

SPORT CLUBS INTERACTION WITH THE FANS USING SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS. CASE STUDY AT SCM CRAIOVA

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ABSTRACT. Today, the process of communication has come to be seen all together differently to how it was viewed a few decades ago, because contemporary society has greatly changed the way people interact with each other. Communication has stretched its arms to all areas, starting with businesses, where the human relations sector is quite important, up to sport organizations in which communication with the fans is essential. Organizations in all areas have become aware of the need for communication, realizing the strategic role that communication plays in achieving goals. The communication strategy is the defining lines of the organization's attitude and conduct in order to achieve its communication goals and thereby performance goals. The paper aims to present some theoretical aspects regarding the notions of social media and the connection between social media communications and the sports clubs, emphasizing how this connection leads to the increase of the awareness, with a practical example at the handball club SCM Craiova.

Keywords: *social media, sports, marketing, internet, communication.*

REZUMAT. *Interacțiunea cluburilor sportive cu fanii folosind comunicarea prin social media. Studiu de caz la SCM Craiova.* Astăzi, procesul de comunicare a ajuns să fie privit în totalitate diferit față de modul în care a fost văzut în urmă cu câteva decenii, deoarece în societatea contemporană s-a schimbat foarte mult modul în care oamenii interacționează unul cu celălalt. Comunicarea și-a întins brațele în toate domeniile, pornind de la sfera afacerilor, unde sectorul relațiilor umane este destul de important, până la organizațiile sportive în care comunicarea cu fanii este esențială. Organizațiile din toate domeniile au devenit conștiente de nevoia de comunicare, realizând rolul strategic pe care îl joacă comunicarea în atingerea obiectivelor. Strategia de comunicare reprezintă liniile de

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definire a atitudinii și comportamentului organizației pentru a-și atinge obiectivele de comunicare și, prin urmare, obiectivele de performanță. Lucrarea urmărește prezentarea unor aspecte teoretice privind noțiunile de social media și legătura dintre comunicarea prin social media și cluburile sportive, subliniind modul în care această conexiune conduce la creșterea notorietății, prin prezentarea unui exemplu practic la clubul de handbal SCM Craiova.

Cuvinte-cheie: *social media, sport, marketing, Internet, comunicare*

Introduction

The online environment or the internet has developed rapidly over the last few years, and it is not a simple fashion or a fad at this moment, but a necessity, a way to discover virtually anything we care about (Weinstein and Lejoyeux, 2010). Moreover, every day the online environment tends to become more and more addicted, most of our day-to-day work being in close contact with it.

From simple communications to complex negotiations in any corner of the world, from sales to promotions in unlimited variants, from various presentations to the vast field of advertising, from simple information to elaborate broadcasts, all are possible due to the unprecedented development that known in the last few years to the online environment (Bauer and Stockburger-Sauer, 2008). At this point we can say that modern society is strongly anchored to the Internet, and it is found in any field of activity. Through the online environment we can make unlimited connections, we can find out and transmit almost instantly everything we care about, whether the information is of a general or custom nature.

Today social media has an increasing role, we can say it helps to create marketing miracles. Especially for businesses and organizations, social media is conducting not only to build a conversation with its customers or fans in the case of sports, but also to an interaction that no longer only takes into account the physical location, such interactions are taking place today especially on the Internet. The new way to achieve marketing and to advertise is now through social media networks (van Dijck, 2013).

Literature review

1. Social media communication

Social Media can be defined as a set of tools (web sites and software/applications) that work with an Internet-connected device (computer, laptop, tablet, mobile phone) and built to facilitate communication Internet users and

creating, sharing and sharing content (text, photo, video, audio, multimedia presentations) between members of social groups (friends, colleagues, family). Unlike traditional media, Social Media is distinguished by quality, frequency and proximity. In today's society, the media play a crucial role in social life, becoming, over time, a growing and indispensable power with a strong influence on the segments of society. The presence of the media is felt in all the fields and sub-domains of society, and we can consider it an industry of its own (Stern, 2013).

Social media marketing is the new form of communication, being increasingly used as it leads to the growth of brand awareness and community building, requiring minimal investment and yet a way to measure maximum results. Social Media Marketing refers to how to interact, participate, and be at the heart of discussions, all of which have the goal of cultivating and developing trusted relationships with existing or potential clients (Fillis and Mackay, 2013).

Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are the most popular social media tools, as they are based on users in Romania. Social Media Marketing as a general term refers to different types of sites that offer completely different ways of social interaction (Holmes et al., 2012). For example, Twitter is a social site that allows users to share news with other users in a very different way from other platforms. Twitter is useful in very dynamic environments such as journalism. Facebook, on the other hand, is a social network in its entirety that allows posting of news, events, pictures, movies and more. Facebook is the socialization platform most used in Romania.

2. The relationship between sport and social media communication

Without a strong promotion, the sport industry would not enjoy the commercial success that allows it to generate huge revenues. Therefore promotion and communication are extremely important in sport marketing (Barbu, 2010, Apostu et al., 2009).

All the changes in the social media landscape that have occurred over the last ten years have had a major impact on all aspects of our lives and sports industry is in no way an exception.

Without media coverage, sport is not as attractive as television, radio, the media and other media do not meet the audience unless they include sports content in their programs. Society is becoming increasingly diverse and addicted to information (Hookway, 2008).

Today, sports events and social media go hand in hand. We are witnessing an era where every team, league or sports association has at least one social media profile where they announce all the important information (Smith, 2012).

Moreover, it became impossible to scroll down your Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account during a major sports event and not have your news feed overwhelmed with information, real-time gifs, vines, or memes about it. Whether we are talking about benefits or disadvantages, they are present in both areas, both in the media and in sports.

Social networks are in many cases seen as an excellent tool to avoid costly market research. They are known for offering a short, fast and straightforward way to reach an audience through a known person (Miah, 2017).

When it comes to sports, there are always two games: the field and the social media, where fans consume statistics, recapitulate and fight with other fans. Colleagues and professional sports marketing teams have long enjoyed the power of visual media to bring action on the field on the small screen to inspire, fill seats in matches, and even help increase the energy of the crowd, which in turn inspires athletes (Peters et al., 2013).

In order to orchestrate an adequate social media communication sport organisation need to establish a strong communication department (Constantinescu, 2008) in which the roles and responsibility of each member must be defined with precision (Bocean, 2008). The clarity of the external communication is reflected in the quality of internal communication (Somacescu and Barbu, 2017).

It is normal for many companies to have accounts on various social networks, because having a social media presence increases the visibility of the brand, which leads to a brand more accessible to its customers. When the brand has social media accounts on different social networks, it has access to a completely new customer base or fans and thus extends not only the domain of communication but also the image. Social media offers companies a platform to talk directly with consumers. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are excellent examples where companies excel at this strategy of establishing a constant flow of communication (Smith, 2007).

So every post made on social media by a particular brand becomes important. Any post or ad can be an opportunity for fans to be up to date with all the news. Whether it's an image, a video, audio, gif or blog, it has the chance to attract fans to the social network. Brands became more humanized thanks to social networks. Brands are the relationship between the sport club and the fans (Florea et al., 2018). For sport clubs it is essential to have strong brands (Barbu and Popescu, 2018; Popescu, 2009).

Sport Club Municipal Craiova and social media

Sport Club Municipal Craiova, commonly referred to as SCM Craiova, is a Romanian women handball team from Craiova who plays in the National League, established following the decision of the Local Council of Craiova.

Sport Club Municipal Craiova also has a handball section, and the women's handball team was established in February 2007. The team promoted in the 2009/10 season in Division A.

SCM Craiova performs its own field matches in Polivalenta Hall, one of the newest and largest sports arenas in Romania. The hall has a capacity of 4,215 seats. Until the construction of the Polyvalent Hall was completed, in November 2012, SCCM Craiova played home matches at the Sports Hall in Filiași with a capacity of 250 seats.

SCM Handball Club Craiova communicates with its fans through several media, printers including the online media. To this end, the club has created a Facebook page where it informs its fans about all sports competitions, but also their timetable and timetable.

Also on the Facebook page, you can find more pictures and videos from the sports competitions, but also from the various events that the team does. By publishing these images, the club can get feedback and feedback from fans.

Also, for each post, whether it's a movie or a photo, fans can show their interest, appreciation, but also dissatisfaction about the event that is related to the images.

Using Facebook as a way of communication and promotion, the club increases its popularity among fans, and also increases the number of supporters participating in sports competitions. At the same time, fans suggest different activities or what they can perform during breaks in sports competitions, such as different dancers of the team or even mascot.

On the club's official site we also find events and their calendar, as well as various announcements and decisions about the club as a company, more than the hands-on game itself. Also on the official website we find a page dedicated to the results of the competitions, news about the club, press releases, conferences and a ranking with the club's position at the time. We can say that through the official website provide a more formal framework to communicate with fans and other media (televisions, newspapers, forums).

Another important feature of the official site is that it is kept up to date with all news and updates so that if a support wants to find out what happened in the previous competition, who scored but also other key points of the match can be informed by visiting the official website.

Considering the importance of the online media in today's life but also the rapidity with which it has developed and the degree of use, it is very important for a sports club to keep its supporters informed by all possible means.

Research methodology

Given the nature of research issues, this study was based on a survey, believing that this method is best suited to gaining insights and acquiring knowledge that is currently not so well grounded in the athlete's brand literature. Due to insufficient in-depth examinations in this area, our paper must be a starting point and a prelude to future investigations that can be based on the existing study. As research methods in this paper we used bibliographic study, where we concentrate on the analysis of specialized literature, and statistic-mathematical method in data processing.

This study was conducted between January 25 and February 23 on a sample of 187 people. The sample was selected from Facebook fans pages of SCM Craiova. The questionnaire was posted on these pages. The questionnaire contained 12 questions that first aimed at creating a profile of people questioned and then followed various aspects of social media and Sport Club Municipal Craiova.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the respondents

Variable	Classification of the variable	Percentage
Gender	Male	60%
	Female	40%
Age	20 - 30 years	43%
	40 - 50 years	20%
	Over 50 years	5%
Study	Highschool	31%
	College	48%
	Postgraduate studies	21%

We present in the following paragraphs the description of the socio-demographic structure of the subjects of the research.

The next question was about the degree of participation of the fans in the team matches, so most of them participates in all the matches that take place at home, 35% participate in both the home and the ones that take place in other cities, and 18% go about once a month to the team matches, while 5% respondents go less often (figure 1).

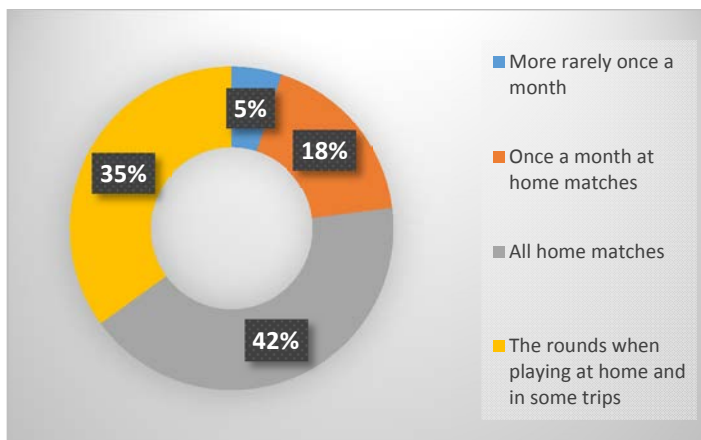


Fig. 1. Distribution based on the degree of participation of the fans in the team matches

Discussions

Regarding the level of information distributed by the fans’ club via Facebook posts, our respondents had to choose between 4 variants of the answer. Thus most of them considered that the posts on the Facebook page of the club contain new and interesting elements, followed by the variant according to which the information contains novelty elements that can not be found in other sources, more than 40 people consider that the information provided does not bring anything new, and that almost 10% of posts are lacking in useful information (figure 2).

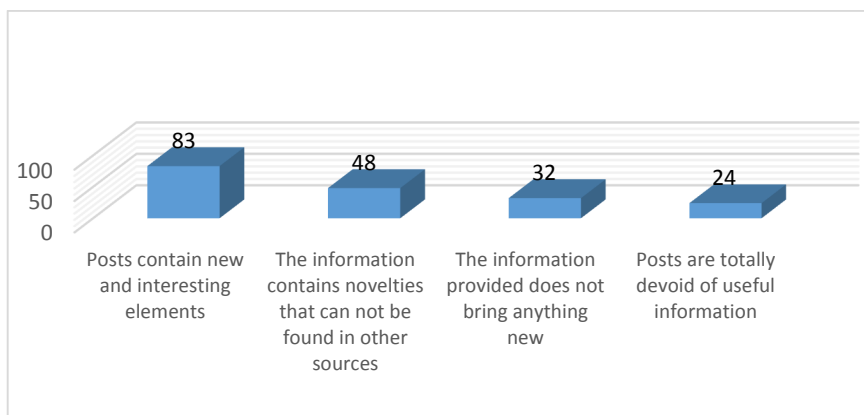


Fig. 2. Degree of information provided by the club in Facebook posts

The next question was about the degree of curiosity of the fans about the club's new posts regarding the handball team. Thus, the vast majority of people, namely 58% said they read all new posts immediately, while 22% do not read them immediately and leave them later and 20% ignore the posts (figure 3).

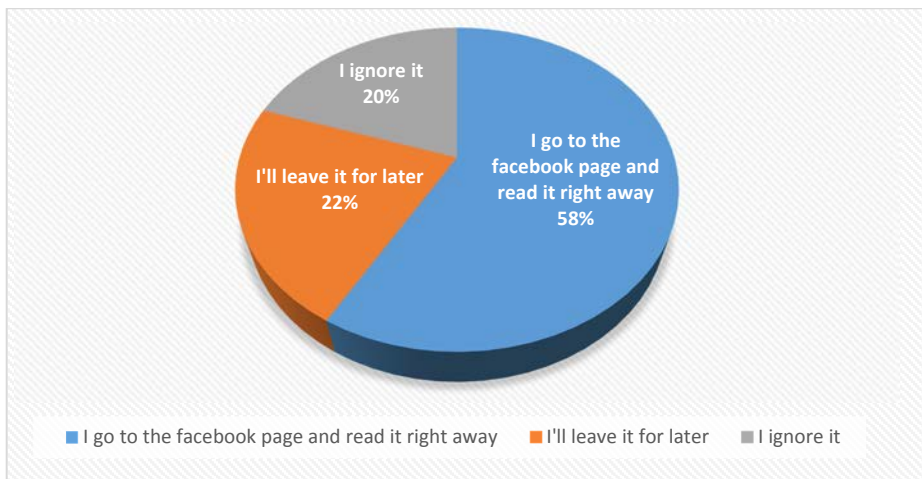


Fig. 3. Distribution of the degree of about the fans' interest in the club's posts

In this question we wanted to see the reactions of the fans after seeing different posts, so after reading the postings, 41% they gave a liking to each post, followed by 35% respondents who besides like, give a share of the announcement, 15% add comments on what is being posted, and just 9% may chat with friends in off-line environment (figure 4).

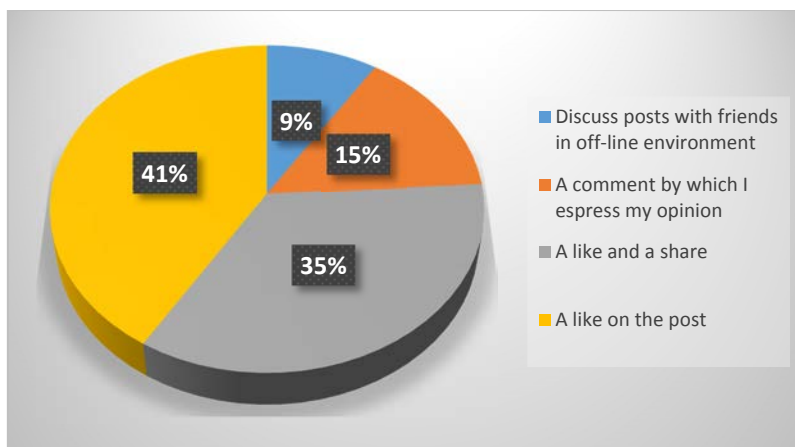


Fig. 4. Appreciation for the club posts

In our study, we wanted to see how much the Facebook page helps communication between supporters and the team, so 74 respondents consider that the page is updating supporters with the last news in a very short time by creating a new post, 69 believe that supporters can freely express their opinion about the buyouts and various events, 38 appreciate the communication as being quite active, and the fewer, in the proportion of 27 people, consider the site to respond promptly to supporters and provide clear information.

When they were asked if they used to invite other friends on the club page to find out about their favorite team, 42% of the respondents said they did this quite frequently, while 36% only occasionally invite other friends, while 22% do not ever do that (figure 5).

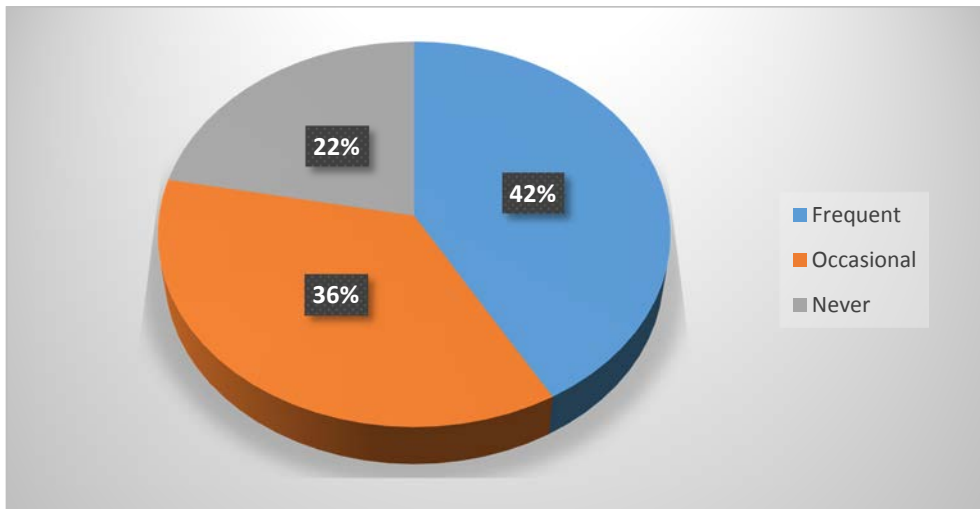


Fig. 5. Distribution based on the invitation level of friends on the club page

Regarding the degree of satisfaction with the involvement of the club in active communication with supporters, most of the fans are satisfied in a proportion of 47%, while only 34% are very satisfied, and at the opposite side there is only 17% respondents who are indifferent about this issue (figure 6).

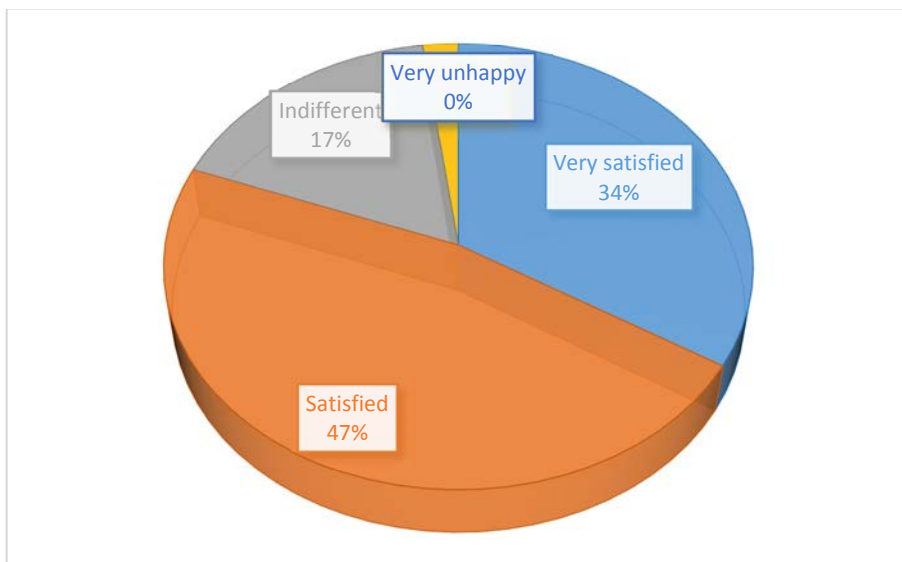


Fig. 6. The degree of satisfaction with the involvement of the club in active communication

Regarding the appearance of a more active involvement of the handball team on the club page, there is no doubt about what the fans want, 83% of whom want the players to be active on the social media, believing that the team would win a plus image and notoriety, while 17% do not want such activity from players (figure 7).

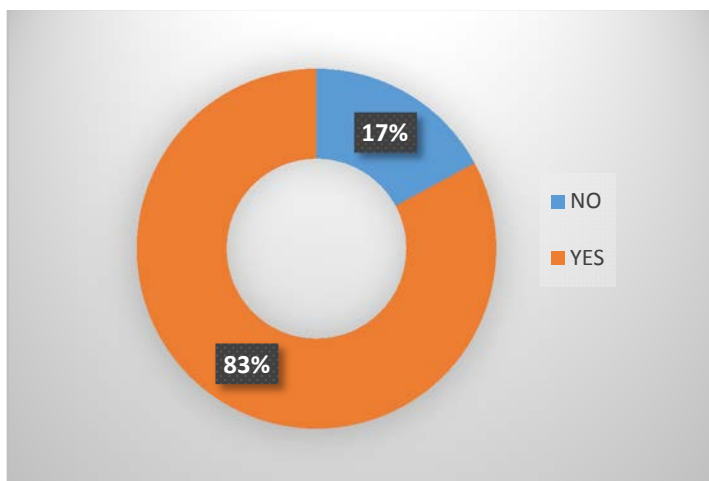


Fig. 7. Active involvement of the handball players on the club page

When we asked the participants in our study about the eventuality of organizing competitions for fans, where they can receive different types of prizes, 95% of respondents agreed, considering that this would lead to an increase in the number supporters on social media and an improvement in the interaction between the club and the fans (figure 8).

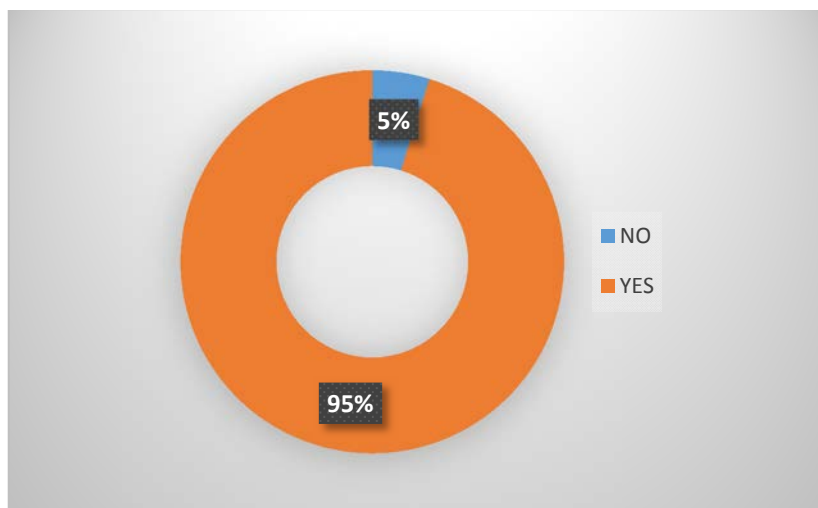


Fig. 8. Organizing competitions for fans on social media

Our study has shown that social media communication is essential for sport clubs to maintain and to develop their relationship with the fan base. Fans are spending more and more time connected and they want to interact quickly with the favourite clubs and favourite players. Social media is an excellent tool to connect all the parties interested in the sport world.

Using its Facebook page the handball club SCM Craiova was able to increase its fan base and to increase attendance both at home and away. The sports results are a great way to increase fans' participation but the power of sports results is multiplied when social media communication is used. When SCM Craiova won the EHF Cup in 2018 the fans interests for the tickets in the final stage sour also due to intense Facebook communication.

Conclusions

Social media communication is important for sports clubs as fans want to be connected with their favourite team. Our study reveals the fans would like a deeper involvement of the clubs on on-line communication with the fans. People integrated social media in their lives and they want that their favourite sport club follow the trend. There are various limitations that are normal and should serve as a starting point for future research. The first limitation in this paper is related to the size and structure of the case study. Thus, future studies could try to analyse several sports clubs in terms of social media communication, in the country or abroad and rely on larger samples to better understand the importance of social media in sport.

Future studies should also include different categories of sport organization. This type of study would provide a more in-depth picture of the importance that we need to show to social media and its connections with sport. Another point to be discussed in future research is to understand the importance of social media in different types of sports, the link between the athletes who represents brand, how this influences the fans behaviour and reaction.

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