Testing Whiting and Williams's social media Uses and Gratifications Model in building Creator Economies through Mega Sporting Events

By

Noura Eissa
Associate Professor of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Political Science FEPS, Future University in Egypt FUE
Email noura.eissa@fue.edu.eg

Eiman Abdel Maksoud Eissa[2]
Department of Mass Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, Qatar University, PO Box 2713, Doha, Qatar
E.mail eeissa@qu.edu.qa

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between social media, sports mega events, and creator economy. First, we present a literature review highlighting previous research conducted on the rise of dependence on social media for building creator economy towards MSEs during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a summary of Whiting and Williams social media uses and gratifications model and the instrumental case study methodology applied in this research. The results offer a practical application of Whiting and Williams social media Uses and Gratifications Model 2013 that serves as theory-testing, next an analysis is conducted on the MSE's utilisation of social media and MSEs as a tool for the creator economy. Finally, limitations are presented, and future research is suggested.

Keywords: creator economy, social media, value creation, decision-making, uses and gratification theory

Introduction

Megaevents are enduring marks on the calendars of modern societies, the intergenerational cultural references, and the memorable points associated with great parades, shows, and festivals. Mega Sporting Events (MSEs) are large-scale sporting events within a time-specific-networking-spacing framework of the host country and non-state actors dependent on media reach, public relationships, popularity, and interactions among interest groups (Roche, 2017). Lamirán -Palomares et al. (2019) emphasise the networking of various sectors of the sports industry, business models, and communication strategies. MSE interest groups include the event owners or organisers, such as the national FIFA Organising Committee.

Global diplomacy shapes the international images of countries as tourism and business development sites, and thus sports mega events hold a significant role in public diplomacy efforts (Nauright, 2013). Boykoff et al. (2020) emphasise the role of MSE capacities as a reflection of general social and cultural processes and change. Social media, as a tool, penetrates strongly into people's lives, dynamically changing social interactions among individuals, societies, communities, institutional structures, and professional routines (Wenner et al., 2017). In the sporting context, Stavros et al. (2008) explain that sport organisations seek

to build relationships with fans to enhance fan loyalty. With social media, consumers can actively produce content (Armstrong et al., 2016). Within specific industries such as sports, the advantages of social media appear well suited to brand and relationship building with fans (Wallace et al., 2011). Social media offer considerable shifts in the interaction and consumption of sport, whereby sport brands now can foster personal relationships with consumers through increased brand interaction (Ross *et al.*, 2008).

The connection between social media, major sporting events, and the creative economy is examined in this article. Following a summary of Whiting and Williams's social media uses and gratifications model and the instrumental case study methodology used in this research, we first present a review of the literature highlighting prior research on the growth of reliance on social media for creating creator economies toward MSEs during the COVID-19 pandemic. After investigating how the MSE uses social media and MSEs as a tool for the creator economy, the results provide a practical application of Whiting and Williams' (2013) social media Uses and Gratifications Model, which also serves as theory-testing. Finally, restrictions are listed and suggestions for further study are made.

Review of Literature

Rise of social media for Sports Mega Events during the COVID-19 Pandemic
Previous studies emphasise the impact of social media on sports mega events. Atkinson and Young (2012) investigate the framing of socio-political issues in MSEs strengthening the role of electronic media sources. Murray & Pigman (2014) prioritise the shift toward social media reach and MSEs during times of social distancing. The COVID-19 pandemic required sports entities to seek additional actions to show that they are committed to society during this crisis (López-Carril & Anagnostopoulos, 2020). Giulianotti and Collison (2020) emphasise the unpredictable future of MSEs, stand-stillness, and postponements discussed on social media, as a key site, even with limited live sports due to the global pandemic.

With the spread of COVID19, the MSE environment faced several changes, decisions had to be made in accordance with social responsibility thus, during 2020 many events were postponed, cancelled, replaced with e-tournaments, or held with precautions which limited the number of players and spectators involved. A joint task force decided whether to launch the Tokyo Olympics, which included the host city of Tokyo, the Japanese government, the IOC and the WHO. The WHO, according to the IOC (2020), is the contingency planner and the instrumental information provider, offering advice to international health experts. In global risk management, WHO experts are referred to for mitigation measures for mass gatherings aimed at maintaining an all-inclusive safe environment for MSEs. Furthermore, the stand-stillness of Euro 2020 (17 March 2020) was a collaborative and coordinated response involving the WHO, restrictive orders from national governments and local authorities, the UEFA, the European League, the European Club Association, and FIFPro Europe (UEFA, 2020). The role of social media thrived during this period, as the organisers used social media to keep the audience's updated with the latest developments, as well as enhance their image through social marketing messages/campaigns. In times of pandemic, immediate high-speed decision-making and rapid political intervention are needed (Hanreider and Kreuder-Sonnen, 2014). The responsibility to act to postpone or cancel MSEs lay with the owners and organisers of those events in a "truly exceptional period" in social history (Parnell et al., 2020). Sport governing bodies such as Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), and International Olympic Committee (IOC), are positioned to adopt guidelines and feedback from the World Health Organization (WHO), health experts, and other

committees. The sport governing bodies responded to key recommendations; thus they rescheduled events to contain outbreaks in times of uncertainty.

Expert groups include, but are not limited to, assessment committees with roles in assessing risks and whether any changes are required in international gatherings at the event planning level (The Guardian, 2020); scientific interpretation committees which provide scientific knowledge on the global crisis and debate heterogeneous scientific interpretations (Constandt and Willem, 2020); and economic policymakers who rationalise decisions based on opportunity costs and trade-off principles, weighing the opportunity costs versus hosting a portfolio of smaller, non-sport, home-grown events (Giulianotti et al., 2020). Collaborative decisions are framed within the sustainability framework with its leveraging benefits and embedded sustainable activities (Smith et al., 2015; Eissa 2020).

Using a digital qualitative approach and drawing upon frame analysis, Lee (2021) examines how sport governing bodies communicated their initial responses to the pandemic. Social media allow athletes, teams, and MSE organisers to build an interactive consumer base and foster fan relationships. Filo et al. (2015) emphasise the use of social media for popularity, public relations, and communication, common to athletes, teams, and sports organisations. Altruism from athletes and sports organisations, during the COVID-19 pandemic, was transmitted through channels of social and civic responsibility messaging, strengthening the priority to comply with regulations to halt the spread of the virus through social distancing, washing hands, wearing masks, etc.

Sports Media Events and the Creator Economy

The transition from traditional economic tangible goods-based economic approaches to value-creation-in-consumption-based approaches dictates the service dominant social media perspective. It is based on consumer psychological engagement, defined by Annamalai et al. (2021) as a multidimensional relationship comprising cognitive, behavioural, and affective elements. According to Abreza et al. (2013), value creation is a long-term product with consumers and stakeholders focusing on interactive relational services as the main paradigm. Vargo et al. (2020) emphasise value creation assuming primacy in the consumer's role of value exchange. The value co-creation process is built by prioritising consumer psychological engagement and facilitated by social media platforms (Brodie et al., 2013). Psychological engagement is defined as "a multidimensional construct that can comprise cognitive, affective and behavioural elements" (Annamalai et al., 2021). Hatch & Schultz (2010) identify psychological engagement as the key to forming relationships between brands and consumers, communities of consumers and stakeholders.

The creator economy has increased innovation in all forms of media, with a dynamic continuation in niche creator-led platforms in sports entertainment and commercialization. Many legacy cable customers opted, in just the last two years, to move to YouTube TV, Hulu, Amazon, and Facebook streaming platforms. Although these platforms do not stream every game and lack regional sports networks, there are micropayment and subscription-based companies that allow consumers to tune in to only the worthwhile moments of sporting events (i.e., last ten minutes), such as Buzzer, and private Facebook pages. In the United States, for example, according to SportsPro Media, every broadcaster launched over-the-top (OTT) platforms in 2021 or 2022 (Yan et al., 2019).

To maintain relevance and presence, sport governing bodies integrate social media platforms and fortify collaborations with newfound energy, enhancing their digital footprints (Karg et al., 2021). For example, the digitalization of stadium experiences using smartphones

encourages fans to co-create content. As digital compensation grew, it progressed from hastily added content to comprehensive esports and virtual alternatives (Woratschek et al., 2020). MSEs are complex meta-digital entertainment systems designed in a creator economy to strengthen fan engagement, and celebrity athlete brand monetization. Since the emergence of social media, athletes, federations, clubs, and sports brands have embraced it, using it to develop their personal brands (Geurin and Burch 2017).

While technology firms have begun to integrate content, the creator economy has encouraged sports properties to move into technology. With the 2021 omicron variant global pandemic responses, supply chain challenges, and labour shortages, MSEs transferred to esports and OTT streaming. Investment in the esports industry to connect with existing and potential sports fans is evident; up to $2.5 billion in 2022, communicating high audience growth in streaming. The sport governing bodies value MSEs in the esports format, while esports teams are dependent on the creator economy, streaming, branded merchandise, and corporate sponsorship. There are catalyst roles for esports teams to increase monetization, and professionalism, such as the initial public offer (IPO) via a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) of Faze Clan.

Significance of Sports Mega Events in Nation Branding

Sports mega events are an important transcontinental tool for political rapprochement between nations and countries (Almashat, 2021). Hosting MSEs, from a national perspective, increases the willingness of governments to instrumentalize sports to promote their image and prestige (Grix, 2012). De Almeida et al. (2014) explain how the bidding process and staging are strategies to give a country recognition and symbolic power on the international scene. Grix, et al. (2019) cite examples of proactive sport diplomacy, such as Germany's hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the 2014 Winter Olympic games in Sochi, were thought by the Russian government to "signal strengths in the contemporary international order" (Alekseyeva, 2014). In 2008, the Chinese government showcased China's technological and economic advancements, as well as its organisational capacities through the Beijing Olympic Games (Panagiotopoulou, 2012).

Countries' decisions to host MSEs physically or through virtual means embeds the leveraging approach, the image of the ability of the host community to qualify as a competitor in the global market and attract both domestic and international consumers, i.e., consumer tourism. Blackman et al. (2016) argue that no public relations campaign could garner the effects of hosting MSEs and launching them through social media. Social media and MSE national networking are *de facto* states of potential, with expected enforcement of creative and skilful management, even when the risk of whether the country is considered a brand, or not, is delivered. Branding theory, in origin, is the development of a nation's competitive advantage in the cluttered global marketplace. On a broader level, social media and nation branding hold a larger national agenda for nation building (Knott et al., 2013). Branding is multifaceted, originating from the nation brand construct (Dinnie, 2015). Culture, language, political regimes, history, and literature, "are communicated to a desired audience through a variety of means (such as branded exports, sporting achievements, cultural artefacts, brand ambassadors, tourism experience and prominent personalities)", which create a subjective image of a nation that is shared by customers, investors, governments, and the media (Knott et al., 2017).

Nation imagery and place meaning are enhanced through the popularising of MSEs, which hosting countries use as a catalyst for change. Nations engage in MSEs, delivered through media channels in various dimensions. Nation branding through MSE social media

publicises a country's narrative, characteristics, and cultural heritage to increase attraction (Ahmed, 2020). For example, the misperception of the audience of African nations before they hosted the World Cup in 2010, known as the dilemma of Brand Africa, as a collective continent of violence and corruption, was corrected by social media (Freire, 2014). The hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup by Germany brought about fundamental changes in global attitudes to Germany, which was seen by the audience as friendly and welcoming but was rebranded as a hip and trendy place (Zollner, 2016). Qatar is currently branding itself as a sports nation, through social media accounts such as #Roadto2022 on TikTok. Using the nation's co-staging of the 2002 FIFA World Cup as an example, Dinnie (2015) illustrates how the South Korean government took advantage of its originality to increase global recognition of the nation's brand name products, boost exports, and raise the nation's brand image overseas. Evans et al. (2020) argue that the London 2012 Olympic Games portrayed the United Kingdom as a "once in a generation opportunity" through its marketing strategies and global positioning.

Consumer perception of MSE host nations is dependent on the nature of the consumer, the psychological aspect, whether the consumer is flexible in mind and open to experience or fixed in mind with a relative perception of the country on the positive or negative side. Rojas-Méndez (2020) argues that media comments and posts can explain variations in general perceptions of the hosts of MSEs based on a longitudinal study of the effects of the 2014 World Cup on Brazil's overall image. The findings show that the fixed-minded consumer with a relatively negative pre-event attitude toward Brazil could shift their attitude with positive media, viewing the closing ceremony and actively searching for Brazil news. Others, with high openness to experience are reported to be neutral, with a negligible effect on their attitudes. Notwithstanding, the overall net effect was improvement in consumer tourism and potential new consumer tourism.

Role of social media in Preserving Consumer Loyalty towards Disrupted Mega Sporting Events

Social media platforms have strategic operational roles to play in building consumer loyalty, according to the theory of relationship marketing. Relationship marketing is a process that involves service delivery, consumer behaviour, communication, and strategy building, to create and maintain bonds between stakeholders and consumers through mutual and interactive exchange (Abreza et al., 2013). Relationship marketing is a supply-demand derivative and an engagement concept that clarifies why brands use social media to strategically build and facilitate relationships between consumers and stakeholders. Relationship building executes and sustainably cultivates long-term loyal relationships between consumers and stakeholders, and the importance of consumers (users) as co-creators and participants in sports committees and communities, in turn, benefits brands.

Social media has transformed the way sports products are offered, encouraging fan participation within the media's reach. Consumers are empowered to play a larger role in the creation of content for MSEs, before, during, and after the event (Li et al., 2019; Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Billings et al., 2019). Sport consumers set their interests and informational needs through media reach, selecting which official social media accounts, such as events, teams, leagues, coaches, and players, to follow. For example, during a MSE, a social media user can watch the game live on BeIN Sports Live Streaming, receive WhatsApp pictures from a friend who went to the game, follow the team's official Twitter account and their favourite player's account on Instagram, watch the highlights of the game afterwards on YouTube, then watch critic videos on Facebook. The user can retweet the team's messages, write a comment to her favourite player, like the YouTube video that played the critic's reruns, follow the critic's

Facebook page, and reply to her friend with a meme showing how unlucky they were not to attend the game. Using these new channels, fans can instantly share their emotions with a wide audience, causing the sport's consumption (Watanabe et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study bridges between creator economy and uses and gratification. The audience-based uses and gratifications theory (UGT) sees the audience as a source of challenge for producers. It is used by MSE organisers to attract the consumers and sustain their on-going interest. Katz et al. (1973) reason that the UGT detaches media from being parameterized by audience expectations, and rather it caters to the multiplicity of role requirements. Event organisers, teams, players, and media channels use social media to perform the functions that keep audiences interested. Social media enables the audience to create their own experiences to satisfy UGT functions. Updates to the UGT are presented by several researchers who aim to apply traditional theory in accordance with new media developments, specifically social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Lou et al., 2018). Social media connects people by giving them the means to create accounts, invite friends, send messages, and upload pictures and videos. Organisations often use social media to promote their products and services.

McQuail et al (1972), pinpointed the four main functions that audiences use the media for: 1) diversion which represents the emotional release, as they can use media to escape from routine, burdens and problems; 2) personal relationships which enhances societal relationships as well as offer substitute ones; 3) personal identity enhancement though setting personal images and self-value as well as self-exploration; and 4) surveillance aimed at learning new information about the world we live in to live a safely. MSE audiences seem to voluntarily get exposed to ongoing news, experiences, and jokes/memes about the event. Although the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is audience-based, it is often used by media creators to attract the users and to keep them interested, thus loyal. Katz et al. (1973) initiated this track of thought almost four decades ago, as they explained, "instead of depicting the media as severely circumscribed by audience expectations, the uses and gratifications approach highlights the audience as a source of challenge to producers to cater more richly to the multiplicity of requirements and roles that is has disclosed." (p. 521). Thus, the event organisers, the teams, the players, and the media channel all use social media to fulfil the functions that keep the audiences interested. In turn, social media has enabled the audience to create their own experiences that satisfy the UGT functions.

Updates to the UGT were presented by researchers who aimed to apply the traditional theory in accordance with the new media developments, specifically social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013). "Social media allows people to connect with each other by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends, sending messages, and uploading photos and videos. Whiting and Williams's (2013) application of the UGT in relation to social media consist of ten functions: information seeking, information sharing, knowledge about others, expression of opinion, communicatory utility, convenience utility, social interaction, entertainment, pass time, and relaxation.

Material and Methods

Rule & John (2015), pinpoint the two approaches of linking theories and case studies as inductive "theory-building approach" or deductive "theory-testing approach." Theories are powerful because they can explain phenomena and their relationships by providing interpretive

or explanatory insight (Rule & John, 2015). In turn, case studies are important as they offer theory-testing; as Ulriksen and Dadalauri (2014) explain "single case studies can provide vital contributions to theory-testing in social science studies," (p. 223). This research focuses on the deductive approach, where Whiting and Williams's (2013) uses and gratifications theory for social media is applied to the case study of Mega Sporting Events, specifically the TOKYO2020 Olympics. It is an analytical application research, where a specific case study is conducted using a qualitative content analysis on the English TOKYO2020 Facebook page. The data sources used are the posts on the English TOKYO2020 Facebook page and public reactions to them (i.e., comments, likes/loves). A purposive sample was used to analyze data that is relevant to the theory under study.

The significance of this research lies in its academic and institutional roles. First, it offers theory-testing of Whiting and Williams's (2013) social media uses and gratifications model, which is an extension of McQuail's (1972) traditional uses and gratifications theory. The researchers realised the comprehensiveness of the new model in relation to the social media environment, but also noticed that there is limited research that tests its application. Next, this research offers an opportunity for other Mega Sporting Events organisers to learn about the process of appealing to the needs of the audiences through utilising the functions of Whiting and Williams's (2013) uses and gratifications theory for social media during difficult times. They can also benefit from this case study in developing the fan-base loyalty throughout longer time spans using these strategies. This is an instrumental case study which goes beyond the case and aims to offer guidance in future events. The research aims to explore the MSEs' social media strategies used to enhance the uses and gratifications functions for the consumers. The main research question is: How do SMEs use social media to accommodate the consumers' uses and gratifications functions?

Results and Analysis

This section is an overview of how Mega Sporting Events fan, a social media user, can apply Whiting and Williams's (2013) functions using an analytical application followed by examples that were applied in the TOKYO2020 Facebook account. Each of the ten functions is discussed from the organisers' role, the consumers' role and then an example is presented from the TOKYO2020 Facebook account.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT first function is information seeking. MSE organisers can exploit this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through search engine optimization to include official social media accounts in the results. They can also actively update social media accounts and use of hashtags that the consumers can follow. Consumers can apply this UGT function by searching for information regarding the MSE events and those involved. They can also follow the social media accounts for MSE officials (organisers), team/ players/ coaches/ critics/ fan pages/ news outlets for social media accounts. Consumers can also follow hashtags that the MSE created. Often consumers face the fear of missing out (FOMO) so they end up seeking information about the trending news. An example from Tokyo 2020 Olympics Facebook page is that MSE Organizers regularly posted the competition schedules throughout the event. For example, on August 8, 2021, they posted the daily schedule. Consumers (fans) who were interested in following certain events can search for it and gain the knowledge. As of July 22, 2022, there were 828 like/loves, 42 comments and 6 shares. Although these numbers are a few, many others could have gained the knowledge but not interacted with the post.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT second function is information sharing. MSE organizers can utilize this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through. Activating hashtags for the audience to use in their own posts. They can also make social media contests where the audiences can share their submissions, as well as posting interactive posts such as questions or polls. Consumers can apply this UGT function by posting their pictures, opinions, critical analysis, submissions to contests regarding the MSEs, use hashtags to relate their posts to the MSEs Consumers are engaged in conventional information sharing and e-social practices such as hashtags for sharing trending posts, social media contests where the audience can share their submissions, and interactive posts such as polls or questions. On July 23, 2021, the organizers posted an image of the opening ceremony with the performers and a 3d model of the Olympics logo and wrote the following "Mesdames et messieurs are you enjoying the #OpeningCeremony? [Party emoji] #TOKYO2020 | #UnitedByEmotion | #StrongerTogether | #Olympics". This post received eight thousand likes/loves and 261 comments as well as 463 shares. One of the comments said ""I am still watching the extraordinary opening ceremony with my whole family. Kudos to the Japan Olympics organising committee. It is extremely heart-felt that the games must go on during the pandemic. We need the Olympics to remind us to go forth in life, in whatever situation we may be in. Life is to be celebrated and what better way than in fair and motivated challenges and tests as in the Olympics. Thank you, Japan, for going ahead with the Summer Olympics. We are very honoured to witness it all and we respect Japan for hosting it even with all the challenges on hand." This comment, among others, showed that initiating a conversation can lead to the consumers taking part in information sharing.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT third function is knowledge about others. MSE organisers can use this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through. Offering opportunities for organisers, players, fans to present their personal accomplishments, failures, and/or feelings so that the audiences can read about it and satisfy their curiosity. Consumers can apply this UGT function by seeking information about the experiences, success, failures, and feelings of players/coaches during the MSEs. An example from Tokyo 2020 Olympics Facebook page is on July 27, 2021, when the following was posted: "Carissa Moore (US Flag icon) has won the first women's surfing gold medal in #Olympics sports history at #TOKYO2020." The following hashtags were added to the post #UnitedByEmotion | #StrongerTogether. The image included in the post was of Carissa Moore on her surfboard with a big smile as she won the competition. There were 3 thousand likes and loves, 70 comments and 179 shares. An example of the comments written was "Awwww Congratulations [popper icon and redballoon]". These interactions showed support and emotion sharing.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT fourth function is expression of opinion. MSE organisers can utilise this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through requesting the audiences' opinions through polls and questions. Consumers can apply this UGT function by interacting with the polls of the MSE organisers, answer the questions they post, write their opinion in the comments of posts, react to a comment through like, love, laugh or cry, post emojis or memes that express their feelings and/or opinions. An example from Tokyo 2020 Olympics Facebook page is on August 4, 2021, when a post that includes seven images of winners and players in different sports, countries and genders, and it included the following text "That was Day 12 at #TOKYO2020. Best day yet? What has been your moment of the #Olympics so far?" This post had 4.3k likes and loves, 332 shares and 79 comments, for example there was one comment that said "The women's skateboard park showed a good

match. [I] was impressed. Especially Okamoto-san [did] her best." This post is an example of how the organisers strived to encourage the consumers' expression of opinion.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT fifth function is communicatory utility. MSE organisers can employ this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through facilitating audience communication through opening the comments on the social media posts, etc. so that the audiences can share their input on the MSE events. Consumers can apply this UGT function by posting their opinions, pictures, memes, etc. about the MSE event and those involved. Write a blog, record a video, offer a critical analysis, a comic analysis or just sharing their feelings/reacting to new information regarding the MSE events or people involved, such as the players. On July 27, 2021, The Tokyo 2020 Facebook posted a Thank you note because they had reached one million followers. The image included had "ONE MILLION FOLLOWERS!" repeated on it four times for emphasis. One comment said that "this is because Japan won 5 Judo Gold medals." This is an example of how posting updates can generate analysis/opinion sharing from the consumers.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT sixth function is convenience utility. MSE organisers can make use of this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through sharing information before, during, and after events or games, they can do so from the office or even working from home. Consumers can apply this UGT function by using all the features of social media to interact with the MSEs and those involved from anywhere, any time. While the TOKYO2020 Facebook page regularly posted updates, the consumers were free to see these posts from the time and place convenient for them. For example, a series of videos were posted of Olympians doing their workouts at home and giving directions to the consumers. For example, on May 14, 2020, a video of Federico Molinari, Olympic Gymnastic finalist at London 2012 was posted as he did a home workout with the following hashtags: #StayHome, #ThursdayMotivation, #StayStrong #StayActive. It also had an interactive question of "How tough was it? 1-10" followed by a hand icon pointing below (to the comments section) so that the consumers can interact. This video, and others that served the same purpose, were convenient for the athletes, the organisers, as well as the consumers who could watch it anytime and from any place and join the workout if they please whenever it is suitable for their own circumstances.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT seventh function is social interaction. MSE organisers can utilise enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through enhancing social interaction through posting controversial questions, such as who the best player or which team was do you think will win, etc. this would stir up communication between them and the consumers, as well as between consumers and others who share their opinions or are against it. Consumers can apply this UGT function by interacting with MSE organisers as well as other consumers (fans) with mutual interests, receiving comments/messages and reactions to MSE-related posts. They could also engage in conversations with celebrities, strangers, friends, and family who shared similar interests, or hold a debate with people who have opposing opinions. Users could react to the communications of others. Only July 30, 2021, the Tokyo 2020 Facebook account wrote the following post "Are you enjoying Day 7 at #Tokyo 2020? We've had a week of intense #Olympic action! What has been your highlight of the day so far?" One of the comments received was "Absolutely loving the Olympics cheering on my country, and absolutely love seeing all the [scenery] of Japan. I can't wait for commercial flying to return for the everyday person, who misses going overseas." This post is an example of how the organisers can encourage the social interaction function with the audiences through posting questions that can lead to discussions with the consumers and among them.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT eighth function is entertainment. MSE organisers can adopt this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through offering latest updates on players, organisers, coaches, etc., such as a player's birthday. Posting memes, songs, games, activities, or short videos. Consumers can apply this UGT function by watching the games, reading about the latest updates about those involved. They are also entertained when they read comments posted by others, read memes, or watch a comic criticism on the subject. Songs, fames, activities or short videos can also be entertaining for the consumers. On May 5, 2020, the TOKYO2020 organisers made two posts, each included a colouring page of one of the event mascots (Miraitowa and Society) that fans can print and colour. These posts are an example of how the organisers can keep the followers entertained even before the MSE officially starts.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT ninth function is pass time. MSE organisers can harness this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through offering continuous posts/interactions so that the consumers can spend long periods of time on the social media pages without getting bored. Consumers can apply this UGT function by taking part in social media interactions regarding the MSEs offered them something to do to pass the extra free time that they have, which many were not used to having pre-pandemic. They can do so through going through the posts, commenting about them, sharing them, or just browsing through the posts or comment sections. An example from Tokyo 2020 Olympics Facebook page is on July 6, 2021, where a post announcing the "FanZone" was placed encouraging the consumers to "Checkout the #TOKYO2020 FanZone! [Confetti popper icon] It's an interactive area where fans can experience the games and engage with each other leading up to and throughout the Olympics. #PlayTogether #FanZone [pointing down icon]" the post included a video showing scenes of diverse groups of people playing together the four games available as they cheer on the players and have a good time. The consumers can pass time watching the video, among other posts, or in playing the four games that were announced.

Whiting and Williams's (2013) UGT tenth function is relaxation. MSE organisers can use this function to enhance uses and gratifications of the consumers through playing an active role in relieving audience stress and taking their minds off difficult times (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic). Although watching games may be stressful for sports fans, reading about the preparations taking place for games, the players, or teams can offer relaxation. Fans of teams that win often experience relaxation after the game is over. Catharsis is often felt by MSE fans as they release everyday stress or repressed emotions through the excitement of cheering and screaming while watching games. They often feel relaxed after games, regardless of the performance of the team or the outcome. An example of this is during the closing ceremony, which consumers around the world can watch and relax after all the competitions finished, which was posted on August 8, 2021. The post included five pictures of players/teams and included the following text "The athletes of the #Olympics #TOKYO2020 have entered the stadium for the #ClosingCeremony. They enter not as individual nations but together as friends! #StrongerTogether | #UnitedByEmotion." This post is an example of how social media can offer entertainment for audiences all around the world.

Conclusions

The schedule disruptions that Mega Sporting Events face may surely affect consumer loyalty towards them, especially in cases with a short notification period where consumers (i.e., fans) may have already invested time, effort, and money in hope of attending the event. For example, an average employee would have taken time and effort to plan the trip and would

have paid for the transportation, tickets, accommodation (as needed) as well as requested days off work as needed. Also, many make these plans in social groups, be it family, friends, fan clubs, etc., which means even more time and effort were invested into making the plans as well as obligations and commitments towards the involved social network. The disruptions to these plans and commitments will result in a wide range of negative connotations towards the event and/or organisers. Thus, the MSE organisers needed to find ways to overcome these challenges and preserve consumer loyalty throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, they turned to social media. The findings highlight the importance of understanding the adaptive behaviour of consumer psychology to expand existing media to build consumer loyalty, considering the Whiting and Williams's social media Uses and Gratifications consumers and open opportunities for potential new consumers.   Results show that Whiting and Williams (2013) succeeded in highlighting the main functions of uses and gratifications of social media for the consumers, and that TOKYO2020 applied the ten functions.

Policy recommendations for strengthening consumer loyalty in MSE networking using social media are based on consumer psychological engagement, resorting to the basic principle of economics that people respond to incentives. This involves a trigger for consumer behaviour change. Behavioural changes are anticipated after the building up of consumer loyalty through the popularisation of social and civic responsibilities, role model behavioural encouragement, and consumer financial donation generosity, specifically during difficult times. Consumer loyalty is a process that requires dynamic co-creation strengthened by fan engagement, and celebrity athlete brand monetization. Decision-makers of MSEs are responsible for ensuring consumer safety in a collaborative manner, while recognizing the leading role of sport governing bodies in the networking process. Through innovative management and interdisciplinary research, behavioural trends and psychological factors can build consumer loyalty.

The main limitation of this study is that it is conducted on a specific event within a timespan of one year, so it cannot be generalised to other events or the same event during other times. However, as an instrumental case study, it offers a detailed analysis of the use of social media by MSE organizers which can be used as a guide for other event organizers as a benchmark, it is also beneficial for researchers since it offers theory-testing for the newer version of the uses and gratifications theory, which was developed by Whiting and Williams (2013).

We suggest that further research be done on the developments of consumers' economies related to the utilization of social media to build consumer loyalty towards MSEs. Further research can also be conducted to compare the strengths and weaknesses of different social media forms utilized by MSE organizers from the viewpoint of the consumers.

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Yogesh Hole et al 2019 J. Phys.: Conf. Ser. 1362 012121

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