

Examining the Loyalty of Diverse Internet Users and its Impact on Sports Public Relations

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Abstract

This study explores the concept of user loyalty in the context of sports media consumption, particularly in relation to diverse internet users' engagement with online sports content. Building on the framework used for examining user stickiness in online variety shows, this paper develops and tests a model to identify the antecedents of user loyalty among sports fans. A survey conducted with 331 internet users reveals that user engagement is significantly influenced by factors such as content embeddedness and the empowerment provided by the programs. These factors positively affect user satisfaction, enhancing emotional involvement (referred to as "heart flow") and ultimately fostering user loyalty. Furthermore, the study confirms the positive impact of perceived ease of use and usefulness on user satisfaction and heart flow. Personality traits are also found to affect the continuity of sports content consumption. The findings underscore the importance of tailored public relations strategies in sports media to enhance user loyalty. Recommendations for sports broadcasters are provided to improve user engagement and loyalty by optimizing content delivery and interactivity, crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in the digital era.

Keywords: Sports Media, Variety Show, Network, Stickiness, Website Stickiness, SEM.

Introduction

In the digital age, the landscape of sports media consumption is rapidly evolving, driven by the diverse preferences and behaviors of internet users. Understanding what keeps these users engaged—commonly referred to as "user stickiness" or loyalty—is crucial for sports organizations aiming to optimize their public relations strategies and maintain a competitive edge. This paper explores the dynamics of user loyalty in the context of sports media, leveraging insights from the broader field of online media consumption to shed light on how sports organizations can effectively engage their audiences. Traditionally, the concept of user stickiness has been associated with online platforms and variety shows, where the ability to attract and retain viewers for long-term, high-frequency engagement determines success. This concept is equally pertinent to sports media, where fans' continuous engagement is vital for the sustainability of sports channels, teams, and brands. As digital platforms proliferate and user preferences become more fragmented, sports organizations face the challenge of adapting to a landscape where user loyalty is fleeting and multifaceted.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are rooted in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Flow Theory. TAM suggests that perceived ease of use and

usefulness are pivotal in influencing users' attitudes towards using technology, which can be translated into the sports media context as factors influencing viewers' satisfaction and continued engagement. Flow Theory, on the other hand, describes a state of deep absorption or 'heart flow' where individuals are fully immersed in an activity, a state particularly relevant to the immersive experience sports can offer.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are to:

Identify the key factors that contribute to user loyalty in sports media consumption, particularly among diverse internet users. Examine how these factors impact user satisfaction and emotional involvement, and subsequently, their loyalty to sports media platforms. Offer actionable insights for sports public relations practitioners to harness these factors to enhance user engagement and loyalty. To achieve these objectives, this study employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. A survey of 331 internet users provides the quantitative backbone, allowing for the statistical analysis of how various factors such as embeddedness, empowerment, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness influence user satisfaction and loyalty. Qualitative interviews and focus groups complement this data, offering deeper insights into the personal and emotional dimensions of sports media consumption.

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Significance of the Study

This research is significant as it addresses the pressing need for sports organizations to understand and adapt to the changing dynamics of media consumption. By focusing on the specific factors that foster user loyalty, this study not only contributes to academic literature but also offers practical guidance for sports public relations strategies. The insights gained can help sports organizations develop more effective engagement tactics, tailored content strategies, and ultimately, stronger relationships with their audiences.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Network User Stickiness and its Measurement

"User stickiness" is a term emerging with the development of mobile social networks, is the key to the success of websites (Grasdalsmoen et al., 2020), and is also a major indicator to measure the user retention of mobile applications, online websites and other products. At present, the research on "stickiness" is mainly concentrated in the field of products and services. The term "stickiness" originates from the research on corporate behavior, which refers to the ability of a company to retain users (Paul, 1999). In the context of the Internet, it is defined as the ability of a website to attract and retain users (Arede et al., 2022; Zott, Amit, & Donlevy, 2000), or the ability to extend the duration of each user's stay on the website (Bhatnagar & Ghose, 2004). Lin puts more emphasis on repeated visits by users (Lin, 2007). The duration of users' stay on the website is a key factor to measure users' stickiness (Oliver, 1999). Mărginean believed that interaction frequency was also an important indicator to measure customer loyalty (Mărginean, 2016). In addition, click times are also an important indicator of user stickiness (Kim & Malhotra, 2005; Zhang, 2022).

TAM Model and the Formation of User Stickiness

The stickiness of network users refers to a behavioral feature generated in the process of using the Internet, an information platform. Therefore, the theory of information system use should be the theoretical cornerstone of its formation. TAM proposed by Davis uses perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and use attitude to explain users' motivation (Davis, 1985). The research on user behavior in information system use theory involves two stages: pre adoption behavior and post adoption behavior. The main theoretical achievements in the pre adoption stage are Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), while the achievements in the post adoption stage are mainly the theory of continuous use, of which the more

representative is the Expectation Confirmation Model of IS Continuity (ECM-ISC) proposed by Bhattacharjee on the basis of Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Bhattacharjee, 2001). The technology acceptance model in the pre adoption stage was further improved by Davis on the basis of TRA theory (Davis, 1989). This model is mainly used to analyze and measure users' acceptance of the information system, and attempts to analyze users' attitudes and behaviors towards the information system through the two dimensions of perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). It also speculates the user's acceptance of new technologies or systems, and emphasizes the influence of personal use attitude on behavior intention. Among a large number of studies on the continuous use behavior of information systems, the theory of expectation confirmation is one of the most influential research results. As a research theory of consumer behavior, the theory of expectation confirmation is very suitable for studying users' purchase behavior, satisfaction and perception effect after purchase, and is one of the essential theoretical models for studying user stickiness.

Flow theory and User Stickiness

Flow theory is to explore the state of people's participation in certain activities. Csikszentmihalyi believes that flow is a high-level experience in which users are completely immersed in a certain process (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993), and when individuals are in the process of flow experience, they will feel happy. It emphasizes highly focusing on the present; Curiosity, enjoyment, time warping, concentration and telepresence (Csikszentmihalyi, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Kwak, Choi, & Lee, 2014; Cao & Zhang, 2022). The users in the flow state will unconsciously prolong their retention time in the network platform or network programs, so the flow theory plays an important role in the study of user stickiness. Hoffman and Novak also noticed the existence of flow experience when studying the computer media environment (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). He believed that flow experience has the following characteristic elements: control and response, challenge and arousal, concentration, strong interaction, loss of self-consciousness and strong stimulation of self.

Social Network Theory and User Stickiness

The social network theory also plays a guiding role in studying the formation mechanism of user stickiness. Wellman proposed that a social network is a whole composed of multiple social members and their

relationships (Wellman & Potter, 2018), that is, "network" is regarded as a related connection between social members, which together constitute a stable social structure. Each of us, as a part of the network, more or less needs to exchange information, provide emotional support and so on with others (Fish et al., 1992; Wei, 2022), so we can avoid being affected by others connected in the network. The concept of the key majority principle is similar to this. Before the social collective participation, a small number of people will first try something. When such people reach a certain number and scale, they will reach the critical point, which will lead to large-scale collective participation. Therefore, when more and more people like the same thing or do the same thing, they will have an impact on the people around them. The personal perception of this impact is called structural embeddedness perception. The concept of social norms is similar to the concept of structural embeddedness, which emphasizes that individuals will make the same or similar behaviors and choices under the influence of the key majority.

The Five-factor Model of Personality and User Stickiness

In the research on Internet overuse, some scholars believe that personality characteristics are closely related to overuse behavior (Floros & Siomos, 2014). The use of media is an independent type of behavior, which will definitely replace other activities. For example, watching TV will reduce people's outdoor entertainment behavior, radio can replace communication between people, and people addicted to online games will be disconnected from the real society. Generally speaking, the use of media itself is a common and normal way of social behavior and an acceptable substitute for actual social interaction (McQuail, 1997).

Similarly, the choice of such alternatives is different from person to person, and different personality types have different choices. In the evaluation and classification of personality types, the Big Five personality model is the most widely accepted, studied and recognized (John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five Personality Framework is a hierarchical model of personality traits. It has five broad bipolar factors, representing the personality at the broadest abstract level (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann Jr, 2003).

Research Hypotheses and Model

Figure 1 details the model of this study. The five factors in the big five personality model include: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and

consistency (White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004). Considering the characteristics of extroversion, and according to the fact that users with a high degree of extroversion will be more willing to show their star chasing behavior, online variety shows, especially talent show variety shows, will use idol stars to attract a lot of traffic, so the author believes that the degree of extroversion will positively affect user stickiness; According to the characteristics of humanity, conscientiousness and openness, the author believes that these three will positively affect satisfaction; In this study, neuroticism is not used, but its opposite Emotional stability is used. Emotional stability mainly indicates a person's ability to control emotions. Therefore, the following assumptions are proposed:

- H1:** Extraversion positively affects user stickiness
- H2:** Agreeableness has a positive impact on satisfaction
- H3:** Conscientiousness positively affects satisfaction
- H4:** Openness to experience negatively affects satisfaction
- H5:** Emotional stability negatively affects cardiac flow

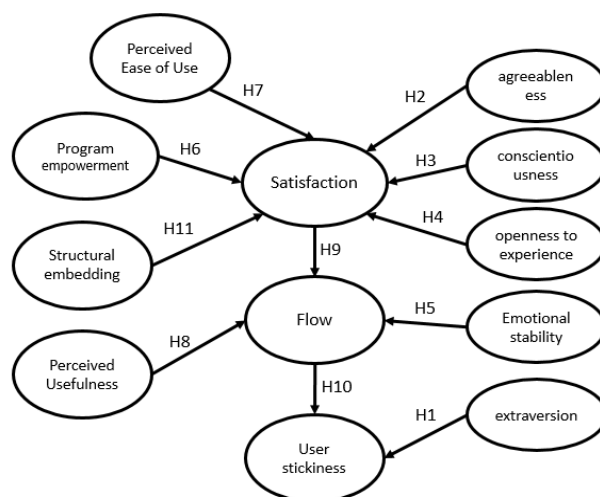


Figure 1: Research Model.

With the continuous strengthening of users' "id consciousness", when watching online variety shows, they pay more attention to their own subjectivity, and are no longer satisfied with simply receiving information passively, but hope to get more empowerment. The user's sense of self ownership is constantly strengthened, so the program needs to constantly give users the opportunity to express their voice to enhance user satisfaction with the program. Empowerment of users by programs can also further enhance the pseudo relationship between users and guests in programs. Especially when the program content is close to life itself, interaction can more easily resonate with the audience, enhance users' satisfaction with programs, and thus enhance users' stickiness.

H6: The degree of program empowerment has a positive impact on satisfaction.

According to the analysis of TAM and ECM in the previous section, it can be concluded that the intention of continuous use will have a greater impact on the actual use of users. Bhattacharjee proposed that perceived usefulness has a positive impact on continuous use intention (Bhattacharjee, 2001), and perceived usefulness is affected by expected confirmation, and confirmed this hypothesis. Gefen used the TAM model to verify the influencing factors of continuous use intention (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003), and found that perceived usefulness significantly affected the continuous use intention. According to the above description of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, considering that perceived ease of use has a greater relationship with satisfaction from the perspective of bringing convenience to users. Perceived usefulness for users is to judge whether they can bring more happiness to a greater extent, so further analysis can put forward the following assumptions:

H7: Perceived ease of use positively affects satisfaction

H8: perceived usefulness positively affects cardiac flow

For the degree of realization of expectations, the commonly used measure is satisfaction. The concept of satisfaction was first proposed by Locke (Locke, 1976). At that time, it was defined as a happy or positive emotional state triggered by the evaluation of personal work achievements, mainly used to explore the relationship between individual work performance and job satisfaction. User satisfaction in online variety shows refers to the degree to which users meet their expectations in the process of watching variety shows, and the degree to which they meet the expected interest, interactivity, usefulness and aesthetic feeling in the programs (Soares Costa et al., 2022).

H9: Satisfaction positively affects cardiac flow

An important output variable of flow experience is pleasant emotion, and this emotion will make users have a positive impact on online variety shows. The sense of control and interactivity are also important components of flow (Magnusson & Stattin, 1996). In the research related to Internet addiction, the flow experience of deep immersion in the Internet world is considered to be an important antecedent of addiction (Bissett & Tamminen, 2022; Champ et al., 2021). Therefore, the following assumptions are made:

H10: Positive effect of heart flow on user viscosity

As a part of social groups, people will inevitably be affected by social relations. According to the theory of structural embeddedness and social norms mentioned above, the behavior of members of a group will exert pressure on other members, emphasizing the influence

of the whole group on individuals (Rosemary et al., 2022). Under this influence, people will be forced to do things that they are not very interested in by their subjective normative beliefs, just hoping that their behavior conforms to these social norms. Therefore, the following assumptions are made:

H11: Structural embeddedness has a positive impact on satisfaction

Research Methodology

Sample

Because watching online variety shows is an online viewing behavior, and online users are the main research objects, this survey obtains samples from microblogs, forums, post bars and groups of various online variety shows, and invites users who have watched online variety shows to answer. The main object of this survey is users who often watch online variety shows, without limiting their gender, age, occupation and education level. 331 valid replies were obtained.

Survey Instrument and Variables Measurement

The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part is the demographic variables related to this study, and the second part is the survey of viewing of online variety shows. To improve the survey, the survey was pretested by students and staff with professional knowledge. A total of 144 questionnaires were distributed in the pilot test, and then the collected data were preliminarily analyzed.

After the survey was revised according to the suggestions obtained in the pilot study, the questionnaire was officially distributed. The variables used in this research model have been discussed in the literature review, and the scales used have also been successfully tested in previous studies. In this study, except for the user stickiness variable, the other variables are 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) were used to measure the usage intent variables

Scale Reliability and Validity

Cronbach alpha is used to measure the internal consistency of the scale (Cronbach, 1951). The coefficient alpha values for perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, program empowerment, satisfaction, structural embeddedness, flow and user stickiness were 0.71, 0.706, 0.806, 0.757, 0.73, 0.708 and 0.719 respectively. Cronbach alpha of each variable were above the the conventional level of 0.70, indicating that the structure of the scale is very reliable (D'Elia et al., 2021). See Table 1 for details.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's α

| Construct | Mean | Cronbach α |
|-------------------------|------|-------------------|
| Perceived Usefulness | 3.99 | 0.710 |
| Perceived Ease of Use | 4.07 | 0.706 |
| Program Empowerment | 3.08 | 0.806 |
| Satisfaction | 3.74 | 0.757 |
| Structural Embeddedness | 3.87 | 0.730 |
| Flow | 3.92 | 0.708 |
| User Stickiness | 3.65 | 0.719 |
| Extraversion | 3.37 | 0.710 |
| Openness to Experience | 3.40 | 0.783 |
| Agreeableness | 3.35 | 0.813 |
| Conscientiousness | 3.29 | 0.738 |
| Emotional Stability | 3.29 | 0.718 |

Principal component analysis was used to assess the differences between the proposed structures. In the principal component analysis, factors with eigenvalue ≥ 1 are extracted, and the factor load matrix is obtained after orthogonal rotation, as shown in Table 2. A total of 4 factors were extracted, and the cumulative variance interpretation rate reached 66.547%. Therefore, the extracted principal components can basically cover most of the information of variables, and have good interpretation ability.

Table 2

Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotations

| Construct | Scale Items | Factor | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Perceived Usefulness | PU1 | | | 0.762 | |
| | PU2 | | | 0.732 | |
| | PU3 | | | 0.725 | |
| Perceived Ease of Use | PE1 | | | | 0.787 |
| | PE2 | | | | 0.844 |
| Program Empowerment | PP1 | | 0.865 | | |
| | PP2 | | 0.870 | | |
| | PP3 | | 0.726 | | |
| Structural Embeddedness | CE1 | 0.682 | | | |
| | CE2 | 0.790 | | | |
| | CE3 | 0.729 | | | |
| | CE4 | 0.594 | | | |
| Eigenvalues | | 2.203 | 2.2 | 1.948 | 1.635 |
| Percentage of Variance Explained | | 18.3618 | 33.116 | 23.513 | 13.621 |
| Cumulative Percentage | | 18.3636 | 69.152 | 92.666 | 105.547 |

Analysis of Results

Model Assessment

First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to evaluate the applicability of the model. The reliability of variables and the validity of structures were determined by observing composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Since all values of CR are greater than AVE, and all values of AVE are greater than 0.50, the validity of the model is confirmed. Then evaluate the fitting of the model, and the specific indicators include: chi-square/degrees of freedom, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square of approximation (RMSEA).

In this study, the measurement model has the chi-square/degrees of freedom less than 3.0, GFI, AGFI and NFI all greater than 0.8, CFI greater than 0.9 and RMSR less than 0.1, so the model fits well. The specific results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Assessing the Measurement

| Measures | Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom | | | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | GFI | AGFI | NFI | CFI | RMSEA |
| Measurement | 1.517 | 0.881 | 0.858 | 0.821 | 0.930 |

Hypotheses Testing

Figure 2 describes the standardized path coefficients and hypothesis test results between structures in the research model. Extroversion positively affects user stickiness, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness have no significant impact on satisfaction, and emotional stability has no significant impact on flow. Therefore, only Hypothesis 1 is true, and Hypothesis 2, 3, 4, and 5 are not true.

This conclusion shows that extroverts are more likely to be attracted by online variety shows. Hypothesis 6 shows that users attach great importance to interacting with programs and expressing their own opinions. This also confirms the awakening of users' "id consciousness" in the Internet era. From the one-way transmission of traditional TV to today's two-way interactive network variety show model, users are paying more and more attention to the participation and experience of programs, and begin to hope to get more voice. Therefore, the degree of program empowerment has an important impact on user satisfaction.

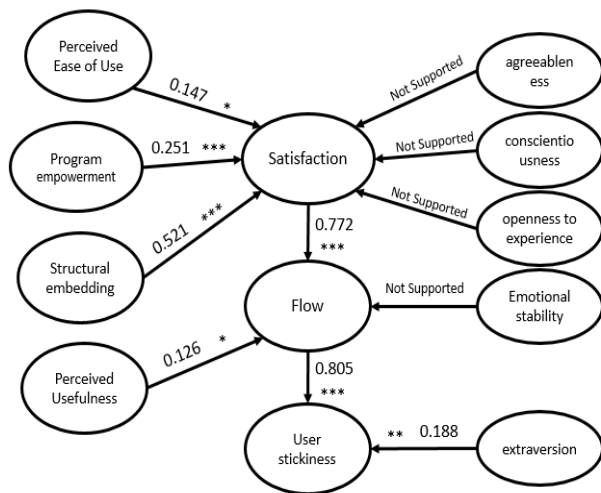


Figure 2: Results of SEM Analysis.

The path coefficient of perceived ease of use on satisfaction is 0.147, which is significant at the level of $P < 0.05$, supporting hypothesis 7. It shows that compared with traditional TV stations, online variety shows have Internet features that are more suitable for users to watch in various fragmented time and scenes to kill their leisure time. Assumption 8 is also true. The perceived usefulness of users is mainly reflected in watching online variety shows, which has achieved the goal of relaxing and obtaining a sense of pleasure. At the same time, they can also obtain topics through online variety shows, so as to better communicate with colleagues and friends. Of course, the most important function of online variety shows is to bring pleasure to users. This pleasure will strengthen users' flow state, and make users in the process of extreme relaxation and happiness, Immersion in this state will strengthen users' perception of the usefulness of online variety shows, further improve the possibility of continuing to watch

online variety shows, that is, generate the intention of continuous use. The results show that satisfaction has a significant impact on cardiac flow, and the path coefficient is 0.772, which supports hypothesis 9. It further explains that the higher the satisfaction, the more easily the user is immersed in the flow state. The satisfaction mainly includes the satisfaction with the content, scene, form, music and other elements of the program, which requires the production team of online variety shows to attach importance to their own specialization and create more exquisite variety shows. Cardiac flow has a significant positive impact on user viscosity, which supports hypothesis 10. It shows that the flow characteristics of network users will promote the generation of network stickiness, which is very significant. It further verified that the sense of time distortion associated with the emergence of flow state ultimately led consumers to indulge in online variety shows for a long time, and would make users rely heavily on online variety shows.

The result of Hypothesis 11 is strongly supported, that is, users subjectively believe that many people in their social networks are watching online variety shows, then users will strongly learn the social norms of other people in the organization, have a stronger desire to watch online variety shows, and under the influence of this desire, their satisfaction with online variety shows will be improved, At the same time, the study also found that users could not help but recommend their favorite web show and accept the web show recommended by friends in the process of communication with people around them. Affected by relevant recommendations, users' evaluation of online variety shows will also be affected, which further confirmed hypothesis 11. Table 4 summarizes all assumptions and results.

Table 4

Summary of Hypotheses and Results

| | Hypotheses | | P | Results | |
|-----|-----------------|------|------------------------|---------|---------------|
| H1 | User Stickiness | <--- | Extraversion | ** | Supported |
| H2 | Satisfaction | <--- | Agreeableness | 0.698 | Not Supported |
| H3 | Satisfaction | <--- | Conscientiousness | 0.53 | Not Supported |
| H4 | Satisfaction | <--- | Openness To Experience | 0.305 | Not Supported |
| H5 | Flow | <--- | Emotional Stability | 0.085 | Not Supported |
| H6 | Satisfaction | <--- | Program Empowerment | *** | Supported |
| H7 | Satisfaction | <--- | Perceived Ease of Use | * | Supported |
| H8 | Flow | <--- | Perceived Usefulness | * | Supported |
| H9 | Flow | <--- | Satisfaction | *** | Supported |
| H10 | User Stickiness | <--- | Flow | *** | Supported |
| H11 | Satisfaction | <--- | Structural Embedding | *** | Supported |

Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive examination of the factors influencing user loyalty in the context of sports media consumption, particularly among diverse internet users. By adapting and extending frameworks from the fields of online media and user behavior, we have identified key determinants of engagement and loyalty that are critical for sports organizations aiming to optimize their public relations strategies.

Synthesis of Key Findings

The findings from our survey of 331 internet users underscore the significant roles played by content embeddedness, empowerment through interactive features, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness in fostering user satisfaction. Satisfaction, in turn, leads to a state of emotional immersion or "heart flow," which is crucial for developing long-term user loyalty. Additionally, personality traits emerged as influential factors, indicating that user engagement is not only a matter of content and functionality but also personal disposition.

Practical Implications

For sports public relations practitioners, these insights offer actionable strategies to enhance audience engagement: Content Embeddedness: Tailoring content to be deeply embedded with relevant, engaging, and contextually rich information can significantly enhance user satisfaction. This involves integrating in-depth analyses, behind-the-scenes content, and interactive elements that allow users to feel a part of the sports narrative.

Empowerment: Offering users control over what and how they consume content empowers them, thereby increasing satisfaction. Features like customizable viewing options, interactive platforms for fan engagement, and tools for

content sharing can make sports media more appealing. Ease of Use and Usefulness: Ensuring that digital platforms are user-friendly and effectively meet the needs of diverse users is critical. This might involve intuitive user interfaces, reliable streaming services, and content that is both entertaining and informative.

Theoretical Contributions: This research contributes to the broader discourse on media consumption and user behavior by highlighting the specific dynamics at play within sports media. It extends traditional models like TAM and Flow Theory into the realm of sports, offering a nuanced understanding of how these theoretical frameworks can be applied to the sports industry.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could explore the long-term trends in sports media consumption and how this influence user loyalty over time. Longitudinal studies would provide a deeper understanding of how loyalty develops and changes in response to innovations in sports broadcasting and fan engagement practices. Additionally, cross-cultural studies could examine how these factors vary across different global markets, offering insights into how global sports brands can tailor their strategies to diverse audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of understanding the factors that influence user loyalty in sports media. By focusing on the elements that enhance user satisfaction and emotional engagement, sports organizations can craft more effective public relations strategies that not only attract but retain a diverse and dedicated audience base. This research not only enriches the academic literature but also provides practical guidelines that can be implemented by professionals in the field to foster robust, loyal user communities in the competitive sports media landscape.

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