

Social media based sponsorship activation – a typology of content

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper thematically categorises sports sponsorship-linked Twitter content and, by drawing on uses & gratifications (U&G) theory, maps the extent to which these categories cohere with known user motivations for consuming social media.

Methodology: Qualitative content analysis of a sample of 1502 Tweets by London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games sponsors posted between January 2011 and September 2012 was used to develop the typology of sponsorship-linked Twitter content.

Findings: From the data, a typology is developed, comprising 17 categories grouped under four main types: informing, entertaining, rewarding and interacting. The majority of sponsor Tweets (68%) fell into the informing type, with 17% categorised as interacting. While few (2%) Tweets were categorised as entertaining, the link to the sponsored event implies a degree of entertaining content even in ostensibly informative, rewarding or interactional sponsorship-linked Tweets. Therefore, the typology categories highlight Twitter content produced by sponsors which engages customers, fostering dialogue alongside providing informative and entertaining content.

Originality: The typology extends existing understanding of the use of social media within sponsorship activation campaigns by thematically categorising content and mapping this against known user motivations for consuming brand-related social media content.

Practical implications: The typology can inform practitioners' future sports sponsorship activation planning decisions and can also aid rights holders in tailoring appropriate sponsorship opportunities to potential sponsors, based on an appreciation of the nature of content sought by brand followers.

Keywords:

Sponsorship; Social Media; Twitter; Typology; Activation

Introduction

The growth of sponsorship as a marketing communications vehicle for a range of brands has been well documented (IEG, 2015; Reuters, 2011), with global sponsorship expenditure reaching \$55.3 billion in 2014 (IEG, 2015). Arguably the most high profile sponsorship property in sport is the Olympic Games, with the 53 London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games sponsors paying a combined \$2.2 billion for the right to be associated with the event (Rogers, 2012). The lack of signage at Olympic venues pushes to the fore the importance of activating a sponsorship, over and above acquiring the sponsorship rights themselves. Simply acquiring the sponsorship rights to a property does not guarantee a return on investment and the ability of sponsorship to contribute to highly prized metrics such as brand equity is thus contingent on its activation (Ukman, 2011; Papadimitriou and Apostolopoulou, 2009). Recent years have seen considerable growth in these associated promotional activities which allow sponsors to connect with fans and consumers (O'Reilly and Lafrance Horning, 2013) and add value to the event (Skildum-Reid, 2009). Increasingly, sponsors are incorporating digital and online marketing into their sponsorship activations (Meenaghan et al., 2013) and social media is forming a growing part of many brands' sponsorship activation strategies (Chanavat and Desbordes, 2014).

The London 2012 Olympic Games were billed as the first truly social Olympics, or Socialympics (Crow, 2012), with social media playing an important role in the way in which

fans consumed and shared the Olympic experience (Miah, 2012). Indeed, the opening ceremony of London 2012 generated more Tweets than did the entire Beijing 2008 Games (Frederick et al., 2015) and overall 150 million Tweets were sent about London 2012, compared with only 125,000 for Beijing 2008 (Pillai, 2012). From a sponsorship perspective, the London 2012 sponsors spent a reported 15-20% of their sponsorship budgets on digital media (FoxBusiness, 2012), providing a true showcase of the use of social media in sponsorship activation (Meenaghan et al., 2013).

A significant and growing body of literature on the use of social media in sport now exists (see Abeza et al., 2015 and Filo et al., 2015 for comprehensive reviews of literature in this area), looking at sectors including national governing bodies (Eagleman, 2013; Thompson et al., 2014), sport for development (Svensson et al., 2015; Svensson and Hambrick, 2016), professional sports teams (Armstrong et al., 2016; Parganas et al., 2015) and athletes (Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). However, literature on the use of social media by sponsors remains limited (Abeza et al., 2015; Geurin and Gee, 2014), with much research to date focusing on whether sponsors are posting about their sponsorships on social media (Abeza et al., 2014), how social media can be used to assess sponsorship effectiveness (Delia and Armstrong, 2015; Meenaghan et al., 2013) and the impact of communicating sponsorships through social media on metrics such as perceived congruity and relationship quality (Do et al., 2015) Therefore, there still remains a need to better understand the use of social media as a sponsorship activation tool (Abeza et al., 2014; Abeza et al., 2015; Geurin and Gee, 2014) to achieve meaningful outcomes.

This study provides insight into the use of social media within a sports sponsorship context, based on a content analysis of Tweets by 44 sponsors of the London 2012 Olympic

and Paralympic Games between January 2011 and September 2012. Drawing upon both Twitter data and literature on consumer motivations for the use of social media, the aim of the paper is to develop a typology of sponsorship-linked Twitter content. Unlike many previous studies, which have focused on structural elements such as the use of hashtags or particular keywords (c.f. Abeza et al., 2014; Blaszkka et al., 2012; Swani et al., 2014), our focus is on Tweet content themes, similar to what García-Albacete and Theocharis (2014) termed the purpose of the Tweet, rather than message structure. Thus, this study advances the academic body of knowledge on sponsorship activation strategies and brand-related social media usage. Given the lack of existing research on precisely how sponsors are using social media to activate their sponsorships, the development of this typology extends our understanding of sponsorship activation and social media, while also reflecting the managerial considerations of sponsors seeking to optimise their use of social media within integrated sponsorship activation campaigns. Unless the content posted by brands is relevant to consumers, they are unlikely to engage with those brands (Schmitt, 2012). Therefore, rather than providing a simple categorisation of sponsorship-linked content, this typology draws on uses and gratifications (U&G) theory to map sponsor-generated content against known user motivations for consuming social media, allowing for a more informed appraisal of the extent to which sponsors are providing the type of social media content likely to be valued by their target markets. To this end, the next section will review literature to date on sponsorship activation, social media and U&G theory, before outlining the method employed. The resulting typology will then be presented and discussed with reference back to extant theory and literature. Finally, implications for practitioners will be outlined, alongside a discussion of the limitations of the study and areas for future research.

Literature review

Sponsorship activation

Weeks et al. (2008, p.639) define sponsorship activation as ‘communications that promote the engagement, involvement, or participation of the sponsorship audience with the sponsor.’ Thus, the definition of activation is consistent with the view that fans are no longer happy to passively consume advertising content, but want to actively engage with and experience sponsor brands (Dees, 2011). In this context, the use of social media within sponsorship activation has grown (Chanavat and Desbordes, 2014). Indeed, for the first time, in 2014 social media occupied first position in the list of sponsorship activation tools used, as reported by sponsorship practitioners in the IEG Sponsorship Decision Makers’ Survey, with 90% of sponsors reporting its use (IEG, 2014). In an increasingly cluttered and crowded sponsorship environment (DeGaris et al., 2009), activation through social media allows sponsors to achieve a range of objectives, including brand awareness, interacting and engaging with fans, providing information, conducting sales promotions, relationship development (Dees, 2011) and influencing consumer attitudes towards brands (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016)

Social media

Social media is defined as ‘the tools, platforms, and applications that enable consumers to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others’ (Williams and Chinn, 2010, p.422). Inherent within this definition is the distinguishing characteristic of social media as permitting the creation (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and sharing of information (Akar and Topçu, 2011) in real-time (Gibbon et al., 2012). One of the most prominent social

media platforms is microblogging sites, such as Twitter, which as of June 2016 had 313 million active users (Twitter, 2016). These microblogging sites permit users to rapidly share small amounts of information, often about current events (Heinrichs et al., 2011; Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011). Thanks to its ability to facilitate two-way communication (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012) and relationship-building (Lipsman et al., 2012), microblogging has been widely adopted by marketers (Becker, 2013) to complement their traditional communications (Andzulis et al., 2012). In the context of sport, social media can facilitate interaction with fans (Pegoraro, 2010) allowing for a more humanistic approach to communication and thus a greater acceptance of its role as a marketing tool amongst those fans (Thompson et al., 2014).

Therefore, microblogging tools offer a timely and efficient (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) means of influencing consumer perceptions (Kumar and Mirchandani, 2012), understanding consumers' needs (Kumar and Sundaram, 2012) and engaging in meaningful two-way conversations with consumers (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012), offering sponsors the opportunity not only to reach sports fans (Dees, 2011) but to participate in conversations where these fans, or consumers, are already talking (Gibbon et al., 2012). Two notable studies have explored how sponsors are using social media, with a focus in both cases on the Olympic Games (Abeza et al., 2014; Geurin and Gee, 2014). Looking at TOP sponsors of the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games, Abeza et al. (2014) identified that these sponsors are using Twitter to communicate content, allowing them to achieve a range of objectives such as promotion, athlete encouragement and customer appreciation. Using the single case of Molson Canada's sponsorship of Team Canada at Sochi 2014, Geurin and Gee (2014) categorised the brand's posts on Facebook and Twitter as informational, promotional, interactivity and diversion, based on earlier work by Hambrick et al. (2010), finding that

informational and promotional posts were used more prominently than were interactive messages. However, both of these studies included within their analysis posts which were not sponsorship-related (categorised as diversion by Geurin and Gee (2014) and as a result of the use of the Leximancer software by Abeza et al. (2014)), with the latter being concerned more with whether topics posted were sponsorship-linked (as determined by the textual analysis software) rather than the nature of their specific, sponsorship-linked content. Therefore, the present study aims to thematically categorise the content posted by sponsors, to assess how sponsors are using Twitter as part of their activation campaigns. Thus, the following research question is advanced:

RQ1: What sponsorship-linked Twitter content is produced by sports event sponsors?

When developing their activations, sponsors must decide whether to adopt a more product-oriented or sponsored property-oriented theme (Carrillat et al., 2015). Interestingly, for Molson Canada, Geurin and Gee (2014) found that social media posts mentioning Team Canada received significantly fewer retweets and favourites than did posts not mentioning the team. Such a finding is supported in the case of activational video adverts, where directly promoting a product and emphasising the role of a brand as a sponsor can increase both brand attitude and purchase intention (Carrillat et al., 2015). Outside of sponsorship, in a study of the creative strategies employed by top brands on Twitter, Ashley and Tuten (2015) identified that most branded content posted tends to be functional (i.e. product- or service-related), rather than emotional or experiential, in appeal. Despite the much lauded relational benefits of social media, therefore, there is considerable evidence to suggest that many organisations and brands are posting more informational and one-way communications (Mamic and Alvaraz, 2013; Svensson et al., 2015; Waters and Jamal 2011; Waters and Williams 2011). In developing their sponsorship-linked social media content, sponsors must consider not only

the benefit to the brand but also the incentive or motivation for the consumer to engage with their brand via social media (Solis, 2012). This calls for an understanding of user motivations for consuming brand-related social media content and thus the next section reviews literature on such motivations, through the lens of U&G theory.

Uses & Gratifications theory

Using social media content to nurture shared interests with an audience (i.e. in this case, the Olympic Games) offers brands an array of benefits including generating interest, building brand likeability and credibility, and nurturing stronger brand-consumer links (Aaker, 2013). Thus, brands need to identify consumer motivations for engaging with social media content and use these to develop their message strategies (Swani et al., 2014). The most prominent theoretical framework employed to explore audience motivations for consuming a range of media is U&G theory. U&G theory is built on the social and psychological notion that people seek out media to meet their particular needs, ultimately leading to gratifications received (Chung and Austria, 2010).

From a sponsorship activation perspective therefore, when brands deliver social media content which coheres with the identified user motivations, consumers are more likely to respond favourably to this content (Taylor et al., 2011). It thus becomes imperative for brands to develop social media strategies and content that align with consumer motivations and which are relevant and add value to users of sites such as Twitter (Rohm et al., 2013). U&G theory has recently found renewed application in studies of motivations for Internet usage (Ko et al., 2005) and consuming social media (cf. Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Muntinga et al., 2011; Pentina et al., 2016; Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013; Rohm et al., 2013;

Whiting and Williams, 2013; Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman, 2015). Within the sport context, U&G theory has been predominantly used in user-focused studies (Abeza et al., 2015; Filo et al., 2015). Consequently, much attention has been paid to understanding fan motivations for following professional sports teams (Gibbs et al., 2014; Stavros et al., 2014) and athletes (Frederick et al., 2012; Witkemper et al., 2012), identifying factors such as passion, hope, esteem, camaraderie (Stavros et al., 2014), interaction, promotion, news, live game updates (Gibbs et al., 2014), fanship, passing time and entertainment (Witkemper et al., 2012). Outside of sport, many studies applying U&G theory to examine user motivations for consuming social media have used McQuail's (1983) four categories of entertainment, integration and social interaction, personal identity and information as a base, and have proceeded to add motivations including remuneration, empowerment (Muntinga et al., 2011), relaxation and surveillance/knowledge about others (Whiting and Williams, 2013). Of the six motivations for consuming social media identified by Muntinga et al. (2011), three (information, entertainment and remuneration) were identified as motivations for consuming brand-related content, with the information and entertainment motivations being the most pertinent in the case of Twitter (Witkemper et al., 2012). Beyond this, social interactions and brand interactions (Jahn and Kunz, 2012) have been put forward as relationship-oriented gratifications sought through social media consumption.

The information motivation includes surveillance, knowledge, pre-purchase information and inspiration (Muntinga et al., 2011). The provision of information could thus include content about the brand or organisation itself, the sponsored property or other news which will be of relevance to the audience (Swani et al., 2014). Notably for sponsors, sports fans use social media such as Twitter for information-gathering purposes (Filo et al., 2015); therefore, a key benefit of social media for sponsorship activation is its ability to allow brands

to engage consumers through the provision of interesting, instantaneous, real-time content updates (Meenaghan et al., 2013; Millan and Ball, 2012; Pappasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012).

With sports fans craving athlete-centred content such as behind-the-scenes access (Williams, 2012), social media presents sponsors with an opportunity to satisfy consumers' entertainment gratification (Witkemper et al., 2012). Entertaining content can be thought of as anything not directly related to the brand (De Vries et al., 2012), including 'escaping or being diverted from problems or routine, emotional release or relief, relaxation, cultural or aesthetic enjoyment, passing time and sexual arousal' (Muntinga et al., 2011, p.19).

The third motivation for consuming brand-related content found by Muntinga et al. (2011) was remuneration, in terms of using social media to obtain some future benefit. Sales promotions such as competitions and giveaways are commonly used activation tactics (Papadimitriou and Apostolopoulou, 2009) and therefore social media offers a further opportunity to activate sponsorships through the use of these promotional devices. In other cases, the benefit consumers get from social media is in the form of social, rather than monetary, value (Taylor et al., 2011). Finally, and consistent with Jahn and Kunz's (2012) relationship-oriented gratifications of social and brand interactions, sports fans use Twitter not only for information-gathering but also for interactivity (Filo et al., 2015), meaning that sponsors are also presented with the opportunity to facilitate dialogue (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2011) around the sponsored event (and possibly the brand).

While much previous work on the use of social media by brands has been underpinned by the theoretical framework of relationship marketing (Filo et al., 2015), U&G

theory has been applied to the study of Twitter content posted by athletes (Hambrick et al., 2010). These authors categorised content produced by athletes according to known user motivations for consuming such content (from Clavio (2008) and Seo and Green (2008)), identifying that Twitter posts by athletes can help followers to meet their need for entertainment, diversion and information gathering (*ibid.*). Thus, in Hambrick et al.'s (2010) work, athletes are seen as content providers, with the content they produced being mapped against known motivations that fans have for seeking out such content. It thus follows that if sponsors, also playing the role of social media content providers, are to develop content with which their followers are going to want to engage, then follower motivations for consuming brand-related content on Twitter need to be considered. Consequently, and consistent with the approach of Hambrick et al. (2010), this study draws on U&G theory to categorise the types of content posted by sponsors in order to address the following research question:

RQ2: How do the categories of sponsorship-linked Twitter content relate to user motivations for consuming brand-related social media content?

As the focus of the study is on the nature of content posted by sponsors, the goal in relating the Twitter content types to U&G theory is to examine the extent to which the content posted matches known user motivations for consuming brand-related social media content. Therefore, the method used to address the research questions is outlined in the next section.

Methodology

This study adopts content analysis, described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p.1278) as 'a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the

systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns,' using Tweets as the unit of analysis (Lin and Pena, 2011). Content analysis has been extensively employed in the study of social media (cf. Shen and Bissell, 2013; Lin and Pena, 2011; Waters and Jamal, 2011; Rybalko and Seltzer, 2010) and the development of subsequent typologies (Park and McMillan, 2015), and is a useful tool through which to identify the creative strategies used by brands on social media (Ashley and Tuten, 2015). It is not the intention of this study to draw conclusions about the activation strategies and objectives pursued by sponsors, but rather to assess the extent to which these sponsors are producing content which coheres with known user motivations, regardless of whether this connection was intentional or not. However, it is acknowledged that incorporating data on sponsor objectives would represent a fruitful area for future research to extend the current study.

Given the lack of existing categories of sponsorship-linked Twitter content and with the aim being to describe the content produced by sponsors (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008), this study began with an inductive approach to conventional content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). As such, the lead researcher immersed herself in the data, with categories identified from that data (Kondracki et al., 2002). Subsequent to the inductive development of the initial content categories, a deductive approach to content analysis was employed to categorise the remainder of the sample and to group the categories according to known user motivations for consuming brand-related Twitter content. Keeping in mind the importance of interesting and relevant content in engaging consumers on social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), the thematic content, rather than structure of the Tweets was the focus of analysis, thus overarching themes or subjects which can be adopted by sponsors in the development of future activational social media content were identified.

Sampling

Prior to commencing data collection, a search took place to identify the official Twitter accounts of all 53 official sponsors of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Active, English language Twitter accounts were identified for 44 of these sponsors. Where a sponsor had multiple official Twitter accounts, all of those identified as relevant to the Olympic sponsorship context were selected. For example, UPS had the Twitter accounts @UPS, @UPS_News and @UPS_London2012.

All posts relating to the brands' sponsorship of the Olympic Games from the start of January 2011 to the end of September 2012 were manually retrieved by the research team, with support from a trained research assistant. Rather than relying on software to extract either all Tweets, which would lead to a considerable number of irrelevant pieces of data, or Tweets containing searchable terms such as hashtags, which would eliminate those Tweets not using particular keywords, this manual retrieval process allowed for the identification of a total sampling frame within which all Tweets were directly related to the sponsorship. The judgement of the researchers and trained research assistant was used in identifying which Tweets related to Olympic sponsorship. As these researchers were living in the UK at the time of data collection, this involved full immersion in the activation campaigns of the sponsors, consulting sponsor-produced activational materials such as advertisements, sales promotions and other web content as well as immersion in the ongoing dialogue around the Olympic Games in the media. Such immersion allowed for a detailed and contextually rich understanding of whether sponsors were discussing anything related to their sponsorship or the Olympic Games more generally as distinct from other non-sponsorship-related Tweets. For example, without such knowledge and immersion in the sponsorship campaigns, Tweets

such as the following from Cadbury would have been excluded from the population: “*Anyone coming down to Westfield, Sheppher's Bush in London today? We're playing Creme Egg: Goo Dares Wins shortly! <http://yfrog.com/hs277gsj>.*” The researchers’ immersion in the Cadbury activation campaign identified that “Goo Dares Wins” was part of the brand’s “Goo Games” events, which fell under the overarching campaign idea of playing their way to London 2012 (Cadbury, 2011).

In contrast to other studies of social media content in sport, which have focused on shorter periods of time (Pegoraro, 2010; Stavros et al., 2014) or have just covered the duration of a sponsored event (Geurin and Gee, 2014), Tweets were collected from 1st January 2011 to 30th September 2012. Thus, the data collection period included Tweets posted at significant milestones such as ‘1 year to go’ and the start of the Olympic year (2012) as well as those posted during and immediately following the Olympic and Paralympic Games. A total of 19983 Tweets was manually retrieved from Twitter and pasted into an Excel document. Due to the large number of Tweets, a sample of 1502 Tweets was used to develop the typology. This sample size greatly exceeds the number of posts analysed in previous studies which have performed qualitative content analysis on social media data (Hambrick et al., 2010; Shen and Bissell, 2013; Waters and Jamal, 2011). To ensure a representative spread of Tweets throughout the data collection period was included in the sample, stratified random sampling was employed, using a random number generator to identify a random sample of Tweets per month in proportion to the total number of Tweets posted that month (i.e. the desired sample size of 1500 represented 7.5% of the overall number of Tweets, thus 7.5% of Tweets per month were sampled. Any minor deviations from this proportion are due to rounding in order to get a whole number of Tweets per month). The total and sampled numbers of Tweets per month are recorded below in Table 1. Prior to

data analysis, the authors could not determine whether the type of Tweet would vary according to time; therefore, inclusion of Tweets from each month of the data collection period maximised the chances of all Tweet types being included in the sample.

[Table 1 near here]

Coding framework development

Given the lack of a pre-existing categorisation of social media posts and consistent with the inductive approach of qualitative content analysis, an initial sample of 100 Tweets was open coded (Schreier, 2012) by one of the authors. At this stage the analysis was grounded in the Twitter data, with the categories emerging from a detailed qualitative interrogation of the key themes within the sampled Tweets. An iterative process of refining, adding and removing categories took place, resulting in the production of a codebook, which contained the inductively-identified content categories along with a description and example, to be used in the deductive phase of qualitative content analysis. In this deductive phase, the second coder was comprehensively briefed on the inductively-developed categories detailed in the codebook, before both coders coded a second sample of 100 Tweets. Any Tweets not felt to fit one of the categories were put aside and upon completion of this coding session, the authors discussed these Tweets to resolve issues. Intercoder reliability, assessed using Cohen's *kappa* was 0.488, which can be assessed as a moderate level of agreement (Landis and Koch, 1977). As this was below 0.7, the explanations in the codebook were revised, added to and fully discussed between both coders to ensure consistency of understanding and interpretation.

An additional set of 100 Tweets was then coded by both coders, who engaged in dialogue throughout the coding process to resolve any issues of uncertainty or disagreement about particular Tweets or codes. During this second set of coding, it was felt that one of the categories was too broad and actually encompassed Tweets which could be sub-divided into additional categories. Therefore, revisions were again made to the codebook before both coders recoded the additional set of 100 Tweets. In this case, an acceptable intercoder reliability of 0.732 was achieved. The remainder of the Tweets was then divided equally between the two coders. Once this process was complete, the coders again discussed any Tweets where they were unsure of the appropriate category, resulting in all Tweets being assigned to a particular category.

Results

Categories of sponsorship-linked Twitter content

Through the inductive content analysis, seventeen categories of sponsorship-linked Twitter content were identified (RQ1). These are outlined, including a description and example of each category, in Table 2 below.

[Table 2 near here]

Sponsorship-linked Twitter content and user motivations

In line with the tenets of conventional content analysis, once the categories of Twitter content had been developed, linkages between categories were identified and the categories

were related to literature and grouped (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) into main types relating to social media uses and gratifications (RQ2). The starting point for the grouping was to use the three motivations for consuming brand-related social media content of information, entertainment and remuneration, identified by Muntinga et al. (2011). However, during the process of grouping the categories according to these three motivations, it became clear that several categories did not fit into any of these user motivations. Upon closer examination, it was identified that these categories were more interactive, discursive and conversational in tone, thus reflecting social and brand interactions gratifications for consuming social media content (Jahn and Kunz, 2012). . Therefore, the following four types were developed: informing, entertaining, rewarding and interacting. The types (with their related categories) are identified and explained, alongside the frequency of each type within the sample of 1502 Tweets, in Table 3 below.

[Table 3 near here]

Discussion

It is clear from the seventeen categories identified that sponsors are posting a diverse array of content on Twitter as part of their activation campaigns. In many cases, the Twitter content reflects an online application of their offline activations, for example prize competitions. In other cases, social media appears to be used as a support tool for offline activations, such as posts about experiential events (e.g. *“In case you missed it yesterday. We opened the P&G nearest&nearest lounge at the @TeamGB house yesterday!* @ThankYouMum #pgolympics” from Proctor & Gamble) or showcasing sponsorship-linked adverts (e.g. *“Get a sneak peek of our new #London2012 TV advert featuring*

@marlondevonish I due to go out on @ITV this evening: <http://gsk.to/P9vClg>" by GSK).

Therefore, consistent with many previous studies of social media use by organisations (Mamic and Alvaraz, 2013; Svensson et al., 2015; Waters and Jamal 2011; Waters and Williams 2011), many sponsors use Twitter as a one-way communications tool as part of an integrated sponsorship activation campaign.

However, there are also examples of sponsors exploiting the interactive and technological potential of Twitter, for example, to host live Q&A sessions (e.g. "*Q. If you weren't doing athletics, what other sport would you play?@BertStanley #takethecrown*" and "*@jgduggan ...but at the same time I used it in a colour blocking way and dismantled the conventions of the Union Flag. Great question!*" by Adidas) or to post photographs in which followers can tag themselves and share via their own Twitter feeds (e.g. "*If you were at yesterday's #torchrelay celebration in Inverness, tag yourself in our Big Cheer pic*<http://samsung.com/uk/london2012/olympic-torch-relay/#inverness> <http://pic.twitter.com/zSi47CHw>" by Samsung). These uses of social media cohere with the notion of activational communication (Weeks et al., 2008) as sponsors recognise the importance of interacting with followers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and adopting a human touch (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011) in their activations.

Thus, the Twitter content provided by sponsors coheres with four previously-identified user motivations for consuming brand-related social media content (Jahn and Kunz 2012; Muntinga et al., 2011). Categories identified under the 'informing' type are largely factual in nature, with a focus on communicating some form of information, either about the sponsor as in 'Company Promotion' (e.g. "*UK: Fly after the Games to Singapore from just £619 rtn in November. Find other low fares to the Far East here* <http://bit.ly/b2ha5h>" from

British Airways), its sponsorship activities (including other activations) ('Deal Announcement' and 'Activational Promotion' (e.g. "*Have you taken Steve home yet? Sir Steve Redgrave is our first Collectable medallion. More on #legendscollection: <http://bp.com/medallions>*" by BP)) or the sponsored event itself ('Sharing the News' (e.g. "*Jade Faulkner says her fight to make it to the Olympics will be worth it. <http://fb.me/2j4mGYJjP>*" by Gymnova) and the more informal 'Event Observations' (e.g. "*And they're off! #TeamGB looking good! #MensTriathlon#BTLondonLive*" by BT)). As shown above in Table 3, and consistent with Geurin and Gee's (2014) findings in relation to Molson Canada, the 'informing' type dominated the posts made by sponsors of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, accounting for 68% of Tweets in the sample. Within this, two distinct categories, with different areas of focus, dominated the posts: 'Sharing the News' (22%), with a focus more on transmitting information about the sponsored property and 'Activational Promotion' (26%), which has a much more sponsor-centric, commercial orientation. As individuals primarily use Twitter for informational and entertainment purposes (Witkemper et al., 2012), this type of communication from sponsors coheres with user motivations and thus will be seen to add value to fans' consumption of the wider sponsored event. In particular, by tweeting about the sponsored event as well as just the brand, sponsors are tapping into shared interests of their followers and it is these, not pure brand-related content, which are likely to stimulate engagement (Aaker, 2013).

The 'entertaining' type is characterised by Tweets that offer some form of diversionary content, either in the unidirectional communication of trivia or 'Fun Facts' ("*Did you know, what's now known as the Olympic Torch Relay first began in 1936? Anyone lucky enough to be a torch bearer this year?*" by P&G) or fostering a degree of interactivity by 'Playing Games', encouraging some form of non-remunerated activity among followers

(e.g. “*We’ve come up with Beth Tweddle Green, Half Pike Lane, Tom Parsons Green can you think of any more? Tweet your #olympictubestop suggestions*” by Thomas Cook), fitting with identified motivations for using social media to pass time (Witkemper et al., 2012) and escape from routine (Muntinga et al., 2011). Given its prevalence in literature on user motivations for consuming social media content (cf. Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013; Muntinga et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2011), it is perhaps somewhat surprising that the ‘entertaining’ type accounted for only 2% of Tweets in the sample. If entertaining content is defined as anything unrelated to the brand (De Vries et al., 2012), then given that all of the Tweets in this study related in some way to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Tweets in many categories outside of the ‘entertaining’ type contained non-brand-related content (e.g. ‘Sharing the News,’ ‘Event Observations,’ ‘Wishing them Luck,’ ‘Congratulations’ and ‘Q&A’). As such, it is perhaps the case that while the ‘entertaining’ type was quite small in terms of Tweets with a pure entertainment focus, many other Tweets adopted a dual role in that they were informative, rewarding or interactional but also provided content deemed to be entertaining.

Categories within the ‘rewarding’ type relate in some way to an expected future benefit for followers, in the form of competitions (‘Prize Competitions’), their associated terms and conditions (‘Rules’) and the announcement of winners (‘Winners’). The use of sales promotions is common more widely as a sponsorship activation tool (O’Reilly and Lafrance Horning, 2013); therefore it is unsurprising that ‘Prize Competitions’ (e.g. “*It’s day two of our 3 day #openingtheway 10 & today you can win Eurostar tickets to your chosen destination*<http://bit.ly/otheway>” by Eurostar) accounted for 10% of Tweets in the sample. The use of Twitter as a platform for sponsorship-linked competitions coheres with the notion of rewards and incentives as other frequently cited user motivations for consuming social

media (Rohm et al., 2013; Muntinga et al., 2011) and as such represents further evidence of sponsors making effective use of Twitter to provide content that is valued by their followers.

Tweets under the 'interacting' type tend to be more reciprocal in tone, often asking questions, or adopting a more human and friendly voice, consistent with notions of dialogue (Lovejoy and Sexton, 2011), companionship (Muntinga et al., 2011) and a personal touch (Weinberg and Pehliven, 2011). While Tweets in all of the categories were visible to all followers through their regular Twitter feed, some were targeted more towards participants in the sponsored event ('Wishing them Luck,' 'Congratulations' and 'Participant Messages') whereas others were more general in target ('Follower Greetings' and 'Chit-chatting'). The use of a more informal tone in categories such as 'Chit-chatting,' (e.g. "*If you could ask any Olympian past or present a question about the London 2012 Olympic Games, what would it be?*" by BT), which represented 6% of messages in the sample, where the emphasis is on sharing the experience of being at an event or engaging in general chatter about the sponsored event, again evidences that sponsors are embracing more personal (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011) or human personas within their Twitter content. Although often representing an activation by the sponsor, as argued above, Tweets containing live Twitter Q&A sessions, often with athletes ('Q&A'), were identified as fitting under 'interacting', due to the inherently interactive nature of audience-generated questions and athlete-generated answers. Finally, the frequently used Twitter practice of 'Follow Friday' (ff) is included in the 'interacting' type ('Following Recommendations') as it draws on notions of helping, identified as a form of social interaction by Muntinga et al. (2011).

From the above discussion it is clear that a much broader range of sponsorship-linked Twitter content, particularly of the interacting type, was found, than had been identified in

previous studies (Abeza et al., 2014; Geurin and Gee, 2011). Thus, this study builds on existing literature and, through its focus solely on sponsorship-linked content and the deep immersion of the researchers in the data, offers a finer-grained level of detail in terms of how sponsors are using social media within their activation campaigns. This detail in terms of categories of sponsorship-linked Tweets and their relationship with known user motivations thus has implications for sponsors, as discussed in the next section.

Implications for practice

By mapping the identified Tweet categories onto user motivations for consuming social media content, the typology has practical relevance to sponsors seeking to inform their sponsorship-linked social media content with an understanding of what followers want and what will motivate new Twitter users to follow the brand. Given that sports fans frequently turn to Twitter for real-time updates on sports events (Millan and Ball, 2012), there is potential for sponsors to make more use of the event-related ‘informing’ categories of Tweet, such as ‘Sharing the News’ and ‘Event Observations’ to provide content which is relevant to their followers (Schmitt, 2012) and thus to drive brand engagement around the theme of the sponsored property. However, as was demonstrated in the context of sponsorship-linked video advertisements (Carrillat et al., 2015), if the relevance is there then sponsors might also benefit from posting content which showcases the brand as a sponsor, whilst still being more commercial in focus (e.g. ‘Company Promotion’ and ‘Activational Promotion’).

In terms of entertainment, this study identifies an opportunity for sponsors to create content which is both ‘entertaining’ as well as ‘informing’, ‘rewarding’ or ‘interacting’. Sponsors have an in-built advantage in that they have access to properties (e.g. athletes,

venues) and content that are inherently interesting to fans of the sponsored event. This means that they are well-placed to satisfy multiple user motivations through their sponsorship-linked Twitter content. The creation of ‘rewarding’ content allows sponsors many of the same advantages that can be achieved through equivalent offline activations, but with the added audience reach of social media such as Twitter (Pegoraro et al., 2015). Therefore, sponsors must consider the scalability of any competitions they run through social media.

Finally, perhaps the greatest opportunity for engagement and thus generating significant value from social media activation lies in the use of ‘interacting’ Tweets, where brands can engage in dialogue with followers and potentially nurture relationships (Dees, 2011; Filo et al, 2015; Geurin and Gee, 2014). At one level, the benefits of association and image transfer can be relatively easily achieved by posting, for example, appropriate images. At another level, the interactive power of social media is such that it presents sponsors with clear opportunities to promote customer involvement. The onus is therefore on sponsors to understand and apply the types presented in this paper in ways that are relevant to their brands and associated products. We therefore look forward to more sophisticated practice in the field emerging as the result of this work.

Limitations and areas for future research

This study has looked purely at the use of Twitter by sponsors, yet Twitter represents only one of many social media platforms currently being employed within the context of sponsorship activation. Therefore, no claim is made for the generalisability of this typology beyond Twitter. Consequently, examining and categorising sponsorship activation content on other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat represents a fruitful

area for future research. As a result of the scale of the data collection and the number of sponsors and posts relating to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the typology has been developed based on a sample of sponsor-generated posts. While the use of stratified random sampling ensured a spread of Tweets across all months in the data collection period, it is possible that additional categories of Tweet may have been identified had a different or larger sample been used. Within the time-related stratified random sampling process, it is possible that certain sponsors were under or over-represented in the final sample. It was not the intention of this study to appraise whether certain sponsors were posting different types of Tweet. However, this potential under- or over-representation of certain sponsors means we were not able to control for the different strategies or objectives pursued by different sponsors in their activation campaigns. As such, future studies should look to incorporate some measure or qualitative understanding of sponsor objectives and then assess the content posted against these objectives to gain a more comprehensive overview of the patterns of Twitter usage for different sponsors over the lifetime of a sponsorship activation campaign. Equally, this study looked at sponsors of a global, multi-sport mega event. Therefore, a fruitful area for future research would be to examine the extent to which these findings are mirrored, or indeed differ from, sponsorship-linked Twitter content posted by sponsors of team sports, where there is a strong degree of fan attachment to the sponsored properties.

Finally, this study relied entirely on analysing the content of Tweets posted by sponsors, with no examination of consumer response to these Tweets. As such, future studies should draw on data on retweets and favourites as well as qualitative research with consumers to assess consumer attitudes towards the different types of Tweet. Social media is an incredibly fast moving area of marketing communications activity and therefore both the

nature of sponsor Tweets and user motivations for consuming Twitter content are likely to evolve over time. Future research should therefore look to combine updated sponsor-generated Twitter content (from a range of sponsorship contexts) with an appraisal of consumer response to further our understanding of the extent to which sponsors are providing their followers with sponsorship-related content which they value.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to develop a typology of sponsorship-linked Twitter content in order to gain a greater understanding of the nature of content being posted by sponsors within their activation campaigns. By examining, thematically and in detail, the sponsorship-linked content posted by sponsors, this study builds on previous work which had identified that sponsors were communicating about their sponsorships on Twitter (Abeza et al., 2014) and extends this, through the lens of U&G theory, to identify that sponsors are creating content on Twitter which coheres, to a large degree, with the motivations individuals have for consuming social media.

The categories in the typology showcase sponsors using Twitter as a vehicle for both one-way and two-way communication around the sponsored property. The inclusion of Tweets of an interactional nature in particular, highlights the use of Twitter not merely as another sponsorship mouthpiece but as a vehicle for engaging in dialogue with the target audience, creating a sense of reciprocity and ‘human-ness’ among sponsors in this social medium. Thus, this study advances the growing academic body of knowledge on sponsorship activation strategies, while also acting as a guide for both sponsors looking at planning campaigns and for rights holders in understanding the assets valued by sponsors in the digital landscape.

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Table 1: Total and sampled Tweets per month

Month	Total Tweets Posted	Tweets in Sample
January 2011	149	11
February 2011	247	18
March 2011	310	23
April 2011	382	29
May 2011	301	23
June 2011	259	20
July 2011	611	45
August 2011	597	45
September 2011	766	58
October 2011	460	35
November 2011	380	29
December 2011	486	38
January 2012	860	64
February 2012	695	51
March 2012	752	56
April 2012	924	69
May 2012	1160	87
June 2012	1412	106
July 2012	3378	254
August 2012	4560	344
September 2012	1295	97
Total	19983	1502

Table 2: Categories of spacetime

<i><u>Category</u></i>	<i><u>Desc</u></i>
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Follower greetings	Twe

Q&A

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	Sharing th

	<p>Fun Facts</p>

	Chit-chatt