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# Transforming the Fan Experience through Live Streaming: A Conceptual Model

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this case study research, was to explore how Queensland Rugby League (QRL) used their Facebook brand page the “Queensland Maroons” and incorporated livestreaming throughout the 2017/2018 State of Origin seasons. Specifically, this sought to understand managerial perspectives regarding interactive advertising within digital sport marketing strategy encompassing live streaming and the extent to which it may impact fan engagement. This research utilized a multimethod case study approach involving a content analysis of Facebook, complemented by two semi-structured interviews with the organizations digital staff. The findings revealed live streaming can be an engaging proposition when it provides exclusive content that allows the fan to experience authentic insights into the rituals and traditions of their favorite sport team and athletes in real-time. Furthermore, three unique management live streaming experiences were identified: planning, organization, and delivery (POD) and as a response, a conceptual (POD) model has been created, which re-evaluates the opportunities for fan engagement adapted from previous research findings (Haimson and Tang, 2017; Naraine and Karg, 2019). This model is important for sport organizations when considering livestreaming, as there may be unique opportunities to focus on interactive advertising and thus, develop awareness and the fan-to-fan and fan-to-athlete/sport organization/team relationship.

Key words: social media, live streaming, fan engagement; sport marketing

## **Transforming the Fan Experience through Live Streaming: A Conceptual Model**

While applications for real-time video transmission over the internet are not new, live streaming through social media (SM) is a more recent phenomenon that has become a normative content delivery tool in the social space. Development in technology, growing internet penetration, and expansion of SM platforms have contributed to the evolution of social live streaming services (SLSS; Scheibe et al., 2016). Consequently, there have been a growing abundance of SLSS including Periscope, Ustream, YouNow, Instagram Live, and Facebook Live, all of which represent some of the most globally accessible and used services. Additionally, scholars have also contended that the simultaneity of SLSS is one of its prominent features, attached by text-based chats that occur during a live stream providing an authentic and raw experiencing promoting high levels of fan engagement (Haimson and Tang, 2017; Scheibe et al., 2017).

In sport, specifically, several organizations (e.g., Cleveland Cavaliers, Denver Broncos) have implemented SLSS within their interactive SM strategy, giving “fans unprecedented access to the action, taking them on the field and into the locker room, and inviting them to interact directly with their favorite players, coaches and media personalities” (Facebook, 2016, para.6). These entities have increasingly invested their time and resources into producing live streams on established social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Although researchers have determined SM to be an effective tool for fan engagement (Li et al., 2020; Vale and Fernandes, 2018), there is a distinct lack of knowledge and understanding related to its use through SM amongst sport organizations, particularly as it relates to the sport fan engagement process (Filo et al., 2015; Naraine and Karg, 2019). To use social media effectively and understand the

potential impact of SLSS within digital strategies, sport organisations need guidance on how to implement this tool effectively to garner relative fan engagement benefits.

As such, we aim to not only understand how fans engage with SLSS, but also how managers implement SLSS within their digital strategies and consequently utilise this knowledge to guide sport organisations' future direction. To do so, we employ a case study of the Queensland Maroons rugby league team and their use of Facebook Live throughout the 2017 and 2018 State of Origin seasons.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Social Media***

For brand managers, SM can be utilized for two types of marketing communication, interactive advertising and digital communities (Chi, 2011). Leckenby and Li (2000) define interactive advertising as “the paid and unpaid presentation and promotion of products, services and ideas by an identified sponsor through mediated means involving mutual action between consumers and producers” ( p.3). SMs “two-way” nature of communication allows organizations to move beyond just talking directly at fans, allowing conversation between both the fan and the organization (or between fans). Thus, encouraging consumers to actively engage in marketing communications. This fundamental aspect of interactive advertising will continue to grow in importance as organisations seek to establish and maintain healthy long-term relationships with consumers.

Specifically, in the sport context, digital communities are important as one of the values of SM for sport organizations is the ability to serve as a venue for conversations and engagement that helps fans to connect as well as carry, extend, and amplify the game experience outside the sport arena (Stavros et al., 2014). Sport organizations can

listen and understand fans' needs and create "value adds" for fans to engage and become more avid consumers of content (Naraine and Karg, 2019). However, sport organizations have learnt that such content cannot be posted at any given time. Although SM provides fans with an opportunity to simultaneously watch and interact with a live sporting event and communicate with other like-minded individuals over their shared passion (Thompson et al., 2018), the vast majority of sports fans are frequently engaged during non-game periods, with peak engagement levels during the commute periods (e.g., morning and afternoon) during weekdays (Naraine et al., 2019). Thus, while posting live scores and information updates during games might be relevant to a specific audience, there is an opportunity to connect and build relationships with fans during the non-game period, too. As a result, organizations may require a new digital mindset by utilizing SM activities that do not simply replace traditional norms, but instead expands media choices to gain reach, intimacy, and engagement (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000; Vargo, 2016). One of those activities that is gaining traction across the sport industry is SLSS, specifically Facebook Live.

### ***Facebook Live***

Facebook introduced its live streaming tool in 2016, referred to as Facebook Live. The tool is available for all Facebook users, groups, and pages on desktop and mobile devices, providing users with the ability to stream video for up to four hours directly from their mobile device or by linking to an external camera using a stream key. Anyone can view Facebook Live video posts, including those without a Facebook account. However, only those logged into Facebook can comment and react to the video in real-time, which Raman et al. (2018) noted was a key feature of SLSS.

In June 2020, Facebook reported a 50% increase in live video views across their platform with a focus on the tool to generate a sense of social connection. Live

streaming is on the rise, and these new digital tools have the power to help organisations build and develop their brand to a captured audience (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018). As live streaming grows, there is potential to reach larger audiences through specific interactive advertising, encouraging viewer click-through, enhance website traffic and brands recall (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018).

Facebook Live appears to fit within the SM strategy of sport organizations as it provides the ability to create an intimate, authentic connection with a specific organization. Skjuve and Brandtzaeg (2020) suggested that:

Facebook Live streaming practices differ with respect to how content is presented and experienced. Hence, live streaming seems to give users a greater sense of presence than more traditional social media. Through Facebook Live, people can gain a greater sense of intimacy and cultivate more immediate relationship experiences (p. 12).

Although there is anecdotal evidence supporting the benefits of adding live-streaming to a SM strategy, few academic studies have examined how or why people use live-streaming to experience events outside of the “main game”. This is important to consider, as the traditional sport television broadcast has focused mainly on the stadium experience, therefore excluding fans who are not in the physical stadium from the scope of the game. Haimson and Tang (2017)’s research is one notable exception, which identified four dimensions explaining what makes live streams like Facebook Live engaging: immersion, immediacy, interaction, and sociality. Immersion is the feeling of being there through the energy and excitement of the event coming through the live stream and gaining different perspectives – such as a privileged viewpoint (e.g., front row or backstage).

Immediacy relates to the information on the videos being exciting for the viewers as they experience the event as it is unfolding, and it is exclusive to the broadcaster, which may, in turn, generate a higher level of viewers. Immediacy manifests through authenticity. Huertas's (2018) research on the tourism experience found that through immediacy live videos convey more authenticity and a sense of reality in comparison to other content. Within sport, the National Basketball Association (NBA) used SLSS to broadcast training camps, providing fans with an authentic and unique experience, capturing athletes' personalities in real-time, rather than a perception of inaccessibility via a highly edited video production.

Interactivity is a technological feature that is specific to the media platform (Hu & Wise, 2020). With SLSS, interactivity is a key characteristic of live streams, as watching native video is often a passive experience, whereas live streams offer opportunities for interaction (i.e., comments or chat functions) with broadcasters and other viewers in real-time. This co-presence through SLSS provides opportunities to mediate co-viewing experience where viewers emotions are more intense than emotions outside of the live stream (Luo, Hsu, Park & Hancock (2020). This may occur due to the sense of sociality, or a greater perceptual absorption in the event, which in turn, may often enhance the overall number of comments on live video posts. The interactivity components of SLSS are an important consideration for this new form of digital advertising as different structural features contrast to traditional advertising. Notably, interactive advertising has been found to increase advertisement acceptance, increase willingness to receive information, and enhance voluntary efforts to establish or maintain a relationship with an organization (Belanche, et al., 2017).

Finally, Haimson and Tang (2017) described sociality as the way live streams can be social even without the viewer interacting in any way through the creation of



impromptu, short-term groups of people who were all viewing the same content. Sociality differs from interaction as it is focused on co-presence through a shared viewing experience rather than an active form of interaction (i.e., comments). Through this shared experience, live streaming can enhance viewers social well-being and ease feelings of loneliness (Kim & Kim, 2020). Further, a sense of digital community is vital for a successful interactive advertising strategy as it is perceived as trustworthy, informative, and entertaining and less irritating than traditional advertising (Chi, 2011). These dimensions provide an important starting point for a conceptual model to understand the characteristics of SLSS.

### ***Fan Engagement***

A digital strategy that focuses on fan engagement is important for professional sport teams as a means to relate to their fans (Naraine and Karg, 2019), and to provide a place for fans to interact with their favorite athletes, teams, and other fans (Thompson, et al., 2018). Their focus is no longer simply filling a stadium with fans, but rather engaging specific groups of fans both inside and outside a venue, and throughout the preseason, in-season, and post-season activities.

A construct of relationship marketing, fan engagement occurs when a sport organization builds an intense and deeply rooted connection with a fan base and considers consumers as part of interactive relationships with brands, organizations, and each other (Vivek et al., 2012). Sport organizations may increase fan engagement through sharing content that focuses on real-time information, behind-the-scenes photos or videos, and exclusive announcements (Thompson et al., 2018). Highly engaged sport fans who identify with a team may feel a sense of responsibility towards other fans, and therefore the development of relationships amongst fans may promote engagement with their team, and reinforce reciprocity and interaction (Johnson et al., 2013).

Interaction and a sense of community are crucial motivations for fans to engage on SM (Chi, 2011; Naraine, 2019). Accordingly, teams should boost certain features in their online platforms (e.g., sharing content about the fan pride, or the importance of interacting with other fans) to create social connections between fans and allowing mutual support (Santos et al., 2019).

### **Conceptual Model**

Co-creation, which is a prominent paradigm in management and marketing literature is an important element of fan engagement (Santos, et al., 2019), allowing organisations and customers to create value through interaction. Consequently Brodie et al., (2011) state it is an appropriate conceptual framework to interpret engagement (Brodie et al., 2011). Value co-creation is often considered within two perspectives: service logic (SL) (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos and Voima, 2013), and service-dominant logic (S-DL) (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Within sport, Filo, Lock & Karg's (2015) suggested future sport marketing research should explore the S-DL approach to advance a clearer understanding of the engagement process facilitated via SM.

Vargo & Lusch (2008) conceptualised S-DL as a paradigm shift in marketing orientation, fundamentally providing a service-based view of exchange that focused on the interactive nature of services and relationships, where consumers had priority in the value exchange process. In S-DL value is co-created collaboratively by each stakeholder rather than being created by an organisation and then distributed to customers (Grönroos, 2011). While previous research suggested any party involved in exchange can make, add, or transfer value, recent revisions to S-DL theory, suggest that consumers are always a co-creator of value, and can sometimes be a co-producer (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Consequently, engagement, interaction, and experience are recognized as the important elements of co-creation in which value occurs when both

the consumer and organisation receive simultaneous benefits from an interaction (Grönroos & Gummerson, 2014).

In this study, value co-creation represents an important component of engagement via SLSS. Drawing on Ramaswamy and Ozcan's (2018) definition, we distinguish co-creation as an "enactment of interactional creation across interactive system-environments (afforded by interactive platforms[and advertising]), entailing agenting engagements and structuring organizations" (p.200). In the context of SLSS co-creation refers to fans interactivity such as sharing content, impressions, and experiences with the team and other fans on SM platforms (Santos et al., 2019).

Considering sport as a specific context for S-DL, fans are the key customers; involved in the decision-making process regarding their consumption of the sport experience (McDonald & Karg, 2014) and consciously determining the extent to which they consume sport. Notably, McDonald and Karg (2014) found that value was not just focused on the game experience, but before the game and continuing afterwards, allowing fans to enhance their own experience. Therefore, consumers can create value for themselves outside of the allocated duration of the event experience delivered by the sports organization. Importantly, fans who participate in such co-creation processes tend to be more engaged with sport organisations (Santos, et al., 2019).

This research integrates Haimson & Tang (2017), Naraine & Karg (2019), and Brodie et al., (2013)'s work by applying a S-DL and value co-creation theory to inform the conceptual model for this research, which focuses on the fan engagement process to understand how SLSS may fit within this process and impact fan behavior. Through the engagement process (see Figure 1), it is suggested that fans are motivated by hedonic or utility means to engage in an activity (i.e., SLSS; Naraine and Karg, 2019). Following this motivation, a sub-process of co-creation behaviors are developed which entails a

fan sharing, socializing, co-developing, advocating and learning. These behaviors may result in loyalty, deeper connections and relationships, both within and between sport organizations and fans (Brodie, et al., 2013).

**\*INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE\***

Brodie et al. (2013) described sharing as the “sharing of personal relevant information, knowledge and experiences through the process of active contributions to the co-creation of knowledge within the online community” (p.111). An approach further reflected in the findings of Stavros et al., (2014) who suggested that fans need to interact with both the team and fan community by demonstrating their knowledge, expertise, and insight. Socializing reinforces the “social” dimension of SM and reinforces the importance of fans interaction surrounding sporting events not only applying to spectators at the stadium. Co-development is the “process where consumers contribute to organizations and/or organizational performance by assisting in the development of new products, services, brands or brand meanings” (Brodie et al., 2013, p.111). Vale and Fernandes (2018) suggested that advocating may be the highest type of engagement and include posting reviews, uploading photos and using hashtags. Finally, learning is defined by Brodie et al. (2013) as the “acquisition of cognitive competencies that consumers apply to purchase and consumption decision-making” (p.111).

The type of content posted by an organization (Vargo, 2016) influences SM fan engagement, requiring sport managers to focus on this if they wish to meet the needs of fans. Specifically, content that can humanize athletes and connect them to fans, or behind the scenes content that is not available elsewhere, can continue to keep fans connected and encourages a higher level of interaction (Achen, et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2018).

Previous literature also suggests that sport organisations should consider expanding their use of strategies to encourage active interaction, rather than reactive interaction (i.e. purposely encouraging reactions, comments and shares; Achen et al., 2020). We propose that SLSS may be one tool that creates opportunities for sport organizations to meet fan engagement goals by enabling active interaction through viewer consumption, while transcending geographic boundaries, to experience and engage with real-time content, which goes beyond being physically in attendance (Haimson and Tang, 2017).

Further, the measurement of interactive advertising is an important consideration, as responses to the interactive (versus non-interactive) environment will impact outcomes. For example, Rodgers & Thorson (2000) suggest that the measurement of clicks, click-throughs, time spent at websites, exploration patterns and the pattern of online purchasing are influenced by interactive capabilities.

Although, currently, there is little known about how the proposed unique dimensions of SLSS (i.e., immersion, immediacy, interaction, and sociality) can impact engagement and interaction behaviors. It has been previously suggested that SM posts lack a sense of proximity and empathy, but SLSS can effectively capitalise on a reciprocal, real-time interactive communication system (Kim & Kim, 2020). This point is important to consider as content that is designed to specifically garner interaction between fans and between the team and fans, creates a higher level of reactive engagement.

Although there is an apparent growing abundance of sport organizations utilizing Facebook Live, there is little known about SLSS in relation to fan engagement, or how sport organizations are implementing these types of posts within their digital strategy. Thus, the following research questions are advanced:

RQ1- How do live video posts impact engagement in comparison to other types of posts on Facebook (i.e., text, photo, video and link)?

RQ2- What are sport organizations' experiences implementing live streaming within their digital strategy, and how may SLSS impact the fan engagement process?

## **Method**

To answer these research questions and deliver on this study's purpose, a single case study examining fan responses, managerial perspectives, and a content analysis of a sport organization's SLSS feed was conducted. Yin (2014) defined case study research as "an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomena within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Along this vein, the case study approach is useful when there is little existing literature and is suitable for exploring new processes or behaviors that are little understood. Qualitative case study research was used as the primary methodology, in keeping with Leonard-Barton's (1990) approach of utilizing this methodology to respond to the how and why questions about a contemporary set of events.

Patterson and Parent (2017) suggested that smaller sample case studies can still provide a meaningful contribution to sport management and, in the case of Naraine et al. (2019) have been used previously to develop a to greater understanding of how a sport organization may develop communities of identified fans. A single case study involves in-depth study of one case and is "useful in confirming and disconfirming theory, presenting complex phenomena, examining an extreme or unique case, revealing something new or an example of something common, examining something to which

the research has secured uncommon or privileged access and examining a study over time” (Andrew et al., 2020, p.145).

### ***Case Context***

The Queensland Maroons and Queensland Rugby League (QRL) were selected for this case study as, at the time, they were one of the only Australian sport organizations consistently implementing SLSS within their digital strategy. QRL have used Facebook Live on their Queensland Maroons Facebook page since it was introduced in 2016, utilizing live video posts to share access to their fans outside of streaming games. The QRL has responsibility for the management of the Queensland State of Origin team – the Queensland Maroons, which is a high-level representative rugby league team in the state of Queensland, Australia. In 1982, a new rule was created by Australia Rugby League, whereby players were selected to represent their state based on the first club where they played senior rugby league, even if they were no longer living in the state. The rule change created a new competition - State of Origin. The State of Origin series is the annual best-of-three Australian Rugby League competition between the Queensland Maroons and the New South Wales Blues. Smitz and Blake (2007) described the competition as the pinnacle of rugby league, ranking the contest higher than international representative rugby league. The series is one of the most watched sport events in Australia, with most games selling out, and attracting large national television audiences. When comparing television audiences of other sport events, the first match of the 2018 State of Origin was the highest rated television event in that year for Australia, with 3.5 million viewers.

Concurrently, QRL operate a Digital and Content department based in Brisbane, Australia, comprised of five full time staff who oversee all digital aspects of the QRL brand, inclusive of: Queensland Rugby League, Intrust Super Cup and the Queensland

Maroons. The Queensland Maroons Facebook page was first created on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and was verified by Facebook as the only official brand page for the Queensland Maroons Rugby League team. The Queensland Maroons Facebook brand page has more followers than any of their other official SM platforms including Twitter and Instagram (see Table 1).

**\*INSERT TABLE 1 HERE\***

### ***Data Collection***

Data were collected via the Queensland Maroons Facebook account and through semi-structured interviews. All Facebook posts made by the Queensland Maroons May 22, 2017 to July 10, 2017, and May 27, 2018 to July 13, 2018 were collected by the page's administrator using the Facebook Insights tool and saved in a .csv file. These dates were specifically chosen as they captured the first team announcement until the end of game three across both the 2017 and 2018 State of Origin seasons. Data were sent to the lead-researcher four weeks after each end date (i.e., August 7, 2017 and August 10, 2018) to ensure all posts had received a considerable period for which fans could engage. This resulted in a final collection of 443 posts. To enable an analysis of post-level engagement, "Facebook Insights" were used. Facebook Insights is a web analysis, that generates detailed analytics for Facebook Pages. The tool was used to collect data assessing the type of engagement that a post on Facebook generated (i.e., reaction, comment, and share). A data mining process was implemented to narrow down data. SM data mining includes a wide variety of activities, moving beyond small, simplistic content analyses towards larger or richer analysis digging through user clusters and social network analysis (e.g., Naraine, 2019), as well as critical SM measurement metrics (e.g., Naraine et al., 2019). Harnessing the power of SM data mining, the current study focused on understanding engagement at the post level and examined



those posts through several available metrics related to Facebook user interactions (i.e., reactions, comments, shares, and views). Criteria for measuring engagement (i.e., interactions, reactions, comments, and shares) on Facebook was influenced by previous research (Achen et al., 2020). All data collected in this study were from post-level metrics. An Excel document was created with the headings: post type (i.e., photo, video, live, and link), date, post title, content type; all relevant engagement data from the Insights file was imported.

While the content analysis provided face-value SM metrics, the semi-structured interviews provided a richer data source of the actual implementation of SLSS within digital strategy. Face- to- face interviewing permitted further probing, allowing a greater understanding of the case study and a clearer view of rationale behind specific actions. Explanatory insights were derived from two semi-structured interviews with the senior digital manager (SDM) and digital content producer (DCP) of the QRL. As the QRL Digital and Content team consisted of five, the two respondents were able to provide the necessary insights to enhance the study's understanding of SLSS in sport. Both interviews lasted at least 60 minutes; sessions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and interviewees were able to verify transcriptions post hoc.

### ***Data Analysis***

A thematic content analysis was selected to analyze the semi-structured interview data. Creswell (2013) stated that researchers need to make “sense” out of interviews and compile data into groups of information, also known as themes or codes. These themes and codes are composed of consistent phrases, or ideas that occurred commonly throughout the research method (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Data were coded to “identify and provide a label for a feature of the data that is potentially relevant to the research question” (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 3). After coding the data, themes and

subthemes were generated by clustering codes that had unified features which describe a meaningful pattern in the data. Data inside the themes were reviewed to ensure that all data was meaningfully related to each other (Braun and Clarke, 2013). A final analysis of the relationship between the data and themes was undertaken to provide an overall understanding of QRL's perspective towards implementing SLSS within their digital strategy. This same method was replicated for each interview, and a three-column table was formed for each interview with a list of themes, key findings, and quotes. An excerpt of the thematic analysis table is provided in Table 2. The interpretation of results was sent to participants to ensure nothing was misunderstood or misconstrued in the analysis process to ensure trustworthiness (Morse, 2015).

**\*INSERT TABLE 2 HERE\***

## **Results**

RQ1- How do live video posts impact engagement in comparison to other types of posts on Facebook (i.e., text, photo, video and link)?

To answer RQ1, a sample of 443 Facebook posts were collected over a 2-year period. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the sample including the average reactions, comments, and shares per season, per post type. Particularly noticeable from the data set is the decline in overall engagement across the seasons (noting a successful series victory in 2017, and an unsuccessful series campaign in 2018).

**\*INSERT TABLE 3 HERE\***

Engagement differed across post type and results imply photo posts are more likely to receive reactions ( $n=6,583$ ); video posts are more likely to be shared ( $n=801$ ); and live video posts generate the highest level of comments ( $n=538$ ). Although overall engagement declined between 2017 and 2018, comments remained consistent on live

video posts (2017  $n=567$ ; 2018  $n=508$ ). Notably, comments across all other post types significantly declined. While live video posts do not encourage a higher level of overall post engagement in comparison to other posts, they impact engagement through interaction (i.e., real time conversations through comments) which is an important consideration in terms of value co-creation.

*RQ2. What are sport organizations' experiences implementing live streaming within their digital strategy?*

In what follows, we present the results to answer RQ2 with a presentation of statements made by the respondents in two semi-structured interviews with QRL digital media staff. The following themes emerged from the data: planning, organization and delivery.

### ***Planning***

The QRL implemented SLSS within their digital strategy for the Queensland Maroons in 2016 when Facebook Live was first introduced for all Facebook users. The SDM believed the addition of SLSS had not changed their overall digital strategy, but rather provided another opportunity to tell their brand story. Although the staff suggested they wanted to focus on developing specific live opportunities within the digital strategy in the future, SLSS related technology and resources were identified as an ongoing challenge for QRL's planning and implementation of live video posts. This challenge identified issues for the type of content that could be utilized through this digital tool. Although Facebook Live employ the tagline "go live with the camera in your pocket", the SDM reported they utilized an advanced set up to push their videos to Facebook Live, which takes some initial forethought to plan, set up, and engage, and was not a spur of the moment undertaking. This thought was expanded by the DCP in 2018, with

the added resources of a Teradek, a specialized video camera, a computer, and a stream key required to produce their live video. The DCP argued that using this advanced set-up meant there was less room for error (relative to using a phone), as it provided a better quality of audio and allowed comments to be monitored through the software. In 2018, SLSS posts were often strategically planned rather than being “spur of the moment” as the DCP believed the most important characteristic of a live video post was high quality.

### ***Organization***

For this organization, it was indicated that the objective of SLSS content was to “open the door to fans” to extend the fan experience by offering exclusive insights into the team’s rituals and traditions. The SDM indicated the type of content used within live video influenced the level of overall engagement, noting fans appeared to be less engaged with press conferences in SLSS format; “media asking five minutes of questions tends to get boring. It is something that all the media have, so fans do not come to us for that, they would rather watch it on the evening news” (SDM).

Comparatively, the following season, the DCP considered press conference content the “perfect fit” for SLSS as it provides fans with a live feed of information, such as team announcements ahead of other media outlets through the concept of exclusivity liveness.

In 2018, the Queensland Maroons were noted in the media to be “rebuilding” after losing several athletes to retirement and were coming off a dominant history against the New South Wales Blues. Therefore, when the team was unsuccessful on the field in 2018, the DCP was asked if this influenced an apparent change of strategy whereby, they no longer provided fans behind the scenes content but rather a move to content that could be “controlled” such as press conferences. The DCP did not consider

this as a factor but suggested the 2018 digital strategy was focused creating positive content to resonate with fans, and discourage negative interaction around player selections and results, which often did not fit in the SLSS format.

### ***Delivery***

The QRL digital team previously attempted to actively encourage comments on all posts as they believed this specific form of interaction generated higher levels of organic reach. However, they noted they shifted their strategic focus in 2017 to generating content that encourages reactions and clicks (i.e., linking back to the website). With this focus in mind, the SDM indicated that live video generated a high volume of comments, however it did not commonly generate website traffic due to the “liveness” (in the moment) concept. Although, in terms of broader strategic focus was not on generating digital interaction through comments, the QRL valued the position of SLSS within their digital strategy as it produced reactive content in the moment from fans. While reactive fan feedback was important to the QRL staff, this did not encourage two-way interaction, as both the SDM and DCP note they did not reply to any SLSS comments (either through text or audio within the live stream). Due to the high volume of comments that SLSS generates, there was a high volume of noise and, therefore, the team strategically ignored comments on live video posts (as if they reply to one fan, other fans may feel isolated or ignored).

Through triangulating insights from Facebook engagement metrics, developing post types and semi-structured interviews, data may be analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of SLSS consumption habits and build a broader content strategy designed to enhance fan engagement. SLSS may encourage reactive engagement (i.e., fan interaction through an increased level of comments), however the type of content utilized by the Queensland Maroons is an important consideration towards the impact of

fan engagement. Metaphorically speaking, the Queensland Maroons used SLSS to “open the door to fans” by giving them behind-the-scenes, real-time access that were not previously available. These types of posts, which included providing access to the changing rooms post series win, team bus arrivals, and the team kicking a football in a park prior to an upcoming game, proved to be the most engaging type of live video post.

The SDM indicated that this type of content was often not planned but rather used when there was an opportunity to go live that was considered perceived to be engaging to fans. However, in 2018, press conferences were the only type of live video post to feature on the Queensland Maroons Facebook page. These posts were less engaging (in terms of overall engagement) than other types of posts and fans often only viewed these videos for a fraction of time (rather than watching the video for the full duration).

## **Discussion**

The current study sought to investigate the impact of SLSS through the fan engagement process in the context of the Queensland Maroons and Facebook Live. The findings reveal that, on average, live video posts do not generate higher levels of engagement in comparison to other types of posts (i.e., text, link, photo or video). Consequently, sport organizations must consider the unique dimensions of SLSS (i.e., immersion, immediacy, sociality and interactivity; Haimson & Tang, 2017) when planning, organizing, and delivering content to best reap the benefits of SLSS and enhance fan engagement behaviors. Especially if they seek to use SLSS as a means through which to engage in interactive advertising.

As we know, there is an opportunity to connect and build relationships with fans outside of game periods (Naraine, et al., 2019). While television broadcast deals stipulate live conditions for the “main game”, there is an opportunity through SLSS to

allow fans to extend their fan experience and feel a sense of connection with a team or athlete through ‘real-time’ content that was previously only experienced through packaged native video or photos. Further, the type of SLSS content influences levels of engagement, as not all types of content are ‘engaging’ by design; to meet the needs of fans, sport organizations need to consider content type, as fan engagement is influenced by the type of content posted by an organization (Achen, et al., 2020). Thus, enabling sport organizations to meet the unique opportunities and characteristics of SLSS (i.e., immersion, immediacy, interaction, and sociality; Haimson & Tang, 2017).

This current research found live video posts generated a higher level of comments than other types of posts; therefore, may provide an opportunity for sport organizations to focus on value co-creation and consequently a greater understanding of their audience through the notion of ‘interaction. As the information in that particular moment of a live broadcast is exclusive to the viewer (as other media outlets have to package up the content and distribute post-press conference), it may encourage fans to share with their social networks as they react to the information in real-time (either as a positive or negative sentiment). A benefit of SLSS is the mutual, real-time interactive communication system (Kim & Kim, 2020) and therefore, sport organizations may encourage further engagement in these types of posts by allowing fans to ask questions in the press conference and having team officials or athletes pick questions to answer through the live video, which is important in the context of creating, planning, and implementing digital strategies. Additionally, we suggest that the notion of ‘listening’ should be identified as a key part of a digital strategy in terms of a feedback loop and a return on objective tool. When creating specifically targeted content, and generating conversations and interaction via comments, the inherent characteristics of SLSS can

provide sport fans with the opportunity to engage through sharing, socializing, co-developing, and learning (Brodie, et al., 2013; Naraine and Karg, 2019).

There are opportunities for co-development that the Queensland Maroons did not utilize. Remarkably, the Queensland Maroons indicated they are interested in developing reactive content to develop communication with fans, however, they do not seem to be listening to their fans to understand how they are engaging, and therefore are missing key opportunities for fan engagement through SM. For example, the team did not provide opportunities for fans to interact directly with the sport organization or athletes in this SLSS scheme. QRL staff identified that fan comments were not replied to throughout the broadcast in the form of audio or text due to the volume of fan commentary and engagement, however, this may be a missed opportunity to plan and create further opportunities for engagement. Haimson and Tang (2017) suggested that “interactivity is a key difference between event content that is broadcast live in real-time, and content that is made available afterwards” (p. 55). Whilst fan feedback may be collected through surveys or asking for fans to leave comments on a photo or text post, SLSS provides further opportunities for co-development that other types of posts may be unable to deliver.

Although SLSS is a relatively new tool that the QRL were quick to implement in 2016, there are inconsistencies and a lack of clarity in understanding why it is being used, how it is being measured, and how to best implement it within a digital strategy. It was suggested by Effing and Spil (2016) that “to efficiently exploit the newest technology, it must be managed... and this is exactly what a SM strategy should do” (p. 8). Although behind the scenes content was deemed engaging, the experience of the Queensland Maroons suggest that it may be difficult to plan for this type of content



within a digital strategy; as this type of content that excites fans is “spur of the moment”, for which cannot be accounted in *ante hoc*.

Therefore, we argue that implementing SLSS within a digital strategy, is not as simple as “going live with the camera in your pocket” but rather our findings suggest that content needs to be carefully considered to enhance fan engagement. With that in mind, posts should be authentic and provide opportunities for interactivity to capitalize on the unique dimensions of SLSS. One unique characteristic of SLSS is that it combines a simultaneous visual component and chat component on the one screen, allowing users to view content and react in real-time with both the sport organization and other fans. As fans are viewing the video component of the live video post, the concept of ‘real-time’ comments popping up on the screen with other fans offering their opinion on the footage that is being viewed may encourage other fans to respond. Through the live streaming of press conferences, the Queensland Maroons were able to provide a live feed of information through the visual component and the text component provides sociality and interactivity where fans can come together to share their opinions and create conversations with other fans regarding the shared experience of a live video. The “real-time” engagement opportunities through SLSS involving ‘learning’ reflected fans seeking further information that may have been found through other sources online, however, may suggest that fans trust their ‘community’ for access, and information can be received quickly.

Although the Queensland Maroons suggested that digital strategy was not influenced by on-field results, but rather focused on enhancing positive sentiments through content that resonates with fans, which they believed often did not fit in the SLSS format. Athletes may be unwilling to participate in behind the scenes content following a loss or when negative media attention or response is surrounding a team

performance. However, the characteristics of live video posts i.e., immersion, immediacy, interaction and sociality (Haimson & Tang, 2017) may assist fans in developing a form of virtual camaraderie. It is suggested that the meeting of all four characteristics may be unique to live video posts and may not be achieved through utilizing other types of posts (photo, video and link). Through creating content that meets these characteristics, sport organization's may be able to deliver fan engagement goals (Brodie, et al., 2013; Naraine & Karg, 2019) and in return, build, maintain and enhance relationships both within and between the sport organization and their fans.

### ***Contribution to Theory***

Informed by the results of this current study we have developed an adapted fan engagement process, as a conceptual model which we propose offers a new way to conceptualize value co-creation processes and theoretically contributes to frameworks relating to the implementation of SLSS. To effectively address the challenges of SLSS, and benefit from the opportunities SLSS presents, sport organizations could approach SLSS more strategically with a focus on value co-creation. We propose that sport organizations should consider the planning, organization, and delivery (POD) model, and we highlight the importance of interaction within the SLSS model. Additionally, we challenge sport organisations to consider this model and the ways in which SLSS may be used as a form of interactive advertising, to boost reach and engagement with their fans.

**\* INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE\***

The current findings support the notion that SLSS implementation may be challenging for sport organizations, particularly in terms of measuring engagement, resources and content relevance. The conceptual model presented here (Figure 2), can be used as a tool to understand content types and assess opportunities for fan

engagement when implementing SLSS within SM strategies. Based on the findings from this study, we have re-examined the fan engagement process based on previous literature (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Haimson and Tang, 2017; Naraine and Karg, 2019). When SLSS content is created and satisfies all four “engaging” dimensions, as identified by Haimson and Tang (2017), sport organizations are more likely to be able to create opportunities for socialization, sharing, and engagement to deliver the highlighted benefits of fan engagement (Naraine and Karg, 2019).

The POD model suggests that although SM satisfies a consumer need for information exchange, for those seeking to leverage SLSS as a means for engaging in interactive advertising, it would be more valuable when content is focused on opportunities for socialization, sharing and engagement. These findings suggest that although the information provided is important to determine value, there should also be opportunities to develop communities and co-creation to enhance relationships between sport organization-fans and fan-to-fan.

Whilst SLSS is still a relatively new tool within a digital strategy, there are opportunities to increase fan engagement when the POD model is considered. This current research suggests that sports organizations who adopt the POD model of SLSS can yield opportunities for fan engagement through socialization, sharing and co-development instead of encountering the issues experienced by QRL (i.e., resourcing, measurement and content relevancy). Sport organizations should consider live streaming as a formalized part of their digital strategy rather than an opportunistic “toy” and adopt a more consistent measurement approach to understand how and why fans are engaging with their content. It appears that not all content on SLSS is engaging, and sport organizations should consider this within their planning stage through listening to their fans and consistent measurement of previous SM insights. The organization stage

considers how content is developed, created, and then contemplates content type in relation to Haimson and Tang's (2017) dimensions of live streaming. Sport organizations should consider how content may satisfy these unique characteristics to determine the fit of content within SLSS or rather if suited for another type of post (i.e., photo, video, link or text). The delivery stage includes the implementation of live video posts, the monitoring of engagement and interaction between the sport organization/athlete and the fans, and fan-to-fan interaction (Li et al., 2020). Following the delivery stage, sport organizations should consider outcomes concerning fan engagement opportunities (i.e., socialization, sharing and engagement) and then return to the planning stage for future consideration.

Thus, sport organizations should carefully consider how and what content and resources they distribute for utilizing SLSS in their digital strategy, by utilizing the POD model. Specifically, content should be planned and organized with a focus on behind the scenes content that provides authentic insights into athlete and organizations lives.

### ***Implication to Practice***

From a practical point of view, the content shared by a sport organization on SLSS (Achen et al., 2020) is inclined to have an impact on overall post engagement. In this sense, sport organizations who focus on resourcing their SLSS digital strategies for behind the scenes content that allows the fan to have an authentic, raw and exclusive perspective into their favorite team or athletes' rituals or traditions (e.g. in the changing rooms following a game when the television broadcast coverage ends) may generate higher levels of fan engagement. It is also important to consider the unique dimensions that "liveness" can generate and create opportunities that focus on developing immersion, immediacy, interaction, and sociality (Haimson & Tang, 2017). Through

developing these unique opportunities may allow fans to have real-time conversations through the comment feature that can be responded to by other fans or the sport organization in real-time, potentially strengthening fan-to-fan and fan-to-sport organization relationships.

When sport organizations are considering SLSS within a digital strategy as a means of engaging in interactive advertising, a focus on providing content in a format that makes engagement seamless while not disrupting goals is important. This type of engagement is a unique dimension of SLSS, as it provides opportunities for fans to concurrently consume and comment on content in real-time, in comparison to other posts types (i.e., photo, video, or link) that are posted after the event. Thus, response to fans, either through the live broadcast or in the comments during the broadcast is paramount to amplification of interactivity and encourage further opportunities for reactive interaction. In addition, it is important to note that previous studies (Haimson and Tang, 2017) have suggested well-designed SLSS opportunities that promote interactivity can meet the needs of fans not met even by physical attendance, which may be paramount in the current environment of social distancing and event cancellations.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this case study illustrate the experiences faced by a professional sport organization when planning, organizing, and delivering SLSS within a digital strategy. Emergent themes indicated that there were three key areas related to the experience. To successfully implement SLSS, sport organizations need a clear understanding of how and why fans are engaging with content, how return on opportunity will be measured, and how SLSS will be implemented. In this study we consider SLSS to be one form of media used in the process of interactive advertising to turn passive consumption into an activity that helps organisations form connections with

consumers/fans. While the initial study focused on Facebook Live, the experiences from the Queensland Maroons provide valuable insight for other sport organizations looking to include or develop their use of SLSS within their digital strategy. It is recommended that if sport organizations are going to engage in SLSS, they need to ensure they understand the specific characteristics of an “engaging” live video post and plan, organize and deliver (POD) to yield fan engagement opportunities. The development of this POD model (Figure 2) has important implications for both theory and practice.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

It is important to identify the (de)limitations of this study despite its insights. The generalizability of the results is limited due to the methodology providing a single case study of one sport organization. Another key delimitation was the focus on Facebook Live as a single tool of SLSS, and consequently Facebook to extract the data, without considering other platforms such as Instagram Live, Periscope etc. The data collected was also limited to two seasons of State of Origin, and two staff members of the QRL. However, these limitations do not devalue the study’s findings as Andrew et al., (2020) suggested that such data will still reveal something new and insightful.

It is suggested that future scholars should consider multiple observations as they build upon the findings of the current study. First, it would be worthwhile to explore multiple sport organizations’ experiences of using SLSS utilizing content analysis and semi-structured interviews with a wider range of staff involved in the process to determine whether these results are evident in other sport brand organizations. It would be worthwhile to duplicate this existing study to other platforms, i.e., Instagram or Twitter, to understand cross-platform differences and similarities in comparison to the presented results. Exploring findings in different geographical locations would be critical, as these current results are based in Australia, and it may consider how SLSS

encourages global fandom connection of fans outside of the geographical range of the sport organization. Further, future research may examine SLSS in other geographic regions such as North America, Asia, and Europe markets, which would complement the existing findings. Importantly, future research should examine and test the POD model in other circumstances to assess its transferability. Future research may develop further understanding on content types (i.e., press conferences, behind the scenes content) and how they relate to Haimson and Tang (2017) and how they may fit within the POD model.

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Table 1: Queensland Maroons Social Media Presence (July 2017 and July 2018)

Social Media	Page Likes/Followers	% Difference to Facebook
<b>2017</b>		
Facebook	944,000	N/A
Instagram	165,000	-82.52%
Twitter	89,600	-90.51%
	<b>Mean Average Difference</b>	<b>-86.52%</b>
<b>2018</b>		
Facebook	938,304	N/A
Instagram	207,000	-77.94%
Twitter	94,600	-88.92%
	<b>Mean Average Difference</b>	<b>-85.98%</b>

Table 2: Excerpt of Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

Theme	Description	Significant Statement Examples
Delivery	The measurement of SM strategy at either the overall or post level	“I think it [perceived success of a post] comes down to reach & engagement. Typically, with video, especially with the algorithm we sort of look at getting 100,000 reach considering the size of our page obviously. So if videos go above and beyond 100,000 reach – usually that is positive for us. If something doesn’t do as well, we sort of look back and think well, why didn’t that work? We probably shouldn’t do that again or if we do it again – how can we do it differently to make it more reactive or bigger. So that is the sort of strategy we take in that regard, particularly in video”
Organisation	Understanding and determining types of content within a digital strategy	‘It is impossible to define what is more engaging - it is more about the content.’
Planning	The related resources (i.e. athlete, equipment) perceived to be required to either benefit or challenge the implementation of SLSS within a digital strategy	‘The plan is to move away from media conferences but want to focus to extend the live broadcast feature to include more high production stuff - e.g. live show from camp. We want to lift it up more, increase the production spend/quality.’

Table 3: Average Lifetime Engagement per Post type (2017 and 2018)

Type of Post	2017	2018	Overall
<b>Reactions</b>			
Videos	6,050	1,510	3,780
Live Video	2,816	791	1,804
Photos	9,655	3,510	6,583
Links	172	1,044	608
<b>Shares</b>			
Videos	1,091	425	758
Live Video	315	70	193
Photos	984	510	747
Links	208	134	171
<b>Comments</b>			
Videos	476	226	351
Live Video	567	508	538
Photos	596	374	485
Links	208	134	171

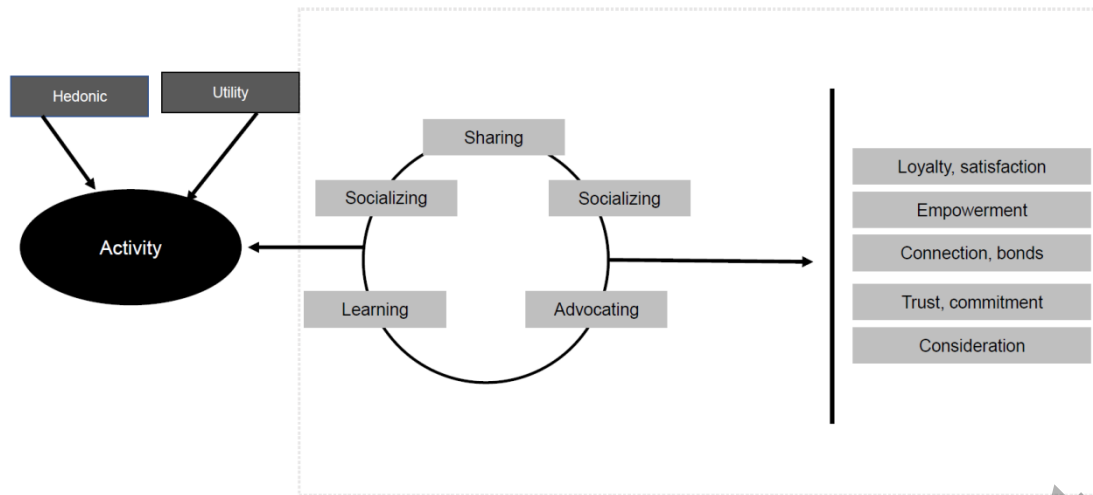


Figure 1. Engagement Process (Naraine & Karg, 2019)

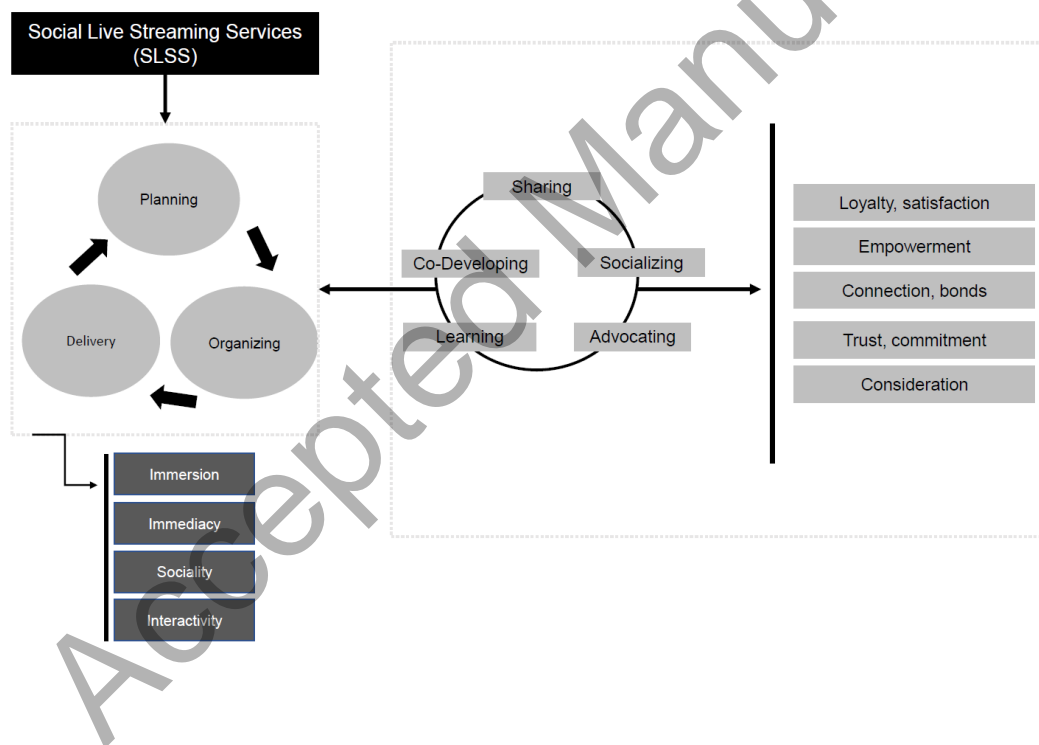


Figure 2. SLSS Fan Engagement Process; Planning, Organization, and Delivery (POD) Conceptual Model