TAKE THEM FOR A RIDE:
AN ONLINE RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR MOTOGP

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ABSTRACT

Luca Semprini: Take Them for a Ride: An Online Relationship Management Plan for
MotoGP
(Under the direction of Dr. Dulcie Straughan, Paul Jones and John Sweeney)

MotoGP – the premier form of on-track motorcycle racing – attracts millions of
fans worldwide but remains a niche product in the competitive American sports market.
This project highlights the connections between public relations, marketing, and
interactive technologies, building on the diffusion of Internet and social network sites to
increase the sport's popularity among the U.S. public.

The project begins by giving an overview of MotoGP's structure and operations.
Then, literature on relationship management in PR and Marketing, interactivity, and
social network sites is reviewed to set the foundations for a promotional campaign.
Finally, the project offers strategic communication solutions for MotoGP to grow and
foster mutually beneficial relationships with its fan base in the United States.

To Luciano, Daniela, all my extended family, Audrey, and, last but not least, Ayrton.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

The concept of relationships is increasingly important for companies and spans both public relations and marketing. The first focuses on managing relationships between organizations and stakeholders, while the latter aims at developing bonds that are based on trust and collaboration and foster an exchange of goods (Ströh, 2007).

From a relationship management perspective, the transition to digital technology has far-reaching implications for both public relations and marketing (e.g., Springston, 2001). For example, new media allow for cost-effective segmentation of audiences, message tailoring, and message distribution (Doyle, 1995).

In particular, the Internet provides public relations and marketing professionals with a wide array of tools to establish two-way, dialogic communication with stakeholders and analyze their attitudes towards products or services (e.g., Kent & Taylor, 1998). To this end, interactivity becomes a key function (Vargo & Lusch, 2004); implementing stakeholders' feedback in communication strategies helps organizations achieve mutually beneficial relationships with publics. Relationship quality, in turn, gives organizations a competitive advantage in the marketplace, resulting, for example, in higher customer loyalty – a key financial variable, given that keeping returning customers costs much less than acquiring new ones (Denove & Power, 2006).

Social media (e.g., blogs, social networking sites, etc.) are highly interactive tools, but also raise challenges for both public relations and marketing, sometimes making companies reluctant to adopt them. First, compared to traditional mass media, they allow for less control over communication (Thompson, 2006), giving receivers the opportunity to respond to the message and share their unabashed opinions about companies or products with a wide audience.[1] Moreover, social media empower customers (Rheingold, 2003), who now have an increased opportunity to retrieve and share information that may influence purchasing decisions (Denove & Power, 2006).

Nonetheless, public relations and marketing professionals have started to accept and incorporate social media as part of wider communication strategies. For example, in a survey conducted by Wright and Hinson (2009), three-quarters of the respondents agreed that social media are more personal than traditional mass media, foster dialogue with key publics, and help gather useful feedback.

However, little research has been done to track the efficiency of these tools, as most businesses overlook the importance of evaluating communications with publics (Hargie & Tourish, 2000). For example, only one organization out of three evaluates social media use, and most research is directed only at content production (Wright and Hinson, 2009). This also holds true for the sports industry. While the Web has become one of the main media channels to communicate with sports fans (Yu, 2007), no research was found that examines sports promotion through the use of social media.

To this end, MotoGP – the world's premier motorcycle racing championship (motogp.com, 2009) – raises some interesting challenges. MotoGP is extremely popular

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[1] For example, see the Chevy Tahoe remixed video ads (e.g., http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oNedC3j0e4&feature=related)

worldwide, being the number-three televised sport in the world behind World Cup soccer and Formula One (Hardcard, 2007a). Its TV broadcasts reach more than 200 countries, averaging a total audience of 311 million viewers per event, and an estimated 5.2 billion people around the world tuned into MotoGP races in 2006 (CBSSports.com, 2009). But in the United States sports market, where NASCAR and many other racing events compete for audience share, it remains a niche product (Perez, 2007).

This study is based on the premise that, given motorcycle racing's young fan base and social media's diffusion among Americans (Alexa.com, 2009a),[2] social media could be a cost-effective tool to promote MotoGP in the United States. The purpose of this study is twofold: to analyze social media's implications from a relationship management standpoint and to devise an Internet-based framework for promoting motorcycle racing in the United States market.

The project begins by giving a short overview of MotoGP's history and organizational structure to provide context to the discussion. The next section reviews the existing literature on relationship management in public relations and marketing, online communications, and social media, in order to highlight how two-way communication serves both public relations and marketing goals, helping organizations establish beneficial relationships with stakeholders. Subsequently, the project will analyze MotoGP's Youtube and Twitter accounts, as well as its Web site and online newsletter, in order to provide an overview of the organization's online communications. The findings will then be used to devise an Internet-based communication plan to promote the sport in the United States.

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[2] For example, 23.7% of Youtube's visitors are Americans and the Web site ranks fourth in popularity within the U.S.

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Background

MotoGP

MotoGP is the oldest and most prominent motorsport championship in the world (MotoGP, 2009a). Its season features 18 races (also known as Grand Prix) in 14 countries and four continents (North America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania). Many of the world's top motorcycle manufacturers such as Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Ducati, Aprilia and KTM, as well as elite riders from all over the world, compete in the championship. In an effort to attract more manufacturers and create more competitive races, MotoGP revised its regulations in 2002, allowing for the participation of four-stroke-engines bikes. Three motorcycle classes currently take part in the championship:

- 125 – This class aims at giving young riders an opportunity to make their first steps into professional motorcycle racing. Riders must be aged 15-28. The maximum engine displacement capacity is 125cc (single cylinder engines).

- 250 – This is the intermediate category. Riders must be at least 16 years old. The maximum engine displacement capacity is 250cc (twin cylinder engines). Moto2, a more cost-effective four-stroke class, will replace the 250cc category starting in 2010.

- MotoGP – This is the premier class and functions as an umbrella body, giving its name to the overall league. Riders must be at least 18 years old, and the maximum engine displacement capacity is 800cc (four-stroke engines).

All the motorcycles used in MotoGP are purpose-built prototypes that are not

available for purchase by the general public and cannot be legally ridden on public roads (MotoGP, 2009a). Three races take place during a regular racing weekend, one for each of MotoGP's three classes. Qualifying sessions determine riders' positions on the starting grid. Races vary between 95km (60 miles) and 130km (80 miles) in length, and usually last 40-45 minutes. Unlike Formula One or Nascar, riders go from start to finish without interruption, and pit-stops are the exception.

The current MotoGP World Champion is Italian Fiat Yamaha Team rider Valentino Rossi, who claimed his ninth world title in 2009 ahead of his Spanish teammate Jorge Lorenzo and Honda Repsol's Dani Pedrosa. The 250 class saw Japan's Hiroshi Aoyama claim the title, while Spaniard Julian Simon won the 125 championship.

Dorna Sports S.L.

Established in 1988, Dorna Sports is an international sports management and marketing company headquartered in Madrid with offices in Barcelona, London and Tokyo (Dorna, 2009). In 2006, Dorna went into private equity hands when CVC Capital Partners sold its controlling stake to Bridgepoint Capital for €500 million (Sport Business International, 2008). The company is the exclusive holder of all commercial and TV rights of the MotoGP World Championship since 1992.

While the company also manages other motorsports leagues, such as the Spanish Road Racing Championship (CEV), MotoGP is Dorna's most prominent property (MotoGP, 2009a). To this end, Dorna provides a wide range of products, such as advertising, promotional activities, merchandising, commercial rights, corporate hospitality, overseas freight, TV rights, TV production, live feeds, post-produced

programs, tailor-made signals, OnBoard technology, timing systems, data processing, graphics for live broadcast, intranets, internet webcasts, online results and video streaming (Dorna, 2009). Given the complexity and vastness of its operations, the company uses a multinational team of some 150 full-time employees, with about 200 part-time contracted professionals operational during racing events.

MotoGP's stakeholders

Given MotoGP's international scope, its operations impact – and are affected by – several stakeholder groups, which are outlined in the following list.

- Broadcasters (TV, Radio, Web)

- Spectators and fans

- Sponsors

- Race track personnel

- Racing teams and riders

- Manufacturers (Honda, Yamaha, Ducati, Suzuki, Aprilia, Gilera, Derbi, KTM, Loncin, Maxtra)

- Tire suppliers (Bridgestone)

- On-track medical team

- Motorcycle racing governing bodies

    o FIM (Fédération Internationale de Motorcyclisme) – this agency is the overall governing body of motorcycling sport worldwide and sanctioning body of the MotoGP World Championship. It comprises 93 affiliated National Federations and six Continental Unions (MotoGP, 2009a).

o IRTA (International Road-Racing Teams Association) – Formed in 1986, this association represents all the Grand Prix teams. The organization's mission is to work together with the FIM and Dorna to maintain high standards within MotoGP and improve the sport overall.

o The MSMA (Motorcycle Sports Manufacturers' Association) – This organization represents the interests of the manufacturers involved in motorcycle racing.

o Race direction – Representatives from FIM, Dorna, and IRTA form race direction teams at each Grand Prix and are responsible for decisions such as declaring race conditions dry or wet.

o Grand Prix Commission – Comprised of Carmelo Ezpeleta (Dorna's Chairman), Claude Danis (FIM), Hervé Poncharal (IRTA) and Takanao Tsubouchi (MSMA), this group has the authority to make changes to the Road Racing World Championship Grand Prix Regulations (the rules of MotoGP).

MotoGP's economic status

MotoGP's characteristics make the product particularly appealing from a broadcast perspective. Each event consists of three, 45-minute races per weekend (125cc, 250cc, and MotoGP), which easily fit into one-hour TV windows, with the possibility to produce shows with a quick introduction and post-race interviews. Moreover, MotoGP caters to a global audience. In 2007, the races averaged 300 million TV viewers worldwide. Within this set, 75 per cent of viewers are age 14-35, and 70 per cent are men

(Sports Business International, 2007a).

From a commercial standpoint, MotoGP is a strong property (especially in Italy and Spain) whose global reach in terms of TV ratings and sponsorships ranks behind only World Cup football, the Olympics and Formula One (Sport Business International, 2007b). For example, more than 5 million TV viewers worldwide watched MotoGP in 2006, with a total average audience of 311 million viewers per race. Nonetheless, the sport has room to grow in markets such as North America and Asia (Sport Business International, 2008).

The U.S. market shows several characteristics that could help MotoGP's growth. For example, motorcycle sales have been growing for 14 years until the current recession (Hardcard, 2007b). Retail statistics, in turn, suggest that an increasing number of Americans are willing to watch or attend a motorcycle race, as shown by the growing popularity of Supercross over the past few years. To this end, the 2005 ESPN Sports Poll measured motor sports' popularity among TV viewers, showing promising results; while still lagging behind Nascar and NHRA, motorcycle racing ranked above Formula One, Indy Racing League, and Champ Car (Hardcard, 2007c).

The following chapter will review academic literature to explore the connections between relationship management (in both public relations and marketing), interactivity, and social media. The review will serve as a theoretical framework to devise an online promotional plan for MotoGP.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This section describes the concept of relationship and its centrality in public relations and marketing theory and practice. Subsequently, the impact of online technologies on relationship management will be discussed with a focus on interactivity, a key characteristic of computer-based communications. Finally, the review will summarize extant literature on social media and social media marketing, with a focus on social network sites, namely Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter.

The importance of relationship management in PR and marketing

Scholars have offered various definitions of public relations. Arguably, the most widely accepted conceptualization was given by Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2006), who described it as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, that is, the publics who have a vested interest in an organization and on whom the organization depends (Heath & Coombs, 2006). This definition shares connections with marketing, as high-quality relationships between an organization and its publics are essential to an organization's financial sustainability (Bauer, Grether, & Leach, 2002), encouraging loyalty toward its products and services (Ledingham, 2005).

Public relations as relationship management

The shift toward relationships as the core focus of public relations started in the mid-1980s (Ledingham, 2005), and reflects a broader concern for managing relationships between organizations and their markets, audiences, and publics (Heath & Coombs, 2006). Relationship management theory identifies public relations as a strategic management function that shapes stakeholders' support of organizational goals (Ströh, 2007). This theory (Ledingham, 2003) defines the concept of relationship as "the state [existing] between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political well-being of the other" (p.184). Within this framework, public relations' goal is to foster understanding and mutual benefit between organizations and publics, ultimately establishing long-term relationships between the two.

Communication, in turn, becomes a means to initiate, nurture, and maintain relationships (Dozier, 1995). Therefore, relationship management theory does not evaluate public relations efforts on the basis of quantitative benchmarks, such as the number of stories placed in the media, but rather focuses on the quality of relationships (Ledingham, 2006).

The relationship management approach can help organizations in several ways. For example, research shows that high-quality relationships with publics build support for an organization (e.g., Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) and protect market share in a competitive environment (Ledingham, 2005).

From a relationship management perspective, public relations is closely connected to marketing. For example, positive relationships with clients encourage loyalty toward

an organization's products and services, provide a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Ledingham, 2005), and build financial sustainability (Bauer, Grether, & Leach, 2002).

Relationship management in marketing

Marketing scholarship has also researched the concept of relationship extensively, sometimes overlapping with public relations (Ströh, 2007). For example, Morgan and Hunt (1994) generally defined relationship marketing as "establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges" (p. 20) with various publics (e.g., customers, suppliers, etc.). Smith (1998) further closed the gap between the two disciplines, defining relationship marketing as "the development and maintenance of close, long-term, mutually beneficial, and satisfying relationships [...] that are based on trust and collaboration" (p. 77).

There are, however, differences between the ways in which public relations and marketing approach relationship management. As Ströh (2007) pointed out, the two disciplines focus on different publics. On the one hand, marketing targets sources of competitive advantage (e.g., customers) based on the premise that both parties are willing to exchange comparable benefits (Grunig et al., 2002). For this purpose, marketing's effectiveness is measured in terms of contributions to the bottom line (Ströh, 2007). On the other hand, public relations aims at building relationships that extend beyond selling products or services, and therefore focuses on a wider set of stakeholders, some of which do not have a direct correlation to the bottom line.

In the end, while marketing communications primarily focus on building brands, identities, and images, public relations guides organizational behavior to enhance overall reputation. Nonetheless, marketing and public relations often overlap, and organizations would benefit from following a multi-disciplinary approach in which these functions support each other and work synergistically to build relationships (Grunig et al., 2002).

The impact of computer-based communication on PR and marketing

Drawing on relational theory, research found that organization-public relationships mimic interpersonal relationships (Ströh, 2007). Within this paradigm, relationship quality is shaped by variables such as trust, openness, credibility, similarity, agreement, common interest, and relational history (Heath & Coombs, 2006). Similarly, Thomlinson (2000) described public relations as a dynamic function whose purpose is to establish dialogic communication. To this end, computer-mediated communication (CMC), enabling constant feedback and dialogue, greatly affects relationship management and introduces new opportunities to cultivate relationships with publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

In particular, the Internet is the most ubiquitous example of CMC. Its penetration among the U.S. audience grew exponentially, reaching about 80% of Americans by the end of 2009, up from 67% in February 2005 (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009a). About two-thirds of the U.S. population use the Internet daily, and common activities include exchanging emails, reading news, and social networking (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009b).

The Internet is particularly important from a relationship management

perspective, because it allows users to access a virtually unlimited amount of content and, most importantly, to interact with it (Page et al., 2008). In other words, the Internet provides public relations professionals with a wide array of tools to establish two-way, dialogic communication with stakeholders. For this purpose, Kent and Taylor (1998) analyzed public relations strategies on the Web, and Kelleher (2006) highlighted the importance of implementing online communications to manage relationships with key publics.

The same holds true for marketing. Since relationship management helps companies achieve a continuing dialogue with customers (Ramaseshan et al., 2006), CMC's interactivity becomes a key function (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Moreover, marketing's recent shift toward a service-dominant view, in which relationships are pivotal, further underscores the importance of enabling consumers to share opinions about brands, both among themselves and with organizations (Freeman & Chapman, 2008). For example, research found that 68% of customers actively searched for information about companies they dealt with, and 60% were more likely to buy from organizations that responded to information requests (Hargie & Tourish, 2000). To this end, interactivity is a key component of two current marketing trends: word-of- mouth marketing – consumers providing information about products or services to other consumers – and viral marketing – using the Internet to persuade customers to share content with others.

Interactivity

Interactivity is often cited as the Internet's most valuable asset (e.g., Rafaeli &

Sudweeks, 1997), and has been generally identified as a key variable in online relationship management (Waters et al., 2009). It is thus essential for public relations and marketing professionals to understand how interactivity may create more effective interactions and long-term relationships with publics (McMillan & Hwang, 2002).

In general, interactive media foster two-way communication, allowing users to act as both senders and receivers of messages and feedback (Burgoon et al., 2000). Extant literature has analyzed interactivity from many perspectives, human-to-human interaction being one of the most common (Leiner & Quiring, 2008). This approach is consistent with relationship management theory, as it defines interactivity as two-way, reciprocal communication between senders and receivers (Cho & Cheon, 2005). By the same token, Ha and James (1998) defined interactivity as the extent to which the communicator and audience respond to – or are willing to facilitate – their respective communicative needs. The authors also analyzed several dimensions of interactivity on the Internet, and identified reciprocal communication as one of the most important in terms of building long-term relationships with publics. In other words, interactive communications can engage stakeholders in an active dialogue with organizations and lead to higher involvement (Liu & Shrum, 2002).

While interactivity encompasses a wide range of digital communication tools, public relations and marketing professionals often focus on social media due to their unique two-way qualities (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008). To this end, pervasiveness is also an important characteristic, as social media use is one of the primary activities on the Internet (Tancer, 2008).

Social media

In general, social media are online tools that enable publics to share content such as photos, videos, music, and insights. Examples include blogs, wikis, RSS, podcasts, and social networks. The overarching traits of social media are user-generated content and increased collaboration among Internet users (Lai & Turban, 2008), which mark a shift in power toward publics and democratize the Internet as a communications medium (Rheingold, 2003).

Recent literature in public relations and marketing explored how social media are changing communications between organizations and publics. For example, Reich and Solomon (2008) provide suggestions about using social media to connect with audiences and establish relationships; Weber (2007) argues that digitalization challenges communicators to adapt to new technologies; Gillin (2009) goes even further, claiming that social media have ended the age of one-way communication.

From a relationship management perspective, social media's most important characteristic is the ability to create communities through conversations (Comm, 2009). For organizations, establishing these social ties with stakeholders fosters relational stability and loyalty.

From a sports marketing standpoint, Santomier (2008) notes that interactive technologies have changed the manner in which sports are promoted, delivered, and consumed, contributing to the ongoing fragmentation of media channels. He adds that the use of social media enables companies to communicate more effectively with consumers, provide them with content, and develop brand awareness more rapidly.

As digital technologies make sports more global, social media's dialogical

qualities, together with their international reach, offer an unprecedented opportunity to build brand loyalty (Voight, 2007) and market sports (Santomier, 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising that an increasing number of sports organizations adopt social media to reach a wide audience with a limited financial investment.

Social media marketing

Social media marketing consists of using the Internet to collaborate, share information, and have a conversation with an organization's key publics (Wilcox & Kanter, 2007). Its purpose is to build brand awareness (Long et al., 2008) and to generate exposure, opportunity, and sales (Stelzner, 2009). To this end, social media technology facilitates information sharing and dialogue.

Social media marketing is a recent, but pervasive phenomenon. In a survey of marketing professionals by Stelzner (2009), 88% of respondents said that they use social media to promote their business, but 72% have been doing it for only a few months. Respondents cited generating awareness about the business, increasing Web traffic, and building new partnerships as the main advantages of social media marketing.

On the other hand, measuring social media's return on investment is a difficult task, as neither academic nor professional literature offers a definitive model to calculate social media's contribution to the bottom line (Warren, 2009). Moreover, social media enable consumers to share information and make counterarguments (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2007). As Thompson (2006) points out, consumers have increased control over what to watch, when to watch, for how long, and on what device. For this purpose, brands should not use social media merely to diffuse a message, but to spark dialogue

(McAllister & Turow, 2002), which can provide companies with valuable insights about customers' attitudes and preferences (Liu & Shrum, 2002).

Social network sites (SNS) are one of the most common avenues for social media marketing; Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook are the most widely used (Stelzner, 2009). These sites reach more than half of all Internet users (Young, 2009), and viral promotion is one of their main characteristics (Boyd, 2006). To this end, 69% of Fortune 2000 companies are using social networking sites as part of their marketing mix (McCorkindale, 2009).

Social network sites

Social network sites have attracted millions of users, becoming the primary platform for creating and sharing content online (Young, 2009). As of 2009, 46% of U.S. adults used these sites, up from 8% in February 2005 (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009c).

From a demographic standpoint, social network site users are preeminently young, as 75% of online adults ages 18-24 have a social network profile (Lenhart, 2009).[3] On the other hand, social network users reflect the overall Internet population's statistics in terms of distribution across urban, suburban, and rural areas.

In general, social network sites support the maintenance of existing social networks, but also help people connect based on shared interests (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Boyd and Ellison (2007) described SNS as Web-based services that allow users to:

- Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system

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[3] This percentage drops to 57% for 25-34 year olds, 30% for 35-44 year olds, 19% for 45-54 year olds, 10% for 55-64 year olds, and 7% for people 65 and older.

- Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection

- View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system

According to Tredinnick (2006), social network sites are characterized by participation and user-generated content. Within this framework, these sites clearly provide organizations with many tools to become involved with publics and vice versa (Waters et al., 2009). For this purpose, many companies use online social networks to help launch products and strengthen their existing brands, Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter being among the most ubiquitous in the U.S. market.

Facebook

Originally created in 2004 to cater to Ivy League students, Facebook recently surpassed MySpace to become the most popular social network site in the U.S. (Lenhart, 2010). Featuring more than 350,000,000 active users worldwide (Facebook, 2010a), the site reaches 73% of the nation's adult Internet users.

Consistent with the overall population of social network sites, the vast majority of Facebook users are age 18-25 (Tu-Uyen, 2009). However, the site's demographics are shifting toward older segments of the population. For example, users age 35 to 54 grew 276% between June 2008 and January 2009. Moreover, the ethnicity of Facebook users shifted from primarily Asian and white to a more diverse, statistically representative make-up (Swift, 2009). To this end, 11% of the site's approximately 100 million U.S. members are African-American, 9% are Latino, and 6% are Asian.

Facebook's mission is "to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Facebook, 2010b). Millions of Internet users log into the site

everyday to stay in touch with friends, upload photos, share links and videos, and find out more about the people they meet off-line. Upon joining the service, users are asked to fill out a personal profile containing demographic and personal information, upload their picture, and articulate a list of "friends" who also have a profile on the social network site (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

From a marketing standpoint, Facebook's richness of demographic data allows for highly targeted promotional efforts. For example, companies can take advantage of available user information such as age, gender, and education, to deliver tailored advertising messages that resonate with a specific market segment. To this end, advertisers have the option of paying per click (CPC) or per impression (CPM), and may use real-time reporting to perform ongoing evaluation and gain insight about who is clicking on the ad (Facebook, 2010b). Furthermore, businesses have the opportunity to diversify their Web presence by creating Facebook pages (distinct from individual profiles or groups) that allow the company to promote its products or services and enlist "fans" (Pattison, 2009). For this purpose, the site features more than 1.5 million pages, which collectively recruit more than 10 million fans every day. Given the fact that fans can then suggest the page to other users, this tool has become an important vehicle for organic, word-of-mouth marketing. Moreover, Facebook pages foster the so-called "inbound marketing," (Mescher, 2010) featuring links that direct users to corporate Web sites or to e-commerce sites such as Amazon.

From a relationship management standpoint, however, Facebook's main utility lies in its interactive features, which allow organizations to actively engage in conversations with stakeholders and gather valuable feedback (Pattison, 2009). For

example, users can create and participate on discussion boards to address topics of common interest. Moreover, the site offers the possibility to comment on virtually any kind of shared content (e.g., pictures, videos, status updates, etc.), post messages on individual profile pages, send private communications to a user's inbox, and express appreciation through a "like" button.

The site passed the 300 million user mark in 2009 and 70% of its users come from outside the United States (see Figure 2, Appendix 1). This global reach, coupled with the site's interactive affordances, shows Facebook's potential to cultivate long-term relationships, and it is not surprising that many companies now include it as part of their overall communication strategy (Daining, 2009).

Youtube

Youtube is the world's most popular video-sharing social network site, reaching almost 23% of global Internet users daily and ranking fourth in the U.S. for visitors (Alexa.com, 2009a). From a cultural standpoint, watching video content online has become integrated into daily practices (Madden, 2009), and the audience for online video sharing sites is growing swiftly across all demographic groups, far outpacing the adoption rates of many other internet activities such as social networking (see Figure 3, Appendix 1). According to a study by Pew Internet and American Life, more than half of adults use the Internet to watch or download video, and 36% do so daily. From a demographic standpoint, Youtube users are preeminently young; 89% of adults ages 18-29 report online consumption of video, compared, for example, to 67% of 30-49-year-olds.

Created in 2005 and helped by the diffusion of broadband connections (Madden,

2007), Youtube grew rapidly and quickly turned into a mainstream tool. By the end of 2006, the site was already delivering 100 million videos per day and accounting for 60% of videos watched online (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009), which led Time magazine to name it "Invention of the year" (Stephens, 2007). In particular, Grossman (2007) outlined three factors that contributed to Youtube's success: the ease and low cost of video production, the growth of Web 2.0 communities, and the cultural shift away from the mainstream media. As for the latter, providing free access to content is essential, since only a small percentage of Internet users are willing to pay to watch videos online (Madden, 2007).

While Youtube blends interactive elements (e.g. posting a video response) with traditional, one-way forms of communication (Holbert & Geidner, 2009), its structure appears to be particularly suitable for online relationship management. For example, Haridakis and Hanson (2009) argue that there is a distinctly social aspect to Youtube, which manifests itself in the form of video sharing and social interaction (posting comments and ratings to videos, sending messages, or adding users as friends). Harley and Fitzpatrick (2009) further underscored this concept, arguing that Youtube's natural purpose is to use videos to establish social connections.

From a marketing perspective, Youtube offers some advertising opportunities, but its main appeal lies in sharing video content that creates a more personal, direct connection with customers (Gallo, 2008). In particular, Youtube is an important channel for viral marketing. One of the first examples of the Web site's potential was Nike's video of Brazilian soccer star Ronaldinho performing tricks in 2005, which was seen more than 20 million times before the end of the following year (Wasserman, 2006). The case shows how Youtube can generate high exposure with limited costs. For example, a

survey by the Online Publishers Association found that 70% of Internet users have watched an online video, and 30% of them have shared one (Gill, 2006). By the same token, another study found that 57% of online video viewers have shared links to content and that 75% of them have received this kind of link (Madden, 2007). Young adults ages 18-29 are the most active content carriers, as 67% of them spread videos virally, compared, for example, to 50% of Internet users ages 30 and older.

From a sports marketing standpoint, however, Youtube remains somewhat an untapped resource. For example, while almost half of adult Internet users seek sports information online, only 14% watch sport content on the Internet (Madden, 2007). Within this group, young adults ages 18-29 report the highest levels of sports video consumption, as 24% watch or download sports videos online.

Twitter

Twitter is the Internet's most popular micro-blogging social network site (Alexa.com, 2009b). Started in March 2006, the site offers a free, real-time short messaging service that allows users to share content by typing short (140 characters or less) strings of text called "tweets" (Twitter, 2009). Text can be sent via mobile phones, instant messaging, or the Web. Users may also follow other people's "tweets" by subscribing to their feeds.

Its simplicity, stemming from the combination of web and mobile technology, quickly made Twitter a mainstream communication tool (Comm, 2009). The site ranks 13th for popularity in the U.S., where 39% of its users come from, and about 4.5% of global Internet users visit it daily (Alexa.com, 2009b). Twitter's traffic skyrocketed over

the past year, reaching more than 17 million unique visitors in May 2008, up from about 2 million in December 2007 (Fox et al., 2009). Eighteen million people were projected to have a Twitter account by the end of 2009 (Linn, 2009). According to a survey by Pew Internet and American Life (2009d), 19% of Internet users claim they use Twitter or similar services to share personal updates, up from 11% in December 2008.

From a demographic standpoint, people on Twitter mirror the general social networking population, with the majority of users being between the ages of 18 and 44. This segment has quickly joined social network sites over the past year (Fox et al., 2009); for example, 37% of Internet users ages 18-24 use Twitter or a similar service, up from 19% in December 2008. The median age of a Twitter user is 31.

Despite being a relatively new social networking tool, Twitter is shaping various social practices, such as the modern news cycle. For example, it contributed to spreading news of protest gatherings during the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh, and Iranians used it to counter government censorship during the June 2009 elections (Fox News, 2009).

Twitter's popularity and dialogical characteristics are most important from a relationship management perspective. Similarly to other social network sites, Twitter provides public relations and marketing professionals with the opportunity to gauge the opinions of key stakeholders and engage in conversations with them. For this purpose, Google and Microsoft have signed contracts to be able to search tweets (Cohen, 2009). Moreover, businesses are increasingly adopting it to promote products and services (Linn, 2009). According to a survey by Palo Alto Networks, 89% of U.S. firms are now using the online social network, up from 35% in spring 2009 (Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 2009).

Twitter's most unique asset, however, lies in its demographics. First, 60% of its Web traffic comes from outside the U.S., making it a global communication tool (Comm, 2009). Moreover, high-earning, 35-44-year-olds make up more than a quarter of its audience, establishing it as an important marketing venue.

Twitter, however, also raises challenges. Aside from allowing for less message control than traditional mass media, industry pundits also blame it for information overload. For example, in January 2009 there were 2.4 million tweets a day; by October, the number had grown to 26 million (Cohen, 2009).

While literature shows that social media have the potential to foster public relations and marketing goals, the actual impact of social network sites on public relations and marketing within the sports industry is still an uncharted territory. This study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing how MotoGP promotes motorcycle racing through Youtube and Twitter, as well as standard online tools such as the corporate Web site and newsletter. The analysis will serve as the basis for an online framework to promote the sport in the U.S. market.

The next chapter outlines the research questions that will guide the project, as well as the methodological framework employed. The chapter also provides a rationale for using a communication audit for the research component of the plan, and concludes with a discussion of the methodology's limitations and the availability of information resources.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHOD

Research Questions

While the nature of this project is professional, developing research questions provides a foundation for the research component of a public relations plan and can help focus the plan's goals and communication strategies.

Based on the literature review, the following research questions were formulated:

- RQ1: What online communications strategies and tactics does MotoGP use to promote the sport and develop its fan base?

- RQ2: What are the most effective aspects of these strategies and tactics in terms of managing relationships with key publics?

- RQ3: What best practices could MotoGP implement to maximize the impact of its online communications?

To answer these questions, the researcher will develop an Internet-based communications plan for MotoGP in the U.S. market. An audit of the organization's online communications will fulfill the research component of the plan. The following section describes the selected research method and outlines its application to answer the research questions.

Method

This project will address the research question through the development of a

strategic online communications campaign. The plan's goal is to strengthen MotoGP's identity in the U.S. sports market and establish mutually beneficial relationships with its key publics.

In general, a campaign is a sequence of operations designed to achieve a specific result (Kendall, 1992). More specifically, a public relations campaign is a structured series of activities aimed at establishing positive relations with the publics on whom the organization's success depends.

Scholarly literature suggests various models to develop public relations campaigns. For example, Hendrix and Hayes (2006) identify research, objectives, programming, and evaluation (abbreviated as ROPE) as the foundations of a public relations plan. Similarly, Marston (1963) outlines research, action and communication, and evaluation (RACE), while Kendall (1992) suggests research, adaptation, implementation strategy, and evaluation, (RAISE). Despite the different acronyms, these models clearly share common elements: an initial research stage, planning and implementation, and evaluation. For this project, the researcher will adopt Kendall's RAISE model.

1 – Research

Within Kendall's (1992) framework, research is the first step in the development of a public relations campaign. This stage is essential to gain an accurate understanding of the context in which the campaign will unfold, highlighting both issues and opportunities for the organization. Research in public relations ranges from qualitative or quantitative, primary or secondary, descriptive or analytical. For this project, a

communication audit will fulfill the research requirement.

A communication audit is a comprehensive review of an organization's communications with the purpose of uncovering avenues for improvement (e.g., Downs & Adrian, 2004). This approach often employs various research procedures, such as interviews, content analysis, and surveys, and has the potential to benefit organizations in many ways. In general, the data unveil whether an organization meets its communication goals and fosters the development of more efficient communication (Diggs-Brown, 2007). In particular, an audit can help an organization discover if key messages reach – and how they are perceived by – its stakeholders (Hargie & Tourish, 2000). From a public relations perspective, audits may play a key role in the pursuit of excellence, gathering intelligence about the organization's environment (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995).

Scholarly literature differs as to how to perform communication audits (e.g., Strenski, 1984, Hargie & Tourish, 2000). Audits may vary in size and scope; some analyze an organization's entire communications activities, while others have a more narrow focus (e.g., Quinn, 2004).

Conducting a comprehensive communication audit requires a significant investment of time and funds (Hargie & Tourish, 2000), exceeding the resources of this project. To this end, public relations literature offers more streamlined procedures to perform communication audits. For example, Wadman (2006) developed a simple, one-page scorecard that allows practitioners to gather feedback and monitor internal communication quickly and inexpensively, and Diggs-Brown (2007) devised a three-step communication audit process.

For this project, the audit focused solely on MotoGP's online communications (Web site, online newsletter, Youtube and Twitter accounts) and followed Diggs-Brown's (2007) three-step process of data collection, analysis, and reporting. Within this framework, the researcher initially has to conduct situational research about the organization's history, background, products and services. The following step is data analysis, which aims at providing insight about the quality, strengths, and weaknesses of the communications, and drawing cause-effect correlations among the collected information (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Evaluation and reporting, the third step, will conclude the audit and serve as the basis for future communication campaigns. Overall, the audit should address the following four areas (Diggs-Brown, 2007):

- Message quality: are the organization's messages clear and consistent?

- Message delivery: does the organization communicate its messages through the appropriate medium, in a timely manner, and with a minimal degree of distortion?

- Quality of the organization's relationships with stakeholders: do stakeholders support the messages and have a positive opinion of their relationship with the organization?

- Audience interpretation of the message: do stakeholders interpret the messages according to the organization's intentions? Does the message fulfill stakeholders' cognitive needs?

The following paragraphs offer a more detailed description of how Diggs-Brown's (2007) framework was applied to MotoGP's online communications, as well as the limitations inherent to the research method.

Step #1 – Organizational research

In general, this stage entails gathering information about the organization –e.g., history and background, products and services, organizational issues and opportunities. The background section in the introductory chapter partially satisfies this requirement. The majority of the data was gathered from MotoGP's Web site, and additional database research was conducted to complement this information. In particular, Business Source Premier, Ibis World, Sports Business Research, Mintel Reports, and the U.S. Census offer valuable information about the American motorcycle market, motorcycle racing, and MotoGP.

For the purpose of this project, however, it was necessary to gather further data. In particular, a preliminary quality assessment of the organization's Web communications is a necessary step toward the development of an online relationship management plan. To this end, the researcher analyzed the content of MotoGP's materials to determine the overarching themes and key messages. Additional data, such as ratings for MotoGP's Youtube videos, were collected upon availability in order to provide further context and assess the efficiency of the communication strategies.

a) Online communication materials

While MotoGP's online communications encompass several venues, the organization's Web site (www.motogp.com) was selected as the starting point. The site offers a comprehensive overview of the organization's online output, featuring many pages that provide various information about the championship (riders, teams, race calendar, results, etc.) in the form of text, photos, and videos. Consistent with qualitative

research tradition (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the analysis focused on a small, purposive sample to provide an overview of how MotoGP communicates its identity and positions its brand online. Subsequently, data collection targeted the organization's Youtube and Twitter accounts, and online newsletter. As for the latter, the researcher subscribed to the service in October 2009, and collected content until January 2010. Content posted on MotoGP's Youtube and Twitter accounts was easily available on the Web. In particular, the research targeted a sample of this content to unveil what communication strategies MotoGP uses among the online audience.

b) Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews complemented the data-gathering process. This method may provide unique information (Miller & Gallagher, 2000) and generate valuable insight about MotoGP's performance from a relationship management perspective. For this project, the researcher conducted interviews, both with Dorna's staff and external stakeholders. As Dorna's headquarters are in Europe, employees were interviewed on the phone, with a focus on the goals, strategies, and effectiveness of MotoGP's online communications. On the other hand, interviews with stakeholders focused on their opinions about MotoGP as an organization and its online communications. Granted the interviewee's permission, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Step #2 – Data analysis

An analysis of MotoGP's online communications should provide insight about

what themes are emphasized to promote the sport. Given the lack of extant research on SNS use within the sport industry, this project employed qualitative document analysis to generate descriptive findings about MotoGP's social media communications. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), this method is useful to discover new or emergent patterns in the data. Moreover, it can be used to address substantive areas about which little is known (Stern, 1980). In general, qualitative analysis can be defined as "a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For the purpose of this study, MotoGP's online communications will be analyzed through Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three-step coding approach to grounded theory. While this method is often used to generate theory, it can also be applied for description and conceptual ordering, that is, the organization of disparate data into specific categories based on their properties and dimensions.

In general, coding implies assigning labels to units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding usually happens at different stages of data analysis, with descriptive coding generally setting the ground for inferential coding. The grounded theory approach is made of three stages: open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding fractures the data down in various pieces to discover similarities and differences; at this stage, the researcher starts to identify concepts, that is, common characteristics or meanings within the data. Concepts are then clustered into initial categories by grouping them for similarities (Charmaz, 2003). This process is essential to draw inferences, establish correlations among the data, and subsume the particular into the general (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The following

stage is axial coding, which involves a reorganization of the data that was fractured during open coding into more abstract categories, based on their properties and dimensions. These categories, however, are not always mutually exclusive, and may overlap. Finally, the researcher employs selective coding; this process integrates and refines categories, organizing them around a central explanatory concept.

Within the grounded theory framework, coding often applies to narrow units of analysis,[4] such as words or phrases (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, to streamline the process, the researcher often scans the data in search of relevant analytic materials, and then performs microanalysis only on specific elements. For this project, a purposive sample of MotoGP's online communications was coded on a document-by-document basis to identify the overarching themes the organization emphasizes to brand and promote the sport. Ultimately, MotoGP's online communications were clustered into categories based on similar content, resulting in a small set of generalizations about patterns within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Step #3 – Evaluation and reporting

As the audit's final stage, the researcher compiled a brief report to summarize the findings and draw conclusions about MotoGP's online communications in terms of strengths, weaknesses, and overall effectiveness. The evaluation will result in a problem/opportunity statement that will guide the development of the online relationship management plan. For this purpose, the report provides overall suggestions for improving MotoGP's online communications, while the final plan will address this area in greater detail.

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[4] This process is often referred to as "line by line" coding.

2 – Adaptation

Within Kendall's (1992) framework, adaptation follows research in the development of a communication campaign. In general, this stage connects the research findings to the available resources and key stakeholders, devising a strategy to achieve a specific goal. First, the researcher analyzed the current situation to provide a rationale for the campaign and state the problems or opportunities that result from research. Subsequently, the researcher articulated achievable and measurable goals for the campaign, segmented and prioritized the target publics, outlined the tentative strategies, and evaluated the availability (or lack) of resources to achieve the campaign's goals.

3 – Implementation Strategy

This step is the core of the campaign, outlining the course of actions to achieve the previously stated goal (Kendall, 1992). In general, the implementation phase includes a selection of objective, strategies, and supporting tactics (including timing, messages, and media outlets), a timeline, a budget sheet, and a rationale for management to approve the overall plan.

For this purpose, the researcher listed specific objectives, strategies, and tactics to improve MotoGP's online relationship management efforts, together with a justification for management to adopt these recommendations. A calendar and a budget for implementation will also be included. The first provides a detailed timeline for tactics to unfold, while the latter describes the financial component of each tactic.

4 – Evaluation

Finally, evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the campaign (Kendall, 1992). To this end, the researcher offered a framework to appraise the usefulness of the suggested strategies and tactics and gauge stakeholders' response to the organization's online communications. To maximize the effectiveness of the plan and make changes if necessary, evaluation should occur both during the implementation stage and once the campaign is over. Moreover, since evaluation often serves as the initial research stage for communication campaigns, this process can lead to new developments for MotoGP and improve the organization as a whole.

In general, this project's goal is to provide MotoGP with an online communications campaign that allows the organization to manage positive relationships with its stakeholder in a cost-effective way. To this end, SNS's dialogical quality can help MotoGP gather useful information about its key publics and strengthen its relationships with them. The final product offers MotoGP a framework for improving stakeholder relationships in the United States, as well as establishing new relationships in the long term.

CHAPTER IV
AUDIT

This chapter will first offer an overview of MotoGP's Web site in order to generate descriptive findings about its content and interactive possibilities. Subsequently, qualitative document analysis will unveil what themes the organization focuses on to brand and promote the sport in the online sphere. Finally, SWOT analysis will summarize the findings and lay the foundation for an online relationship development plan.

MotoGP's Web site

Overview

Web sites are one of the most common platforms in online communications, and quickly became a key tool in global relationship management (Roberts and Ko, 2001), allowing companies to reach out to various stakeholders in multiple markets with limited cost. By the same token, Web sites allow stakeholders to obtain company- or product-related information at their convenience.

Launched in August 1998, MotoGP's Web site (www.motogp.com) is the hub of the organization's online relationship management efforts, offering a wide array of multimedia information and interactive opportunities for stakeholders such as consumers, media, sponsors, and business partners. The site averages almost 100,000 visits per day,

and it is most popular among educated males, age 25-44 (Alexa, 2010).   Having a Web presence can help the organization establish and reinforce its identity, and position MotoGP in the broader sports market (Argenti, 2003). For this purpose, the Web site features various visual and verbal components such as MotoGP's logo, articles, pictures, and videos, all of which help brand and promote the sport.

Given the site's abundance of content, the analysis will focus on the home page and 10 main subsections shown on the "links" bar, all of which will be scanned to gather basic information and to provide a general overview of the organization's online relationship management strategies. According to Hwang (2003), this page is essential to online communications and plays a more important role than, for example, the headline of traditional print ads. Moreover, this page is the hub of MotoGP's online presence, and its content is meant to entice users and direct them to subsequent pages.

A description of the home page and the main linked pages will determine what content MotoGP makes available online, how it organizes the information, and the interactive opportunities it provides users with. Consequently, qualitative analysis of the organization's online newsletter and Twitter and Youtube accounts will unveil what themes the organization uses to brand and promote the sport.

Analysis

MotoGP's Web site is available in seven languages (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, and Chinese). The home page clearly brands the site by identifying its source at the top of the layout, where a banner shows MotoGP and FIM's logos along with the tagline "motogp.com – official website." Below this banner, a

horizontal bar features links to 10 subsections. To facilitate the navigation of the site's extensive content, an internal search engine was added on top of this bar in November 2009. The main subsections of the site are:

- *Videos*: this section contains miscellaneous footage, including full races, highlights, features, and interviews. Unlike the rest of the content on the site, the vast majority of videos can be viewed only with a subscription. As of January 2010, fees are €24.95 ($40) for the high-resolution and €19.95 ($27) for the standard-resolution off-season passes, which are valid between November 15, 2009, and March 30, 2010. Season passes range from €99.95 (high resolution) to €79.95 (standard resolution). Users also have the option of buying a 24-hour workday pass for €2.99 ($4). Finally, vintage footage from the '90s is available for fees ranging between €14.95 ($20) and €19.95 ($27) per volume. Since November 2009, videos have been categorized by year, event (i.e. Grand Prix), class (125, 250, and MotoGP), rider, team, and content type (full race, highlight, on-board footage, interview, action clip, and feature story). The internal search engine also allows users to browse the content based on the tags assigned to each video.

- *News*: this section contains articles, reports, and news releases. Not surprisingly, most content focuses on the races, often emphasizing the spectacular, entertaining, and risky character of this sport. For example, articles discuss battles for first place, existing rivalries, or dangerous crashes. During the season, this section is updated almost daily, while in the off-season content is posted weekly. The information is organized chronologically, with

the latest news at the top of the page. In December 2009, year-by-year links to MotoGP's news archive were added under a "Previous Editions" menu. Users can browse this section for free.

- *Photos*: in this section, miscellaneous photographic footage is organized by location (e.g., garages, pitlane, or off-track), content type (e.g., action shots, "paddock girls," etc.), or subject (specific riders and teams). Consistent with the "Videos" session, the majority of the content portrays the sport in action, further underscoring its spectacular and dangerous character. For example, pictures feature many close-up shots of the riders bending, passing one another, or crashing on the circuit. The section is free to browse.

- *Riders and Teams*: this section contains information about the protagonists of MotoGP, organized by class. The "rider search" function allows users to quickly retrieve information about specific riders. An additional "MotoGP Legends" page gives an overview of MotoGP Hall of Fame's inductees. Users can browse this section for free.

- *Results & Statistics*: this section features the latest results (e.g., qualifiers, races, and off-season tests) as well as a calculator that enables users to find out virtually any statistical information about MotoGP and its protagonists since 1949. The calculator's drop-down menus contain parameters such as track, year, and rider's nationality, allowing for a highly customizable search. For example, the tool can calculate who is the most successful rider at a given track, thus being useful not only for fans, but also for the media. This section is free to browse.

- *Calendar and Circuits*: this section offers extensive information about the 18 events that make up the MotoGP season, such as location, past results, and time schedule. A map and tips about where to follow the race on the track are also included for each event. Users can access this information for free.

- *Race Tickets*: this page is built in collaboration with travel reservation Web site Expedia and allows users to purchase tickets to races, as well as related accommodations such as hotels, flights, and cars. Transactions can be made in Euros, Dollars, and Pounds.

- *Sponsors*: this section provides an overview of the corporations involved with MotoGP as title sponsors of races, official sponsors, partners, or product suppliers. The logo of each brand links to the company's home page. Users can browse this section for free.

- *Inside MotoGP*: this section contains heterogeneous information. Users can find out about MotoGP's basics (e.g., history, rules, and constituents) and its philanthropic branch (Riders for Health). Information about official merchandise, such as product presentations, displays, and promotions, is also available. Finally, the page offers information about MotoGP's VIP Village, the official corporate hospitality service, including its price packages and a detailed description of facilities and amenities available. Users can browse this section for free.

- *Fan Zone*: this section allows fans to download MotoGP's screensaver and wallpapers for free. Users can also play "Fantasy MotoGP," a free, online prediction game that rewards winners with prizes such as tickets, helmets, and

official MotoGP merchandise. Moreover, the page links to two mobile applications, one specifically made for the iPhone (available for $0.99) and a general one to access MotoGP's mobile portal on a wireless application protocol (wap.motogp.com).

Below the links bar, a prominent, rectangular frame in the center of the page highlights the lead content through the display of a photograph and a caption (see Appendix B, Figure 1). This content is usually a video, but can also take the form of an article. Upon clicking on the frame, the user is taken to another page displaying the whole story.

The home page also divides the content by racing class. The MotoGP class takes the most prominent spot, with an extensive column of links on the left side of the page. Moto2, 250cc, and 125cc content appears alongside MotoGP's, but in a less prominent fashion; the home page displays the link to only one article per class (coupled with a thumbnail), and users have to move to a different page to access more content.

Miscellaneous content appears in the "latest photos" and "latest videos" menus, both of which have two small thumbnails that serve as a preview and arrow buttons to quickly browse the content on the home page. Similarly, a "most popular" menu contains links to the five currently most viewed links.

The right side of the home page is characterized by promotion, with images and banners that link to MotoGP's VIP Village page, Paddock Girls footage, and Twitter account. This area also features advertising banners as well as Google ads.

The bottom of the page features another menu, somewhat overlapping with the one at the top. This item, however, presents two distinctive options: "hot picks" and

"motogp.com." The first features a series of links to the latest content posted on the site and the organization's social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook, while the latter contains general information about the Web site (terms of use, advertising rates, FAQs, contact form, etc.).

Conclusions

Overall, the Web site brands the product by creating an all-around MotoGP experience. To this end, the site offers plenty of racing-related content, but also exposes the public to various other facets of the sport, such as the riders' philanthropic activities, what celebrities attend the events, and miscellaneous off-track trivia. Moreover, the site clearly distinguishes among the main MotoGP constituents, such as riders, teams, manufacturers, and tracks. For example, the "Videos" page allows users to select the content by rider, team, or event. The internal search engine also divides the results into articles, photos, and videos, allowing users to quickly retrieve the desired content.

From a branding standpoint, the organization clearly positions MotoGP as its top class – not coincidentally the one that lends its name to the whole sport. This choice allows the organization to avoid conflict between classes by establishing a clear hierarchy and to expand its sponsor list by offering flexible packages. On the other hand, giving the same name to both the league and the top class may confuse the American public who do not have a long-standing interest in the sport.

Furthermore, the choice to make most of the videos available only with a paid subscription seems somewhat problematic. While MotoGP clearly has to protect the exclusive broadcasting rights it awards to individual countries, mere photos and articles

do not seem to be the most suitable means to promote such an action-heavy sport. Moreover, the site fails to consistently attract users over time. For example, the site is in Alexa's (2010) Top 10,000 for daily traffic when the championship is in session, but drops down to the top 30,000 during the off-season (see Appendix B, Figure 2). Moreover, the site draws only half the visitors of competitor Formula One.

Most importantly from a relationship management perspective, the organization fails to take advantage of the Internet's possibilities to dialogue with its stakeholders. For example, the site does not allow users to comment on content, merely featuring social bookmarking or sharing buttons[5] for services such as Delicious, StumbleUpon, Digg, Facebook, and Twitter. That said, users have the possibility to bookmark or share content only for articles; to share videos (those available for free) and photos – arguably more important material given the nature of the sport – users need to make a more active effort, copying and pasting the URL on their Web site of choice. Furthermore, the site does not offer a chat room or forum where fans can share opinions and provide feedback, both among themselves and with the organization. Conversely, users can communicate with the organization only through a standardized, fairly impersonal contact form. Despite allowing for stakeholders' input, this tool does not appear to be the most suitable to establish long-term, mutually beneficial relationships through dialogue. For example, the organization may not respond in a timely manner, or not address the concern at all.

In the end, MotoGP does not abide by best practices in relationship management (e.g., Grunig et al., 2002), failing to take advantage of the online technology to achieve two-way, symmetrical communication with its stakeholders. In other words, MotoGP uses its Web site merely as a one-way tool to push content and build brand awareness,

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[5] This option was added in November 2009.

instead of joining conversations with key publics that may unveil precious insights about their attitudes and behaviors. This information, if incorporated into MotoGP's overall communication strategy, may lead to solid, long-term relationships with key publics and benefit the company's bottom line.

Nonetheless, the site still constitutes a valuable opportunity to promote MotoGP in the American market, as U.S. Internet users are ranked third, slightly behind India and Indonesia, for total visits (Alexa, 2010). In other words, U.S. fans log into the site more often than Internet users from countries where the sport is more popular (e.g., Italy or Spain). The following section will analyze a sample of communications from MotoGP's Facebook, online newsletter, and Youtube to determine what themes the organization emphasizes to brand and promote the sport online.

MotoGP's Facebook account

Overview

MotoGP recently joined Facebook, creating a page in February 2009. As of January 1, 2010, 175,300 members of the social networking site were fans of the organization. From a relationship management standpoint, joining a mainstream social network site such as Facebook provides MotoGP with an opportunity to diversify its Web presence, to make publics interact with the brand, and to foster organic promotion. To this end, the organization can leverage a wide array of visual, verbal, and multimedia content that helps brand and promote the sport.

In particular, Facebook's technological features allow MotoGP to use the site as a duplicate of the corporate Web site.   For this purpose, a description of MotoGP's

Facebook account will simply provide an overview of MotoGP's relationship management strategies. Consequently, qualitative document analysis of the organization's online newsletter and Twitter and Youtube accounts will unveil what themes the organization uses to brand and promote the sport.

Analysis

MotoGP's Facebook account is divided into different sections, namely, "Wall," "Info," "Video," "Twitter," "Photos," "Events," "Pages," and "Discussion Board." Clicking on the page, users are automatically directed to the "Wall" section. This page displays posts by both the organization (in the form of news releases) and fans; a series of links including MotoGP' fan list, videos, favorite pages; and a profile picture showing the company's logo blending with a faded image of riders racing (see Appendix B, Figure 4).

The "Info" section merely consists of a link to the company's Web site and a short, textual message that states:

> "MotoGP is the world's premier motorcycling championship, with a season of 18 Grand Prix in 16 countries bringing together the world's top motorcycle manufacturers such as Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Ducati, Aprilia, and KTM, plus an elite crop of top riders from every corner of the globe.
> Among those riders, Valentino Rossi, Nicky Hayden, Dani Pedrosa, Casey Stoner, Andrea Dovizioso, Loris Capirossi and many more. The page features almost four hundred links and 29 videos, mirroring the content updates on the Web site."

The "Photo" and "Video" sections feature a small selection of free content from the organization's Web site. Added in January 2010, the "Twitter" section merely duplicates the posts on MotoGP's Twitter page. On the other hand, the "Event" section offers unique content, featuring open invitations to all the races of the upcoming season. In particular, races are categorized as "Sports – Sporting Event" and invitations include

detailed information about time and location. Likewise, the "Discussion Board" section provides fans with a unique venue to share opinions about the sport. Finally, the "Pages" section features links to 20 MotoGP sponsors.

In terms of content, the page does not offer unique information. Posts simply mirror the news releases on MotoGP's Web site, except for the "videos" section, which shows only a limited number (n=29) of free videos. News releases consist of a photographic thumbnail, a short blurb, and a link to the specific page on MotoGP's Web site. The information is organized chronologically. Consistent with the corporate Web site, most content summarizes or previews the races, often providing an individual rider's perspective. By the same token, the "photos" and "videos" sections offer miscellaneous footage, mostly portraying the sport in action. For this purpose, however, the organization changed its content feeding strategy while the 2009 championship was still in session. After posting two albums specifically dedicated to the first two events of the season, MotoGP only created one "2009 MotoGP World Championship" album in May 2009, which has not been updated since.

Contrary to the Web site, MotoGP's Facebook account offers a discussion board where publics can dialogue and share opinions/information about the sport. Threads are created only by users, and mostly target the sport's protagonists. For example, two posts specifically debate who is the best rider. However, the organization does not allow for any other form of user-generated content. To this end, it is interesting to note how MotoGP initially enabled fans to contribute material –for example, uploading personal videos – but once again changed its strategy to adopt a more controlled approach.

Conclusions

Facebook provides MotoGP with an additional venue to distribute content. On the one hand, posting the same material available on the corporate Web site fosters brand consistency and reinforces the sport's identity. Moreover, the page promotes inbound marketing by repeatedly linking back to the site. Also, Facebook's "share" button encourages viral promotion of content.

However, using Facebook merely to syndicate content hinders the page's unique value and stifles users' experience. To this end, the organization fails to take advantage of the site's dialogical characteristics, using the page as a one-way promotional tool instead of interacting with publics. For example, MotoGP created Facebook events for each race on its calendar, but did not send any invitations. Moreover, the company does not respond to queries on the discussion board. In particular, one post – titled "watch Motogp in the US?!?" (Cole, 2009) – asks for information about media coverage of the races and notes how difficult it is for U.S. fans to follow the sport, but did not receive any response from the organization.

In the end, Facebook's interactive features allow for a more active participation by publics. For example, fans can comment on content and discuss topics of shared interest. However, MotoGP once again fails to take advantage of online technologies to achieve dialogue and mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders. Next, qualitative document analysis will unveil what themes the organization emphasizes to brand and promote the sport online.

Online Newsletter

Overview

MotoGP offers a free email newsletter. In order to subscribe to the service, users need to create an account on MotoGP's Web site and provide basic demographic information such as date of birth and country of residence (see Appendix B, Figure 5). In terms of content, the newsletter mirrors the updates on the Web site and it is released whenever new content is available. Issues are either titled "motogp.com – Headlines of the day [date]" or "motogp.com – Headlines of the week."

Each newsletter contains a "Headlines" banner with MotoGP's logo and the silhouette of a race official waving a checkered flag, under which lays a rectangular advertising banner (see Appendix B, Figure 6). The top of the layout features the Web site's address, together with the tagline "official website," and the current date. Further down, a content list displays thumbnails and blurbs that accompany each link. Content is classified either as "article" or as "report." While the former consists only of written information, the latter features multimedia content (most often in a video form) that can be viewed only upon paid subscription unless otherwise specified. Each issue includes from three to 10 pieces. Clicking on content, users are re-directed to the organization's Web site.

Analysis

The researcher subscribed to the service on August 24, 2009, collecting 90 issues by the end of the year. Throughout this period, MotoGP held six races and published an average of five newsletters per week, with a higher frequency before the championship

ended on November 8, 2009. Qualitative document analysis will target a small, purposive sample within this collection. In particular, coding will focus on the six newsletters issued on a Monday after a race, for a total of 42 content pieces, to unveil the themes used by MotoGP to brand and promote the sport online. The rationale behind the sampling choice lies in the assumption that Mondays after race week-ends are ideal to summarize the event, build on its highlights to brand the sport, and emphasize specific themes to position MotoGP in the broader market. The researcher first scanned each content piece in its entirety, taking notes about the overall tone, main topics, and style. Subsequently, the articles were analyzed paragraph-by-paragraph, highlighting particular linguistic choices (e.g., adjectives, quoted sources, stereotypes, etc.). Each article was read at least a second time, in case any incidents were missed.

Findings

Issues span a wide array of topics, ranging from race summaries to features about individual riders. Through open coding, diverse data were organized into categories based on similar content or meaning; new categories were created as unique incidents came along. Frequency of category recurrence was also taken into account to establish a hierarchy within content.

Most articles addressed the races from a specific rider's perspective, for example, using quotes to give a personalized account of the event or discussing its significance to the future of the championship. To this end, 80% (n=34) of the articles featured a rider's name in the title. Within this subset, the MotoGP class clearly took the spotlight, as 57% (n=24) of the articles focused on the top class.

Pieces often linked to a video on MotoGP's Web site, which was usually available only with a paid subscription. A small number of articles focused on aspects of the sport that go beyond the mere race. For example, one piece (MotoGP, 2009b) linked to pictures and videos of young girls hired by teams for promotional purposes, such as giving away coupons in the paddock, wearing clothes with teams and sponsors' logos, or simply posing for photographs next to the bikes.

Through open coding, these miscellaneous data were clustered into 46 specific categories (see Appendix C, Figure 1). Axial coding helped organize these data into broader categories (see Appendix C, Figure 2, bold type), that is, "constituents," "defining traits," and "branding/linkage." The first category consists of recurring elements such as the different classes, teams, riders, and manufacturers that participate in the championships, as well as the tracks and paddock girls, both of which change for each race. For example, the pieces not only mention the riders' and teams' names, but also frequently couple them with their respective manufacturers such as Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, and Ducati. Track names and locations are also mentioned repeatedly, underlining the global character of the sport.

MotoGP's "defining traits" are less evident, but arguably more important from a branding perspective. This set of attributes, further divided into "collective" and "individual," is the foundation of MotoGP's identity and helps position the sport in the broader market. In terms of the "collective" traits (i.e., the ones shared by all participants) MotoGP emerges as competitive, professional, spectacular, and sportsmanlike. For example, the pieces frequently mentioned the struggles each rider faces to be fast on track and the constant need to push the limits to win, underlining the challenging aspect of this

sport. Articles also position MotoGP as a highly professional sport, emphasizing the risk of racing at speeds as high as 320km/h, sometimes in rainy conditions, and frequently defining its protagonists as the top riders competing with the best brands in the industry. Moreover, MotoGP's spectacular character is underscored by defining races as dramatic, unpredictable events with frequent lead changes and dangerous, visually striking crashes. Finally, content portrays MotoGP as sportsmanlike, describing the relationships among competitors as respectful, or even friendly, despite the tough battles on the tracks (e.g., MotoGP, 2009c). Similarly, one item mentioned how Riders for Health, the sport's charity branch, donated bikes to help humanitarian efforts in underdeveloped African countries (MotoGP, 2009d).

"Individual" traits were further divided into attitude, technical skills, and emotions. For example, the items frequently highlight the determination each rider uses to overcome the difficulties in finding the right set up for the bike, or the courage it takes to race despite being injured. Moreover, direct quotes convey the personal emotions of each rider, ranging from happiness or disappointment following races to resilience or hope for the future. Finally, the content diversifies the unique skills of each rider. For example, pieces repeatedly underscored the clash between different generations, usually juxtaposing the young competitors' ambition and recklessness with the elders' experience and shrewdness.

Conclusions

Qualitative document analysis of six issues of MotoGP's online newsletter unveiled broader content categories and overarching themes that the organization focuses

on to brand the sport and promote it online. To this end, MotoGP's content shows consistency of themes, portraying the sport as competitive, professional, spectacular, and sportsmanlike.

From a marketing perspective, the newsletter successfully serves the purpose of establishing a distinctive, coherent identity for MotoGP, and positioning its brand in the broader sports market. In particular, the organization clearly tries to market the MotoGP as the elite form of motorcycle racing and a highly entertaining, global sport. Moreover, the company further diversifies its brand by creating a hierarchy among the various classes and riders. The 125cc comes across as a laboratory where young riders take their first steps in the world of professional motorcycle racing, generating close, unpredictable races. The 250cc class helps to polish the skills and to get the most talented riders ready for the top class. MotoGP is then described as the premier expression of the sport, the place where the best manufacturers and riders compete and become legends. Not surprisingly, the organization builds on both individual and team performance for promotion, focusing on its most successful, charismatic riders. For this purpose, the best four riders in the standings (that is, Valentino Rossi, Jorge Lorenzo, Casey Stoner, and Dani Pedrosa) received the highest number of mentions (n=12).

As previously noted, however, written and photographic material is not the most suitable to communicate the sport's identity. For this purpose, the decision to make only a few videos available for free seems somewhat problematic, especially in terms of developing the sport in the U.S. market, where it lacks mainstream media coverage and promotion. Furthermore, the newsletter shows several weaknesses from a relationship management standpoint. First, the inherent characteristics of this medium make it a one-

to-many, one-way promotional tool that does not allow for feedback. Re-directing users to the corporate Web site could overcome this drawback but, given that the Web site does not allow for comments or other user-generated input, the organization fails to take full advantage of the dialogic opportunities offered by online technologies. Moreover, by simply mirroring the Web site updates, the newsletter does not have any distinctive character and merely serves as a reminder that new content is available. The newsletter should feature exclusive content to increase its value and entice readers.

In the end, this communication tool may foster the organization's promotional goals with existing consumers, but does not foster the promotion of the sport or the development of mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its stakeholders. The next two sections will analyze MotoGP's Twitter and Youtube pages to provide further insight about the organization's social media strategy.

MotoGP's Twitter page

Overview

MotoGP further diversified its online presence by creating a Twitter account in August 2009. As of January 1, 2010, the organization had released 155 tweets, 87% of which (n=135) were posted while the championship was in session. The account has 7,581 followers – a 268% increase since September 2009. Moreover, 299 lists follow MotoGP's Twitter feed.

From a graphic standpoint, the page features a customized background showing the organization's logo, the corporate Web site's URL, and images of Casey Stoner, Valentino Rossi, and Jorge Lorenzo racing. A short information blurb also links to the

corporate Web site and recites: "Welcome to the official channel of MotoGP, the premier championship of motorcycle road racing" (@OfficialMotoGP, 2009).

Qualitative document analysis targeted a purposive sample of posts to unveil MotoGP's relationship management strategies on Twitter. Consistently with the sampling procedure adopted to analyze the newsletter's content, the researcher coded the tweets immediately following a race. To this end, newsletter analysis sampled Monday issues due to the time required to package and deliver the product. In this case, given Twitter's real-time nature, qualitative coding focused on tweets posted on the Sunday of a race. In particular, 24 pieces were analyzed to discover overarching themes and branding strategies. Each post was scanned for main topics and style. Subsequently, the tweets were analyzed word by word, highlighting particular linguistic choices (e.g., adjectives, verbs, direct quotes, etc.). Each post was read at least a second time, in case any incidents were missed.

Findings

MotoGP's tweets consist mostly of news updates, and often contain a content link that brings the user back to the official Web site. Content spans different topics, from races to off-track news concerning, for example, riders' activities during their free time.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of posts addressed race-related matters. For example, the organization offers quick previews or summaries of the various races through plain-text posts, sometimes providing a direct quote from a rider. MotoGP also uses the social network site to provide timely information updates on a race day. For example, one tweet offered details about the rescheduled start of a Grand Prix that was

delayed due to weather conditions (@OfficialMotoGP, 2009). More than half of the tweets (n=14), however, linked back to MotoGP's Web site for videos. Within this set, half of the links offered free content. Videos showed, for example, a special livery used by MotoGP rider Casey Stoner for his home contest in Australia, or a parade lap before the Indianapolis race by retired champion Kevin Schwantz. However, none of the free videos showed footage of the latest Grand Prix (e.g., highlights), which was available only with a paid subscription.

Posts also concern off-track facts. For example, one tweet discussed contract renewals for individual riders (@OfficialMotoGP, 2010). Arguably more interesting from a relationship management perspective, one post directly invited users to participate in MotoGP's online prediction game to win prizes.

In terms of content, MotoGP's tweets showed consistency with the topics addressed by the online newsletter. For this purpose, open and axial coding evidenced the same categories that previously surfaced for the organization's online newsletter, that is, "constituents," "defining traits," and "branding/linkage." As for "constituents," tweets repeatedly mentioned the names of riders, teams, and manufacturers. Moreover, various linguistic devices gave the sport a definite identity and brand. For example, adjectives such as "thrilling" (@OfficialMotoGP, 2009) underscore MotoGP's spectacular character. Moreover, tweets framed the competition as a "fight," "clash," or "dominance." Individual riders' attitude, skills, and emotions, are also addressed. For example, one tweet contained a direct quote from Yamaha's Jorge Lorenzo acknowledging the value of teammate and rival Valentino Rossi (who claimed the MotoGP title), saying: "he was the #1 this year - he's been faster in most races, more

consistent, more clever." As for "linkage," posts used linguistic devices such as ellipses to entice users, re-direct them to the organization's Web site, and become paying subscribers. For example, one tweet said: "Thrilling 125cc race at Indianapolis: Terol led the way until the antepenultimate lap, when … http://bit.ly/6hvJc."

Conclusions

MotoGP's Twitter page features miscellaneous content, providing a comprehensive MotoGP experience. From a branding standpoint, the posts showed consistency of themes with the organization's newsletter, portraying the sport as the premier form of motorcycle racing and as competitive, professional, spectacular, and sportsmanlike. Moreover, the choice of "officialMotoGP" as the account name seems appropriate, reinforcing the authenticity and authority of the source.

On the other hand, only a few tweets carry unique value for the public. The vast majority of posts are simply a short version of the content uploaded on the Web site. Similarly to MotoGP's newsletter and Facebook page, the organization uses Twitter as a reminder of content updates on the corporate Web site.

Most important from a relationship management standpoint, the organization does not build on Twitter's conversational features. In particular, the organization uses the social network site only as a one-way promotional tool to push content, instead of creating a dialogue with its stakeholders to gather feedback. For example, MotoGP does not follow anyone on Twitter.

The following section will examine MotoGP's Youtube page. In particular, the analysis will take advantage of the site's rich amount of metadata (e.g., number of views)

to provide a detailed account of the organization's most popular video content.

MotoGP's Youtube channel

Overview

MotoGP's Youtube channel was created on October 7, 2005, and has grown at a steady pace ever since. As of January 1, 2010, the channel featured more than 31,000 subscribers and had been visited 1,773,708 times – respectively an 18% and a 17.8% increase since September 2009. The main page offers general details about MotoGP (linking to the official Web site for more information), basic information about the organization's profile on Youtube, and a video player that automatically shows the most recently uploaded content. The channel featured 143 videos, including race highlights, previews, post-race interviews, season recaps, episodes of MotoGP's show "After the Flag," and other miscellaneous material. Videos can be sorted by date, number of views, and average rating.

The 10 most viewed videos on the channel were coded to discover what elements of the organization's communications are most popular among the online audience. To this end, Youtube lists metadata about each video, such as ratings, number of comments, and geographical location of viewers, all of which were collected to provide further context. The pieces were first scanned in their entirety, and notes were written about content and style. Subsequently, the videos were analyzed shot by shot, highlighting particular images or words. Each piece was then viewed at least a second time, in case any incidents were missed.

Findings

The videos contained a wide array of topics. Once again, race footage constituted the vast majority of content. This material shows, for example, riders cornering at high speed, passing one another, crashing, and colliding. Summaries of one-on-one duels are a stand-alone subcategory within this type of content. These videos focus on just two riders breaking away from the pack and competing for first place, dramatizing the close battle through rhetorical devices such as the use of live, passionate commentary, fast-paced music, and slow motion. For example, the "Rossi-Stoner Laguna Seca 2008 Battle" (motoGP, 2008a) piece shows the highlights of the first laps of the race, when riders Valentino Rossi (Yamaha) and Casey Stoner (Ducati) pushed each other to the limit, passing each other several times, with the former eventually claiming the victory.

The videos also portrayed aspects of the sport that go beyond the mere races, such as the teams' mechanics tuning up the motorcycles, the riders talking with engineers in their private boxes, and the fans cheering in the stands. Women also appear consistently throughout the content, as three of the 10 most-viewed videos are specifically dedicated to "paddock girls."[6] This footage emphasizes the attractiveness and sexual appeal of the women hired by teams for promotional purposes (such as holding umbrellas with sponsor logos while riders wait on the starting grid) and mostly features close-ups of their bodies. In light of the sport's male-heavy audience, this content's popularity is not particularly surprising. The most-viewed video, titled "Sachsenring Paddock Girls," (motoGP, 2008b) was seen 8,223,486 times – more than twice as many as the number two video. The piece is ranked 57th among Youtube's most popular videos for Global Sports and, quite surprisingly in light of MotoGP's mostly European fan base, is more popular in the U.S.

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[6] The paddock is an enclosure adjoining racetracks where teams are stationed to work on the bikes.

than anywhere else.

MotoGP's name and logo are also recurring elements. For example, nine of the videos start with a brief introduction linking to the organization's Web site. Over time, this prologue changed from a 10-second, cartoon-like animation of riders racing to a simpler, 5-second display of the Web address with elements of the logo zooming past it to the sound of roaring engines. The videos also repeat the Web address at the end, often coupled with a textual encouragement, such as "to see more, visit motogp.com" (motoGP, 2008c) or "Enjoy all the action" (motoGP, 2008d).

Open and axial coding evidenced the previously noted categories, that is, constituents, defining traits, and branding/linkage. For example, the Honda, Yamaha, and Ducati logos are repeatedly displayed, and race summaries show the flag of the nation where the track is located, with the video's title indicating the name of the circuit. MotoGP once again emerged as competitive, professional, spectacular, and sportsmanlike. For example, the two videos focused on close battles for the victory (one between Valentino Rossi and Casey Stoner, the other between Rossi and Jorge Lorenzo) emphasize the rivalry among riders and the difficulty of winning a race, and show the sport's spectacle through slow motion and on-board footage. MotoGP's professional character is underlined by footage of mechanic crews tuning up the motorcycles, or bikers racing in precarious, wet conditions. As for individual traits, the riders' skills and courage are shown, for example, through footage of the risky moves they sometimes make to pass an opponent (sometimes coupled with intense commentary), or the ability to almost touch the ground while bending the bike. Finally, personal emotions are underscored by scenes of celebrations or disappointment at the end of the races.

From a marketing perspective, using the video format provides MotoGP with additional branding options. For example, content repeatedly displays MotoGP's Web address and logo in brief segments at the beginning and end of each piece, as well as throughout the video. Placement and appearance, however, have shifted over time. The Web address is either placed on the upper left corner of the screen or, more recently, on the upper right. The logo, in turn, is displayed either in color on the top right, or in white on the lower left. These connections are essential to claim authorship of the content, reinforce MotoGP's identity, and position its brand in the consumer's mind. Moreover, they serve the purpose of linking users to the more comprehensive corporate Web site and convincing them to pay the subscription to access MotoGP's content.

Conclusions

The analysis of the 10 most-viewed videos MotoGP's Youtube channel evidenced the same categories and themes previously noted for the online newsletter and Twitter account. From a marketing perspective, however, Youtube has a unique value; portraying the sport in action is essential to establish MotoGP's unique identity and position the brand in the broader sports market, especially given the lack of mainstream media coverage in the United States. Not surprisingly, race highlights are extremely popular and make up the largest video category (n=6). Through these videos, MotoGP clearly tries to position itself as the elite form of motorcycle racing and a highly spectacular, global sport. To this end, duels are essential to promote MotoGP, not only because they portray motorcycle racing at its finest, but also because they emphasize the human components of the sport, such as riders' different personalities and existing rivalries.

The videos, however, fail to maximize the emotional impact of the sport by fragmenting the race footage (for example, none of the videos shows a whole, uninterrupted lap), which is often assembled without a chronological order. For example, the "Rossi vs Lorenzo at the 2009 Catalunya Grand Prix" video (motoGP, 2009e) drew some negative comments for not showing in their entirety the last three, climactic laps of the race, during which the two opponents rode with maximum skill and emotion and passed one another many times.

Despite the fact that MotoGP does not feature any female riders, women play a significant promotional role. "Paddock girls" footage constitutes the second largest category (n=3), depicting young, attractive, scantily clad women hired by individual teams for promotional purposes. This content targets MotoGP's mostly male audience and draws a significant amount of attention – taking the first, third, and fifth positions among the 10 most-viewed videos. To this end, it is interesting to note how, while all the remaining videos are most popular among males age 35-44, the demographics for this content shift to men age 45-54. Moreover, while Europeans (especially Italians) and Indonesians are usually the most avid consumers of MotoGP content, Americans show a marked interest in these videos; in two instances, the videos were more popular in the U.S. than anywhere else.

MotoGP's Youtube strategy consists of posting footage to brand the sport as competitive, professional, and spectacular. Ultimately, this strategy should develop fans and foster viral promotion. As far as the latter is concerned, this decision proved to be successful, as the 10 most-viewed videos posted a total of 927,534 viral contacts. However, fan development is somewhat hindered by the fact that the organization once

again uses the social network site only as a one-way medium to communicate with its publics. For example, MotoGP does not post (or reply to) comments, nor does it allow users to embed the videos on different sites.

In the end, while MotoGP's Youtube communication shows consistency of themes and achieves promising figures in terms of exposure and viral promotion, the organization fails to take full advantage of the dialogic opportunities the site offers and develop more personal relationships with its publics. For this purpose, MotoGP should monitor (and respond to) comments to gather valuable feedback and try to incorporate the necessary changes to satisfy users' demands.

Audit report

Qualitative content analysis addressed RQ1 and RQ2, evidencing what strategies and tactics MotoGP uses to promote the sport online and what the most effective strategies are. Overall, the organization simply uses the Internet and social media to push content. For this purpose, MotoGP promotes consistent themes across the online sphere, forging a coherent, distinctive identity and branding the sport as competitive, professional, and spectacular. In terms of popularity among Internet users, race summaries draw a significant amount of attention, but videos of paddock girls clearly steal the spotlight. To this end, mixing this content with racing footage may increase the public's interest and help organic promotion. The company, however, makes only a fraction of the content it produces available for free. This strategy serves the purpose of increasing subscriptions to the corporate Web site. For example, the company briefly posted an entire race on its channel, but swiftly deleted it (MotoMatters, 2009).

From a relationship management standpoint, the organization does not build on online technologies' unique interactive features to foster two-way communication with its stakeholders and establish mutually beneficial relationships. First, the company's Web site does not offer standard interactive features such as comments and ratings. Furthermore, MotoGP paradoxically uses social networking sites only as a one-way, one-to-many tool to disseminate content, instead of having a conversation with its publics. For example, the organization does not follow any account or participate in conversations on Twitter.[7] By the same token, MotoGP does not post or respond to comments on Youtube.

This one-way approach led independent Web site MotoMatters.com to claim that, for MotoGP personnel, "the internet is a threat, a force they can neither understand nor control, and […] a medium without an obvious method of generating an income" (MotoMatters, 2009). Furthermore, many Internet users complained about the organization's practice of filing copyright claims to remove user-generated content from Youtube. For this purpose, both MotoGP and its mother organization Dorna Sports have been repeatedly featured on Youtomb, a Web site by MIT Free Culture whose purpose is to investigate what kind of videos are taken down from the Internet due to allegations of copyright infringement, with a particular emphasis on those for which the takedown may be mistaken (Youtomb, 2010).

The rationale behind MotoGP's approach lies in the fact that a substantial portion of its income stream comes from exclusive agreements with TV broadcasters, which, in turn, leverage audience figures to sell advertising space. Within this framework, MotoGP's broadcasting contracts would obviously lose value if content were available

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[7] Not even those managed by its riders, e.g. @lorenzo99 or @BenSpies11.

online for free. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that Dorna, not the national TV companies, issues all the copyright claims (MotoMatters, 2009). Not only may this practice be seen as a waste of corporate resources – the Internet will always offer versions of the race, such as videos of home TVs showing the broadcast or video files on peer-to-peer systems – but it also defies one of the main benefits of social media, that is, viral promotion. By the same token, the choice to make most videos available only by paid subscription appears somewhat problematic in light of the minor coverage the sport receives in various non-European markets, such as the United States. Moreover, MotoGP could delay posting summaries of the races in order not to compete for viewers with broadcast television.

Furthermore, using social network sites only to promote content updates on the corporate Web site stifles the unique value of MotoGP's social media presence. To this end, MotoMatters (2009) pointed out, the organization has "unlimited amounts of footage [that] never gets seen, disappearing on the cutting room floor under the harsh eye of the editor. And yet thousands, if not millions of fans are crying out for this kind of material." Considering that the current media landscape is moving toward user customization (Thompson, 2006), the Internet provides MotoGP with the means to create an interactive, engaging experience necessary to increase the American public's involvement with the sport. For example, the organization could upload unseen footage of a race, such as a bird's eye or on-board view of a single lap, allowing users to choose from different options. Moreover, offering free content online may attract visitors to the corporate Web site and increase MotoGP's advertising revenues. For this purpose, showing exclusive footage greatly increases the value of MotoGP's online presence. For example, posting

unseen videos of Valentino Rossi and Jorge Lorenzo battling for first place in Catalunya drew favorable comments by the online public, leading one user to say: "I'm happy that they have FINALLY used the website to show un-aired footage. This [is] a major step in the right direction for them" (MotoMatters, 2009).

In the end, this audit shows how MotoGP successfully established a diversified online presence, with a particular focus on social media outlets. However, the organization does not abide by the best practices in relationship management, avoiding dialogue with stakeholders and losing control of the brand. To this end, the organization should not use social media only as another opportunity to push a message. Instead, MotoGP should interact with online publics on their terms, focusing on topics that they find interesting. The following section summarizes the audit's findings in terms of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (e.g., Larsen, 2004). Findings, in turn, will guide the development of a relationship management plan in the next chapter.

SWOT Analysis

The purpose of SWOT analysis is to assess the current health of an organization by examining its main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The following list presents a SWOT analysis of MotoGP's online presence:

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Branding:	*Content:*
✓ Consistency of themes ✓ Clear identity ✓ Paddock girls and racing summaries are the most popular content	• Pictures and text are not the most suitable to communicate MotoGP's identity • Redundancy of content does not provide unique value to social media outlets

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Relationship management:

- ✓ Viral promotion
- ✓ Diversified social media presence reaches different audience segments
- ✓ SNS provide fans with communication platform

Relationship management:

- • Social media used as one-way tool, not to engage in dialogue with publics

Opportunities

Relationship management:

- ✓ Democratization of social media
- ✓ Use social media's interactive features to dialogue with publics
- ✓ Gather feedback to develop more effective communication strategies
- ✓ Social media's reach in the U.S.

Promotion:

- ✓ Personality and charisma of its riders
- ✓ In-house content production provides vast amount of footage and control over its dissemination

Threats

Relationship management

- • Not interacting with publics makes MotoGP lose control of brand and miss opportunities to grow
- • Social media clutter
- • Competitors: AMA Pro Racing, World Superbike, Supercross

The SWOT analysis shows MotoGP's potential to grow in the U.S. market. In terms of key strengths, consistency of themes and identities provides the organization with a distinctive brand. Moreover, social media technology provides the organization with the opportunity to spread content virally, track what themes are most popular among Internet users, and adjust communications accordingly.

The organization's one-way approach to social media, however, hinders the development of relationships within the online sphere. In particular, MotoGP fails to provide feedback to its stakeholders and does not take full advantage of its proprietary footage. For example, the company shares mostly static material (i.e., text and photos) instead of dynamic (video).

MotoGP's competitive environment offers both problems and opportunities. On

the one hand, the organization could adopt a two-way approach on its social media accounts, building dialogue with publics, gathering valuable feedback, and enhancing the quality of its relationships with stakeholders. Also, producing the content in-house provides MotoGP with great flexibility over the craft and distribution of the message. For example, the company could post exclusive, unseen footage on Youtube to reward its online fans. Finally, the MotoGP could leverage its pool of well-known, international riders and teams to promote the sport all over the world.

The main threat toward the sport's development in the U.S. market is represented by the organization's asymmetrical approach to social media. For example, MotoGP risks losing control of the brand by not participating in online conversations among fans. Also, the organization is competing for motorcycle enthusiasts' interest and media coverage with the American Motorcycle Association (AMA), World Superbike, and Supercross championships (to name a few), all of which hold races in the United States. Finally, the cluttered social media environment requires creative and strategic thinking to engage Internet users' attention. To this end, lack of internal resources might prevent MotoGP from devising a comprehensive, innovative social media campaign.

The next chapter consists of an extensive, social-media-based relationship management plan with the goal of promoting the sport in the United States.

CHAPTER V
RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN

Situation analysis

MotoGP is managed by Dorna Sports, which supervises virtually every aspect of the property, including advertising, promotion, sponsorship, merchandising, commercial and media rights, hospitality, and content production. Over time, MotoGP has been able to position itself as the world's premier form of road motorcycle racing and a global sport that attracts more than five billion viewers[8] per season. However, MotoGP remains a niche property in the United States. For example, SpeedTV did not broadcast its races live last year. The American sports culture is certainly influenced by this decision. As David Emmett (freelance journalist and owner of motomatters.com) underscored (personal communication, February 22, 2010), the U.S. audience emphasizes pure entertainment over the technical aspects of the sport, preferring events that are easy to understand. MotoGP's spectacle, however, goes beyond the sheer number of passes, encompassing the pinnacle of two-wheel technology and the ability to operate at the limits of what is humanly possible on a motorcycle. Moreover, the sport faces a unique logistical challenge in the U.S. market. As Emmett highlighted, MotoGP's natural settings prevent fans from being able to see all the action unfold in front of their eyes

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[8] While Dorna did not release consumer data, analysis of Youtube and a chat with David Emmett, owner of motomatters.com, profiled the average viewer as male, 35-44, highly educated and technologically savvy.

within a close, stadium-like environment (something Americans are greatly accustomed to).

The interview with Emmett also evidenced somewhat of a corporate culture problem. According to the journalist, Dorna Sports sees itself primarily as a TV rights seller. In light of the six-figure contracts it stipulates with national broadcasters, the company has little incentive to experiment with the Internet. By the same token, lack of competition (i.e., being a de facto monopoly rights holder) stifles Dorna's search for innovative online revenue models. This insight not only sheds light on MotoGP's one-way approach to social media, but also highlights a broader issue of access to MotoGP for external publics such as fans and media. For example, Emmett stated his frustration about not being granted a permanent media accreditation for the 2008/2009 season, while traditional outlets (i.e., print and broadcast) were able to receive it.[9]

Nonetheless, the Internet and especially social media provide MotoGP with an opportunity to develop. For this purpose, implementing an online relationship management plan shows great potential to increase the sport's global reach and protect the brand's competitive advantage. On the other hand, failure to embrace an online relationship management strategy would imply not only losing control of the brand, but also giving competitors an advantage. For example, the World Superbike championship (similar to MotoGP, but using modified production bikes) uses its Web site and Youtube to post free interviews, features, and shows. Moreover, as the U.S. media scenario shows, broadcast revenues are declining, forcing sport properties to diversify their revenue streams. For example, major sport leagues such as the National Basketball Association (NBA) or Major League Baseball (MLB) launched proprietary broadcast stations that

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[9] In contrast, he was granted one by MotoGP's competitor World Superbike.

stream games, interviews, features, and other miscellaneous content that is not shown by partnering broadcasters.

While providing MotoGP with a revised online revenue model is beyond the scope of this project, a relationship management plan will serve the purpose of increasing access to and recognition of MotoGP's brand, promoting the sport with limited cost, and increasing the quality of the organization's relationship with stakeholders. The plan will follow the logical structure suggested by Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2006), first focusing on increasing brand awareness, and only then aiming at improving MotoGP's stature among target publics and achieving viral promotion.

While relationship-management efforts will employ traditional means of communication (e.g., news releases), the plan will focus mostly on digital communication. To this end, social media's unique dialogical features constitute an untapped opportunity to enhance brand awareness and opinions about MotoGP in the U.S. market. Moreover, given its role as content producer, the company can use the Internet to post content other than the mere races (thus not jeopardizing its relationships with broadcasters) and provide unique value to its online presence. Just as important, this might enable the company to generate a more substantial income from the Internet in the future.

This plan will benefit MotoGP insofar as it can offer useful insights about relationship management, leading to more social contacts and opportunities for economic advancement. As Heath and Coombs (2006) point out, relationships are stronger when characterized by mutually beneficial outcomes. For this purpose, it is crucial for the company to position itself as a professional and accessible source of content and services

while reaching out to its stakeholders. Before implementing the campaign, however, it is crucial for MotoGP to define its mission and goals, as well as internal roles and responsibilities, in order to ensure that the staff's efforts are strategically directed toward the same desired outcomes.

Goal

The goal of this relationship management plan is to improve MotoGP's brand awareness, stature, and viral promotion among U.S. publics, ultimately enhancing this market's contribution to the company's revenue stream.

Research recommendations

Although frequently avoided due to a lack of time and funds, research constitutes a key element toward the planning of effective communications between an organization and its publics. Given Dorna's data disclosure policies, however, it was not possible to access any data MotoGP owns about the U.S. market. As a rule of thumb, MotoGP should initially perform contextual research in order to establish baseline data, identify threats and opportunities that exist within its competitive environment, and confirm or dismiss the hypotheses that drive this relationship management plan.

Baseline data will be essential to gauge the effectiveness of the campaign, and MotoGP staff should conduct research to measure current awareness and attitudes of its target publics. Qualitative document analysis conducted in the communication audit provides a good understanding of MotoGP's identity, but the success of the relationship management plan will ultimately depend on external stakeholders' perception of

MotoGP's brand. For this purpose, the company can take advantage of several affordable research methods – both quantitative and qualitative – to gather insight about key publics, ongoing trends in relationship management, and best practices in online sports promotion. In order to maximize the efficiency of research, it is advisable to develop a strategy beforehand. To this end, research should address (but not limit itself to) the following questions:

- What is the demographic profile of MotoGP's fans in the United States?

- What are the psychographics (e.g., attitudes, values, beliefs) of MotoGP's community?

- Who are the influential third parties and opinion leaders within this community?

- How can MotoGP establish a solid third-party support system and lead long-term growth in the United States?

- What are the best practices in the online sports promotion and how can MotoGP implement them successfully?

- How can MotoGP attract and retain more users into its website?

- How can the company position MotoGP as a top-class, exciting, interesting-to-watch sport within the U.S. media environment?

The following section lists several research methods that MotoGP can use to address the aforementioned questions (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006).

Focus groups

This relatively cheap method can raise unexpected insights about MotoGP and provide a more accurate understanding of stakeholders' expectations about the company.

The findings, however, cannot be generalized to the entire target population. Thus, focus groups are valuable research tool only if used in conjunction with other research methods.

Interviews

This qualitative research method can further investigate the findings of previous focus groups. Interviews represent one of the most controllable research methods and can be analyzed both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, although results cannot be generalized. If conducted with opinion leaders, interviews could also serve the purpose of building relationships with this key public.

Surveys

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan, it is essential to gauge some baseline data about MotoGP among U.S. fans. To this end, surveys represent a viable option for gathering relatively in-depth information about the respondent's knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about the sport. By the same token, surveys are also a valuable instrument to assess the efficiency of the relationship management plan. In longitudinal design, a survey analyzes different samples of the same population across time in order to assess changes and trends. To minimize the costs of this research method, MotoGP could conduct random-sample surveys through its Web site or online newsletter.

Online tracking systems

To establish baseline data, it is also important to incorporate a means of tracking user activity within MotoGP's Web site. Key metrics include average number of site

visits per day, time on site, and what content receives most clicks. To this end, the company can take advantage of various, relatively inexpensive online services. For example, Google Analytics can uncover user patterns, providing insight about Web traffic and increasing the effectiveness of MotoGP's online presence. The service is free to use below half a million visits per month.

Case Studies

This informal research method allows MotoGP to identify best practices in online sports promotion and avoid potential stumbling blocks. While using this research procedure, however, it must be kept in mind that each case is highly contextual and therefore represents only a snapshot of the larger online relationship management process.

MotoGP should try to collect both academic and professional literature. The first one is available in libraries and online databases (e.g., LexisNexis, Academic Search Premier, Communication and Mass Media Complete, etc.), while the latter abunds on sites such as Mashable or Techcrunch.

Built-in social media features

Online social networks have several built-in tools that allow MotoGP to track the efficiency of its communications. From a quantitative standpoint, for example, Facebook's "like" button or Twitter's "retweet" function represent an easy way to calculate message exposure. The aforementioned longitudinal design would also help the company track trends over time. Moreover, from a qualitative perspective, content

analysis of comments or tweets helps gauge stakeholders' opinions about the company and the brand.

Key publics

Since it is managed by a multi-national sports marketing company, MotoGP communicates with a wide array of publics. In order to develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders, the company should not approach them as a single unit, but rather as a collection of different key groups.

According to academic public relations literature, publics can be generally segmented as internal (e.g., employees) and external (e.g., customers), intervening or enabling, and (based on level of involvement) latent, aware, or active (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). Situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1989) could also help MotoGP tailor its communications to various stakeholder segments. The following list outlines the groups that are essential to MotoGP's development in the U.S. market.

Employees

MotoGP should capitalize on its ongoing employee relations. Reinforcing ties with its PR, Marketing, and News staff is crucial to enhancing the continuity of MotoGP's promotional efforts and reinforcing the brand. Moreover, members of this public have the opportunity to act as spokespersons, reaching out to external publics such as fans, sponsors, and media. For this purpose, MotoGP should encourage exchange of ideas about its relationship management efforts, acknowledge employees' contributions, and emphasize the importance of ongoing evaluation. Furthermore, employees should be

provided with guidance (e.g., content policies) on how to interact with external publics online. This not only would facilitate individual contributions to MotoGP's Web presence, but also give structure and consistency to the organization's voice and identity.

Media

This group plays a pivotal role in increasing public awareness of MotoGP, acting as an intervening public (both online and offline) and reaching out to a broader segment of the U.S. population. Just as important, media are generally perceived as a more trusted, reputable, and objective source of information than companies.

The competitive, widely developed U.S. media environment provides MotoGP with a great array of potential partners. In order to maximize the efficiency of its outreach efforts, MotoGP should establish a hierarchy within contacts. According to the situational theory of publics, outlets that already have an involvement in the organization's business are the easiest and most-effective groups to target (Grunig, 1989). These media are likely to seek out the information offered by MotoGP. As a starting point, the organization should scan U.S. media databases (e.g., American Newspapers) to keep track of which outlets already cover the sport or publish stories based on MotoGP's news releases. Subsequently, the company should break down this public into two smaller groups, namely news media and industry media, to tailor its communications more effectively.

a) News media

This group consists of print, broadcast, and online media outlets that cover sport beats and occasionally mention MotoGP or other forms of motorcycle racing. Given the

sport's lack of mainstream status in the U.S., outlets covering this sport generally share a geographical proximity with MotoGP's American riders and events (held in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Laguna Seca, California), or simply broadcast the races. For example, the majority of articles brought up by a search of the American Newspapers database were published by newspapers in California or Indiana, with USA Today being the only notable exception as a national newspaper. As for the online sphere, Fox, CBS, and SpeedTV (all of which showed MotoGP races) gathered the most mentions in search engine results.

While a simple online search represents a good starting point for MotoGP to create a database of media outlets with an interest in the sport, the success of the organization's relationship management efforts with this public largely depends on the ability to achieve unique positioning for the MotoGP brand and increase its appeal to the U.S. audience. As a rule of thumb, the organization should try to provide valuable footage that is specifically tailored to these outlets (e.g., a race analysis by one of its U.S. riders). Moreover, MotoGP should provide content that meets the cultural standards of the American sports audience, for example, emphasizing riders' personalities and existing rivalries. To this end, MotoGP should package material specifically focused on its three U.S. riders participating in the top class (Ben Spies, Colin Edwards, and Nicky Hayden), thereby providing the U.S. media with a local angle and increasing the likelihood of publication.

b) Industry media

The online sphere is also widely populated by motorcycle-racing media outlets.

Members of this niche media community are particularly important to promote MotoGP; not only do they constitute an intervening public, potentially reaching out to a wide audience, but they also act as opinion leaders. In other words, they are perceived as a credible source of information and are essential to promote the sport's brand.

Members of this public are, for example, independent journalists and industry pundits who cover motorcycle racing. The goal of this relationship management plan is to increase their interest in MotoGP, building third-party support for the sport. When evaluating potential contacts, MotoGP should prioritize those with existing knowledge of the brand. Nonetheless, the company should constantly scan the online sphere to identify relationship-building opportunities (e.g., the launch of a new motorcycle racing blog).

Motorcycle racing community

Through social media, MotoGP can increase the quantity and quality of relationships with this stakeholder segment and achieve viral promotion. A diverse external public, U.S. Internet users with an interest in motor sports arguably constitute MotoGP's most important audience to achieve organic growth.

In general, the company must foster two-way, relevant, and transparent communication with this segment. While it is obviously not feasible for MotoGP to reach out to all American motor sports enthusiasts in the nation, a closer look at the situation can help the company to identify specific sub-segments within this larger, heterogeneous group, and develop more targeted and efficient communication strategies for each of them.

a) Dealers

MotoGP needs to nurture relationships with members of this group, as these individuals often are a trusted information source among motorcycle enthusiasts, especially in the South (IbisWorld, 2009). The organization, in turn, can help dealers sell more vehicles by emphasizing the spectacle of the sport and highlighting the manufacturers that participate in the championship (namely Honda, Yamaha, Ducati, and Suzuki).[10]

That said, the company must narrow members of this public to maximize the efficiency of its communications. Primary market segmentation distinguishes between street and off-road bikes. Given the nature of the sport, MotoGP should focus on businesses that sell street bikes. In particular, the organization should give priority to those that sell sport bikes, generally defined as compact, high-performance vehicles (Mintel, 2003). To this end, MotoGP should conduct research to find out about the most popular outlets (common metrics might include, for example, sales volume, average Web site visitors, number of followers on Twitter, etc.) in order to reach as many motorcycle enthusiasts as possible through this intervening public. The company could also segment this public geographically; to this end, the Southeast region hosts the highest percentage of motorcycle dealers across the United States (IbisWorld, 2009).

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[10] As street motorcycles represent the main share by value, accounting for more than 80% of the market's dollar value annually, MotoGP's character maximizes the relationship-management opportunities with this public. Furthermore, considering that three of MotoGP's manufacturers hold a strong market share in the United States, targeting this public would greatly increase the value for these brands' participation in the sport, providing them with increased sales opportunities.

b) Other related businesses

Aside from dealers, there are plenty of motorcycle racing-related businesses on the Internet, such as graphic designers, product suppliers (e.g., helmet and leather makers), racetracks, and sponsors. Many of these businesses do not take full advantage of their associations with MotoGP. For example, title sponsors such as Cinzano and Bwin do not emphasize their partnership with MotoGP on their Web sites. To this end, the company needs to network to increase the online connections (e.g., Web links) with members of this public. This not only enhances the value of their partnerships with MotoGP by increasing the exposure of each brand, but also fosters organic promotion of the sport through a more diversified network of channels.

c) Motor sports enthusiasts

Given their high level of involvement with the sport, motor sports enthusiasts represent a key target public for MotoGP's growth. This public can be further segmented according to the preferred form of racing (e.g., two-wheel or four-wheel). Given MotoGP's characteristics, road-racing enthusiasts will be the primary target of the company's communications. Situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1989) indicates shared interest as a key factor in a public's receptiveness to messages. Within this framework, people who already value motorcycle road racing and believe they can contribute to its development constitute a primary target. To this end, fan clubs represent a great promotional opportunity in light of their organized, collective structure. Moreover, MotoGP may try to leverage its unique traits to entice fans and supporters from other disciplines, such as Motocross or Formula One. The company needs to make

sure these publics know about the sport and put them in the condition to contribute to its success virally.

It is important to note that, while reaching out to this public, MotoGP faces the challenge of sustaining its interest during the off-season. A search-volume analysis through Google Trends and Google Insights for Search highlighted a significant drop in Internet users' interest in MotoGP from November to April (See Appendix B, Figure 3).

d) Insiders

Several MotoGP constituents are also actively participating in the online sphere. Not surprisingly, most teams have their own Web sites to upload original content and foster self-promotion. Some of these sites simply push sport-related information, while other encourage more interactive engagement. For example, some teams have accounts on social network sites such as Facebook and Youtube, diversifying their promotional efforts and reaching out to a broader public.

Furthermore, a handful of riders, mechanics, and freelance journalists have personal profiles on social network sites and often discuss MotoGP-related matters. For example, Fiat Yamaha Team rider Jorge Lorenzo is very active on the social media front, posting content on Twitter, Facebook, and Flickr almost daily and gathering thousands of followers.

Given their credibility and expertise, members of this group are particularly important to promote the sport organically. MotoGP should nurture relationships with these constituents and encourage them to share content virally. While this entails somewhat of a risk to lose control of the message, it will nonetheless increase the overall

access to MotoGP's brand and show its human aspects, giving it a competitive advantage compared to more sanitized organizations such as Formula One.

Objectives, strategies, and tactics

The following objectives represent the desired outcomes of an online relationship management plan for MotoGP. These objectives are intended to reach one or more of the aforementioned publics from an informational, attitudinal or behavioral perspective (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006).

Objective #1 – Informational

To increase brand awareness among U.S. audience by at least 20% within 6 months from the start of the campaign.

Strategy #1

Low awareness among the U.S. sports audience is a major issue for MotoGP. To successfully achieve wider recognition, it is crucial for the organization to establish a positive identity and gain social support through sustained and innovative "grassroots" relationship management efforts.

As a starting point, the organization should selectively target opinion leaders within news and industry media. This group includes, for example, journalists, industry pundits, business owners, and directors of fan clubs. These constituents share a high involvement with the motorcycle racing community, are perceived as a trustworthy source of information, and have the potential to reach out to many people. Therefore,

forging strong relationships with them should be a prime concern for MotoGP.

Given the relatively small size of this group, phone calls or, if possible, face-to-face communication, represent a viable means of initial contact. While communicating with this group, the company should clearly emphasize its commitment to the overall growth of the motorcycle racing community in the United States. To this end, MotoGP's races on American soil undoubtedly represent a strategic resource to engage with these publics and nurture social connections. The organization should then network with this public on Twitter (and, subsequently, Facebook and Youtube), promoting content and encouraging organic dissemination. To reciprocate, the company should monitor and address their information needs (e.g., publicizing the launch of the street replica of a MotoGP bike on the corporate Web site).

While disseminating content online, MotoGP should try to drive traffic to its corporate Web site. Given that the company produces an extensive amount of content in the form of articles, photos, and videos, a categorization system should be implemented to streamline the retrieval of information.

Tactics:

- Appoint a staff member as the main contact for potential partnerships with opinion leaders. This person must be able to respond to queries both via Internet and in person during racing weekends.
- Launch a "Partnership Bureau" section on the corporate Web site, highlighting the benefits of potential collaborations and increasing opinion leaders' access to the organization and brand.

- Develop a database of current partners and monitor their information needs. Maintain this document on an online server or some other Web-based form (e.g., Google Docs) so that all communication staff can access it at any time and from any location.

- Work with U.S. broadcasters to maximize windows of exposure and increase race promotion.

- Develop a protocol to consistently send out pitch letters and promote exchange of content.

- Streamline information retrieval on the corporate Web site by upgrading the internal search engine to sort content not just by category (i.e., articles, photos, and videos), but also by other parameters, such as date and number of clicks.

- Use third-party applications such as Twellow, Tweetbeep, and Hashdictionary to find opinion leaders' social media contacts, monitor the environment, and gauge brand reputation.

- Add opinion leaders as contacts on the company's social media profiles, start a conversation, and form a "mastermind group" (a collection of contacts who, based on shared interests, support each other and share knowledge amongst themselves). In general, following other people and re-tweeting their content are two essential ways to network. For example, using the "@" symbol to mention members of this public when relevant content is posted will increase the visibility of MotoGP's Twitter communications. When appropriate (i.e., when topics overlap with stakeholders' professional area of expertise), tag contacts on Facebook.

- When outsourcing content on partner outlets (e.g., articles, videos, guest blog

posts), include Web site and Twitter URLs in the byline.

- Post links to these contacts (either to their profile pages or content) on both the Web site and social media profiles.

- Implement a widget on the corporate website (e.g., Widgetbox or Tweetgrid) to allow people who are not familiar with Twitter to track conversations directly on motogp.com.

<u>Strategy#2</u>

Among the broader group of opinion leaders, news media personnel deserve particular attention, especially in light of their reach and influence on public opinion. A first logical step toward developing relationships with this public is to reinforce the existing connections with outlets that previously covered MotoGP. Then, the organization will work on establishing new contacts. When attempting to complete this task, MotoGP should accompany the aforementioned networking endeavors (i.e. phone and face-to-face meetings) with a rationalized use of news releases and pitch letters. Scanning databases and the Internet for articles that mention MotoGP will provide the organization with an initial list of contacts to build relationships with. Subsequently, the company should develop a database for journalists and editors who may be interested in MotoGP content based on geographical proximity to either a racetrack or one of the riders. After establishing an initial contact, the organization should direct members of this public toward its Web site, making it the primary source of MotoGP information. Granting media outlets licenses to use content posted on the site would minimize the time investment and other costs related to covering the sport, further appealing to this public's

self interest.

To successfully build contacts with media personnel, however, MotoGP must find a way to appeal to their interests. To this end, it is important to consider the American sport audience's interest in personalities and rivalries. The organization should not only focus on the sport's unique traits, but also on the three U.S. riders who participate in the top class, highlighting the individual traits and character features that distinguish them from, for example, European rivals.

Tactics:

- Develop a database of media outlets covering the sport and monitor their information needs. As a tentative start point, MotoGP should focus on outlets based in the three American riders' home states (that is, Kentucky, Texas, and Tennesse), as well as the Southeast (cf. this area's general interest in motor sports). This list should be maintained on a central server, intranet, or some other Web-based technology (e.g., Google Docs), allowing all news staff to access it and update it easily. The document should either be in the form of an Excel spreadsheet or an Access database. All staff should receive training on how to use it.

- Keep a standardized MotoGP letterhead and boilerplate on a central server or some other Web-based form. These documents will enable news staff to streamline the content diffusion process.

- Craft and disseminate news releases and pitch letters specifically focusing on American riders. This material should be sent before and after each event, as well

as regularly throughout the year.

- Incorporate a "Media" section on the corporate Web site. The section should include contact information about staff members who may serve as sources, a one-page fact sheet describing MotoGP, a chronologically ordered news release archive, and links to the latest content posted. A separate page should feature a streamlined contact form to address accreditation and content license requests.

- Develop a protocol to return media inquiries within less than 24 hours, select a list of possible spokespersons, and appoint a staff member to take questions after business hours during racing weekends.[11]

- Develop a system of tracking and responding to media coverage. For this purpose, MotoGP can either subscribe to a news-clipping service such as Nielsen or appoint a staff member to track mentions of the organization. The company should also assess the tone of the coverage, follow up with each outlet to address errors and, if appropriate, introduce spokespersons. Once again, contact forms should be centrally available online to streamline communications.

- Appoint a social media manager and develop publishing guidelines for Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube, both for employees and constituents (e.g., riders, mechanics, team managers, etc.).

- Use the "Posted Items Pro" application to automatically embed content from MotoGP's multiple social media accounts on the organization's Facebook page. MotoGP can use this application to provide media with a dedicated back-up section on Facebook in case the Web site malfunctions.

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[11] It is interesting to note that MotoGP's Web site currently features a standardized contact form that automatically divides queries by topic. A query was sent to test the promptness of response, but no asnwer was received.

- Brand the American riders (i.e., Edwards, Hayden, and Spies) by producing textual and visual profiles of "The Big Three," and train them to contribute with their own content regularly. To this end, both Nicky Hayden and Ben Spies have Twitter accounts, and MotoGP should link to their feeds both on its Facebook and Twitter pages.

- Promote social media profiles by having each page link to the others (e.g., Facebook links to Youtube and Twitter).

Strategy #3

While opinion leaders undoubtedly play a pivotal role in the organization's organic development on the Web, it is just as important for MotoGP to reach out to the motor sport community at large. In particular, the company has to attract attention and emphasize the sport's unique traits to position the brand in the consumer's mind. Given the size of the U.S. Internet population (more than 204 million people), mediated communications are the only available means to reach out to this public.

For this purpose, relationship management efforts should mix creative solutions with more traditional means of promotion. First, MotoGP should try to establish a presence in major motorcycle-racing-related Web sites. While the aforementioned networking aims at building links to motogp.com on other Web sites, the company should also take advantage of the highly flexible advertising opportunities on the Internet to promote its brand effectively. Furthermore, the organization must bring into play creative communications to create a "buzz" around the sport and draw readers to its Web site – a technique called inbound marketing. In other words, MotoGP should feed content

across its online platforms to reach out to the broadest possible audience and generate traffic toward its Web site. To this end, the organization only uses social media to push content online and could benefit from implementing best practices in online relationship management (e.g., participate to conversations).

According to Dorna's Marketing Manager Jose Maria Asensio, the company adopts this approach to reward online subscribers' loyalty (personal communication, March 8, 2010). MotoGP, however, should keep in mind that the vast majority of content disseminated through social media is free. In an effort to maintain loyalty and build new markets, global sport organizations such as the NBA use social media to link to great amounts of free content offered on their Web sites. Similarly, MotoGP should increase its offer to include more free material and increase exposure and brand awareness in the U.S. market. For this purpose, the organization can take advantage of its role as content producer to post footage beyond the mere races. MotoGP already adopts a similar approach for the Spanish market. As Asensio noted, the company has agreements with national newspapers to sell DVD footage of each event with exclusive content during the week following a race.

In order to provide fans with extensive amounts of online footage, TV contracts must carefully specify broadcasters' exclusive rights and the content that MotoGP can disseminate autonomously. The NBA, for example, successfully crafted contracts with network and cable channels that give broadcasters priority over what games to show, but also allow the league to upload great amounts of free content on its Web site. For example, nba.com features game recaps, in-depth analyses, and a weekly show as part of the league's long-term strategy to seed new markets.

Before implementing this strategy, however, MotoGP should conduct research to profile target customers and discover online places of interaction. In terms of diffusion among the American public, Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter represent as good starting point.   As for what content to show, MotoGP should generally try to bring consumers value by giving them access to free content that, in the past, might not have been available due to the limited shelf space of broadcast. In particular, videos online can help to improve publics' attitudes about the company; videos carry a higher perceived value and may lead to an increase in trust (Mescher, 2010). Examples may include behind-the-scenes interviews with riders and other staff, lifestyle profiles, or exclusive "webisodes" that analyze recent races. This strategy is not primarily aimed at achieving viral promotion – the success of viral marketing is extremely unpredictable and Youtube is riddled with "one-hit wonders" by brands that failed to sustain attention thereafter. Instead, this content enables MotoGP to establish a consistent Web presence (especially during the off-season) and increases the overall access to the brand. Moreover, social media's avenues for feedback (e.g. the "like" button on Facebook or Youtube ratings) provide the company with relatively inexpensive tools to learn what content resonates the most with consumers and increase the efficiency of its relationship management efforts. Upon providing valuable content to Internet users, social media's interactivity and stakeholders' involvement with the brand will allow MotoGP to achieve viral promotion. Nonetheless, the company should always encourage users to share the footage.

Tactics:

- Advertise MotoGP's Web site on Facebook and motor sports Web sites.

- Optimize search engine results through the use of efficient keywords within HTML meta-tags and page codes. For example, a Google search of the term "Valentino Rossi," the current world champion, only ranked the corporate Web site as sixth. Given the high volume of searches about this rider, MotoGP should try to rank higher on the result list, directing users to its site and, consequently, increasing brand awareness.

- Promote social media profiles by adding links to one another on each social network site, as well as the online newsletter. For example, change the Twitter background to include links to the organization's Facebook and Youtube accounts.

- Use hashtags to maximize the visibility and categorization of Tweets. In the Twitter lingo, a "hashtag" is a topic preceded by the "#" symbol. These tools help spread and organize information on Twitter. If users include a certain hashtag in tweets about a topic, posts are easier to search. Most importantly, the topic will appear in Twitter's Trending section. As a rule of thumb, the hashtag of choice must be simple (e.g., #MotoGP, #Moto2, #125cc, etc.) and easy to memorize. MotoGP should then promote the hashtags on its Web site and social media accounts.

- Develop guidelines and calendar to post content regularly and sustain social media presence. In general, MotoGP should scatter updates to develop a persistent but unobtrusive presence in users' feeds. While there is no specific rule about the timing of the uploads, MotoGP should be mindful that posting too frequently will hide updates from the feeds, while posting too seldom causes the company to run

the risk of being forgotten or lost within the clutter. To this end, MotoGP should try to mix different kinds of updates (e.g., a status update, a link, a note, a photo, or a video). If necessary, the company should schedule moderation periods for comments. For this purpose, it is interesting to note that most interaction (e.g., comments) will occur within 24 hours of an update before it drops out of users' news feeds.

- Link MotoGP's Youtube account to Facebook and Twitter to automatically share videos across social network sites, saving time and money. This can be done by simply checking the "AutoShare" box on the organization's account page on Youtube.

- Optimize the "Share Preview" for the Links and Publisher tools on Facebook. When a user shares content from MotoGP's site using these tools, the application automatically offers a number of images that can be chosen as a thumbnail to accompany the link. The organization can add a snippet of code to the "HEAD" section of the pages that points to your desired image (Facebook Developers, 2010). There is no perfect size for a Share Preview image, but Mashable (2009) suggests 100 pixels as the optimal measure, as it requires no resizing by Facebook and also provides a suitable shape for Digg (which uses the same code for its own Share Preview).

- Authenticate Twitter accounts[12] to prevent identity confusion and increase brand visibility.

- Launch additional Youtube channels, for example, according to racing class or

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[12] The site is testing this option for well-known accounts (for example, artists, athletes, and actors) that have had problems with impersonation or identity confusion.

content type (recaps, features, paddock girls, etc.), instead of grouping all the content in a single account. By doing so, MotoGP will cater to the different audiences for each of its products and facilitate retrieval of content, preventing users from sifting through hundreds of videos.

- Include "Take 'em for a ride" slogan within photo and video updates. Also, insert it as a hashtag on Twitter and video tag on Youtube.

Objective #2: Attitudinal

To establish a favorable attitude about the organization among at least 30% of target publics within one year from the start of the campaign.

Strategy #1

In order to meet this objective, MotoGP needs to create and push messages that convey its identity (as evidenced in the audit chapter) in a more explicit and clear fashion, highlighting the sport's unique traits and positioning the brand the consumer's mind. In particular, the organization should emphasize how the sport pushes the technological and physical boundaries of what is humanly possible on two-wheel road racing. To this end, it is interesting to note that, compared to other successful sport organizations, MotoGP lacks a slogan or mission statement. Crafting this material not only will help the company focus its future communication campaigns but also position the brand more distinctively. MotoGP then should train its communication staff to increase its ability to convey organizational image and key messages to target publics.

<u>Tactics:</u>

- Explain the identity that results from the communications audit in a staff meeting with all communication employees. A copy of this project and a summary of its findings will also be made available to MotoGP staff.

- Encourage staff to list communication goals and target publics and on a worksheet before embarking on any project. The document will serve as a guide to think strategically while crafting messages.

- Develop orientation materials about MotoGP's identity and online communications policies for incoming staff members. Existing staff should receive copies of the same material for reference.

- Articulate a succinct slogan and mission statement. MotoGP should incorporate the mission statement in the "Inside MotoGP" section of its corporate Web site and place the slogan next to the logo in all communication materials (both traditional and online) to enhance consistency. In particular, the slogan should communicate the sport's defining qualities (competitive, professional, spectacular, clean, technological) in a few words. "Reinventing two wheels" is a tentative example.

<u>Strategy #2:</u>

In light of its role as content producer, MotoGP can leverage social media to create a personal dialogue with its stakeholders, especially motorcycle enthusiasts. By the same token, social media enable publics to create and spread their own content about the organization. On the one hand, social network sites empower users to share their opinions

and, to some extent, make companies somewhat lose control of their brands. Nonetheless, MotoGP should not underestimate the importance of interactivity and dialogue in the social media sphere. As Lash and Wittel (2002) noted, users often visit a Web site to perform specific actions, rather than simply be passive receivers of information. MotoGP thus needs to emphasize interactive engagement and promote a user experience as part of the brand. Given that user-generated content reinforces connections between consumers and companies and improves corporate reputation, MotoGP should dialogue consistently with followers, answering queries but also stimulating dialogue and asking their perspectives about the sport.

In particular, MotoGP should encourage motorcycle enthusiasts – its most loyal fans – to show their passion for the sport and act as advocates for the organization. Including this public's perspectives about MotoGP would change the company's reputation to a more democratic, accessible one. Also, incorporating multiple voices within the company's promotional messages would increase the credibility of MotoGP's communications. Most importantly, creating a dialogical interaction would allow the organization to strengthen its ties with key publics, providing the brand with a competitive advantage and protecting it from competitors. By the same token, two-way communication will provide the company with valuable feedback, allowing it to constantly evaluate the status of the brand, identify potential issues before they turn into crises, and improve the overall efficiency of its relationship management efforts.

Tactics:

- Implement protocol for social media interaction with fans. In particular, the

company should establish: quantitative (e.g., number of posts per week; promptness of replies) and qualitative benchmarks (e.g., main topics of interest) to evaluate its efforts.

- Set up a centralized social media management technology that maximizes the use of corporate resources. To this end, online social network sites' application programming interfaces (APIs) allow integration with external Web clients. A variety of software is available that aggregates social media profiles, enabling the management of multiple accounts on a single platform. For example, Tweetdeck and Seesmic Desktop can help MotoGP manage its social media accounts simultaneously. Similarly, Monitter, Twitterfall, and Twilert help aggregate conversational trends about different hashtags on Twitter.

- Encourage fans to provide testimonials and personal accounts of their MotoGP experience. For example, the company could launch a "Full-throttle Tribe" competition as part of which fans submit videos of their racing-weekend activities, showing their passion about the sport. The company should then upload the best content on its Facebook and Youtube pages. First-person quotations should be used, but fans should always be asked for permission to use their names in the story.

- Launch a weekly "Pole Position" Twitter trivia contest that gives prizes to the three fastest-responding fans (e.g., tickets and official merchandise).

- Display different content for fans and non-fans on MotoGP's Facebook page. Given that each fan's account represents a rich amount of data to build profiles, it is important for the company to encourage occasional visitors to become fans to

see exclusive content. This tactic will also make MotoGP's Facebook page more appealing by offering fans an incentive to remain supporters and visit it regularly. To reward fans and increase brand reputation, MotoGP should also display a "Thank you" note and a short blurb with company information to new fans.

- Use FBML- and HTML-compatible applications to add customized elements to MotoGP's Facebook page, such as clickable images, anchor text, and interactive content. For example, the "Extended Info" application allows MotoGP to use HTML code, customize content, and create numerous fields beyond the standard information categories. The application's tab can also be renamed to better match the page.

- Set up a Flickr account and launch a "MotoGP fan photo of the week" contest.

Objective #3: Behavioral

To increase overall viral promotion (shared content on Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter) by at least 20% within one year from the start of the campaign.

Strategy #1

From a marketing perspective, social media provide MotoGP with a cheap opportunity to promote the brand through viral referrals.[13] Internet users can now share content across multiple platforms with members of their online social network. Even though increasing the size of MotoGP's online social graph reflects the organization's participation, it is not indicative of brand stature, customer loyalty, or business performance. The company should thus focus on viral promotion to increase U.S.

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[13] For example, the Facebook's "share" and Twitter's "retweet" buttons.

audience's awareness and opinion about the MotoGP brand.

As mentioned previously, the organization should conduct research and ongoing evaluation to track what content resonates the most among Internet users and increase the offer of this kind of footage. A primary analysis of online comments and the company's most viewed videos on Youtube indicates that the American audience not only has a keen interest in action-heavy recaps (i.e., one-on-one battles) but also the glamorous, off-track facets of the sport (i.e., paddock girls). MotoGP should thus increase the offer of this kind of content, mixing the on-track and off-track sides of the sport to provide stakeholders with a comprehensive MotoGP experience.

From a production perspective, the audit highlighted somewhat of a lack of consistency and compelling elements within the free videos. For example, racing summaries often unfolded without a chronological order, missing the climactic build-up toward the finish line. Moreover, live commentary was used sporadically and different musical genres (spanning from rock to techno-ambient) accompanied the videos. For this purpose, the company should generally try to produce tighter, more engaging packages. While doing so, it is important to focus on the sport's defining traits and desired identity.

Tactics:

- Produce free racing recaps that mix on-track action with paddock-girls footage.
- Show racing action in chronological order to convey excitement and drama. Also, use consistent, fast-paced music and live commentary to maximize the content's emotional appeal.
- Explain the identity that results from this project to production employees and

encourage them to list goals and target publics and on a worksheet before embarking on any project.

- Share orientation materials on MotoGP's identity with members of the production staff.

Strategy #2:

Aside from increasing the content's appeal, MotoGP should make an active effort to encourage Internet users to share footage with their contacts. This is particularly important, as members of one's social network are perceived as a more trusted source than companies. First, the organization should further diversify its online presence to reach the greatest possible number of users. However, transforming a public from passive to active is a difficult task. To this end, MotoGP should use two-way, symmetrical communications that target the users' self interest. In particular, the company should provide incentives (e.g., prizes or discounts) to spread the content online, increasing the likelihood of promotion and forging more satisfactory relationships.

Tactics:

- Set up a "Ticket to Ride" promotion on the corporate Web site that encourages users to recommend the site to friends and rewards them with various prizes. For example, MotoGP could offer discounts on live-video packages to users who brought new subscribers to the site by including a "recommended by …" field in the online registration form.
- Syndicate content on sites such as Ustream, LiveVideo, Megavideo, etc.

Budget

Since it was not possible to gather access to data about Dorna's resources, the following table provides the organization with flexible options to implement the aforementioned tactics. Basic Web research was conducted to identify the cost of each recommendation. Given the size and expertise of Dorna's staff, most of the tactics can be implemented in house. Even though much of social media technologies are free, the cost of engagement (i.e. staff hours) and equipment must be taken into account. If, on the other hand, Dorna decides to outsource some of the tactics, external costs will increase.

Tactic	Resources	Min. staff hours	Max. staff hours	Min. Cost	Max. cost
Baseline research	Interviews, focus groups, case studies, surveys, etc.	10	50	$4,000	$20,000
Monitor social media conversations	Online software or outsourced tracking service	250	500	$0	$10,000
Develop U.S. contacts database	Phone calls and meetings, Web server (or other)	50	150	$1,000	$3,000
Online advertising	Banners and FB ads	0	15	$5,000	$15,000
Develop online communications protocol and train staff	Printing and binding	5	25	$50	$200
Develop standardized communication templates	Web server (or other)	5	25	$0	$0
Set up "Media" and "Partners" sections on Web, maximize SEO, upgrade SE	Web master	10	30	$2,000	$6,000
Re-design and upgrade social media profiles	Web master	5	15	$1,000	$3,000

Content production (video, text, photos)	In-house team	500	1,000	$0	$0
UGC initiatives	Prizes	100	200	$0	$10,000
Evaluation	Interviews, focus groups, case studies, surveys, etc	10	50	$4,000	$20,000
Total		**945**	**2060**	**$17,050**	**$87,200**

Timeline

The following illustration gives suggestions about the timing to implement the aforementioned strategies and tactics. The campaign will tentatively start in April, contemporaneously with the beginning of MotoGP's championship.

Evaluation

The most important reason for specifying measurable objectives before executing a campaign is to establish benchmarks that enable the organization to gauge its effectiveness. MotoGP can evaluate the success of this relationship management plan in several ways. Since the completion of the plan lies outside the scope of this project, staff members will be responsible for this process. The suggested means of evaluation require limited time and a limited budget, and should be carried out each month. For this purpose, it is important to consider evaluation an ongoing component of the plan's execution rather than its final step. Hence, MotoGP should constantly review the status of the program throughout its implementation and tweak strategies and tactics to avoid wasting time and finances.

The Internet provides the organization with several cost-effective tools to track the effectiveness of this plan. To evaluate brand awareness, MotoGP should take time each month to track percentage changes in the following parameters:

- *Size of social network* –Facebook fans, Youtube and Web site subscribers, and Twitter followers. For Facebook in particular, the organization should use the free "Facebook Page Statistics" tool[14] by Allfacebook (2010) to gauge monthly growth and compare with competitors.

- *Inbound activity*: number of incoming links from other Web sites.

- *Quantitative metrics*: number of Web site visitors and average time on site and location of users, with a particular emphasis on trends among the U.S. audience; Youtube channel's total views; and shared items on Facebook.

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[14] Available at http://statistics.allfacebook.com/pages

- *Lead generation*: number of users who subscribed to MotoGP's live-video service based on recommendations.

Qualitative research methods are generally the most suitable to track opinions and attitudes. Budget constraints, however, might direct MotoGP toward more quantitative means of evaluation that are somewhat indicative of the brand's stature. The following lists provide the organization with both options.

Quantitative evaluation:

- Average Youtube ratings; number of retweets, Facebook's "likes," videos in response, and comments for each piece.
- Follow-up, random-sample online survey. For this purpose, Survey Monkey and similar programs would provide MotoGP with relatively cheap tools to gauge publics' attitudes.

Qualitative evaluation:

- Paid tracking service like Radian6 or Nielsen can track social media conversations, identify trends, and measure opinions. In particular, evaluation should target how much money social media brought to the company (e.g., number of resolved issues and leads generation).
- Interviews with stakeholders. In particular, MotoGP should look for a positive change in the interviewees' opinions about the sport and the organization. Similarly, follow-up focus groups can provide a means of further examination.

Finally, built-in features in the various social networking sites used by MotoGP offer an easy way to track viral promotion.

- Number of viral referrals on Youtube

- Retweets.

- Facebook "shares."

In the end, the results of this evaluation should serve as the research stage for future relationship management efforts, enabling this plan to serve as the basis to meet future challenges.

CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

This project builds on academic and professional literature on public relations, marketing, and online social networks to devise a communication plan for a multi-national sports management company. The plan begins by providing background information about MotoGP and Dorna Sports, and goes on to review literature on relationship management in both public relations and marketing, paying particular attention to interactivity, online technologies, and social network sites. Then, a communications audit evaluates a sample of MotoGP's online communications to determine an emerging identity for the sport. Subsequently, the project suggests adaptation and implementation strategies to promote MotoGP (both as a sport and as an organization) within the underdeveloped U.S. market. Finally, the plan outlines methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the suggested strategies and tactics. This project is meant to rollout through the course of 12 months, providing MotoGP with guidance and a comprehensive set of relationship management tools, both while the championship is in session and during the off-season. However, since it usually takes time to reap the fruits of relationship management efforts, MotoGP should try not to dismiss some of the aforementioned best practices too quickly.

Applying scholarly research and theory to a concrete plan presented both

challenges and opportunities. As an example of the latter, the concept of relationship management appears to be a valuable framework to bring public relations and marketing closer. These two disciplines have been generally seen as separate, but online technologies blur this distinction and practitioners from both areas will increasingly have to integrate their expertise and activities (especially within corporate settings) on a daily basis. Moreover, social media provide a means to reach out to broader segments of the public with limited costs, but also challenge companies to enhance accountability, transparency, and reciprocity, engaging with stakeholders on a common ground. Within a competitive environment, mutually beneficial relationships become an important asset for organizations, protecting market share and fostering long-term loyalty.

But how these principles translate in a real-world setting is a different question altogether. For example, companies often overlook the importance of pre- and post-implementation research due to lack of time or funding. Moreover, the difficulty of tracking social media's return on investment deters many practitioners from using these tools in a creative fashion. By the same token, upper management is often reluctant to engage in a symmetrical dialogue with customers, defying interactivity's unique value and embracing the Internet simply as another means to push a message in the hope it increases sales. In other words, various organizations are permeated by a corporate culture that is still skeptical about new media and fails to adapt to current trends in relationship management. This holds especially true in the world of European sports marketing, and Dorna Sports is no exception. To this end, as David Emmett noted (personal communication, February 22, 2010), stipulating long-term exclusive contracts with FIM to manage the MotoGP brand stifles the company's quest for innovation.

Moreover, the Spanish and (to a lesser extent) European media cultures are not particularly accustomed to the Internet, leading companies to treat this medium merely as a one-way promotional tool. This explains the difficulty of contacting Dorna's communications staff and gathering insight about its professional practices. However, as the U.S. media scenario shows, advertising revenue for broadcast is rapidly declining, and companies will have to embrace the Internet to diversify their revenue streams. To this end, American sports organization such as the NBA, NFL, and MLB represent a fruitful example that can, to a certain extent, be applied to international markets. These companies have been building an extensive online presence over the last decade, offering multimedia content and encouraging public interaction. Even though broadcast rights still make up a substantial portion of their income, the Internet is a growing segment of their marketing mix and will likely gain ground against broadcast and sponsorship money.

However, one of the main challenges in the online sphere is to move beyond the social media's theoretical potential to actually implement relationship-management campaigns. To date, no academic literature was found that addresses a successful relationship-management effort with a focus on social media. Professional resources (e.g., Mashable), however, cover many facets of effective online communication endeavors, ranging from debates on ROI to analyses of successful social media campaigns. These sites offer a fertile resource to keep up with professional trends in public relations and marketing and, most important, take inspiration from the best practices in the industry.

While making a case for using social media, it is important to go beyond the fact that competitors and consumers are likely to use these tools, highlighting how companies

can obtain tangible benefits from making an investment in this area. If the aforementioned strategies and tactics prove to be successful, MotoGP will perhaps see the Internet more as an opportunity and develop a more diversified revenue model that will allow the organization to thrive in the future.

Suggestions for future research

This project applied traditional relationship management theory in public relations and marketing to a multi-national sports management organization. While the principles suggested within this framework can be applied to virtually every company, future research should target sport organizations as unique entities that are distinct from other corporations. Research could further investigate, for example, the connections between social media, sports fans, and brand loyalty, either from a team's or a entire league's perspectives. Similarly, scholars could address the differences in relationship management across various sports (e.g. team versus individual) or geographical contexts.

Scholars should also investigate how social media and, in particular, social network sites, apply to the construction of a relationship management plan. In particular, research could address how social media impact models of symmetrical communication and overall relationship quality through case studies. Just as important, researchers could examine how relationship management and online social networks theories apply to daily practices. For example, literature could evaluate the efficiency of a specific company's strategies and tactics. Finally, given these tool's unique conversational opportunities, social media's influence on environmental scanning and issues management also offers fecund research opportunities.

APPENDIX A – Online statistics

Internet Adoption

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys, March 2000-April 2009. All surveys prior to March 2000 were conducted by the Pew Research Center for People & the Press. For 1995, internet users include those who ever use a home, work or school computer and modem to connect to computer bulletin boards, information services such as CompuServe or Prodigy, or computers at other locations. For 1996 to 1998, internet users include those who ever use a home, work or school computer and modem to connect with computers over the internet, the World Wide Web, or with information services such as America Online or Prodigy. For 2000 to 2004, internet users include persons who ever go online to access the Internet or World Wide Web or to send and receive email. For 2005, internet users include those who at least occasionally use the internet or send and receive email.

Pew Internet
Pew Internet & American Life Project

Figure 1: Internet adoption trend
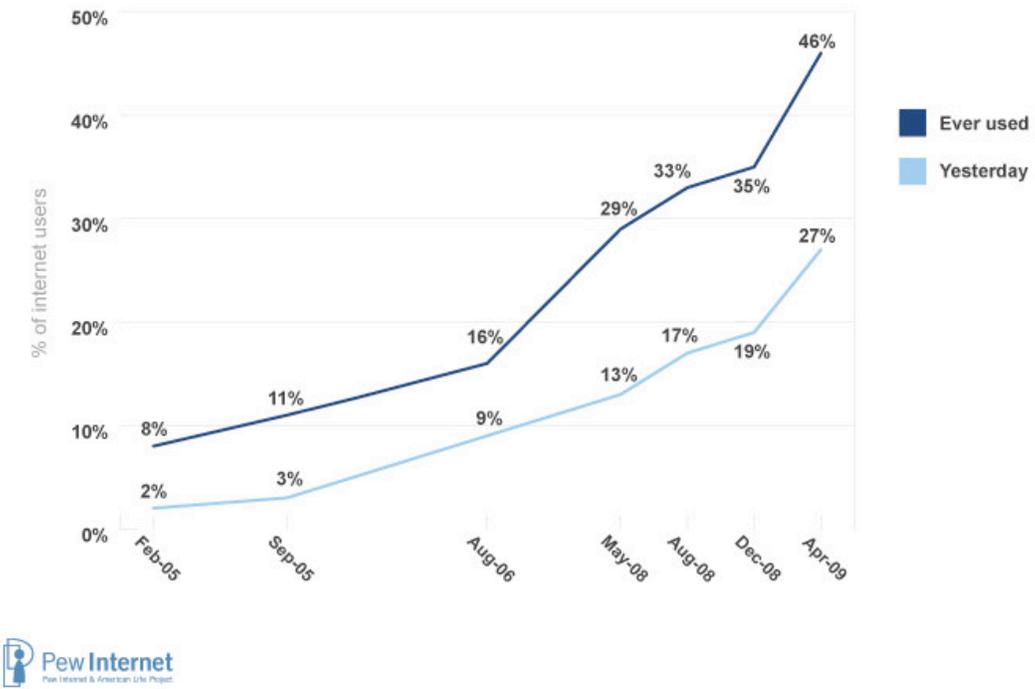
Figure 2: SNS adoption trend

Figure 3: Video sharing sites adoption trend

Figure 4: Internet activities

APPENDIX B – MotoGP online

Figure 1: Screen-shot of motogp.com home page

Figure 2: Motogp.com traffic trend (6 months)
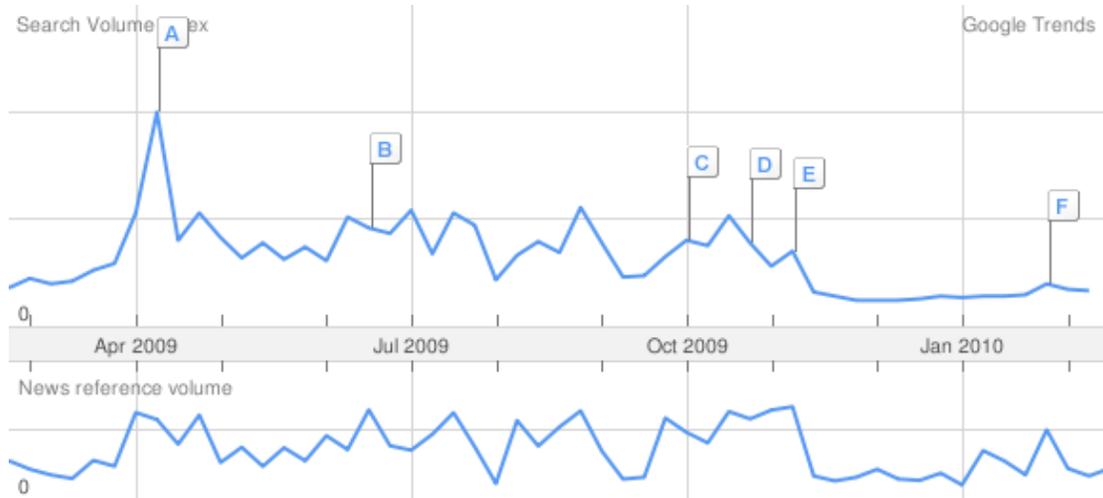
Figure 3: Google trends for MotoGP (12 month-span).

Figure 4: MotoGP's Facebook page

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Figure 5: User registration form on motogp.com

Figure 6: Screen-shot of online newsletter

APPENDIX C – Coding categories

• Bikes	• Logo
• Battle	• Party
• Beauty	• Push limit
• Body	• Race
• Celebration	• Respect
• Challenge	• Responsibility
• Champion	• Riders
• Charity	• Rivalry
• Competition	• Skill
• Crash	• Speed
• Damage	• Struggle
• Danger	• Success turnover
• Defeat	• Tease
• Determination	• Thrill
• Difficulty	• Top
• Emotion	• Track
• Excitement	• Tuning
• Exclusive	• Update
• Fandom	• Unpredictability
• Friendship	• Victory
• Game	• Wet weather
• Generation clash	• Web address
• International	• Women

Figure 1: Open coding categories

Constituents

Teams

Riders

Bikes

Tracks

Women
body, beauty, appeal

Branding/Linkage

Logo

Web address

Animation

Tease
exclusive,
update

Defining traits

External

Competitive
battle, challenge, champion, competition,
defeat, determination, game, generation
clash, race, rivalry, struggle, victory

Professional
crash, damage, danger, difficulty, international,
responsibility, skill, speed, top, tuning, wet weather

Spectacular
celebration, excitement, fandom, party, push lim-
its, success turnover, thrill, unpredictability

Sportsmanlike
charity, friendship, respect
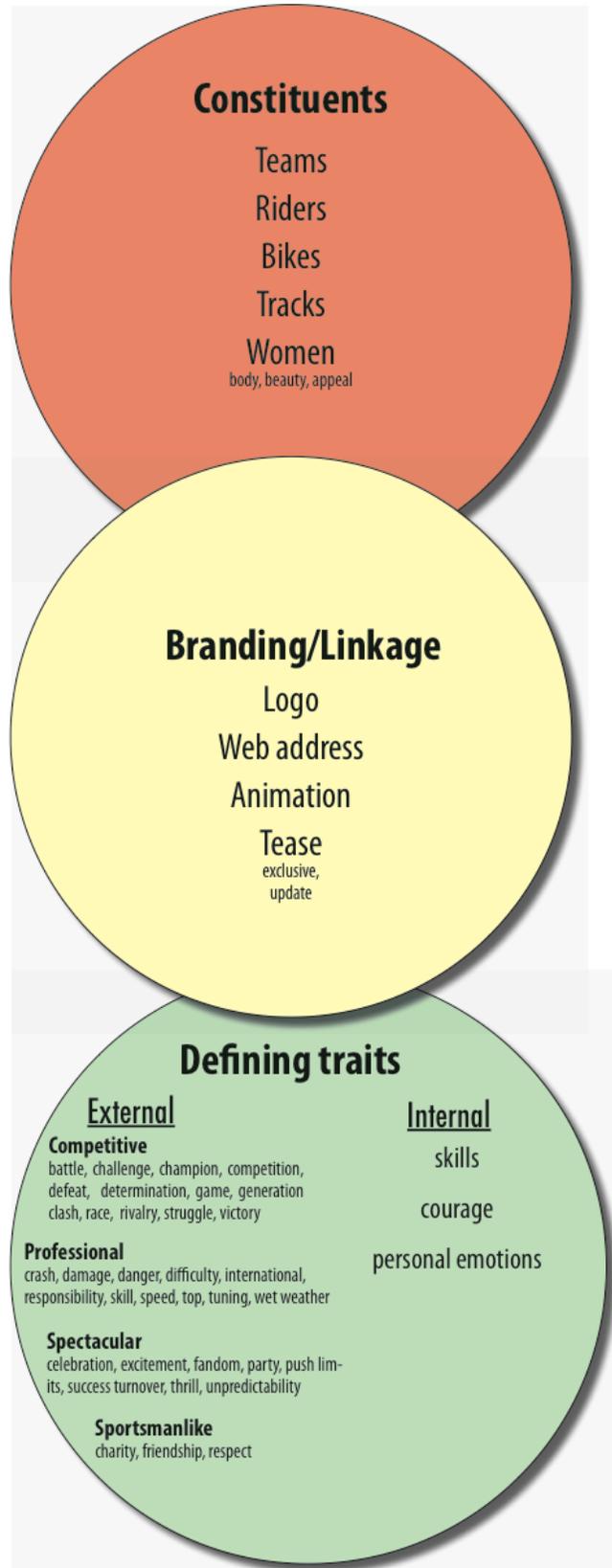
Internal

skills

courage

personal emotions

Figure 2: Open and axial coding information graphic

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