E-CRM applications of soccer teams as a strategic tool: a content analysis of English Premier League and Turkish Super League

Metin Argan
Anadolu University

Mehpare Tokay Argan
Bilecik University

Hüseyin Köse
Anadolu University

Sevda Gökce
Gaziosmanpaşa University

ABSTRACT

Electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) is a strategic initiative of sport marketing and allows building long-term relationships. This paper discusses the results of content analysis of the websites of the most popular soccer teams in Premier League and Super League (English and Turkish, respectively), carried out to identify the features of electronic customer relationship management on websites. A content analysis of websites was performed, utilizing categories representing a range of e-CRM. Differences between Turkey and England and among soccer clubs based on e-CRM features are identified. The results show that many of soccer teams employ the features of e-CRM strategy. The results of the study indicate that there are slightly differences among teams of Turkish Super League and English Premier League.

Keywords: Sports marketing, Relationship marketing, Customer relationship management (CRM), Electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM).

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Relationship marketing represents a paradigm shift and it is an established and important part of modern marketing era (Stavros, Pope and Winzar, 2008). In marketing discipline, there is a paradigm transformation from transaction marketing to customer relationship management. Lee, Chu and Chao (2011) state that relationship marketing is mainly designed to increase customer coherence. The relationship between fans and sport organizations is the key to successful business operations and is crucial to maintaining a competitive advantage. Sports marketers have always been concerned with increasing attendance at games and building loyal fans (Neale and Funk, 2006). Loyal fans display intense recurring behavior and a strong, positive attitude toward a sport product (Dwyer, 2011). To accomplish goal of increasing attendance, many sport organizations and clubs pursue new and creative solutions. Customer relationship management (CRM) is a customer driven strategy. CRM is mostly defined in terms of the acquisition and retention of customers and the resulting profitability (Feinberg and Kadam, 2002). CRM comprises direct interaction and use of data on consumer for raising relationship with customers. CRM characterized as a differentiated strategy for marketers worldwide. With the emergence of the Internet and continued advances in technology, CRM has entered a new era (Luck and Lancaster, 2003). According to O'Reilly and Paper (2009) contemporary literature rarely discusses CRM without the additive construct of an internet oriented business model relying on e-business technologies. The application of technology to customer relationship management (CRM) initiatives (e-CRM) is one of the fastest growing technological developments (Adebanjo, 2003). Internet technology plays a significant role in many businesses nowadays. An important internet-related technology is electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) which allows building long-term relationship between companies and customers. For this reason, today many of research are widely used for the display of electronic CRM application cases. O'Reilly and Paper (2009) imply that CRM internet model is aptly titled electronic customer relationship management (eCRM). According to Chaston and Mangles (2003), e-CRM can be defined as the use of internet technologies to facilitate the management of customer relationship. In essence, e-CRM is another extension of relationship marketing that draws on internet-based technologies to enhance its strength and capabilities (Harrigan, Ramsey and Ibbotson, 2009).

Electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) is one of the primary strategic initiatives in many industries today. It has become the latest paradigm of relationship marketing in the e-world (Chen and Hong-Mei, 2004). "The electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) is defined as the application of information and communication technology to increase the scale and scope of customer services" (Greenberg, 2001). Functions of e-CRM help organizations evaluate customer loyalty and profitably on measures such as repeat purchases, money spent and longetivity. E-CRM is developed on the basis that consumers vary in their needs, preferences, buying behavior and price sensitivity (Kriemadis, Kotsovos and Kartakoullis, 2009). E-CRM integrates sales, marketing and service strategies that will create more value propositions for customers. It employs modern information technology- from relational databases, to data warehousing, to data mining, to computer telephony integration, to internet delivery channels- to unlock customer profitability (Chen and Hong-Mei, 2004). Today, many organizations from different industry are considering adopting the concept of e-CRM (Pan and Lee, 2003).

Fienberg et al. (2002) suggest that e-CRM fulfills the promise of anytime, anywhere, and anyhow the customer wants. But CRM has to be more than simply a technology and process that meets changing competitive realities and customer demands. In addition, Fienberg et al. (2002)

argue that CRM is a path to that future, giving customers even more choice.

The e-CRM strategy exploits different electronic services in different sport markets. In sports electronic ticketing services is one of the most suitable applications for this strategy. Through the advantages of the use of online and electronic ticketing (e-ticketing) services, the sporting entertainment industry has been able to increase the production and effectiveness of their customer relation management department (Smith and Smith, 2012). The soccer industry lags behind other industries in implementing e-CRM (Adamson, Jones and Tapp, 2006). E-CRM, which has become a major strategy of sports marketing, plays an important role for creating and developing relationships to sports clubs. There are, however, crucial differences in soccer compared with conventional businesses (Adamson, Jones and Tapp, 2006).With the development of soccer industry e-CRM began to take its place in this industry. Today, many teams have utilized e-CRM applications by web sites. Manchester United which is one of the most famous and valuable soccer clubs in the world have a CRM manager and have invested a great deal of money on systems and processes to maximize the value of their massive fan base, 90% of which live outside Manchester (http://www.customerthink.com/forum/crm_in_sports). The biggest soccer clubs (eg., Chelsea, Arsenal and Manchester United) in Premier League facilitate the service by websites. The web sites are set up to allow fans chat facilities and contact with the club (Adamson, Jones and Tapp, 2006).

According to Sterne (1996) internet based CRM has three general areas. These are: presales information, electronic services, and post-sales support (Fienberg et al., 2002). There are some studies to identification of e-CRM attributes. The literature focuses on 42 e-CRM features. Feinberg and Kadam's (2002) study benefits 25 features first identified by Anton and Postmus (1999) as defining e-CRM with an additional 17 features defined by Feinberg et al. (2002) in their analysis and study of e-CRM in retailing. Kriemadis, Kotsovos and Kartakoullis (2009) point out that e-commerce success is heavily dependent on design of websites. The functions of websites of companies are deemed of a part of e-CRM application. Gehkre and Turban (1999) have emphasized five categories of web site design. These are: page loading speed, business content, navigation efficiency, security, and marketing/customer focus. Taylor and Hunter (2002) point out that electronic service is viewed as an emerging mechanism for achieving customer relationship management strategic outcomes. E-service is largely being implemented through the use of electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) software (Taylor and Hunter, 2002). Internet can be used to provide considerable consumer services as a part of e-CRM application. In term of e-CRM application, consumer services are comprised following variables: orders, payment option, shipping information, returns, interactive services, web policy (Kriemadis, Kotsovos and Kartakoullis, 2009). While much is known about traditional CRM that influence the behavior of consumer for different marketplace, little is known about e-CRM applications in sport contexts. Based on this notion and related literature the study aims to determine the using level of e-CRM applications at teams of Turkish Super League and English Premier League. In terms of e-CRM applications, the current study also aims to apply comparisons between two counties' teams.

METHOD

The main purpose of this study is to provide a comprehension of how the soccer team web site is used as a strategic tool in electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM). In other words, the study was designed to evaluate the state of e-CRM of soccer clubs in Turkey and England. In order to collect the required data qualitative research method was used. Content

analysis is appropriate approach in terms of qualitative research. Content analysis in qualitative research is a technique for gathering data. Content analysis has been successfully used in a variety of marketing research settings including research on websites (Bodkin and Perry, 2004). It involves codifying qualitative and quantitative information into pre-defined categories in order to derive patterns in the presentation and reporting of information (Guthrie and Abeysekera, 2006). In current study the researcher content analyzed the websites of eight soccer clubs on the 20 e-CRM features. In consequence, the content analysis was conducted using eight web site of soccer teams (Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester United, Galatasaray, Fenerbahce, Besiktas, and Trabzonspor) from 20 February to 20 May 2011. The data were collected through two observation checklist group containing web CRM features (20 items) and determinants of soccer clubs' websites (13 items). The observation checklists of e-CRM applications were adapted from literature (eg., Feinberg and Kadam, 2002; Feinberg et al., 2002; Kriemadis, Kotsovos and Kartakoullis, 2009). The observation checklist identified whether certain features of e-CRM were present within the web site, and feature was coded "Yes" for present and "No" for not present. Content analysis forms were then analyzed for frequencies and percentages of related features using SPSS, version 15.

As Gerstenfeld, Grant and Chiang (2011) point out, a purposive sampling method is appropriate for content analysis of websites. In this research, method of purposive sampling method was employed. The selected sample was the official websites of eight clubs in English Premier League (Manchester United, Liverpool, Chealsea and Turkish Super League (Galatasaray, Fenerbahce, Besiktas, Trabzonspor). All of these clubs have a significant potential of e-CRM implementation due to the large number of fans, economic status and brand value.

For content analysis to be effective, certain technical requirements should be met (Guthrie et al., 2004). First, the categories of classification must be clearly and operationally defined, that is, the units of analysis. Second, data capture must be systematic - it must be clear that an item either belongs or does not belong to a particular category. Third, content analysis must demonstrate some characteristics for reliability and validity (Guthrie and Abeysekera, 2006). In this research, categories of classifications contain the e-CRM features. The data gathered to the research is conducted as systematic base. As indicted by Li and Wang (2011), four trained evaluators (researchers in this paper) assessed the websites using the evaluating instrument (e-CRM features) adapted from literature. Then, the evaluators divided into two groups. Before evaluating teams' websites, practice sessions were carried out to ensure that these evaluators were familiar with the evaluation criteria used in this study and capable of assessing websites independently and impartially. The data gathering process indicate reliability and validity dimensions. The instrument containing e-CRM features derived from literature (eg., Feinberg and Kadam, 2002; Feinberg et al., 2002; Kriemadis, Kotsovos and Kartakoullis, 2009) and it could be evaluated as validity. According to Milne and Adler (1999), reliability in content analysis involves two separate issues. First, it is necessary to attest that the coded data set produced from the analysis is reliable. This is usually achieved by the use of multiple coders and by reporting that the discrepancies between coders are minimal. Another factor to consider is the reliability associated with the coding instrument. Establishing the reliability of particular coding tools reduces the need for multiple coders (Guthrie and Abeysekera, 2006). Four trained researchers can be evaluated as reliability, in terms of multiple coders. The percentage of agreement method (Kassarjian, 1977) was employed to determine the coefficient of inter-coder reliability for 33 category items used in the framework. In the coding stage of this research, two coder groups were formed and data were then independently coded by both encoders. In explaining CRM levels and applications of soccer clubs,

achieving similar results by the two encoders (inter-coders reliability) has a great importance (Kassarjian, 1977). Coding themes was nominal variables (Yes and No), and therefore agreement measures are employed for calculating the reliability of nominal variables (Avery and Ferraro, 2000). For any specific theme, the agreement ratio for nominal variables is determined according to 0.80 acceptance level (Lerman and Callow, 2004). For the thirteen pre-determined measurement themes 104 coding were made and 92.3 % agreement was achieved for the overall coding process. Twenty measurement themes examined at the second part named "Customer Service Items". Totally 160 coding were made and reliability percent of these coding were 84.3 %. The agreement themes were above the minimum acceptance level 0.80 (Lerman and Callow, 2004) and it could be said that the analysis were reliable.

DISCUSSION

The results of the research reveal the ownership level of e-CRM features for specific soccer clubs (four teams for each league) in Turkey and England. Table 1 shows the complete list of features on websites in terms of countries. In terms of certain web site features there were no significant differences between two countries.

Table 1. Features of Team Websites

Features of Teams Websites	TUR	ENG
Contact info	4	4
Online Information form	4	4
Customization	4	4
Online Questionnaire	4	4
Online suggestion	4	4
Membership	4	4
E-Surf easy	4	4
Searching	4	4
Visitor number	0	0
Site updating	4	4
Updating date	4	4
Language option	4	4
Flash animation	0	0
TUR: Turkey, ENG: England		

Table 2 indicates the results from a content analysis of 20 criteria related with e-CRM features of soccer teams' websites. The results of this study indicate that soccer clubs in Turkey and England but visitor number use e-CRM features on web. It can be stated that the websites of English Premier League are more functional in terms of three features (interactive chat function, FAQ and site map) than Turkish Super League's. Both of two country websites employ in equal level of placing order, payment option and web policy. The websites of Turkish Super League's teams provide more services like money back guarantee, and sales and tax information than

English Premier League.

The results of the study revealed that there are no significant differences among teams in terms of feature dimensions relating placing order, payment option and web policy. As is apparent from Table 3, there are meaningful differences among some features of e-CRM for the soccer teams. Additionally, findings also showed that there are significant differences according to dimensions of money back guaranty, interactive chat function, FAQ and site map. All of four websites of English Premier League's teams have a service providing instant answer to FAQ. Regarding interactive chat services, four teams of Premier League provide instant e-talking options however, there are no teams of the Turkey Super League in terms of this service. Confirmation of product order of eight pages of the websites is presenting. However, money back guarantee is not available at sites of English Premier League.

Table 2. E-CRM Features

E-CRM features	TUR	ENG
Placing order (PLAC)		
Number of order method (PLAC-1)	4	4
Order status (PLAC-2)	4	4
Confirmation of product order by e-mail (PLAC-3)	4	4
Payment option (PAYM)		
Number of credit card accepted (PAYM-1)	4	4
Offline payments (PAYM-2)	4	4
Pay later (PAYM-3)	0	0
Shipping information (SHIP)		
Shipping and handling information (SHIP-1)	4	4
Sales and tax information (SHIP-2)	4	3
Returns (RETU)		
Money back guarantee (RETU-1)	4	0
Convenient returning information (RETU-2)	4	4
Returning methods (RETU-3)	4	4
Interactive service (INTE)		
E-mail (INTE-1)	4	4
Toll-fee number (INTE-2)	0	0
Interactive chat function (INTE-3)	0	4
FAQ (INTE-4)	3	4
Site map (INTE-5)	2	4
Shopping help site (INTE-6)	4	4
Web policy (WEBP)		
Privacy (WEBP-1)	4	4
Security policy (WEBP-2)	4	4
Company information (WEBP-3)	4	4
TUR: Turkey, ENG: England		

Table 3: E-CRM features according to soccer clubs in Turkey and England

	FB	GS	BJK	TS	MUN	CHL	LVP	ARS
PLAC								
PLAC-1	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
PLAC-2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
PLAC-3	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
PAYM								
PAYM-1	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
PAYM-2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
PAYM-3	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
SHIP)								
SHIP-1	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
SHIP-2	√	√	√	√	√	√	○	√
RETU								
RETU-1	√	√	√	√	○	○	○	○
RETU-2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
RETU-3	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
INTE								
INTE-1	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
INTE-2	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
INTE-3	○	○	○	√	√	√	√	√
INTE-4	√	√	√	○	√	√	√	√
INTE-5	√	√	○	○	√	√	√	√
INTE-6	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
WEBP								
WEBP-1	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
WEBP-2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
WEBP-3	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Total %	85	85	80	75	85	85	80	85

Note: FB: Fenerbahce, GS: Galatasaray, BJK:Besiktas, TS: Trabzonspor MUN: Manchester United, CHL: Chelsea, LVP: Liverpool, ARS: Arsenal
√: Yes, ○: No

Regarding ownership percentages, Arsenal, Chelsea Manchester United, Galatasaray and Fenerbahce have 85% of e-CRM service options. Liverpool and Besiktas provide 80% of all of CRM features. Regarding minimum weight of these services, Trabzonspor have the weakest options (75%). As shown in Table 3, the range of providing e-CRM services of eight teams varies from %75 to 85%.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which soccer clubs have e-CRM features. With respect to the different types of e-CRM components, it is clear that much of the web

site activities involve features indicating e-service. What is interesting to note is that the most likely utilized features of e-CRM strategy were orders, shipping information and web policy. These results suggest that, with respect to e-CRM, web site services are particularly integrated with marketing in the sports industry. While e-CRM features are commonly used in websites of many soccer teams, fans or viewer's opinion is an important part of marketing strategy. The basic findings of this study show that the current state of E-CRM no differs across type of soccer clubs in Turkey and England. In terms of soccer clubs and two countries, the researchers find significantly differences in e-CRM associates with web features, such as money back guaranty, interactive chat function, FAQ and site map.

The results of this study provide that e-CRM is a strategic application in terms of soccer clubs and there are slightly differences between two countries' league. Additionally, this descriptive study contributes to literature since it has investigated the use of internet in CRM. Since little efforts have been made to understand the applications of e-CRM on soccer clubs the study focuses on this subject. In other words, due to little of research concerning the e-CRM in soccer this study makes a comparison between two countries. The study also indicates that websites of English soccer clubs examined, was designed more functional than Turkish teams in terms of specific e-services. The websites of sport clubs reflect the images of products. For this reason, it can be design as possible as attractive. In order to attract consumer websites of soccer teams should provide free services, rich applications, frequently updated pages and a help section (Sterne, 2000). In addition, since the web site helps to meet needs of sport fans, the sites have to arrange these applications. The soccer industry could benefit from an appreciation that fans need to be treated like customers but recognized as being fans (Jones and Tapp, 2006). E-CRM can be used to satisfy the fans and transform them to loyal supporters. Additionally, the implementation of e-CRM applications to customers via websites should be seen as a means of creating loyalty on customers and supporters.

It can be adapted the Adebanjo's (2003) view to sport context. E-CRM applications have the potential to improve sales by fan/viewer profiling, automated campaign management, e-mail marketing, customization, etc., thereby improving the bottom line for the sport organization (Adebanjo, 2003).

Relationship quality is focused more on long-term customer relationships rather than on short-term transaction. A high quality relationship can earn life-long fan commitment and is valuable far a sport business (Lee, Chu and Chao, 2011). Kim and Trail (2011) report that sport consumer-organization relationship quality affects four primary behaviors of sport consumers: word-of-mouth, merchandise consumption, media consumption and attendance. To establish a good relationship quality, clubs in many sport branches should be pursue the transactions relating with e-CRM.

According to Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2006), fans are generally more loyal, but have different levels of loyalty that need to be understood. The key for understanding is strategy and philosophy of customer relationship management. To understand the special needs of soccer fans, customization approach may be the best solution. With segmenting the fans based on specific needs, physiographic and demographic characteristics, sport marketers achieve to reach the most suitable solutions.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This study provides a number of important contributions to literature and sport marketing,

but it also has limitations. Aspects of the sampling method may potentially limit the ability to generalize the results. Data was collected on only eight websites in two countries. Researchers are not able to perform content analysis on multi leagues to generalize the results to whole of the marketplace because of time and cost limitations. The study measured ownership of e-CRM features rather than actual fan behavior. The results found in the research may be markedly different given another league or sport branches. According to Feinberg et al. (2002) having e-CRM on a website is not related to having a full-fledged e-commerce effort. For this reason in the future studies, the researcher can combine the e-CRM features and e-consumer behavior. Additionally, future studies could measure actual fan behavior to more accurately determine the effects of e-WOM. Future research should also continue to compare and test the hierarchical framework of this study against other research models.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPIES

Metin Argan is an associate professor of marketing in Department of Physical Education and Sport School at Anadolu University, Turkey. He received his Ph.D. in marketing from the University of Anadolu. His areas of research include sports marketing, sport sponsorship management, ambush marketing. Particular issues of investigation include consumer behavior in sport, leisure, and sport consumer experiences. He has published books and articles about sports marketing and sponsorship and presented various works at a range of international and national conferences.

Mehpare Tokay Argan is an Associate Professor of Marketing at Bilecik University, Turkey. Her primary research interests are in the areas of health care marketing, social marketing, social campaigns and service marketing. She published book chapter, international based articles about marketing, social marketing, virtual community and health campaign in Turkey. She also presented various works at a range of international and national conferences.

Huseyin Kose is a research assistant in Department of Physical Education and Sport School at Anadolu University, Eskisehir, Turkey. He is a graduate student of Sport Management program and doing his PhD on Department of Physical Education and Sports. He is doing his researches on sports management and sports marketing.

Sevda Gokce is a research assistant in Department of Physical Education and Sport School at Gaziosmanpasa University, Tokat, Turkey. She is a graduate student of Sport Management Master program. She is doing her researches on sports marketing and sports management.