

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**A Systematic Review of the Role of Social Media in Sports Management: Fan Engagement, Market Dynamics, and Data-Driven Strategies**Shabbo Salimi¹, Alireza Elahi^{2*}, Najaf Aghaei³, Mohammad Bahrani⁴

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Introduction**

In the digital age, social media has become an integral part of sports management, transforming the way sports organizations interact with fans, brand themselves, and make strategic decisions. However, the multifaceted impact of social media remains shrouded in ambiguity. Therefore, the aim of this study is to review the multifaceted impact of social media on sports management by combining insights from 40 studies. This study is a systematic review conducted by collecting secondary information or data. Articles were searched using keywords in specialized sports management databases within the period from 2014 to 2024.

The findings show that social media platforms significantly increase fan engagement and loyalty through direct, personalized, and timely communication. These platforms also change market dynamics through insights based on data collected from user interactions and preferences, enabling targeted market analysis and effective marketing campaigns. Additionally, social media facilitates innovative marketing strategies that enhance brand reputation. This study, by providing a comprehensive perspective, emphasizes the importance of the strategic use of social media for sports organizations to build stronger relationships with stakeholders and maximize market opportunities in the digital age.

The integration of social media in sports management has created a paradigm shift. This change is evident in sports institutions' approach to marketing and fan participation. The heart of social media's appeal in sports management lies in its unparalleled capacity for fan interaction. These platforms provide a space for fans to connect not only with teams or athletes but also with each other. This interaction strengthens the sense of community and belonging, ultimately leading to increased brand loyalty. Beyond engagement, social media plays a profound role in shaping market dynamics in the sports industry. From changing consumer behavior to influencing purchasing decisions, these platforms act as both a marketplace and a medium for market research. The most significant advancement that social media has brought to sports management is the emergence of data-driven strategies. The vast volume of data generated from user interactions provides a valuable source of insights for targeted marketing, fan base analysis, and strategic planning. Alongside these benefits, challenges such as privacy concerns, the potential for negative publicity, and the need for continuous content

innovation exist.

Previous studies in the field of social media and sports management can be divided into three categories. First, studies that have generally and comprehensively examined the impact of media on sports marketing and management. Second, studies that have analyzed platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for specific topics using traditional and quantitative methods. Third, studies that have used data mining methods to analyze the impact of platforms like Instagram on user behavior and their clustering. These studies have presented contradictory results. One of the limitations of previous research is the lack of an overall and comprehensive view of the multifaceted impact of social media on the sports industry. Therefore, the present study, with the aim of tracing the evolution of social media in the sports industry in the form of a review study, examines all research conducted in the field of the impact of social media and marketing strategies on sports management and media. This review emphasizes brand credibility, fan participation, and digital innovation. The present study, by combining existing research, highlights pivotal studies and shows significant changes in the application and effectiveness of social media over time. It also fills the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications in sports management and media, providing a roadmap for future research in this field.

Methodology

This research is a systematic review conducted with the aim of collecting, evaluating, and analyzing data and secondary information. The stages of implementation and reporting of results were performed in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines. Searches were conducted in valid academic databases to identify all articles related to the research topic. The time period for reviewing articles was set from 2014 to 2024.

The search strategy included a comprehensive search in academic databases such as Web of Science, BioMed Central, SportDiscus, Medline, Embase, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Keywords related to sports management, social media, brand credibility, fan engagement, and digital marketing strategies in sports were used. The inclusion criteria for articles were publication in peer-reviewed journals, focus on sports management and media, examination of the impact of social media or marketing strategies on sports organizations, having full text, and being written in English or Persian.

Data extraction was performed using a pre-designed form based on the study objectives. Initially, 395 studies were found. Then, duplicates and irrelevant studies were excluded. Finally, 40 documents were selected and analyzed based on agreement between two independent researchers. Given the qualitative nature of most studies, a combined thematic approach was used. The analysis focused on the role and impact of social media and marketing strategies on brand credibility, fan engagement, and digital marketing in sports, as well as identifying best practices and innovative approaches. The complete process of searching for studies is shown in Figure 1. The quality of the included articles was evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist.

Findings Numerous studies have been conducted in the field of the impact and function of media in sports. Overall, previous studies can be classified into three categories.

The Impact of Social Media on Fan Attraction and Branding In the digital age, social media has emerged as a vital arena for sports organizations to engage with their fans, cultivate loyalty, and create a strong brand identity. Platforms such as Instagram provide unique opportunities for teams to share behind-the-scenes content and engage fans personally. Studies in this category show how social media platforms affect fan engagement, team branding, and digital presence. They used quantitative and qualitative techniques including content analysis, surveys, and interviews. These studies demonstrated that social media is a powerful tool for meaningful communication and strengthening brand image. Emphasis was placed on creating engaging and participatory content that increases loyalty and

engagement. The research highlights the importance of authentic and interactive content for brand identity and fan loyalty.

The Role of Social Media in Market Dynamics and Consumer Behavior In the era of big data, analyzing social media content through data mining and machine learning provides a significant advantage. This category addresses technical approaches for examining interactions, discovering fan behavior patterns, hashtag analysis, and data-based strategies. Articles mostly used quantitative methods to examine impacts on sports equipment market, consumer behavior, and digital advertising effectiveness. Topics include knowledge management, entrepreneurship, brand promotion, and effects of social media advertising on attitudes and behaviors. These studies provide insights into strategic use of social media for market analysis and understanding consumer preferences.

Analysis of Social Media and Data Mining This category focuses on technical and analytical aspects including data mining for fan behavior, hashtag analysis for branding, and machine learning for engagement strategies. Studies used qualitative methods and data mining to analyze large data volumes. Findings show insights into user behavior, brand interaction, and content effectiveness. The diversity in methods highlights the versatility of data mining. Implications extend to broader fields such as public health and consumer marketing.

Discussion and Conclusion

Social media in sports management has created tremendous changes in fan interaction, brand identity development, and market dynamics management. The present study integrates findings from extensive studies and emphasizes the profound impact of platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

Fan Engagement and Brand Identity: Research findings indicate that social media plays a key role in strengthening engagement and loyalty, contributing to stronger brand identity. Maintaining engagement requires continuous innovation and strategy adaptation. Organizations must adopt dynamic approaches using participatory content and storytelling. Social media is a double-edged sword requiring active crisis management. Organizations need precise monitoring systems and specialized teams.

Market Dynamics: Social media plays a vital role in changing consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. It enables direct communication and new market creation. Challenges such as competition and crises require comprehensive strategies, attractive content, and influencer collaboration. New technologies like virtual reality can enhance fan experiences.

Data-Driven Strategies: Data-driven strategies have created significant progress. They provide opportunities for targeted marketing and fan base analysis. Machine learning helps understand behavior patterns. Ethical challenges regarding data privacy must be addressed through transparent policies and staff training. Investment in technology and expertise is essential.

This systematic review underscores that social media is a strategic infrastructure influencing brand reputation, stakeholder relationships, and competitive advantage. It highlights the importance of strategic use of these tools for sports organizations seeking growth and success in the digital age.

KEYWORDS

Social Media, Sports Management, Fan Engagement, Market Dynamics, Data-Driven Strategies, Brand Management, Systematic Review.

