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Marketing Communication Trends in Sports Organisations

Case Study: Futebol Clube do Porto, Sporting Clube
de Portugal, Sport Lisboa e Benfica, Manchester
United and Real Madrid

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by

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Abstract

Marketing communication environment has changed in the last two decades, new technologies are challenging traditional media. Communication is now dominated by the internet. Sports organisations begin to understand the opportunities that arise with web 2.0 and are demonstrating great involvement on online communities, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Social networking sites (SNS) have become a key platform for brands to communicate with consumers. They became the most powerful tools for brands to engage and interact with consumers to create long lasting relationships.

Sports are normally characterised by a high degree of consumer commitment and the football clubs are the sports with most followers/viewers in the world. SNS give clubs the possibility to establish a more direct, a two way relationship with their fans. The emerging of new communication tools facilitate this process. Mobile marketing is one of the growing trends in sports industry and is still not explored to its full potential. Mobile devices, now-a-days, are very sophisticated and have a lot of functionalities which can come as a competitive advantage, if explored fully.

For this study we used a case study strategy where we analyse five football clubs, namely Futebol Clube do Porto, Real Madrid, Manchester United, Sport Lisboa e Benfica and Sporting Clube de Portugal. We conducted a benchmark of the Facebook page, Instagram and mobile apps of these five clubs to understand how sports organisations are communicating with their fans and followers on SNS.

Results show that sports brands are very active online, they try to be present in the day to day of their fans. They try to diverse the content they post and try to capture the consumers attentions. Most of the football clubs are present in all the SNS and most of them have mobile apps. Further research should investigate if the content posted online and if the mobile apps measure up to the consumers expectations.

Keywords: Communication Trends, Social Media, Content Analysis, Social Networking Sites, Sports Organisations, Web 2.0

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1. Introduction

Globalisation and technological advances have greatly advanced the business opportunities for sports organisations, marketers and entrepreneurs involved in sports, the increased number of people travelling worldwide in addition to international migration has meant that marketing innovations within sports travel quickly (Ratten and Ratten, 2011).

The wide use of social media is changing the ways in which individuals consume information, and it is also transforming the relationship between organisations and their audience (Reinhold and Alt, 2012). Professional sports teams, athletes, journalists, and sport-media brands connect with their audience through a social media experience (Gibbs, O'Reilly and Brunette, 2014).

Proactive use of Web 2.0 tools in engaging consumers in direct, personalised, multidimensional communications and interactions adds value and strengthens relationships, thus a growing number of professional sports organisations are using social media to reach fans in dynamic ways (Williams and Chinn, 2010).

It is not enough to have an online site or an official profile on a social network, something else is needed, namely, a continuous interaction with the users in order to maintain their interest alive. Apps and posts on social networks such as Facebook facilitate this kind of interaction that is needed, transforming these 2.0 communication tools into a potentially ideal means to appeal to an important number of faithful fans (Araújo *et al.* 2014).

It is important to have a communication strategy for each social media tool used, to develop a style, to find a balance between selling and talking, to update content, and to discriminate between what information should appear on the website and what informations should appear on social media (Ramsay, 2010).

Research shows that recent communication trends evolve around Web 2.0. Although the internet has existed for a long time, brands are still trying to find their place in the virtual world. Social Networking Sites (SNS) are a powerful tool for brands to create relationships with their fans. Even though SNS were born in parallel to the Web 2.0, they are perceived currently as an integral part of the latter because they share

a number of features belonging in all the products embedded in this scenario: connectivity, sharing of opinions, participation or relationship (Araújo *et al.* 2014).

Social media are revolutionising how consumers interact with brands. Interactive and social media changed the way brand-related content is created, distributed and consumed. The power to shape brand images has shifted from advertisers to the words of consumers (Munting, Moorman and Smit, 2011). One form of communication that can be compared across social media sites is user-generated content (UGC) (Smith, Ficher & Yongjian, 2012).

While UGC has already been available prior to the Web 2.0, the combination of technological drivers, economic drivers and social drivers make UGC nowadays fundamentally different from what was observed in the early 1980s (Kaplan and Heinlein, 2010). The term UGC is usually applied to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users (Kaplan and Heinlein, 2010).

An important characteristic that makes SNS unique from other eWOM media is that users' social network are readily available on these sites. SNS contacts are members of consumers' existing networks and may be perceived as more trustworthy and credible than unknown strangers, which leads SNSs to become important source of product information for consumers, and tremendously facilitates and accelerates eWOM (Chu and Kim, 2011).

The ability to allow for two-way communication between an organisation and its fans, as well as between fans themselves, is one of the most fundamental changes resulting from social media. Social media also offers a more humanistic approach to the communication between brands and their public, and this has made it more accessible, inviting, and acceptable fans as a marketing tool. Social media has also provided organisations with a new means to acquire and distribute information, along with the opportunity to communicate with fans rather than to them (Pfah *et al.* 2012, Safko, 2010, Tsai, 2009 apud Thompson *et. al.*, 2014).

The present study is divided into six main chapters, after the introduction, the second chapter is dedicated to the literature review. The literature review begins with the literature on sports globalisation, following new communication trends. During the literature review, we identified the major trends, namely the use of social media to

communicate with fans, the use of social networking sites, the increase importance of mobile marketing and of user-generated content. These topics are explored in detail as well as the application of communication trends in sports organisations. The third chapter presents the methodology and explains the procedure used to answer the research questions. We used a case study to investigate the use of SNS by the chosen football clubs: Futebol Clube do Porto, Manchester United, Real Madrid, Sporting Clube de Portugal and Sport Lisboa e Benfica. A benchmark of the football clubs SNS's was done using a framework adapted from two models: The Organization-public Relationship and Content Analysis model. The goal of the analysis was to understand what type of content was posted by the football clubs, what strategy these clubs were using and how or if it differed from one club to another. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the case study, and in the fifth chapter we discuss the results of the case study, having in consideration the literature review. Finally, the sixth chapter, we present the main contributions of this study, its limitations and future research directions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Introduction to Sports Globalisation

Sports clubs are inevitably preoccupied with results. Market orientation is a relatively recent phenomenon, which professional sports clubs have started to adopt, rather than traditional “common sense” management where team performance was the primary focus (Shilbury *et al.*, 2003 apud Blumrodt *et al.* 2012, p. 482)

The worldwide appeal of sports is due to the sports industry being worth an estimate \$141 billion (Klayman, 2009 apud Ratten *et al.* 2011, p. 614). Moreover, sports as a business offers massive potential for revenue generation on a global scale for all parties involved (Klayman, 2009 apud Ratten *et al.* 2011, p. 614). Being global is the major objective of sports brands in general and professional football clubs in particular (Dickinson 2008 apud Chanavat *et al.* 2009, p. 460). In addition to a general trend of economies towards globalisation and internationalisation, sports brands start to actively look for new profitable foreign markets (Bodet and Chanavat, 2010).

Sports enjoy a prominent status in today’s society, football being the most notable among them in many countries (Olabe, 2009 apud Araújo, 2014, p. 251). Football clubs are interested in increasing their number of fans and members because the further their image can be projected, the larger their appeal to firms with the aim of using them as a vehicle for marketing their own products. This is only reinforced by the very fact that football, standing out among any other sport, is an area where a club’s corporate image is a particularly powerful driving force, enjoying faithfulness from the sport’s consumer market to a large degree (McCarthy *et al.*, 2011 apud Araújo, 2014, p. 251).

Globalisation and technological advances have greatly advanced the business opportunities for sports organisations, marketers and entrepreneurs involved in sport. One of the most important assets of a sports organisation is its brand (Bauer *et al.*, 2005

apud Ratten et.al 2011, p. 616). Many brands particularly sports brands have transcended geography by focusing on the global appeal of the sport (Muniz and O'Guin, 2001 apud Ratten et.al 2011, p. 616). The most successful sports teams in Europe are those that have been successful on the field such as Manchester United (\$259 million brand value), Real Madrid (\$155 million brand value) and Bayern Munich (\$150 million brand value) (Bauer et al., 2005 apud Ratten et.al 2011, p. 616).

Internationalisation of the global economy has meant that many sports marketers now look to the global market instead of one region in their marketing efforts. Innovative international marketing techniques provide a way to support sport and at the same time enhancing a company's image (Ratten and Ratten, 2011). In the context of professional-sports clubs, internationalisation appears to be a recent but rapidly growing phenomenon which has been enhanced by the globalisation of sports and the professionalisation and evolution of sport clubs into transnational corporations (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004 apud Chanavat et al. 2009, p. 461).

We can say that the global sports industry is growing much faster than GDP rates around the world. The worldwide sports event is defined as all ticketing, media and marketing revenues for major events, and it was worth €45 billion in 2009. Football remains king - global revenues for this sport equal €20 billion yearly - in Europe alone, football is a €16 billion business, with the five biggest leagues (the UK's Premier League, Germany Bundesliga, Italy's Serie A, Spain's La Liga and France's League 1) accounting for half of the market and the top 20 teams comprising roughly one-quarter of the market (www.atkearney.com apud Petrovic *et al.* 2015).

2.2 Football Clubs as Brands

Increasing competition in the sport entertainment market and the inherent lack of guarantees of success (only one club can win the championships) force professional sports clubs (for example Manchester United, Chicago Cubs, New York Knicks, New England Patriots) to face the constant challenge of achieving economic success independent of their sportive success (Gladden and Funk, 2002; Heere, 2010 apud

Schade *et al.* 2014, p. 651). In this context, sports managers increasingly view their clubs as brands to be managed, such that their professional aim is to create a strong brand that can influence the behaviour of external target groups, independent of sportive success (Gladden and Funk, 2002 apud Schade *et al.* 2014, p. 651).

A brand is a promise a company makes to its customers (Baston and Levy, 2012). This promise is built on the coherence and continuity of the brand's products or services that customers experience every time they are in contact with that brand (Balmer *et al.* 2009). The value of the brand is measured as brand equity (Richelieu and Lessard, 2014).

Each sport organisation owns a brand, and it is in the interest of all sports organisations to increase their brand equity through a marketing approach (Ferrand and Torrigiani, 2005 apud Chanavat and Bodet, 2009, p. 463). Since Aaker (1991), marketing scholars have focused on the measurement and the assessment of brand equity (Kapferer, 1998, Keller, 1993 apud Chanavat and Bodet, 2009, p. 463). According to Keller (1993), brand equity consists of the four dimensions of brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Therefore, strong brand equity means that customers have high brand-name awareness, maintain a favourable brand image, perceive that the brand is of high quality, and are loyal to it (Chanavat and Bodet, 2009, p. 463).

This definition of customer-based brand equity also emphasises the differential impact of brand knowledge on customers' responses to marketing. Brand knowledge is composed of the two dimensions of brand awareness and brand image and relates to the "network of strong, favourable, and unique brand associations in consumer memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 3). Brand awareness is composed of consumers' brand recall and brand recognition, which is "related to the strength of the brand node or trace in memory, as reflected by consumers" capacity to identify the brand under different conditions (Keller, 1993, p. 3). Brand recognition reflects the consumers ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand (Keller, 1993, p. 3), and brand recall requires that consumers correctly generate the brand from memory when given some probe as a cue (Keller, 1993, p. 3).

Brands have equity, based on loyalty, recognition and perceived quality, but brand image is the foundation for building brand equity (Chen, 2001 apud Blumrodt *et al.* 2012, p. 483), and a strong, positive brand image leads to competitive advantage (Rio *et al.* 2001 apud Blumrodt *et al.* 2012, p. 483). Communication stimuli may trigger a positive consumer response, therefore, brand communications are positively correlated with brand equity, as long as the message leads to a satisfactory consumer reaction to the product in question, compared to a similar non-branded product (Yoo *et al.* 2000 apud Shivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p. 36).

Strong brand equity has many advantages for football clubs, such as customer loyalty and a stable number of spectators, even if the team does not compete at the top level. Strong brand equity makes higher tickets prices acceptable and allows for the sale of club merchandise (Gladden *et al.* 1998 apud Blumrodt *et al.* 2012, p. 483).

Bearing the uniqueness of a sport product in mind, it is important to adapt Keller's conceptualisation of brand equity to the sport setting. In team sports, the product is the actual game between two teams, and thus is more unpredictable and uncontrollable. Moreover the consumption of the product in sports is experimental and emotional (Mullin *et al.* 1993 apud Kaynak *et al.* 2008).

Sports team's have the characteristics of true "products" composed of: first, intangible benefits, such as the emotions fans experience at the stadium, the social interaction with other fans in the stands, as well as the feeling of pride when associating themselves with the team and second, tangible dimensions, such as the results of the game, the facilities provided in the stadium and the merchandising products they can purchase or receive as a give-away (Desbordes and Richelieu, 2012 apud Richelieu *et al.* 2014, p. 286). A sports team has the potential to build its brand equity by capitalising on the emotional connection it shares with its fans, in order to strengthen customer loyalty and long-term associations (Richelieu and Pons, 2011 apud Richelieu *et al.* 2014, p. 286). Beyond the products they offer to their fans, it is the "corporate brand" supporters identify with and internalise in their sports consumption (Svensson *et al.* 2012 apud Richelieu *et al.* 2014, p. 286).

In the case of football, the most successful clubs are now considering their club a brand and particularly on foreign markets. Indeed, it seems that because of territorial,

familial and identity bonds, professional football clubs are reluctant to fully consider themselves as a real brand on their home market (Bodet and Chanavat, 2010). In the European context, geographical, cultural and family bonds seem to be the strongest factors because of the ages and the deep-rooted links (clubs cannot be relocated like franchises) between clubs and fans (Chanavat and Bodet, 2009, p. 462).

Again, in the European context and in the particularly case of football, Manchester United was the first professional club to understand the potential of internationalisation and to become a global brand (Hill and Vincent, 2006 apud Chanavat and Bodet, 2009, p. 462), and it is still benefiting from its first-entrant position. This is particularly the case in Asian markets, which still provide the club with strong brand equity, at least for the moment (Chanavat and Bodet, 2009, p. 462).

The fact that professional sports must market themselves to these diverse groups means that a strong and relevant brand could potentially increase the commercial value of the sports organisation and create a virtuous circle leading to increased revenues from commercial activities for the club. Of course the club brand also operates within its own leagues structure and therefore must simultaneously compete and co-operate with other clubs in the same league, it cannot exist in isolation (Abosag *et al.* 2012).

2.3 Internet and Marketing Communications

Marketing communication tools can be divided into six main categories, that can be applied online and offline: advertising, online marketing, public relations (PR), sponsorship, personal selling and sales promotion (Kall, 2006 apud Grybs, 2014, p. 158). There is a division between advertising and online marketing due to the fact that the importance of online advertising is rising nowadays, having major impact on new trends development described further in this paper. Internet and social media significantly influence the development of marketing communication's (Grybs, 2014).

From a communication perspective, the most significant development was the internet. Traditionally, marketing communication had been a linear one-way process from producer via media to consumers, with limited feedback afforded via the market

research techniques of the day. Developments in technology opened up the potential of two-way communication and created opportunities for consumers to share and discuss information with each other and with businesses and brands (Senecal and Nantel, 2004).

By taking advantage of Web 2.0 technologies, companies are using Social Network Sites to promote and relay information about their brands (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012 apud Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.32). Organisations have begun to understand the importance of the internet and have taken control of it, demonstrating both interest and involvement in online communities (Berthon et al., 2012 apud Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.33). We can identify several important trends in the international marketing communication environment related with the internet (Grybs, 2014, p. 161).

Lots of interesting communication alternatives come from the hand of the tools 2.0 or the Web 2.0, among which we must emphasise the role of SNS. SNS are web-based services that allow the creation and strengthening of affective relations or links amongst members, and between members and the organisation, or the network brand manager (Koh and Kim, 2004). Their interest lies not only in their communication effectiveness, ensuing from their interactive nature, but also in their capability to strengthen the club's marketing mix and to convey a particular image to both their regular fans and newly acquired customers, especially among those who make frequent use of the new technologies (Olabe, 2009 apud Araújo, 2014, p. 251).

SNS offers both firms and customers new ways of engaging with each other. Companies hope to engage with loyal consumers and influence individuals' perceptions about their product, spread information and learn from and about their audience (Brodie et al., 2013 apud Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.33).

In the new world, it is no surprise that many brands are failing to engage consumers. Long before the web went mainstream, social analysts were tracking how the trust people place had switched from institutions to their friends, and highlighting the implications these changes had for marketing. Social media and online social networks simply unlocked an existing human need, and accelerated the trend by enabling everyone connected to the internet to experience these new tools (Klue, 2007).

Stone and Woodcock (2013) demonstrated how different areas of marketing are affected by the surge of interactivity. For this study only the most relevant communication tools were selected to demonstrate these changes, namely advertising, public relations and direct marketing. Regarding advertising, the authors state that “website/mobile advertising is gradually usurping advertising in conventional media, allowing greater trackability and better assessment of return on investment. This is leading to a blurring of the distinction between advertising and other marketing communication methods” (p.6). Regarding public relations, the authors state that “electronic word of mouth, or “word of mouse” (p.6), is replacing conventional media exposure, not solely through social networks, but through all aspects of web and mobile dialogues. In some sectors, online reviews have become absolutely critical in determining whether a product will sell” (p.6). Finally, when it comes to direct marketing the authors believe that “direct marketing has expanded out of the conventional media of mail and telephone to include virtually all marketing communications” (p.6).

2.4 Sports Communication Trends

Professional football (soccer) is the sport with the most followers (and viewers) on the planet. The media coverage of sports entertainment assures a disproportional high degree of visibility of the small and medium sized enterprises, such as Chelsea with its 160 employees. European clubs and their competitors are widely broadcast in Europe and in Asia, so even small clubs have started to investigate these markets (Soderman *et al.*, 2010 apud Blumrodt *et al.* 2012, p. 483).

The role of technology in sports industry has been intrinsically involved in the development of sports events, not just for the communication potential to increase spectators and viewers’ number only, but for the revenue increase through various types of sponsorship and advertisements to all kinds of innovation (Petrovic *et al.*, 2015). Sports itself have become a major industry and internet sports offering are a significant

part of the industry. Beyond revenue generation, sport team website is an excellent tool for relationship management with fans (Brown, 2003 apud Nicholls *et al.*, 2013, p. 119).

The world of sports is continually changing, and the growing use of technology is one area that is greatly impacting sports in the modern day. With an ever-changing virtual landscape, sports organisations and marketers are presented with new technologies opportunities, innovations, and challenges, most recently due to the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Many sports organisations are trying to establish a presence in this unique virtual marketing space in an effort to build and develop long-lasting stakeholder relationships and foster engagement with fans (Thompson, Martin, Gee and Eagleman, 2014, p.43).

There is an emerging market which is beginning to extend the reach of digital technologies adapted for sports industry and sports events. Increasingly, developers are exploring and exploiting the vast potential of information and communication technologies (ICT's) to create value in the field of sports events. Technology applied in this field functions for the purpose of communication, online interaction, events monitoring, results display, access control and adapted software applications. Advances in technology have helped creation of innovative information and communication solutions that have become increasingly commonplace in many of today's sports-related fields (Petrovic *et al.*, 2015).

To understand the communication trends in sports we need to investigate what companies are doing. The Sports Business Journal (2014) asked several marketers to identify growth categories, the trends they are watching, and the most effective platforms for activation. Kit Geis from Genesco Sports Enterprises says "It's not exactly new, but athletes are more important than ever to a sponsor's marketing mix because they are the access point to digital social media. We not only use Q Scores when evaluating player, but how many Twitter and Facebook followers they have. They are the star of popular viral video. We need player to make digital and social work" (p. 1). Durante, Co-Managing Director of Wasserman Media Group says that "brands are getting smarter with the use of digital to leverage sponsorships, including branded content - but there is plenty of room for greater success. Brands increasingly are looking for more than sponsorship, but a brand story with the sport (property or team, even

player). They are looking for joint initiatives - community, technology, multicultural, etc - where they can meaningfully contribute” (p. 2). Abrutyn, Senior Vice President of IMG Consulting confirms that “the passion of consumption of sports in all forms is driving all kinds of innovation in activation. Content is king like never before for many reasons. These are two that come to mind where ideas, content and communications are interesting to drive trends” (p. 3). Neuman, managing partner from Scout Sports & Entertainment explains “how brands are inserting themselves into the fan’s conversations via the most fan relevant social media touch point, including but not limited to Facebook and Twitter. This is driven by shareable and “ownable” content as well as “data driven by design activations” created to capture email and cell information so social media listening analytics can be utilized. Smartphones and social media environments all fans to share their opinion seconds after it happens. Sports and live content will continue to be the ultimate catalyst for social media growth” (Geis, Durant and Abrutyn, 2014, p. 3).

Robert Passikoff is the founder and president of Brand Keys, Inc. Passikoff is a contributor at Forbes Magazines. In one of his articles in December 2014 he states some trends for 2015. The author starts by saying there are three kinds of marketers and how they deal with trends: those who let it happen, those who make it happen, and those who wonder what happens. So, for sports marketers who want to fall into that second group, paying attention to what looms ahead is the wisest move they can make. Passikoff believes that a predictive loyalty and engagement assessment is a more reliable way to identify trends coming down the road. He identifies 15 trends in 2015, for this study the relevant ones are: everyone of a kind - consumers will crave more and expect more customised and personalised products, services and experiences; magnified human technology - digital and mobile in all forms will fuel the sense of empowerment and possibility for consumers; real brand engagement - marketers will link engagement to how well brands are perceived versus the category’s ideal, rather than just counting “likes” or leveraging imagery; the everything expectation - the ability for brands to measure real, unarticulated, and constantly expanding emotional consumer expectations will provide advantages to engage, delight and profit; real-time becomes real important; category is king - to engage those smarter, high-expectation consumers, brands will

need to be smarter about category-specific emotional values that they can leverage and believably own; brands will get emotional: successful brands will need to identify emotional values in their categories and use them as a foundation for meaningful positioning, differentiation, and authentic storytelling; non-fiction storytelling - storytelling is fine, but the stories brands tell must reflect real brand values and category realities that differentiate and meet consumers' believability criteria, otherwise marketers will end up entertaining rather than engaging.

2.5 Social Media Trend

Social media can be characterised by social presence, media richness, self-presentation and self-disclosure. The higher the social presence, the larger the social influence that the communication partners have on each other's behaviour (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Media richness is based on the assumption that the goal of any communication is the resolution of ambiguity and the reduction of uncertainty. Self-presentation is related to the fact that in any type of social interaction people have the desire to control the impressions other people form of them. Self-disclosure is the wish a person has to present themselves, for example in a blog. There are many types of social media, that can be categorised by these dimensions. For example collaborative projects score the lowest, meaning they are often text based and only allow a simple exchange. On the other hand content communities and SNS (e.g. Facebook) score high. They enable the sharing of videos, photos and other forms of media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media marketing is a type of online marketing, however the influence of this tool is so significant that it may be considered as a separate trend. Social media marketing uses various media networks in order to create marketing communication, and it covers activities which involve social sharing of content, videos and images to reach marketing goals (Word stream, 2012 apud Grybs). Social media marketing is

characterised by active participation of consumers, who exchange information, share experience and opinions. Social media marketing can be operated through many tools, which is one of its advantages over traditional marketing communications. It may involve private forums, wide social networks, public discussions boards, etc (Management study guides, 2013 apud Grybs, 2014, p. 162).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. The authors also give some tools and dimensions to define social media, namely collaborative projects (i.e Wikipedia), blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds. For this study we are going to focus on the SNS, which are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)

SNS can be described as networks of friends for social or professional interaction (Trusov, Buckling, and Pauwels, 2009 apud Vries *et al.* 2012, p. 84). Among traditional sources of communication, SNS have been established as mass phenomena with a wide demographic appeal (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). One of the reasons for the rapid popularity of social media among companies is the viral dissemination of information via the internet. Additionally, they provide opportunities for internet users to create and share content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012 apud Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.33).

In 2014, Facebook is regard as the largest online social network with over 1.31 billion users with many communication and integration options available for its users (Carter, 2013 apud Kuzma et al. 2014). In 2015 the number of active users increased by 12% since 2014 (www.statisticbrain.com 2014). In the fourth quarter of 2015, Facebook had 1.59 billion monthly active users (www.statista.com). Facebook is not only a tool for individual users, it can be an effective option for organisations to improve communications (Carter, 2013 apud Kuzma et al. 2014).

Sports are typically characterised by a high degree of consumer commitment and emotional involvement, which make the opportunity to build brands and strong relationships with consumers of sports possible (Sutton et al., 1998 apud Abosag et al. 2012, p. 1236). Given that these devoted individuals are generally more invested in the organisation-public relationship than the average consumer, the sports teams they follow may have a vested interest in creating long-lasting loyalty among the fans (Waters, Burke and Jackson, 2013, p.165). The clubs' official web sites do not usually create the necessary communication means with their users because they do not provide the means for an interactive experience (Beech *et al.* 2000 apud Araújo, 2014, p. 251).

Internet technology offers clubs the opportunity to enhance their marketing activities by establishing a more direct method of communication with supporters and customers (Berthon *et al.* 1996; Thomas, 1998 and Newell, 1999 apud Beech, 2000, p. 38). The possibility to interact with the users is an essential feature, making social networks outstanding communication means, appealing to a wide sector of fans so as to preserve their engagement with the club, and thus reinforcing the club's projected image and, consequently, increasing its appeal as a marketing means (Araújo *et al.* 2014).

Using social media has enabled football clubs to have a two-way relationship with their fans. Previous research states that the average sports fan spends 1-2.5 hours a week following their teams via social media (Harris, 2013 apud Kuzma et al. 2014) These statistics would appear to indicate that football clubs around the world should implement social media campaigns to interact with their fans (Kuzma et al. 2014).

Sports marketers are using internationally interactive marketing mediums to connect with consumers in real time. Cell phones, iPads and iPhones have enabled people to watch sports games interactively and this has been encouraged through social networking sites. Technology innovative media made possible by the Web 2.0 have enabled marketing to be more interactive and socially complex (Cooke and Buckley, 2008 apud Ratten et al. 2011, p. 618). SNS such as Facebook and Twitter have encouraged marketers to aim at technology savvy consumers (Junco and Mastrodicasa, 2007 apud Ratten et al. 2011, p. 618). An example of an entrepreneurial sports marketing campaign is the AT&T laptop card with pitchmen and sports figures (AT&T LaptopConnect, 2009 apud Ratten et al. 2011, p. 618). Other sports marketing

campaigns have used Twitter, blogs and professional networking groups like LinkedIn to target particular types of consumers (Ratten *et al.* 2011, p. 618).

Current trends in social media embody two different directions. On one hand, social media go “back to the roots” of the internet’s beginnings, a world that was ruled by individuals instead of big corporations. On the other hand, they go back to the future by exploring new and futuristic phenomena such as the over-sharing of information made by users which can present itself as an opportunity and/or threat (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012).

The potential value and benefits of using social media to meet relationship-marketing goals is significant, and in an environment such as sports it may be particularly relevant in supporting consumers as they become active contributors. As sports organisations rely on repeat purchase of tickets and promotional merchandise and seek to retain loyal consumers, strategic relationship-marketing practices that strengthen these behaviours may have the potential to provide significant competitive advantage (Williams and Chinn, 2010).

2.6 Mobile Trend

New trends and new phenomena in marketing communications can be observed. The advanced technology solutions and the collapse of trade barriers improved the messages exchange and communication. New media emerged. Internet, especially mobile broadband Internet and mobile technologies made a revolution in the market. Communications with the customers had to change drastically and the possibilities of the mobile solutions are still not fully exhausted (Blythe, 2002 apud Grybs, 2014, p. 158).

The real turn to e-communication is supposed to take place in 2016. At the moment, the tendency of rising penetration of smartphones, tablets, and other technologies gadgets on the market can be observed. Smartphones and tablets are the

main devices for receiving mobile or e-mail marketing messages, for accessing Internet and therefore to be exposed to all forms of e-communications (Grybs, 2014, p. 161).

Most corporations must now “market in a digital world”. The “always on” consumer (and business consumer too) is able, and increasingly likely to search, enquire, interact, complain, buy and pay through mobile devices. Marketing for most corporations is becoming increasingly interactive and “always on”. Delivering an efficient (for the customer and the company), relevant (personalised) and engaging experience increasingly relies on a deep knowledge of the consumers; who they are, the devices they use to connect to the company and the content they want to see (Stone and Woodcock, 2014).

The terms “bring your own device” and “use your own application” challenge the media management teams. Once an organisation is committed to using all the channels consumers want to use, the main challenge marketers face is time, opportunity and speed. Companies always had to understand whether a customer prefers mail, telephone or face to face, but now they need to know more about their preferences and their connecting devices to deliver the right content to them at the right time (Stone and Woodcock, 2014).

One of the most promising e-communication tools is mobile marketing. Mobile marketing is considered as a set of practices that enable organisations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant way through a mobile device or network (Mobile Marketing Association, 2013 apud Grybs, 2014, p. 163). At the beginning it was based mainly on push type sms and mms messages sent to the consumers. Nowadays the concept developed more strongly into pull type messages based on the internet, as a result mobile marketing evolved in a different direction and acquired a new dimension (Rayfield, 2010 apud Grybs, 2014). There are four main factors that make this tool highly effective. First of all, mobile marketing is based on permission, consumer need to give their permission before being marketed. What is more, mobile marketing is live, responses are in real-time thanks to the nature of mobile devices and their users (Rayfield, 2010 apud Grybs, 2014). It is also well targeted. Finally, mobile marketing communications through mobile devices are a two-way form

of communication, consumers do not only respond but also request information that they need at a particular moment (Khan, 2009 apud Grybs, 2014).

Mobile social media i.e. social media accessed via a mobile device, already make computer-based social media look like a gramophone in comparison to an mp3-player (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012). Especially the opportunities of geolocalisation and increase time sensitivity offered by mobile devices will play an important role. For starters, mobile social media are even more closely tied to how people engage in the real world than traditional social media. With mobile social media one not only knows the “status” of friends and acquaintances, but additionally where they are currently located - which opens the possibility to actually go and see them in real life. Also, location-based services provide room for a second and maybe even scarier development: the potential information over-sharing (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012).

Vernali (2010, p. 147) states six important strategic best practices in mobile marketing: 1) mobile marketing messages need to be permission based, highly relevant, and targeted, attention grabbing, to the point, personalised and of value-added content; 2) the relevance of benefit/incentive provided by the mobile marketing should be instant and recognisable; 3) the fact that security/privacy concerns of the mobile users should be well addressed; 4) the need for the mobile applications to be innovative, user-friendly despite technological limitations of mobile devices, and the ability of the apps to provide solutions for needs related with exclusive value propositions of the mobile medium; 5) the need for mobile technologies to be suitable for various industries and task-types, and successful implementations is likely to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of management and integrations of the value chain; 6) players of the mobile value chain should collaborate and co-operate to create synergy, and be ultimately consumer centric.

As mobile devices have become more sophisticated, so has the type of content users expect to have on them. Mobile users want high-quality and engaging experiences. If you do not give it to them, they can easily find an alternative site, app, or service that will (Martin, 2015, p. 20).

Mobile movers and shakers do not have to wait for forthcoming trends to emerge, they can be proactive and stay ahead of the curve with the right strategies. For

example, plenty are convinced that user-generated content is the next big frontier (Martin, 2015, p. 22).

With five times as many mobile phones as computers, marketers and app creators have a lot at stake because mobile phones now have the ability to generate billions of dollars in revenue. Serving the mobile market in a way that meets the needs of consumers will result in a huge payoff understanding the latest mobile phone trends and what consumers really want. For phone users, knowing what is available helps them get more from their phones (Inquistr, 2016).

The Huffington Post (2016) states that the mobile phone has been the star of the year 2015 and will continue to shine through 2016. The author defines eight major mobile trends for 2016: 1) smarter data, sharper results: rich data is sitting at different places such as telcos, e-commerce firms, taxi apps and others. Data from multiple sources are integrated with each other which will enable marketers to derive richer insights on their users; 2) apptimisation: commerce and mobile-first companies will start evolving their campaigns objectives and focus on value creation over just user acquisition; 3) re-emergence of mobile web: brands will have a renewed focus to ensure that both mobile apps and mobile sites provide an engaging consumer experience; 4) mobile becomes the new tv: mobile videos will surpass TV viewership and become preferred course of entertainment and information; 5) money trails: cash, plastic and now mobile: mobile wallets will be used for everything from recharges to online shopping to ordering food to grocery purchase; 6) entertainment space to be disrupted: with reducing price points, consumers are opening up to the idea of purchasing virtual items within games; 7) willing and wired: wearables will see increased adoption in 2016, with the introduction of more affordable devices; 8) more power to programmatic media buying: automation is the future and the use of technology for buying, selling and fulfilling ads will increase substantially. Marketers will look at alternatives to simplify the media buying process, and programmatic will be the answer.

2.7 User-generated Content Trend

Social media is gaining ground and, in many cases, challenges traditional media. News are transmitted within seconds to different parts of the world. And these shifting tectonic plates of communication necessitate both online and offline communications (Kitchen and Proctor, 2015).

When Web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological foundation, User Generated Content (UGC) can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media. The term, which achieved broad popularity in 2005, is usually applied to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

The content created by internet users involve different topics, including brands and products, making companies no longer the primary source of brand communication (Berthon *et al.* 2008, apud Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.33). Marketing and brand managers may assume that brand communication will increase through user-generated social media communication (Smith *et al.* 2012 apud Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.33). Collaborative projects, such as wikipedia, enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end-users and are, in the sense, probably the most democratic manifestation of UGC (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

In brand-related UGC, the brands name can be mentioned for numerous reasons: fan symbolism, content related to opinions or complaints, content related to any kind of interest shown about the brand or social media users may also simply share informations about brands. This content variables reflects whether or not brand-related UGC contains factual information about the brand. Factual information, which may be included in everything from tweets to video reviews, is information which is objectively verifiable such as colour or style of specific clothes, the price of an offering, the location of a store, or the timing of a sale (Smith *et al.* 2012, p. 105).

This distinction between communication sources is relevant because firm-created social media communication is under the management of companies, while user-generated social media communication is independent of the firm's control (Vanden Bergh *et al.* 2011 apud Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, p.34).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWom) has been defined as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (Hennig-Thuray *et al.* 2004 apud Spotler *et al.* 2014, p. 261). Although this type of social media communication is increasing in popularity, it is still considered to be a new practice among marketers (Nielsen, 2013).

eWOM communications is one of many features changing sport marketing strategies, it is a form of communication that is quick and used by more people than ever before (Coyle, 2010; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010 apud Wallace *et. al.* 2011, p. 428). Marketers must shift away from using social media as an unfocused tool to using it as a strategic brand tool to communicate brand positioning desired.

A study conducted by Araújo *et. al* (2014) regarding the use of SNS by football clubs, tried to make an evaluation of the degree of interaction between a club and its Facebook fans and what type of content lead to a bigger responsiveness on the user's part. After analysing many European football club's online presence they concluded that there was a positive correlation between the result of a football club and the number of Facebook fans and also on the degree of activity shown on it's official Facebook page. They also analysed the content posted on the official Facebook pages, and concluded that the content that was more frequent was photos, videos, news and announcements. These contents have a higher probability of inducing a response from the fans. The content with less responsiveness was live transmissions, merchandising and ticket-sales (Araújo *et. al*, 2014).

This study brings interesting insight for this research, since content is a growing trend and a powerful tool to create engagement and interaction with fans and to maintain their interest in the football club.

Engagement with brand SNS pages can be examined using three continuous levels (Mutinga, Moorman and Smit's, 2011). The first level is *consuming content* on SNS's, this includes viewing videos and pictures, reading products reviews, etc. This level is quite passive and regarded as minimum level of online activeness. The second level is *contributing* to page content by responding to content provided by the brands, being involved in online conversations and commenting on pictures and videos. The

third level is *creating* user-generated content, such as posting users's own product review, sharing videos and photos on brand SNS pages that other users can consume and contribute to (Mutinga, Moorman and Smit's, 2011).

The literature review shows that football is a massive industry, worth billions. Football, the sport with most viewers on the planet, continue to look for new and profitable markets. Globalisation and technological advances have increased business opportunities for sports organisations. These technological advances made marketers look to the global market instead of regions. This global view comes with some challenges, namely the increase in competition.

Football clubs are brands, and like every brand it has equity, and it is in the interest of the sports organisation to increase brand equity through a marketing approach. A strong brand equity has many advantages to a sports organisation, namely increase in perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand image.

Communication is a marketing tool that helps sports organisations to increase brand equity. Its important that sports organisations have in mind that the communication panorama is rapidly changing and that new tools are emerging every day and that its essential to keep up with them. The literature review presented previously identifies major communication trends and explains them in detail. It is not a surprise that companies are using online tools to communicate with its audience, this tools create many opportunities for companies to engage with its audience.

Major trends were identified, namely social media, mobile and user-generated content. Companies are using social media to communicate, regarding social media we can highlight the importance of SNS, specifically Facebook and Instagram. Mobile is a more recent trend, due to the advances of mobile technology, companies are still trying to figure out the potential of this tool and what functionalities they can use to create competitive advantage. User-generated content is a trend that comes as a result of the use of the previous trends. Its the ultimate trend that every company desires to achieve. Its out of the companies control but can be encouraged by the companies with the right communication strategy.

3. Methodology

The current research focuses on the major communication trends adapted by sports clubs. In particular, it explores the use of social media practices, the major trend highlighted by the literature review, by five football clubs. It focuses on how these clubs use online tools (Facebook, Instagram and mobile apps) to build professional, personal and community relationships through a content analysis of their official SNS and of the mobile app. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, we will try to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What type of opportunities for fan engagement are available on professional sports teams social networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram?

RQ2: How do sports organisations use social networking sites to build relationship with their fans/supporters?

RQ3: What are the main differences in branding strategies used by the football clubs in the different platforms studied (Facebook, Instagram and mobile apps)?

To answer these research questions we used a case study strategy. A case study strategy comprises an all encompassing method which incorporates specific approaches to data collection and to data analysis (Yin, 1984). The case study is neither a data collection tactic or merely a design feature alone, but a comprehensive research strategy, that can accommodate qualitative and quantitative data (Yin, 1984). A case study strategy is a methodology that is used to explore a single phenomenon in a natural setting using a variety of methods to obtain in-depth knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This approach made sense since the goal of this research was to understand and describe in-depth the behaviour of the chosen clubs on the different SNS.

In order to examine the use of social media by sports organisations, we selected the following football clubs: Futebol Clube do Porto, Sporting Clube de Portugal, Sport Lisboa e Benfica, Real Madrid and Manchester Unites. RM (\$3.26 billion) and MU

(\$3.10 billion) were chosen because they are the most valuable teams in the world and have a big presence in SNS. The choice of FCP, SCP and SLB was due to the clubs being the biggest clubs in Portugal.

We conducted a benchmark of the Facebook and Instagram pages and of the mobile applications of the five clubs that were studied, to better understand how sports organisations are using SNS and mobile apps now-a-days.

The first step was to determine if these clubs had official pages through the official website. The five clubs have brand pages on SNS, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. For this study the most relevant SNS are Facebook and Instagram. Twitter was not considered because it is not a SNS which is significantly used in the Portuguese market compared to the others. Furthermore, there is also extensive research regarding the use of Twitter, by the football clubs, so analysing different SNS would be more interesting. We did not consider Snapchat either due to the lack of resources and time constraints to follow five clubs, 24 hours per day during a month on this SNS. I followed these clubs for a month on Facebook and Instagram with my personal page. The content analysis was made by analysing each post individually and attributing a category using the framework presented in the measurement chapter. We attributed each post on Facebook and Instagram a category. A post could either be attributed to marketing, personalisation, information or activation, and no post can be attributed to two or more categories. Regarding the mobile apps, a more descriptive analysis was made. The goal was to understand how these clubs were using this mobile tool. It was not possible to analyse MU's mobile app since it is only available in the Asian market and FCP's mobile app was exclusive for members until April 2016.

3.1 Content Analysis Methods

We identified two methods of content analysis for SNS. These models were created to analyse posts made on SNS and to categorise them with the goal to better understand sports organisations' online strategy. These two models, although different, have many similarities, namely in the categories they use and in the way they categorise and describe the posts.

3.1.1 Organisation-Public Relationship Method

Organisation-public relationships (OPR) are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organisation and its public. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perceptions of the individuals and social collectivities in the relationship. Though dynamic in nature, relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time (Broom, Casey and Ritchey, 2000, p. 18).

A study conducted by Wang and Zhou (2015) uses the OPR method to analyse social media use of NBA sports team. The authors used three categories used by Bruning and Ledingham (1999) which are: professional, personal, and community relationship. Inside the categories the authors attributed sub-categories adapted from Blaszkka et al. (2012), initially used for the uses-and-gratifications perspective, to investigate Twitter usage during major events. The sub-categories included interactivity, diversion, information, sharing, content, fanship, promotion, and a combination of these.

The authors developed an original Twitter-categorisation scheme to examine how sports organisations used Twitter accounts to establish relationship with the public. They used the categories: personal, professional and community relationship and the sub-categories: information sharing, interactivity, promotion, fanship, activity/event, entertainment.

The category professional relationship includes information sharing which is the attempt to share information about the clubs, players and other content. Promotion is the attempt to sell tickets, apparel or other merchandising. The category personal relationship includes interactivity which is any online interactions between teams, fans, journalists and athletes through public messages or “retweeting” messages. The category community relationship includes fanship which is the demonstration of emotion about a team or athlete; it also includes activity/event which is the organisation of online activities with followers. Entertainment includes publications aimed at entertaining fans, as for example sharing funny content.

3.1.2 Content Analysis Method

A study conducted by Meng, Stavros and Westberg (2015) examined the specific methods by which NBA sport organisations engage fans through social media. They used an inductive category approach with no preconceived categories. They created the categories after they analysed the content repeatedly and matched it to the categories that were created during the data collection. The study was reviewed by multiple researchers to test its intra-coder reliability.

The authors used Facebook and Twitter to conduct this study. The results of this study show that there are four types of communications used to engage fans via Facebook and Twitter. These are: informing, marketing, personalising and activating. Regarding informing, the authors included in this category news and information directly associated with the team and the organisation (information about players, staff, etc.), activity outside the sport and diverting fans to their content (redirecting readers to other content through links, pictures, etc.). In marketing category they considered publications related with promotion and direct sales (advertising, opportunities to purchase items, etc.). Personalising regards initiating contact and direct responses (direct, interpersonal contact with an individual, responding directly to questions or comments). At last, activating is considered as group involvement and gathering feedback (ensuring fans are included in relevant general interactivity processes and group discussions and collecting fans opinions before developing or implementing a new idea).

3.1.3 Content Analysis Framework

The categories were adapted from the studies mentioned above. Some changes were made so that the method could be adapted to the analysis of Facebook and Instagram, as it was originally developed for Twitter. Twitter was excluded from this study because it is not a very relevant SNS in Portugal and it has a minimal presence in the Portuguese market. Since we intended to make a comparison between major

international clubs (RM and MU) and Portuguese clubs, we decided not to consider Twitter.

In an attempt to profit from both studies and use as much valuable insights as possible, a content analysis framework was developed based on both studies. Both seek to understand how sports clubs use SNS tools to engage with fans. Although the categories differ in naming, they are very similar to each other. They interpret the posts made by each sport club and categorise them. This categorisation is made according to the nature of the posts. Each post is attributed to a category depending on the purpose it serves (marketing, informing, sales, etc). Some posts can have multiple purposes, so it can be difficult to attribute it to a single category, a choice based on the main purpose of the post must be made so that a single post is not included in more than one category.

For the content analysis framework used in the present study (see Figure 1), the categories personalising, informing, marketing and activation were adapted from the content analysis model proposed by Meng, Stavros and Westberg (2015). Originally the authors suggested that the categories informing and marketing included “one-way communications”, meaning that they do not necessarily require the participation of the public, they include publications related with relevant information shared by the club with its public, images of the match, scores or posts with a commercial purpose. Being one-way does not mean that the public is not involved, it means that the main purpose of the post is to inform, and thus, although involvement is created, the main purpose of the post is not involvement, compared with the other categories. The categories personalising and activating are related with interactive publications or two-way communications, meaning that they required the participation of the public and were directed at them, with a clear intent to get the public involved and create conversation and “buzz”.

The sub-categories of this model were adapted from the Organisation-Public relationships model proposed by Wang and Zhou (2015) and from the Content Analysis Model by Meng, Stavros and Westberg (2015). The initial categories of the OPR model were professional, personal and community relationship. In each category the authors included sub-categories. These sub-categories were considered relevant to create our content analysis framework. The way the authors separated the individual posts was

very useful for this framework, since some posts can have ambiguous interpretations. The initial sub-categories from the OPR model were information sharing, interactivity, promotion, fanship, activity/event; community function and entertainment. After analysing all the sub-categories from this model and the type of publications that they considered when they categorised a post, we compared it with the Content Analysis Model (2015). Considering the sub-categories from both models, it is clear that the division they make according to the nature of the posts is very similar. Both models divide informational posts from commercial ones, there is also a clear distinction between posts that enable conversation and involvement and posts that are more institutional. The idea was to create sub-categories for the framework, that made a clear distinction from one sub-category to another. Thus, some of the sub-categories were adapted from the OPR model, namely promotional, activity, news and external content and the others were adapted from the Content Analysis model: sales, direct, involvement and answer & questions. Slight changes were made to the naming of some sub-categories in order for them to be adapted to Facebook.



Figure 1: Content Analysis Framework. Source: Author (adapted from Meng, Stavros, Westberg, 2015 and Wang and Zhou, 2015)

This framework represents the categories which are going to be used to categorise the content posted by the clubs on Facebook. The categories used in this study are informing, marketing, personalising and activating. An example was given to demonstrate what type of post was attributed to each category. Informing has two subcategories: news and external activities. News (see Appendix 1) is related with the clubs attempt to share information with its fans. We included in this category information provided by the club, such as organisational news, news about players, the team, details about the game, final scores, goals, changes in the clubs SNS identity (change in the profile picture and cover photo), sports news and press releases. External activities (see Appendix 2) are the links diverting the fans to external content and sites, such as the website, apps, news in magazines and institutional videos. Marketing has two subcategories: promotional and sales. Promotional (see Appendix 3) is related with advertising events, competition and any mention of sponsorship. Sales (see Appendix 4) include any direct approach by the club to try sell tickets, products and merchandise. Personalising has two categories: direct and answer & questions. Direct personalising (see Appendix 5) includes any personal contact between the club and its fans, the direct mention of a player or direct contact with them. Answer & questions (see Appendix 6) includes the direct response to individual questions and comments or any question made by the club in an attempt to create conversations with the fans. Interactions with athletes, journalists and other stakeholders are also included in this category. Activating has two categories: involvement and activities and hobbies. Involvement (see Appendix 7) includes any attempt to create online engagement, group involvement or any interactive process, for example making controversial posts, throwbacks, share of memes or montages. Activities & hobbies (see Appendix 8) are online activities, entertainment or any contest provided by the club.

Slight changes in the content analysis framework were made for Instagram, due to the essence of this SNS, which is mainly a photo app, with less functions than Facebook. Instead of dividing the posts in categories and subcategories, for analysing Instagram, we only considered the main categories: informing, marketing, personalising and activating. Informing (see Appendix 9) includes any photo of the club or videos. Marketing (see Appendix 10) considers any photo of merchandising and advertising/

sponsorship. Personalising (see Appendix 11) includes photos of fans and players. Activating (see Appendix 12) considers any photo montage, old photos (throwbacks) or reposts from fans (contest photos).

To better understand these categories we included an example of each category.

4. Case Study

The first goal of this study was to understand, through the literature review what are the major trends in marketing communications and the second goal was to understand if these trends apply to the case studies analysed.

4.1 History of the football clubs

We began the case study with a brief description of the clubs history to contextualise and better understand the differences in the dimension and culture of the five football clubs studied.

4.1.1 FC Porto

FC Porto was founded by António Nicolau d'Almeida in 1893, a fine sportsman and a Port Wine trader. José Monteiro da Costa, the leader at the time, wanted to unite the efforts of the local community with the strong English representation in Oporto. Moment that led to the extinction of Group Recreativo “O Destino” and was created F. C. Porto.

With the colours blue and white represented in the Portuguese Flag, FC Porto evolved and started growing, winning and thinking big. 1980 were the most memorable decades, FC Porto won the European Champions Cup, the Intercontinental Cup and the European Super Cup. Just a few years later FC Porto achieved what no other club in Portugal had ever achieved, five champions in a row. With modern and quality infrastructures, such as the Dragon Stadium, FC Porto continued to shine in the European context, conquering UEFA Champions League in the 2002/2003 season, UEFA Champions League in 2003/2004, the Intercontinental Cup, in 2004, and the Europa League in 2010/2011. In the end of this season FC Porto became the most successful Portuguese Club (FCPorto Official Website, 2016).

4.1.2 Manchester United

Manchester United (MU) was formed in 1878, under a different name - Newton Heath LYR (Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway). With no idea of the dimension that the club would have, the workers in the railway yard at Newton Heath, indulged their passion for association football games against other departments of railway companies. When the football league was formed in 1888, they didn't consider themselves good enough to become founder members. They waited until 1892 to make their entrance. With some financial problems, the club was saved by a local brewery owner, John Henry Davis. He renamed the club Manchester United Football Club. In 1903, Ernest Hangnail was appointed secretary in September, acknowledged as being the club's first manager. A publicist who knew how to work the media. Under his leadership, the team finished third in the second division. The following season, Manchester set a record when they went 18 games undefeated. Manchester United had some problems during the II World War and the aircraft crash in the late 50, carrying the MU players, officials and journalists. Matt Busby rebuilt the team with the survivors in 1960 and turned over the clubs luck. In 1968, MU became the first English club to win the European Cup.

In 1986, MU appointed Alex Ferguson that had claimed every prize that Scotland had to offer. With the talent and patient of Ferguson, it took 4 years to collect his first silverware as Manchester United manager. He won the FA CUP which allowed MU to return to European competition. MU was the first English club to achieve a hat-trick, dominating almost every competition (Manchester United Official Website, 2016).

4.1.3 Real Madrid

Madrid Football Club was created in 1902, Juan Padrós was the one who formally constituted the institution and Julián Palacion was its first figurehead. The interest grew and it was in this year that the club proposed a tournament to King Alfonso XIII, initiative known as Copa de España. At the end of the decade, due to some problems that arise with the increase attention of football, the Federacion Española de Fútbol (1909) was created.

In 1920 the club moved to O'Donnell Stadium and the King of Spain's high steward granted Madrid the title 'Real'. After many victories and some glory years, the civil war (1936) broke out. Football was cut short by the military conflict. It led to

immigration and end of careers for some football players. On the 15th of December 1943, years after the war, Santiago Bernabéu became the club's president, what is known now a days as the legendary mandate. 4 years later the Nuevo Chamartín Stadium was inaugurated after 30 months of construction. On the 1st of September 1950 the Real Madrid Newsletter was born. Real Madrid felt the need to communicate with its fans.

Between 1951 and 1969 Real Madrid had a brilliant decade, they won five European Cups in a row which amazed the world with its spectacular brand of football making the club the most decorated in Europe. In 1978, with the loss of the president Luis de Carlos replaced his best friend and mentor. In 1999 Vicente del Bosque, former player of Real Madrid, became the first-team manager. He managed to instill a philosophy in the team that made them the best in the continent. His first title was in 2000: the eighth European Cup. In the same year, Florentino Pérez took over the presidency and signed one of the best players on the planet, Luis Figo. It was not until 2006 that the president Florentino Pérez signed with one of the best players in the history of football: Cristiano Ronaldo. In 2013, Carlos Ancelotti arrived at Real Madrid. He won 4 trophies and Real Madrid's first Club World Cup making the team who won more trophies than any other year (Real Madrid Official Website, 2016).

4.1.4 Sporting Clube de Portugal

In 1904 Sporting was founded by José Alvalade. In 1907, Fernando de Castelo Branco authorised for the lion to be the club's emblem. This year SCP had its first game which he lost by 5. In the early 20's, Sporting had its first victory, in the Portuguese Championship. It was in the 40s that Sporting FC had its Golden Ages. The club won ten titles of National Football Champion and four Taças de Portugal.

In 1956, the Stadium José de Alvalade was inaugurated. In 1996 Sporting FC started a new cycle, they created an organisations called Sociedade Desportiva de Futebol (SAD), that was admitted into the stock market in 1998. In 2013 a new era for Sporting FC started, with the election of Bruno de Carvalho as President of Sporting FC (Sporting Futebol Clube Official Website, 2016).

4.1.5 Sport Lisboa e Benfica

Sport Lisboa e Benfica was founded in 28 of February 1904 by a group of 24 elements who often trained and played in Belém. The first National championships started in 1934, SL Benfica won 3 championships between 1936 and 1938. In 1940 SLB wins the first National Cup. In 1950 SLB win on an international level with Latino Cup.

Luz Stadium was inaugurated in 1954. During this decade Benfica wins three National Championships and six National cups. In 1957 Benfica participates in the European Championship and wins Barcelona for 4-0. In the 60s Benfica is the National Champion for 2 years and for the first time in history gets to the finals of the European Championship and wins against Barcelona.

After many dreadful years for SLB, with Manuel Vilarinho as President, Benfica returns to 2nd position in the National Championship. In 2003/04 SLB has a new president, Luis Filipe Vieira which marks a return to the conquer of some titles and the new stadium. It was only in 2010, with Jorge Jesus leading the club that they became National Champions again (Sport Lisboa e Benfica Official Website, 2016).

4.2 Football clubs SNS usage

We collected data on the usage of these SNS during one month, namely January of 2016. January was chosen because it is the first month of the year and the month after December which can be a very busy month with lots of noise because of Christmas, and it tends to be a very commercial month due to the christmas gifts. January was chosen because it is a busy period and due to time constraint, it was not possible to compare it with other months. It would be interesting to understand the differences in some of the content posted in a month like December or November (more commercial) in comparison with January, or a more calmer month like June or July.

In the football world January was a busy month for the football clubs. FCP, SLB and SCP were disputing Taça da Liga. MU, SCP, FCP and RM were disputing Europe League. RM and SLB were disputing Champions League. RM was disputing Spain's Cup and MU the English Cup. It is also the month where the players transfers happen.

We made a descriptive analysis of the publications of the football clubs studied to compare the difference in SNS efforts and in the numbers of followers and fans so we could understand the dimensions of each club in SNS's.

Regarding Facebook, we can clearly identify the difference in dimension of the international clubs (see Figure 2). RM leading the chart with the most followers (86,699,258), MU in second (67,897,576). FCP in third (3,613,607), SLB in fourth (3,186,863) and SCP fifth (2,094,454).

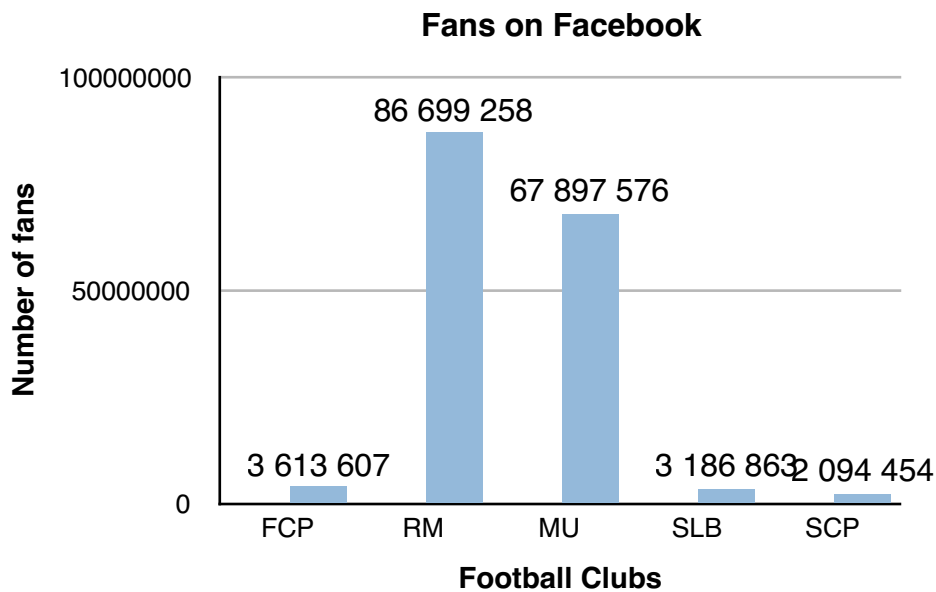


Figure 2: Fans on Facebook. Source: Author

Regarding Instagram, the differences in the brands' dimensions are also clear, but with slight changes (see Figure 3). On Instagram, MU clearly leads (91,000,000), RM is second (25,700,000), FCP third (470 000), SLB fourth (302 000) and SCP last (157 000).

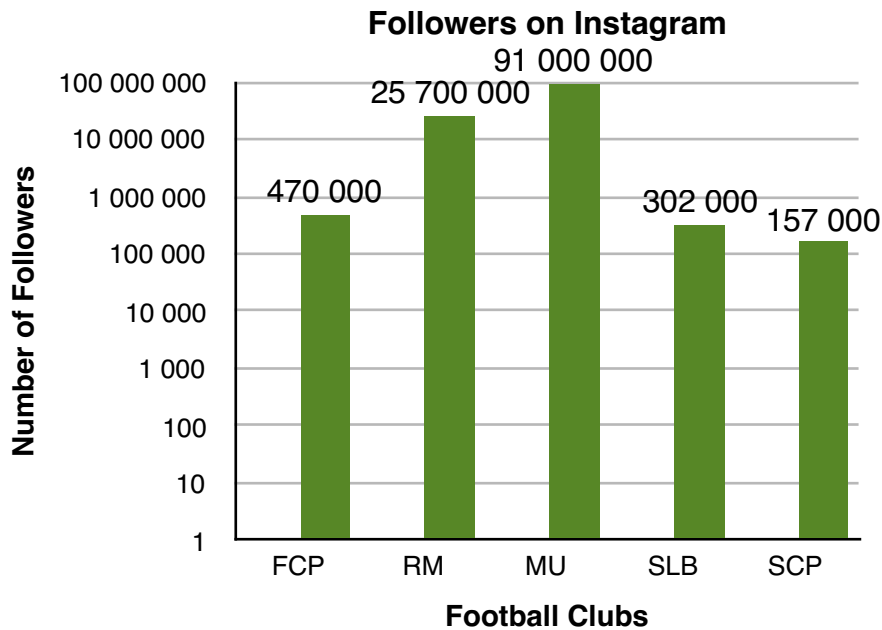


Figure 3: Followers on Instagram. Source: Author

By analysing the number of followers we can understand the club's dimensions but also compare the reach of the different SNS. Facebook is clearly the most relevant SNS since it has 1.59 billion active users (statista.com, 2015) compared to Instagram that had 400 million active users in 2015, therefore it is natural that the football clubs studied focus more on Facebook.

The data regarding Facebook and Instagram publications, highlight the differences in the efforts allocated to each of these two SNS. Football clubs seem to invest more on Facebook than on Instagram. This study compared two international football clubs (RM & MU) and three national clubs (FCP, SLB & SCP), with the aim of understanding if the strategies that these brands, with very distinct dimensions and resources, use to approach SNS are similar or not.

After the analysis of the data collected, it is now possible to state that the five clubs do not differ that much regarding their SNS strategy. In order to analyse the content published by the different clubs and by their fans, we used the content analysis framework previously presented. According to this framework, the different posts were

categorized in several categories considering the nature of the post, and a code was attributed to each category.

The football club which is more active on Facebook (made more posts) is SLB (N = 185 // \bar{x} = 6 (average post by day)), in second FCP (N = 173 // \bar{x} = 6), in third SCP (N = 179 // \bar{x} = 5), lastly RM and MU with exactly the same numbers of posts (N = 123 // \bar{x} = 4). Although the numbers are very similar, it is interesting to see that the Portuguese football clubs invest just as much in SNS as the international clubs (see figure 4).

The maximum number of posts was made by SLB (N = 27). The minimum number of post was 0 by all the clubs (22 de January).

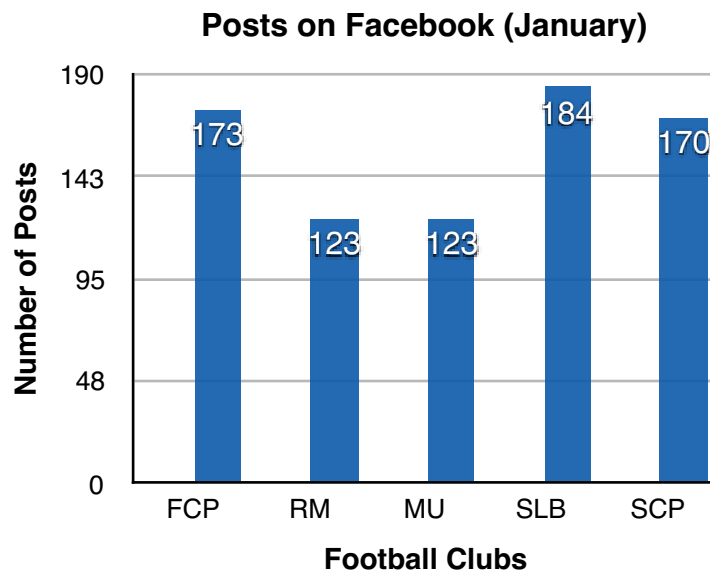


Figure 4: Number of posts on Facebook. Source: Author

Regarding Instagram we concluded that the clubs were not so active. The club which made more posts on Instagram was MU (N = 143 // \bar{x} = 36 (average post by week)). FCP came second (N = 61 // \bar{x} = 15), RM was third (N = 59 // \bar{x} = 15), SLB fourth (N = 56 // \bar{x} = 14) and SCP was again last (N = 47 // \bar{x} = 12). These results show that MU is very active on Instagram when compared to the other clubs, and we can assume that this is related with the discrepancy in the number of followers (see figure

5). We can see that all the clubs are consistent, they all have almost the same average, except for MU.

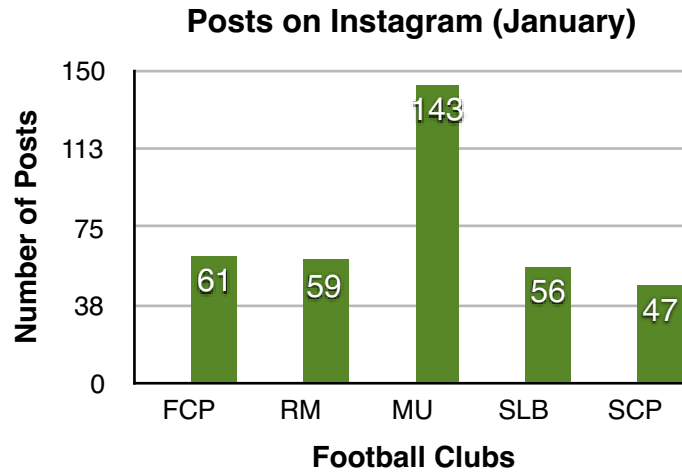


Figure 5: Number of posts on Instagram. Source: Author

4.3 Content Analysis of the Football Clubs SNS

A content analysis was conducted to help us answer the research questions. Content analysis is a widely accepted method of collecting information for scientific inquiry, because of its systematic, replicable nature. Content analysis is non-reactive, as well as unobtrusive; and it allows for objective observation of publicly visible content (Pierce *et. al.* 2012).

As previously explained we decided to use the Organisation Public Relationship method and the Content Analysis Model to analyse the use of SNS (Facebook and Instagram) by the football clubs chosen for this study. We created a framework adapted from these two models to analyse the content extracted from Facebook and Instagram of the football clubs studied.

The framework as shown previously has four categories, namely informing, marketing, personalizing and activating and eight sub-categories, news, external

activities, promotional, sales, direct, answer & questions, involvement and activities & hobbies. Every post receives one code (see Table 1) regarding its nature and purpose, it is not possible for one post to be included into two categories.

1 INFORMATION		2 MARKETING		3 PERSONALISING		4 ACTIVATING	
11 News	12 External Content	21 Promotional	22 Sales	31 Direct	32 Answers & Questions	41 Involvement	42 Activities & Hobbies

Table 1: Categorisation dimensions. Source: Author

4.4 Data Collection & Coding Procedures

Data on Facebook, Instagram and official apps use of sports organisations are obtained from their official pages. The Facebook pages were accessed by links through the official websites of each club. The coding unit was the individual posts of the teams.

For each category a code was assigned as shown in table 1. So the main categories were assigned with a single number from 1 to 4. The subcategories were assigned a number with a decimal point. This coding procedure was assigned for Facebook. As explained in the measurement chapter, for Instagram there were a slight change, the only coding that was considered was the main categories due to the nature of this SNS.

The sample of this study is the content posted by the football clubs analysed during January. The database of this study contained a total of 773 posts on Facebook

and 366 posts on Instagram by the five sports teams (see figure 6). The football club which contributed the most on Facebook was SLB. The Portuguese clubs posted significantly more than the international clubs. This was not verified on Instagram, the club with significantly more posts was MU in comparison with the rest.

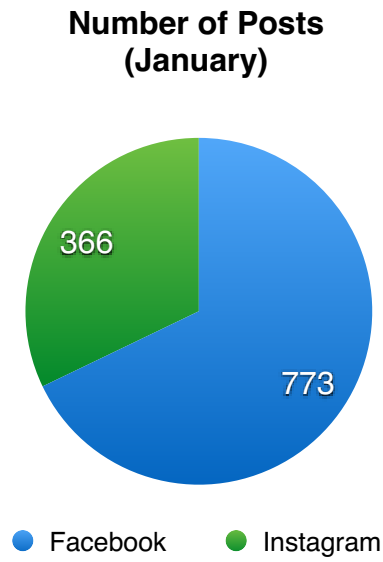


Figure 6: Number os posts made in January. Source: Author

4.5 Results

Previously we analysed the amount of publications made by the football clubs studied, in this chapter we are going to focus on the strategies that these clubs use to communicate with their fans and followers, therefore, an analysis was made of the content of these publications on the clubs SNS. As previously explained, the posts on Facebook were divided into eight sub-categories (news, external content, promotional, sales, direct, answer & questions, involvement and activities & hobbies).

On Facebook (see figure 7), the category with more posts is external content (N = 254). It is very frequent for clubs to post links to videos outside Facebook, redirect the user to the website or to the official tv, this creates a bigger integration between the different communication tools. Also very important to the clubs were the news (N = 196). So that clubs can be active on SNS they need to post frequently, this is not easy most of the time, because content needs to exist so they can make publications. Clubs post a lot of content related to news, because this way they can create content, since there are always things happening related to the club. There is also a lot of content about quotes that the manager made and interviews that were made before and after matches. This way clubs can have updated content to share with fans. Direct contact with fans and mention of players names were also very popular (N = 122). This happens because many fans are interested in specific players, rather than the club itself. Also, when a post is made on Facebook, if you mention a player, you can access the players page through the mention, this redirects users to the players page, which is going to help to increase interaction with the players SNS. The mention of the name of fans is normally done because someone won a prize, or sent a photo about a hobby, and the clubs mentions the fan to create engagement and customer satisfaction. The other sub-categories were less frequent but also important to consider, namely promotional (N = 20); sales (N = 19); answer & questions (N = 59); involvement (N = 76) and activities & hobbies (N = 29). It is not very common to see promotional or sales posts on Facebook, naturally because users do not like to be harassed with sales on Facebook, so clubs avoid these kind of posts. Activities & hobbies are not very common because they involve a lot of resources

and are quite expensive, so its not everyday that brands do online activities, but they are a great way to create engagement with fans.

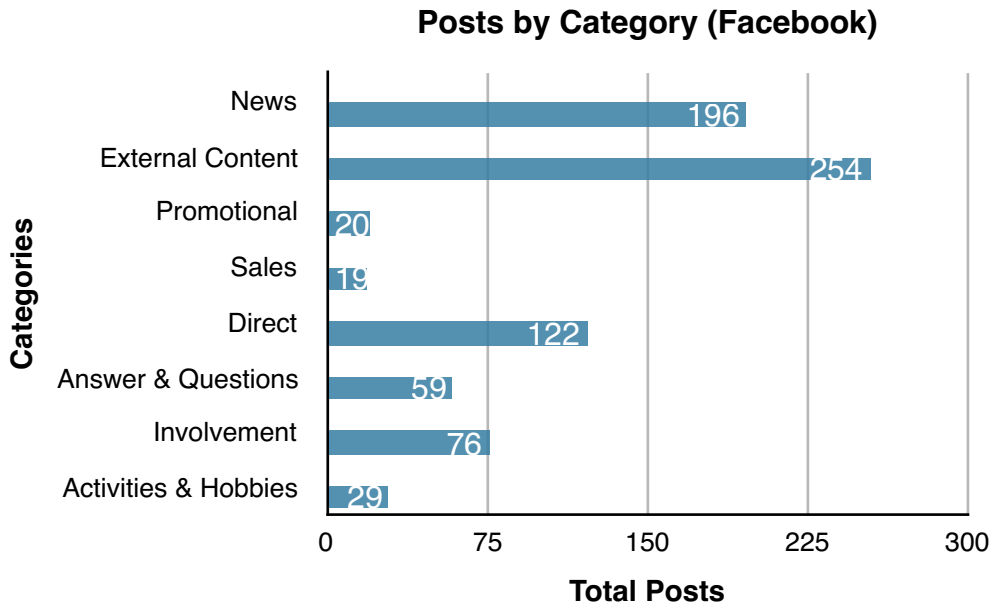


Figure 7: Number of posts by category on Facebook. Source: Author

The posts on Instagram were analysed in a different way. Due to the nature of this SNS, its content cannot be subdivided in all the sub-categories considered for Facebook. Since Instagram is all about pictures, we considered the categories informing, marketing, personalising and activating for the posts, as explained previously (see table 2). The most relevant category for the football clubs analysed on Instagram was personalising (N = 208). This is not surprising since Instagram is a photo application, it is normal that the club uses photos of players to create content on Instagram. The clubs also post a lot os photos of the fans. The second most important category was information (N = 79), the clubs post some videos on Instagram but the majority were photos of the club, of stakeholders, the institution and the stadium. The third was activation (N = 72), MU for example does a lot of montages (many pictures in one photo. It is also very usual for clubs to do a repost of a fan or a player. MU, for example, uses a lot of old photos (throwbacks) mainly of Cristiano Ronaldo, but also of other notorious players. Marketing scored last (N = 7), for the same reasons presented

previously, the posts included in this category are mainly photos of merchandising and apparel, rarely did they make reference to sales or promotions, but we can see some photos that are clearly a reference to a sponsor or to another brand owned by the club, an example can be when FCP made a publication of a photo where Porto Canal had a big focus.

From the analysis of the clubs Instagram pages, it is clear that the majority of the clubs use players to engage with followers. The club with the biggest amount of personalising posts is MU (N = 78). We can see from the results that the football clubs do not use Instagram to sell products, tickets, merchandising or advertising. Only 7 posts in total were from the marketing category. The category personalising was significantly used by MU (N = 40), this club uses a lot of reposts from fans, players and also montages. We do not see this a lot on the other clubs Instagram pages.

Instagram has clear limitations, in comparison with Facebook, regarding the creation of content to entertain fans. On one hand the most interactive content that can be posted on Instagram is videos. On the other hand, it has a very interesting feature which is the repost, a separated app that allows brands to post a post that someone made, and which will appear as a repost. This is interesting because we can post a photo that is not ours and refer to the person who took the photo or posted it first. Instagram also provides users with an option to share photos automatically on the other SNS's such as Facebook, Twitter and Gmail.

Although Instagram's limitations in the creation of interactive content, it is important for brands to be present in this SNS because it has less competition than Facebook for example, and it's an excellent way to communicate visually and to be present in the users life on a daily basis. Instagram is also known to be an excellent way to create engagement, especially if the target audience are the millennials (born between 1980 to early 1990s). The use of hashtags on this SNS is an excellent way to target consumers with specific interests, it provides brands with the opportunity to increase the knowledge they have on consumers.

Categories	FCP	RM	MU	SLB	SCP
Information (1)	13	12	24	16	14
Marketing (2)	1	1	1	2	2
Personalising (3)	38	37	78	30	25
Activation (4)	9	9	40	8	6

Table 2: Posts of the five football clubs by category on Instagram. Source: Author

4.5.1 Mobile Applications Analysis

The football clubs applications were downloaded from the App Store through a personal account. Each club has an official application, except for MU that has an app which is not available in the Portuguese App Store. FCP is the only club whose app was only available to the clubs members until April 2016.

RM has a very complete app, in comparison with the rest of the football clubs. When you enter the app, it has a mathematical question in the end, to check if it is not a children entering the app (see Appendix 13). This application can only be accessed if we register ourself, either through Facebook, gmail or google+. After registering we enter RM's universe. The app has a network feed, where fans can see the score of the game in real time and also of previous games. This app is also very rich in content, it presents many news regarding the club and the championships classifications, and also radio and exclusive videos. Fans can watch the matches on the app, and bet on the scores of the game and win prizes. The app has a menu that allows users to create a profile, shop, buy tickets, play games, cards, do check in, receive messages and even do a virtual tour. This app allows users to gain access to RM's universe (see Appendix 14).

FCP recently made available an app that is not only exclusive to members with an annual Dragon Seat. They created an app available for everyone, with an exclusive section for members with a Dragon seat. This app has a main feed where we can access

the latest news, Instagram posts (but no direct access to Instagram). It is also possible to see the clubs schedule with all the matches and locations. Included in the feed are also some sale options of the clubs apparel, where the fans can place the orders and the item will be delivered in 48 hours. The app provides a section named “club” where we can see the whole schedule, with the matches, the leagues table and the full squad. This app is well organised, user-friendly and with a clear design (see Appendix 15).

SLB app is not so complete as RM’s. The app has some news on its home menu, presents the classifications and scheduled matches. It is divided in different categories (football, indoor football, hockey, handball and volleyball). It has a menu to buy tickets, where we can also buy merchandising and pay membership fees (see Appendix 16). In the app users can also find in the menu a sponsorship separator, where we can see all the partnerships and there is a store option to buy merchandising. Fans can also find online discounts regarding tickets. SLB’s app is not very user-friendly, since the format of the screen is not adapted for smartphone, the information does not fit in the screen and it is a bit confusing (see Appendix 17).

SCP app is called My Sporting. It is available for everyone, fans or not. From the Portuguese market this app is the most complete. It is very well organised and very user-friendly. In the home screen we can find news and videos. It also has a hobby called “the man of the match”, where users can vote and win prizes. In the app there is a menu to buy tickets, to pay membership fees and electronic tickets using QR code system (see Appendix 18).

Regarding the international market and considering the apps which could be accessed by the majority of the people, RM’s app showed to be a very rich application. It is very complete in terms of the categories “informing”, “personalising”, “marketing” and “activation”. RM gives its fans the opportunity to be in a football network and does not only offer an app for them to consult, fans can be involved and entertained. The Portuguese market showed to be a bit different, SLB has an app that is rich in content and in diversity, since it includes other sports category, but lacks in design and user-friendliness, as it is a very confusing app. The club gives great highlight to its sponsors and to the commercial side. SCP has a very well organised app, with a clean design. It is also rich in content, has many videos, news and statistics. It gives fans the opportunity

to buy tickets through the app and use the tickets through QR system. FCP's app is very user-friendly but lacks interactivity, it is very institutional, maybe because it is very recent. It is interesting to see that FCP includes Instagram photos in its app, this shows that the club wants to develop an integrated communication throughout the different online communication tools.

From the analysis of the mobile applications, it is clear that RM has the most complete app, it offers the whole RM universe inside a single app. Although SLB, FCP and SCP have an open app for all fans, RM has an app with very interesting features. RM app users can play cards, watch RM Tv, buy tickets and merchandising and it is a very interactive mobile app. SCP, SLB and FCP strategies are not so interactive. The clubs use a lot the clubs news to create content, they provide a lot of videos and they have different sections dedicated to other sports modalities. These three clubs also allow users to buy tickets through the app. FCP's mobile app was until April 2016 exclusive for members with annual seat in the Dragon Stadium, so this is quite an exclusive app. MU, as previously said, does not have an app available for the Portuguese market.

4.6 Discussion of the Results

Sports organisations communicate through different platforms. For this study we chose Facebook, Instagram and mobile applications due to the increase popularity of these tools over the recent years and due to the opportunities they present for the clubs to engage with their fans, advertise and promote their business.

The first research questions focuses on the type of opportunities that SNS offer for fan engagement on SNS. It was not a surprise that the clubs try to have a strong online presence and that they post on a daily basis, more than once per day. We can see that there is a bigger investment on Facebook, than on Instagram due to the number of posts and diversity of content published. This can be explained by the number of fans/

followers on each of the SNS which is highly superior on Facebook. Facebook is clearly a SNS that allows the clubs to publish a wide variety of posts, because it allows the publication of much more content than Instagram. Instagram is a SNS used to share photos, this is its main purpose, so it can be more difficult to create engagement and stimulate user-generated content on this SNS. The adoption of multiple SNS allows clubs to communicate more effectively with their different target audience and integrate content. Clubs sometimes use Facebook to share important information such as club news, whilst posting photos of fans on Instagram.

The second research question focuses on the strategies used by the football clubs on Facebook, Instagram and on their mobile apps. All the categories from the framework presented in this study have the ability to strengthen team identification and a sense of belonging that would not be possible through other communication tools, for example through the website, due to the lack of interactivity of this tool. The results show us that sharing information is very important for the clubs' strategy. Indeed, followers on Facebook expect to be informed in real time and to know the latest news through a reliable source. Clubs use Facebook to post news about players transfers, to transmit information about the matches and also statements made by relevant stakeholders. The five football clubs use a lot of external content to diverge users from the Facebook page to other content, for example FCP posts a lot of links to Porto Canal which is owned by FCP. The clubs also diverge users to their websites, for example. Indeed, sometimes on Facebook there is only a preview of the news or a quote and to read the whole article the clubs use external links so that users can access the website. These external links are important to increase the website traffic.

The use of direct contact with fans and the "tagging" of players is also very common. In fact, when a club tags a player it creates interest in the fans and this appears in the player's social feed, which is important to attract new fans, because often sports fans like individual players regardless of the teams, so if a fan sees in the player's feed a post from the recent football club where the player plays, then maybe he will follow that club. This happens a lot with Cristiano Ronaldo. Being the best player in the world and the athlete with more followers, it is natural that fans will follow RM to keep up with Cristiano Ronaldo's career.

Mentioning fans creates great involvement, FCP is a good example, the club usually shares photos from fans that spread around the world and take pictures wearing the clubs apparel and use the hashtag “fcpallaround”. The fact that ordinary people appear on the clubs Facebook and Instagram pages is an incentive to keep taking pictures and increase user-generated content. Answer & questions is also an excellent strategy to create engagement and user-generated content, normally the clubs ask a question about a game or about the expectations regarding the game and this can create a lot of “buzz”.

It is not usual to see promotional or marketing posts on Facebook and Instagram. The football clubs studied avoid posting content related to sales explicitly. From all the posts analysed from the five football clubs, only twenty were promotional and nineteen were related with sales. On Instagram only one post was made for promotional purposes with the exception of SLB which made two posts.

The third research question focuses on the differences between the strategies employed on the different communications tools studied by the football clubs. The results show that the five clubs do not differ a lot in their strategies. They all post on average the same number of posts per day on Facebook. We can see by the results that the Portuguese clubs post more news than the international clubs, whilst the international focus more on using external content. MU uses a lot more direct mentions to players, fans and stakeholders than the rest of the clubs. Although it is not usual to see promotional and direct sales posts, SLB and SCP were the clubs which made more posts with content related to sales and promotions of tickets and merchandising, FCP did not make a single post about sales, instead it was the club that posted the most content related to news and links to external content. We can notice from the results that the Portuguese clubs invest the most in activities and hobbies and content that create involvement, whilst the international clubs focus more on personalising, through mentioning the players name, tagging, etc. This maybe because these clubs have some of the best players in the world, very notorious players, which give great visibility to the club.

Regarding Instagram, we can highlight the discrepancy in the number of post made by MU in comparison with the rest of the clubs. MU posted 143 photos and

videos on January, whilst the other clubs posted on average 55 posts. This can be explained by the number of followers MU has, which is significantly superior than the other clubs, so it is natural that the club invests more than the other clubs. This is also related with the fact that in England there are 14 million monthly active users on Instagram (Business Insider, 2015).

Personalising was clearly the category with more posts on Instagram. Clubs tend to post a lot of photos of players and fans, this creates engagement and involvement. They also post many videos. A new feature on Instagram allows to see the number of views the video has and who viewed the video, and this is an important feature because clubs can control who sees the content. MU uses a lot of reposts and old photos of players. For example, there were several posts of Cristiano Ronaldo on MU's Instagram, once again using notorious players to create engagement and to increase the club's followers. On Instagram if you use Cristiano Ronaldo hashtag (#cristianoronaldo), people who are interested can see the page of the hashtag, which automatically will lead them to MU's page, also if you tag Cristiano Ronaldo on a post it will appear on his marked posts, so you are also directed to MU's page, if you follow CR's page, a very common strategy on Instagram. The five clubs avoid commercial posts and very few, with exception of MU, used reposts, photo montages or the use of old players and stakeholders.

In the literature review, regarding mobile applications, Vernali (2010) states six important strategic best practices, namely 1) the need for messages to be permission based, highly relevant and targeted and attention grabbing; 2) the relevance of benefit/incentive provided by the mobile app; 3) the fact that security/privacy concerns must be well addressed; 4) the need for the apps to be innovative, user-friendly and provide solutions; 5) the need for the apps to be suitable for various industries and task-types, to enhance efficiency and integration of the value chain; 6) the fact that the partners of the value chain should collaborate and co-operate to create synergies and the need for the app to be consumer centric. With these best practices in mind, we can analyse the football clubs apps and see if their strategy is aligned with the authors notions of best practices.

Regarding the first requirement, we can consider that the five apps studied are of value-added for the organisations. The five apps request for permission to send notifications and the posted content is relevant to the fans, since it is related with news about matches, classifications, stakeholders, etc. RM's app is with no doubt the app with the most attention grabbing content, the main page starts with the sentence "Play with us", it instantly grabs our attention and curiosity. It is also a very personalised app, since users can create a profile and earn coins when playing the games available in the app. SCP app also grabs attention because it provides many videos of the goals and the summary of matches.

Regarding the second requirement, the benefit/incentive provided should be instant and recognisable, and this is verified in the majority of the apps. The benefits provided by most of the apps is the opportunity to buy tickets. All the clubs with the exception of FCP allow fans to buy tickets through the app. Users can also buy merchandise and apparel through all the apps and this can be a very good incentive to use the app. Another benefit/incentive offered by the apps are the schedules they provide, as all the apps have the dates of the next matches, the main squad and the location and this can be very useful for fans.

Regarding the third best practice, RM's app provides a questioner when users register, where they ask the user if he/she wants the data to be used for other purposes. They also ask a mathematical question in the beginning to allow the user to use the app, to verify age. The rest of the apps all have the terms and conditions available for consult but they do not refer them in the log in.

Regarding the fourth requirement, that relates to innovation, user-friendliness and solutions, we can once again mention RM as the most well developed app. It is a very innovative app, with many features. As previously said all the apps, except for SLB, are very user-friendly, very easy to navigate, present clear sections and informations is well organised. SLB is a bit confusing and the menus do not fit the screen, it seems like we are looking at the website on a phone. The apps of the Portuguese clubs are also innovative since they provide electronic ticket and this is very useful. This also regards the fifth requirement which regards efficiency and integration

of the value chain. The possibility of buying tickets through the app and of using the phone to enter the stadium is a clear sign of integrations of the value chain.

The last requirement is concerned with the need for the app to be consumer centric. RM's app is the most consumer centric, it provides not just a smaller version of a website, but an integrated app with many options for the user. SCP has a section where users can chose the "man of the match", this is an example of customer centric, its telling its users that their opinion matters.

5. Conclusions

Although the five football clubs have a presence in the SNS studied, some invest more than others and they use different methods for engaging their fans and followers. We concluded that, although they do similar amount of publications on Facebook, they use different type of publications. The results highlighted that the main goal of the clubs is to engage with the fans, to create relationships and not to sell directly products through SNS. The amount of posts regarding news and external content is significantly superior to the posts about sales or promotions.

We can also conclude that the football clubs mobile applications can still take advantage of the development of technology. The mobile apps of the football clubs studied look still a lot like websites in a small version. Regarding the clubs studied, we can see a big difference between RM's app and the rest of the apps. Till April 2016, FCP's app was exclusive for members with annual Dragon seat, so we can see that organisations are still trying to understand and create strategies for these emerging tools. RM's app is an excellent example of the possibilities provided by mobile applications.

5.1 Contributions

This study offers some contributions. First, it provides insights into the new communication trends for sports organisations. We aggregate the most relevant trends explained in depth into a single document, which can be useful for future research in communication trends. Second, it provides insights into the strategies being used by clubs to engage with fans. The use of social media by football clubs is not a new issue, but there are not many studies that focus on this theme. Many studies focuses on the usage of Twitter and Facebook by the football clubs, but to our knowledge, there is no study that also includes Instagram and mobile applications. The use of a qualitative research allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the content extracted from the SNS of the clubs studied.

This study also provides insights into the strategies that these clubs use on SNS, and, in particular, about what type of content they post and with what frequency they do this. It also shows the differences between the strategies of the different football clubs, with the limitation that the cases studies are not representative of the football industry. However, they can be considered as good examples, since two of the football clubs analysed are the biggest and most valuable in the world.

5.2 Limitations and directions for future research

One of the limitations of this research is related with the lack of research on the use of SNS by football clubs. The existing information can be quite outdated since this thesis is about new trends, it is natural that an article written in 2010 might be outdated, thus, we had difficulties in finding updated and relevant studies related with the studied topics. We realised that previous studies use a lot of big data, and that they research as many teams as possible, so we had difficulties to find papers using content analysis on small samples.

It is important to state that some of the posts made by the football clubs can fit in more than one category, so they are not mutually exclusive, therefore, in some cases, it was hard to reach a consensus, since the nature of the post can serve more than one propose. Another limitation was related to time constraint. It would be very interesting to broaden the scope of this research and include in the study more football clubs from different countries to find differences in their online communication strategies.

The extraction of the SNS content was made in January, hence it is not possible to understand if the strategies employed by the clubs are an all year strategy or not. It would be interesting to broaden the analysis period so that we could make a comparison between different periods. Moreover, we should see if the championships results influence the way the clubs communicate and if there is a bigger investment in digital marketing when the clubs win.

It would also be interesting to understand if the way the clubs communicate is consistent with the consumers expectations. Thus, future research should study if consumers expectations regarding the football clubs online communication strategy.

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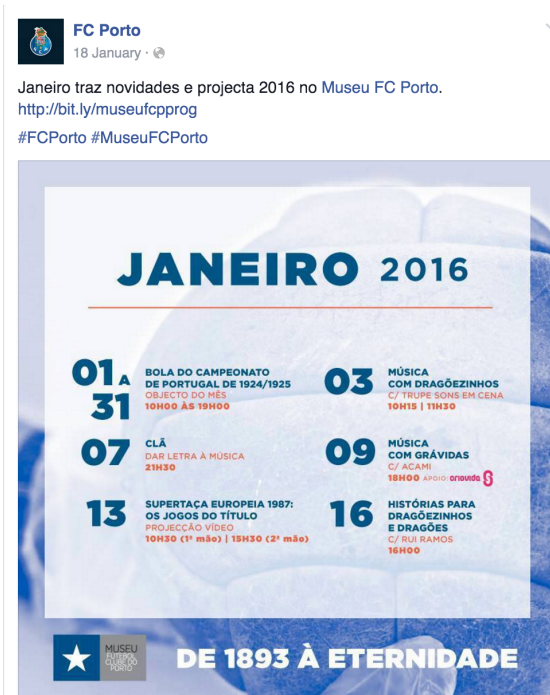
7. Appendix



Appendix 1 - Example of the subcategory news on Facebook



Appendix 2 - Example of the subcategory external activities on Facebook



Appendix 3 - Example of the subcategory promotional on Facebook



Appendix 4 - Example of the subcategory sales on Facebook



Appendix 5 - Example of the subcategory direct personalising on Facebook



Appendix 6 - Example of the subcategory answer & questions on Facebook



Appendix 7 - Example of the subcategory involvement on Facebook



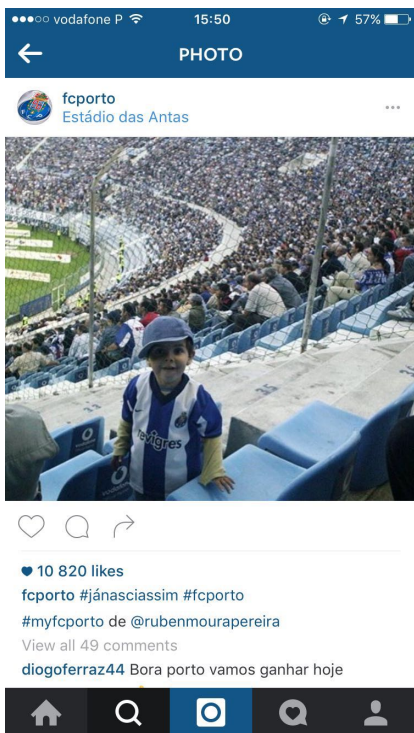
Appendix 8 - Example of the subcategory activities & hobbies on Facebook



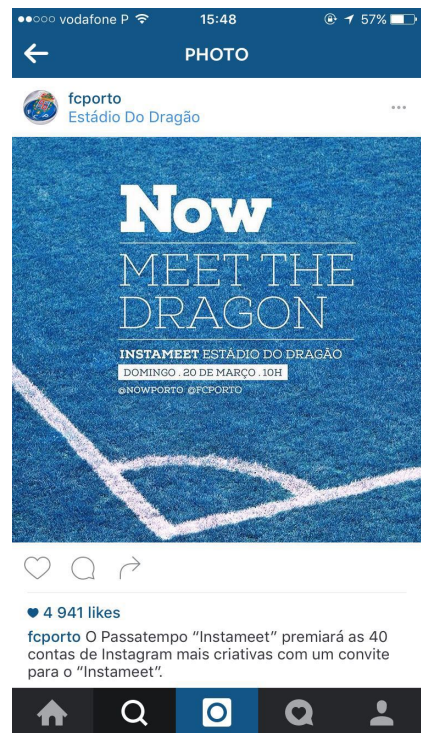
Appendix 9 - Example of the category informing on Instagram



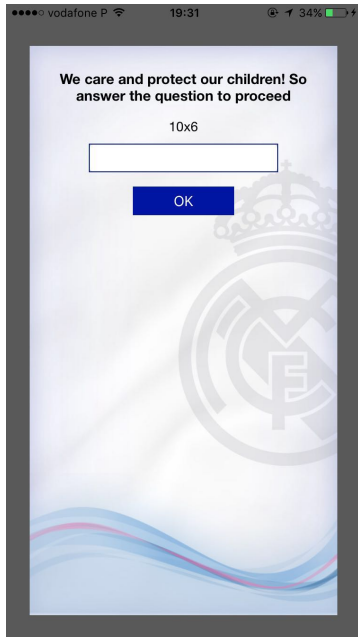
Appendix 10 - Example of the category marketing on Instagram



Appendix 11 - Example of the category personalising on Instagram



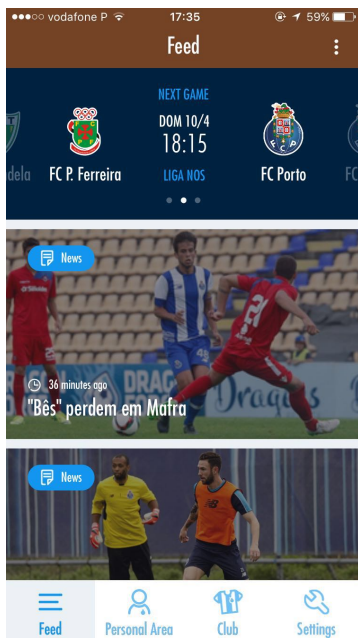
Appendix 12 - Example of the category activating on Instagram



Appendix 13 - Print screen of RM's mobile app



Appendix 14 - Print screen of RM's mobile app



Appendix 15 - Print screen of FCP's mobile app



Appendix 16 - Print screen of SLB's mobile app



Appendix 17 - Print screen of SLB's mobile app



Appendix 18 - Print screen of SCP's mobile app