



Research Article

Understanding the Effect of Social Media Marketing Activities on Football Fans' Satisfaction and Engagement: A Study of Portuguese 2nd League Professional Football Clubs

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Abstract

General use and acceptance of the Internet made social networks an indispensable means of communication between organizations and their target. Both individuals and companies create fan pages on online platforms, using them to interact with different receivers and develop personal and business opportunities. While many past studies have analyzed social media importance and growing acceptance, some questions related to the extension of social media platforms as marketing tools and their impact on brand awareness, customer satisfaction, and a relationship in time are still scarce. We want to continue this discussion by focusing on the impact of social media marketing activities on Facebook and football clubs' brand awareness, promoting fans' satisfaction and engagement. We seek to understand whether the Facebook pages of the Portuguese 2nd league football teams have an impact on satisfaction and on the quality of the relationship their fans develop with the club. This study reviews marketing literature on social media, focusing on Facebook, customer satisfaction, and engagement. To empirically test the effects of Facebook activities on fans' satisfaction and continuance intention, a structured questionnaire was applied to a sample of 272 participants, tested using SPSS Statistics version 24.0 and structural equation model - AMOS 24.0 for data analysis. Despite some limitations (sample and object of study), findings indicate that the majority of initiatives on social media marketing - Facebook- contribute in a positive way to supporters' satisfaction and engagement. Portuguese football club managers need to use Facebook as a way to communicate and promote lasting relationships with supporters.

Keywords: social media; Facebook; Satisfaction; Engagement

Introduction, Literature Review and Framework

The growing acceptance and use of social media have created a great number of opportunities and new ways to make business for companies and brands; managers realized the importance of finding new and interactive ways to reach, satisfy and engage customers (Castels, 2002; Levy, 2005; Gallagher and Ransbotham, 2010; Spillecke and Perrey, 2012).

Internet use grows daily and, according to a recent study, there are approximately 4,66 billion users in the world (<https://www.hootsuite.com/pages/digital-trends-2021>); in July 2020 we were 7,8 billion persons, therefore, more than a half is connected. Focusing on social media, this study also reveals that Internet users are connected on an average of 6h:54m per day and 2h:25m are spent on social media. It is an unquestionable complementary way for marketers to reach customers, get their attention, achieve satisfaction and develop a relationship in time (Godey, Manthiou, Pederzoli, Rokka, Aiello, Donvito and Singh, 2016).

Social media are changing communication between brands and customers since they give consumers actual information on brands, assistance, and a space for free discussion and exchange of ideas (Godey et al., 2016). Customers can be proactive and brands need to post unique content, important information on products and services, adopt an active stance, quick capacity to help with practical matters, and induce interaction (Gallagher and Ransbotham in Godey et al., 2016).

Social media marketing activities affect satisfaction through social identification and perceived value, therefore inducing a continuance and participation intention on customers- relationship in time (Chen and Lin, 2019; Sharma, Singh, Kujur and Das, 2021).

Facebook, as the most popular social media platform for Portuguese users, allows people to easily communicate with each

other -individuals that share the same interests (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2014). Statistics also show that advertising on Facebook is much cheaper than on other platforms and, bearing this in mind, online marketers started to use Facebook ads to increase their brands' awareness and to better understand customers' needs and expectations (Tran 2017).

With the help of Facebook, many companies are capable to do the right monitoring of their brands, get proper information on their customers and make adequate decisions to increase their satisfaction, engagement, and subsequent company's profitability (Sharma et al., 2021). Using social media as a tool to interact with customers also boosts brand awareness (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair and Okumus, 2015), affects consumer choices and satisfaction (Lin, 2013 in Barreda et al., 2015), and increases brand equity and value.

Achieving brand equity and brand value are top priorities for many organizations. Those are two different but intricately linked concepts (Tiwari, 2010): one refers to the financial perspective of a brand (what the brand is worth to managers and shareholders - value), and the other to a set of perceptions and subsequent behavior on the part of customers (equity).

Measuring brand value will not make the brand a more valuable or less risky one; managing brand equity is critical to the company's success since it is a construct that moderates the impact of marketing activities, therefore allowing managers to understand how to act to create value (for both company and customers). Some studies seem to conclude that social media marketing has an impact on consumer satisfaction, and brand equity (Tiwary, 2010).

A lot of studies have been developed on social media marketing activities and their impact on brand awareness, equity, value, and consumers' behavior, but there is a lack of empirical research on sports fan satisfaction and subsequent engagement through Trust, Commitment, Intimacy, Self-

connection and Reciprocity (Kim, Trail, Woo and Zhang, 2011; Ghalandari, 2012; Sashi, 2012; Vries, Gensler and Leeftang, 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Seo and Park, 2018; Sevim, 2018; Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger III, 2019). Sports fans tend to develop unique and engaging relationships with their favorite sports teams and brands and social media have become one of the main touching points between sports brands and customers that seem to promote trust, commitment, intimacy, self-connection, and reciprocity, therefore, impacting on customers' satisfaction and engagement (Kim et al., 2011; Vale and Fernandes, 2018). They have changed the way brand content is created, distributed, and consumed, since the power to shape brand images no longer belongs exclusively to the marketers but depends on consumers' online connections, likes, and comments (Godey et al., 2016). Social media networks democratized dialogue and all the organizations, including sport clubs, need to use them to increase engagement, keeping consumers' attention in time (Villanueva, Shijin and Dominique, 2008; Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege and Zhang, 2013); therefore, our first hypothesis is:

H1: The interaction of fans with Facebook is related to the quality of the relationship they establish with the club.

H.1.1. The fact that fans have a personal Facebook account is related to the quality of the relationship they develop with the club.

H.1.2. The fact that fans have their club page added to their personal Facebook account contributes to a better relationship with the club.

Social media marketing is a complementary tool to interact with customers, therefore impacting their satisfaction (Barreda et al, 2015; Chen and Lin, 2019). According to these findings, we propose a second hypothesis:

H.2: The interaction of sports fans with Facebook promotes better satisfaction with their club.

H.2.1. The fact that fans have a personal Facebook account is related to satisfaction with their club.

H.2.2. The fact that fans have their club page added to their personal Facebook account contributes to their level of satisfaction with the club.

Research design and Methodology

The research model followed a quantitative approach where variables were measured using already validated constructs. The questionnaire was based on the previous literature and we adapted questions from the SCTRQS scale and pre-tested with 10 individuals. The great challenge of this work is to understand if the Facebook pages of the football teams in the 2nd Portuguese league have some type of impact on the supporters' satisfaction and on the quality of the relationship that they develop towards their club, therefore impacting on positive results in terms of participation in games (ticket sales), purchase of merchandising material and maintenance of monthly dues.

Procedures

Previous literature reviews allowed us to determine the appropriate questions for the questionnaire. To measure fans' satisfaction and the quality of their relationship with their favorite club, we used the SCTRQS scale (Kim et al., 2011).

Questionnaire

At the beginning of the form, all potential participants were informed about the nature of the study and required to provide formal consent to take part in the research. We told participants about ethical aspects, mainly confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaire demanded 5 to 10 minutes of participation, both online and by e-mail.

Participants

Survey respondents were targeted among the authors' friends and family, as well as some of the clubs' supporters that, after a direct contact from their club, accepted to answer by e-mail. The study sample

consists of 272 supporters, divided between Famalicão and Gil Vicente Football Clubs. 83,09% are male respondents; average ages are between 40 and 60 years (44,12%) and 54,04% are married. As far as education level, 56,62% of the respondents have a superior degree.

Data Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis was done in the scales; the varimax rotation method was also used to extract the factors, allowing to minimize the number of variables that present high loads in each factor and leading to obtaining a factor structure in which only one of the variables is strongly related to a single factor and little associated with other factors (Pallant, 2011; Hair et al., 2010; Marôco, 2010a). After this analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis of the factorial structure obtained was carried out, considering the adjustment indexes proposed by Marôco (2010). Convergent validity was also measured by analyzing the extracted average variance, which was considered satisfactory with the VEM > 0.5; divergent validity was also analyzed. Subsequently, the reliability of the scales obtained was analyzed - Alpha de Cronbach, with scales whose Alpha value was higher than 0.60 considered as having adequate

internal consistency (Marôco and Marques, 2005; Pestana and Gageiro, 2008). The next step consisted of analyzing the results of the questionnaire using frequencies and percentages, as well as measures of central tendency (Mean, Median, and Mode) and dispersion (Standard deviation, minimum and maximum). The hypothesis was tested using the Mann-Whitney nonparametric test, to compare the distribution of results between two groups, since the normality of the results was not verified. For the results obtained to be positive, the principle followed was that the value of significance obtained should be at least less than 5% ($p < 0.05$).

Results and discussion

Analysis of Factorial Validity

- Relationship with the Club - An exploratory factorial analysis was carried out. The results obtained point to the existence of a one-dimensional factorial solution that explains 88.72% of the variance; it was also possible to verify that all items have an adequate factor load (> 0.40), which allows validating the structure obtained:

Table 1: Exploratory Factorial Analysis Scale Relationship with the Club

<i>Itens Relationship wit the Club</i>	<i>Communalities</i>	<i>Loadings</i>
6- I can trust this club in any situation	0,87	0.93
7- I consider to have a high degree of commitment in relation to ...	0,91	0.96
8- My loyalty to my club is unshakable	0,92	0.96
9- I will keep my commitment to my club even in its ...	0,90	0.95
10- I am very familiar with everything related to ...	0,89	0.95
11- I am aware of the latest news about the day-to-day life of ...	0,90	0.95
12- I feel that the club rewards me in the same proportion for all that ...	0,89	0.94
13- I feel that my club rewards me greatly	0,91	0.96
Kmo		0.92
Bartlett Test	1857.54 (0.00)	
% Variance		88.72%

A confirmatory factorial analysis was then carried out to confirm the factorial validity of the scale obtained; in a first analysis, it was found that the structure obtained was not adequate ($\chi^2/df = 11.53$; RMSEA = 0.20). Thus, adjustments were made to the

structure obtained by establishing a correlation between the items' residues. The new modified solution has already proved to be adequate ($\chi^2/df = 1.37$; RMSEA = 0.04; CFI = 0.99; GFI = 0.99; NFI = 0.99):

Table 2: Confirmatory Factorial Analysis Scale Relationship with the Club

<i>Initial adjustment index</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Final adjustment indices</i>	<i>Classification</i>
$\chi^2/df = 11.53$	$\chi^2/df > 5$ bad adjustment	$\chi^2/df = 1.37$	$\chi^2/df [1-2]$ - good adjustment
RMSEA = 0.20	RMSEA > 0,10 - unacceptable adjustment	RMSEA = 0.04	RMSEA \leq 0.05 - very good adjustment
CFI=0,95	CFI \geq 0.95-very good adjustment	CFI=0.99	CFI \geq 0.95-very good adjustment
GFI=0.83	GFI [0.8-0.9] - sufferable adjustment	GFI=0.99	GFI \geq 0.95 - very good adjustment
NFI=0.94	NFI [0.9-0.95]-good adjustment	NFI=0.99	NFI \geq 0.95 - very good adjustment

- Satisfaction with the Club - Same procedure: an exploratory factorial analysis was carried out; the results obtained in the item adequacy tests confirm the adequacy of this analysis (KMO =

0.93; Bartlett = 3429.10, $p = 0.00$). These results point to the existence of a one-dimensional factorial solution that explains 91.27% of the variance (with all items presenting an appropriate factorial load - loadings > 0.40):

Table 3: Exploratory Factorial Analysis Scale Satisfaction with the Club

<i>Items Satisfaction with the Club</i>	<i>Communalities</i>	<i>Loadings</i>
14- I see my club as a credible organization	0,92	0.96
15- I can rely 100% on my club to exceed my expectations	0,91	0.96
16- I understand all the decisions made within the scope of management	0,92	0.96
17- My team's brand is associated with the perception I have ...	0,91	0.96
18- My team's brand has a lot to do with the person I like ...	0,92	0.96
19- I have a lot in common with my team's brand	0,91	0.95
20- I feel that I will always have a lot to gain by committing myself to my team	0,91	0.95
Kmo		0.93
Bartlett Test		3429.10 (0.00)
% Variance		91.27%

A confirmatory factorial analysis was then carried out to confirm the factorial validity of the scale obtained; in a first analysis, it was found that the structure obtained was not adequate ($\chi^2/df = 18.38$; RMSEA = 0.25). Thus, adjustments were made to the

structure obtained by establishing a correlation between the items' residues. The new modified solution has already proved to be adequate ($\chi^2/df = 2.63$; RMSEA = 0.08; CFI = 0.99; GFI = 0.98; NFI = 0.99):

Table 4: Confirmatory Factorial Analysis Scale Satisfaction with the Club

<i>Initial adjustment index</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Final adjustment indices</i>	<i>Classification</i>
$\chi^2/df = 18.38$	$\chi^2/df > 5$ bad adjustment	$\chi^2/df = 2.63$	$\chi^2/df [2-5]$ - sufferable adjustment
RMSEA = 0.25	RMSEA > 0,10 - unacceptable adjustment	RMSEA = 0.08	RMSEA [0.05-0.10] good adjustment
CFI=0,93	CFI \geq 0.95-very good adjustment	CFI=0.99	CFI \geq 0.95-very good adjustment
GFI=0.76	< 0.8 - bad adjustment	GFI=0.98	GFI \geq 0.95 - very good adjustment
NFI=0.93	NFI [0.9-0.95]-good adjustment	NFI=0.99	NFI \geq 0.95 - very good adjustment

Factorial Reliability Analysis

- Relationship with the Club - Table 5 reveals that the Relationship with

the Club scale has adequate reliability, considering the internal consistency index obtained ($\alpha=0.98$):

Table 5: Analysis of the Reliability of the Relationship with the Club scale (Internal consistency - Cronbach's alpha)

	<i>Corrected total item correlation</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha if the item is deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>
6- I can trust this club in any situation	0,91	0,98	
7- I consider to have a high degree of commitment in relation to ...	0,94	0,98	
8- My loyalty to my club is unshakable	0,94	0,98	
9- I will keep my commitment to my club even in its ...	0,94	0,98	
10- I am very familiar with everything related to ...	0,93	0,98	0,98
11- I am aware of the latest news about the day-to-day life of ...	0,94	0,98	
12- I feel that the club rewards me in the same proportion for all that ...	0,92	0,98	
13- I feel that my club rewards me greatly	0,94	0,98	

- Satisfaction with the Club – Table 6 shows that the alpha value of Cronbach is adequate ($\alpha=0.98$),

with a very good internal consistency between the items and adequate reliability of the Satisfaction scale:

Table 6: Analysis of the Reliability of the Satisfaction with the Club scale (Internal consistency - Cronbach's alpha)

	<i>Corrected total item correlation</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha if the item is deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>
14- I see my club as a credible organization	0,94	0,98	
15- I can rely 100% on my club to exceed my expectations	0,94	0,98	
16- I understand all the decisions made within the scope of management	0,94	0,98	
17- My team's brand is associated with the perception I have ...	0,94	0,98	
18- My team's brand has a lot to do with the person I like ...	0,94	0,98	0,98
19- I have a lot in common with my team's brand	0,94	0,98	
20- I feel that I will always have a lot to gain by committing myself to my team	0,94	0,98	

Factorial Sensitivity Analysis

The calculation of the central tendency measures for dispersion and distribution was used. The values of symmetry and kurtosis coefficients between -1.96 and 1.96 were considered (Pestana and Gageiro, 2009) to test the normality of the scales.

- Relationship with the Club - table 7 shows that the participants have a good relationship with the club; however, the scale has low sensitivity since the distribution of results is not normal according to the significant value of the KS test, having an unusual kurtosis coefficient:

Table 7: Analysis of the sensitivity and normality of the results of the scale of relationship with the club

	Average	Median	Symmetry	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum	KS (p)
Relationship with the Club	3,74	4,5	-1,67	-6,34	1,75	5,00	0.25 (0.00)

- Satisfaction with the Club - as can be seen in Table 8, supporters feel quite satisfied with their club, considering the average value

obtained on a scale of 1 to 5 points. Concerning the normality of the results, according to the significant results of the Kolgomorov-Sminorv test ($KS = 0.25, p = 0.00$),

we are facing a non-normal distribution, even though the coefficient of symmetry obtained (-

1.73) is within the range of -1.96-1.96:

Table 8: Analysis of the sensitivity and normality of the results of the scale of satisfaction with the club

	Average	Median	Symmetry	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum	KS (p)
Satisfaction with the Club	3,77	4,57	-1,73	-6,34	2,00	5,00	0.25 (0.00)

Inferential Statistics - Hypothesis testing

We used the Mann-Whitney test to assess whether the relationship with the club and satisfaction with the club was related to the interaction on Facebook.

- Relationship with the Club - considering the results obtained on the relationship with the club, there is a significant difference

between individuals who have a Facebook account and those who do not ($p = 0.00$), with the relationship being higher in the group of individuals with an account on Facebook ($M = 3.80$, $MR = 126.80$), which allows confirming Hypothesis 1.1. Supporters who added their club's Facebook page appear to have a better relationship with it ($M = 4.75$; $MR = 159.53$), thus confirming Hypothesis 1.2:

Table 9: Analysis of Differences in results in the relationship with the club due to the existence of an active Facebook account and the addition of a club page

Interaction with Facebook	Average	Mean Rank	Average	Mean Rank	p
		No (17)	Yes (222)		
Active account on Facebook	2.23	31.18	3.80	126.80	0.00
		No (94)	Yes (131)		
Added Clube page on facebook	2.42	49.47	4.75	159.53	0.00

- Satisfaction with the Club - as for the results related to satisfaction with the club, they vary significantly between supporters with an active Facebook account and those who do not ($P = 0.00$), with the satisfaction of supporters

with an active Facebook account being higher ($M = 3.83$; $MR = 159.53$), thus confirming Hypothesis 2.1. Supporters who added their club's Facebook page appear to have better satisfaction with it ($M = 4.80$; $MR = 158.87$), thus confirming Hypothesis 2.2:

Table 10: Analysis of Differences in results in the satisfaction with the club due to the existence of an active Facebook account and the addition of a club page

Interaction with Facebook	Average	Mean Rank	Average	Mean Rank	p
		No (17)	Yes (222)		
Active account on Facebook	2.36	48.15	3.83	159.53	0.00
		No (94)	Yes (131)		
Added Clube page on facebook	2.43	49.08	4.80	158.87	0.00

Limitations

Our study has a convenience sample, being limited to a restricted number of football clubs in the north of Portugal and with participants restricted to the authors'

networking and the club's supporters' database; this limit extrapolating conclusions, so comparative studies are recommended to other football clubs in the 2nd league and with a larger sample.

Despite the limitations indicated, the study proves the importance of using Facebook, the network with the largest number of users in Portugal, as a way to promote the individuals' satisfaction and the relationship over time with brands. Many studies already analyzed the importance of social media marketing for 1st league football clubs, but little attention has been paid to smaller clubs, which clearly can benefit from the use of social networks.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the effect of social media marketing on consumers' satisfaction and their relationship in time with a brand, focusing on Facebook and fans' relationship with their favorite football club in the 2nd league. Results reinforce practical and academic knowledge, by allowing to see that supporters with a Facebook account and who follow the official page of their club feel highly satisfied and have a better relationship with the club - engagement.

Table 11: Hypothesis and Results

Hypothesis	Final Results
H.1	Accepted
H.2	Accepted

Social networks promote better communication between organizations and their customers, regardless of the sector or types of goods or services they offer. They allow constant messages from a brand, making it more visible and taking on a closer relationship with customers.

Sports fans are unique as far as engaging relationships with their favorite sports clubs and social media is a complementary way to promote trust, commitment, intimacy, self-connection, and reciprocity - engagement - and highlight satisfaction. This is a reality that cuts across large and small clubs, just as it is for large, small, and medium-sized companies

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