on social media. Together with Facebook comments and tweets/retweets, they are creating an interpersonal communication.

FENERBAHÇE A.Ş.

Social Networking:Fenerbahçe has a fan page on Facebook. 5.078.750 people liked the page. According to the social media ranking, Fenerbahçe is the eighteenth sport team in the world.

Publish: Although the team has a magazine that has a link on Facebook, it is not accessible. Fans can subscribe through its web site.

Photo Sharing: Fenerbahçeshares photos related with the team both on their Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Audio: They have a link for their radio station named Radio Fenerbahçe on Facebook but it is not accessible today.

Video: They also share their videos through their Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Microblogging: Fenerbahçe has a Twitter account, followed by 371.433 people.

Livecasting: The team is not using livecasting as a social media tool.

Virtual Worlds: Virtual world tool is not available for Fenerbahçe.

Gaming: There is no game related with the team on social media.

Productivity Applications: Data related with this category cannot be analyzed.

Aggregators: Fenerbahçe fans can be seen as aggregators as they make comments on their team's Facebook and Twitter page.

RSS: RSS feed is available on the team's Facebook page.

Search: Team's official web page is the first result that appears on Google search.

Mobile: Fenerbahçe has different kinds of applications for mobile devices including phone rings.

Interpersonal: Together with the interactivity the team created on their social media efforts, they are initiating interpersonal communication with their fans.

BEŞİKTAŞ JK

Social Networking: Beşiktaş has an official Facebook page that 2.961.695 of its fans liked according to the data retrieved on the 9th of December 2011.

Publish: Team has a magazine named 'BJK Dergisi'. Fans can subscribe from the team's Facebook page. The magazine also has a special version for Apple Ipad users.

Photo Sharing: Photos related with Beşiktaş are shared through the team's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Audio: Team does not have audio tools on social media.

Video: Images captured from the team's TV channel, Beşiktaş TV are shared through its Facebook page.

Microblogging: Beşiktaş has an official Twitter page with 92.325 followers. They are sharing the latest news about the team by giving links to its web site.

Livecasting: There is no livecasting.

Virtual Worlds: Team does not also use virtual worlds as a social media tool.

Gaming: There is no game available for Beşiktaş publics and fans on social media.

Productivity Applications: Data cannot be traced for this category.

Aggregators: Team's fans are acting as aggregators just like the other teams' fans through Facebook and Twitter.

RSS: Receiving the latest news with RSS feed is possible with the link on its Facebook page.

Search: Team's official web site is the first result when the name of the team is searched on Google.

Mobile: Beşiktaş has more than 10 applications for mobile devices including the news, interesting facts, etc. about the team.

Interpersonal: It can be claimed that Beşiktaş is using social media for interpersonal purposes when we take Facebook and Twitter comments into account.

TRABZONSPOR A.Ş.

Social Networking: According to the data retrieved on the 10th of December 2011, Trabzonspor A.Ş. has an official Facebook page that is liked by 331.582 fans.

Publish: Trabzonspor magazine has a link on its Facebook page. Fans are able to subscribe online to the magazine through that link.

Photo Share: Photos related with Trabzonspor's matches and events are shared through its Facebook and Twitter page.

Audio: Audio data concerning Trabzonspor are not found on social media.

Video: Team has a link for Youtube on their Facebook page. Video images are shared through that link.

Microblogging: Trabzonspor has an official Twitter page that is followed by 34.539 fans. Team is using this microblog for sharing news, information and photos related with the team.

Livecasting: Trabzonspor is not using livecasting on social media.

Virtual Worlds: Team does not use virtual worlds.

Gaming: There is a Facebook page for gaming. According to the data retrieved on the 10th of December 2011, that site is used by one thousand fans monthly.

Productivity Applications: Data cannot be traced for this category.

Aggregators: Team's fans are acting as aggregators through Facebook and Twitter.

RSS: Receiving the latest news with RSS feed is possible with the link on Trabzonspor's Facebook page.

Search: Team's official web site is the second result when the name of the team is searched on Google.

Mobile: Trabzonspor has approximately 9 applications for mobile devices that include games, phone rings and providing other information related with Trabzonspor.

Interpersonal: It can be stated that like other football teams, Trabzonspor is using social media for interpersonal purposes when we take Facebook and Twitter comments into account.

BURSASPOR A.S.

Social Networking: Bursaspor's official fan page is liked by 29.118 fans (data collected on the 10th of December 2011).

Publish: The team does not use publishing category on social media.

Photo Share: Photos are shared on Bursaspor's Facebook page.

Audio: Audio data concerning Bursaspor are not found on social media.

Video: Video images are shared on the team's Facebook page.

Microblogging: The team's fans have a Twitter account. The page is followed by 381 people only, as a result of this, it can be said that the team is not using microblogging effectively.

Livecasting: Bursaspor is not using livecasting on social media.

Virtual Worlds: Team does not use virtual worlds.

Gaming: Bursaspor has a game page on Facebook but it is used by only 2 people monthly.

Productivity Applications: Data cannot be traced for this category.

Aggregators: Team's fans are acting as aggregators through Facebook.

RSS: Receiving the latest news with RSS feed is possible with the link on Bursaspor's Facebook page.

Search: Team's official web site is the first result when the name of the team is searched on Google.

Mobile: Bursaspor has applications for mobile devices that include phone rings and fan page providing other information related with Bursaspor.

Interpersonal: It can be stated that like other football teams, Bursaspor is using social media for interpersonal purposes when we take Facebook comments into account.

After analyzing those five teams' social media usage, it can be claimed that all of them use social networking, publish, photo share, video, microblogging, aggregators, RSS, search,

mobile and interpersonal. None of them use virtual worlds. Only one team out five, use audio and livecasting. And finally, three teams, out of five, use gaming as a social media tool. Since the primary research is based on the teams' publics and fans' usage of social media, productivity application can not be reached. After conducting primary research, the result that we reached is, social media categories are

used by the five of the football teams to connect with their publics and fans. This connection is actualized via Facebook and Twitter. When we examine their social media, all the four areas that MPR is practiced can be seen on their Facebook and Twitter accounts. After analyzing those teams' social media usage, a table is formed in order to show they use these media for MPR purposes.

Table 1. Five of the Turkish Football Teams' Social Media Usage for Mpr Purposes

Product Promotion	Galatasaray	Fenerbahçe	Beşiktaş	Trabzonspor	Bursaspor
Introduce new products	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Revitalize, relaunch or reposition mature products	No	Yes	No	No	No
Communicate new benefits of old products	No	Yes	No	No	No
Involve people with products	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Engage customers with products on-line	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Build or maintain interest in a product category	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Advertising Support	Galatasaray	Fenerbahçe	Beşiktaş	Trabzonspor	Bursaspor
Extend the reach of advertising	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Counteract consumer resistance to advertising	No	No	No	No	No
Break through commercial clutter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Make news before advertising breaks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Make advertising newsworthy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Complement advertising by reinforcing messages and legitimizing claims	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Supplement advertising by communicating additional product benefits	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Attract visitors to commercial web sites	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Gain awareness in media where product is not advertised.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Marketing Support	Galatasaray	Fenerbahçe	Beşiktaş	Trabzonspor	Bursaspor
Test marketing concepts	No	No	No	No	No
Reinforce sales promotion campaigns	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tailor marketing programs to local audiences	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Raise brand awareness through title sponsorships	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Create new media and new ways to reach consumers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sales Support	Galatasaray	Fenerbahçe	Beşiktaş	Trabzonspor	Bursaspor
Gain distribution	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Build store traffic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Generate sales inquiries	No	No	No	No	No
Motivate the sales force	No	No	No	No	No
Win retailer support	No	No	No	No	No

When we examine the table, we can say that five of the Turkish football teams, that have been champions use social media as a MPR tool. They promote their products by introducing new products such as clothes, magazines, involve people with products, engage customers with products online, build or maintain interest in a product category.

They support their advertising efforts by breaking through commercial clutter, make advertising newsworthy, gain awareness in media where product is not advertised. They also support their sales by gaining distribution, building store traffic, etc. Besides these, they support all marketing efforts by creating new media and new ways to reach consumers, to reinforce sales promotion campaigns.

CONCLUSION

Like any other organization, football teams began to use marketing public relations to interact, connect and collaborate with their publics and fans. Since the characteristics of social media match those above, it became an important component of the new MPR approach.

After evaluating the results this study has provided, it can be stated that, the five Turkish football teams that have been champions, are

aware of the importance of social media and use social media categories for their MPR purposes. They also use all of the four areas of MPR that are included in this study.

Another outcome of examining the social media usage of the five teams is that Facebook and Twitter accounts are the main social media categories to reach their marketing public relations goals.

They promote their products by introducing new products such as clothes, magazines; involve people with products; engage customers with products online; build or maintain interest in a product promotion category. As a second category, in the advertising support, they use social media to break through commercial clutter, make advertising newsworthy, gain awareness in media where product is not advertised. In the third category, social media is used for gaining distribution, building store traffic, etc. to support their sales. Besides these, the football teams support all marketing efforts by creating new media and new ways to reach consumers, to reinforce sales by promotion campaigns.

In other words, in today's digital age, social media is an irresistible marketing public relations tool for sport marketing as it is the same for other organizations. As we can

conclude from our primary research data, it can be pointed out that five Turkish football teams, that have been the champions are aware of the value of the social media as an MPR instrument in today's new marketing public relations approach. Their social media practices are used in a way that match MPR purposes in general.

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