

## COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN MULTI-CHANNEL MARKETING OF A SPORTS ORGANISATION

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**Purpose:** The main purpose of the article is to identify the ways in which sports organisations communicate online, mainly using social media. An additional objective is to find differences in the target audience in social media on the basis of the numbers determining the activity of the audience of the communication pages. The reason for the article was also to identify a relatively novel and easy method to measure the effects of communication through these media.

**Design/methodology/approach:** To achieve the intended purpose, a method of desk research and numerical data covering the activity of selected sports clubs (organisations) on the most popular portals in the period from 1 to 31 July 2023 was used. The data will be statistically analysed using standardised indicators to enable comparison. The subjects of the study were the three leading sports clubs of the highest men's football competition class in Poland, as the most active in the online space and generating the highest interest.

**Findings:** The outcome of the study was to establish a ranking of the use of social networking sites in the clubs' communication with their stakeholders and the differences between the effects of messages in these media.

**Research limitations/implications:** The main limitations of the study are the variety of factors that can influence communication management in sports organisations, as well as the multichannel nature of the methods of reaching stakeholders. The main focus of the paper is on social media and how to use data from this source. In the future, this approach can be adapted in solving communication management problems.

**Practical implications:** The method used in the article is flexible, allowing it to be used freely to find out the effectiveness of companies' social media activities. Companies operating in homogeneous markets receive, thanks to the presented one, a tool for recognising their competitive position in terms of marketing communication and the effectiveness of its tools on the Internet.

**Social implications:** It is assumed that with the optimal application of the proposed survey method, a tool is gained for the objective evaluation of the communication management policy through social media. The method replaces a qualitative assessment of this management, showing the position among different types of media or competitors.

**Originality/value:** The article is aimed at various companies active in the online space in multiple social media. The novelty is that publicly available data is standardised and thus comparable. This in turn influences communication management not only at the social media level, but also in multi-channel marketing.

**Keywords:** social media, management, communication.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

With social media constantly evolving, dynamic and flexible, there is a need to study the effects of the activity of companies, entities and organisations in these media. In doing so, tools are required to enable the efficient management of communication and its changes according to the results. Therefore, this topic is very important, as its development makes it possible to avoid losses resulting from unnecessary activities and too much and ineffective communication. The topic of studying the effects of communication via social media is also very topical, because despite many studies, science does not always keep up with trends. Media and content audiences change, and consequently the organisation must change, adapting to these changes.

To begin with, it must be said that in an age of development, it is virtually impossible to exist without the internet and its associated marketing means. Companies' online marketing efforts are primarily influenced by the proliferation of mass communication media. The Internet, like other media, has become an effective method of reaching audiences. The use of the Internet for marketing purposes is influenced by such features of the Internet as:

- unlimited time accessibility to resources from anywhere in the world,
- low cost of information transmission,
- high level of information capacity,
- possibility to update information quickly,
- perception of entities operating on the Internet as modern and innovative,
- higher level of efficiency of activities (Łysik, Machura, 2014).

The Internet has caused a revolution in marketing concepts because it provides a two-way message between sender and receiver. This, in turn, makes it possible to maintain relationships with advertisers. The importance of online marketing activities is evidenced by the emergence of a new concept - internet marketing, which also functions under other names such as:

- e-marketing,
- virtual marketing,
- internet marketing,
- cybermarketing (Pudelko, 2020).

The Internet is the most complex communication medium in the world and is changing rapidly (King, Hall, 2022). Many companies have discovered the opportunities that the Internet offers. Unlike traditional marketing, which provides a one-way message.

Online, consumers have a voice, they can comment, suggest ideas, give advice, but also complain. This provides a wealth of knowledge about the consumer and allows companies to extend analytics. There is a personal dimension to customer contact and access to information is unlimited. Unlike television, a company's marketing activities on its website, for example, are available all the time. The structure of shopping is also changing - customers have noticed that the Internet provides them with significant time savings, so they buy online. This is because, via the Internet, they can check products, compare offers, look at pictures and buy products without leaving home.

Marketing activities carried out on the Internet are characterised by:

- instant circulation of information,
- rapid updates,
- low distribution costs.

A special role in online marketing is played by social media, which use websites and applications operating on the Internet and created by its users (Chojnacki, 2020).

It should be noted that new social media sites are emerging online all the time, offering further functions and opportunities.

The essence of social media is to bring users of these sites together in groups, where bonds and a sense of belonging are established and information can be exchanged in text, graphic, audio or video form. Each user can create his or her own profile on which they can post content of their choice.

The essence of social media is to bring users of these sites together in groups, where bonds and feelings of belonging are established and information can be exchanged in text, graphic, audio or video form. Each user can create his or her own profile, where he or she can post content of their choice. Social media are constantly evolving, which makes it difficult to define them clearly. The most common definition considers social media to be a set of tools that use online media and mobile technologies for the exchange of information and dialogue among their users (Sadowski, 2012). Selected definitions of social media are presented in the table 1.

**Table 1.**  
*Overview of social media definitions*

| <b>Autor</b>                  | <b>Definicja</b>   |
|-------------------------------|--|
| K. Polańska (2010)            | the form in which user-generated information on social networks is transmitted through websites and applications                             |
| M. Moroz (2010)               | the part of virtual media that brings users together in groups   |
| D. Kaznowski (2011)           | socially controlled media, which can be used on any scale, containing message content and opinions   |
| C. Treadaway, M. Smith (2011) | a set of technologies for initiating communication and transferring content between people, their friends and social networks, which include |
| A. Kaplan, M. Haenlein (2012) | a group of applications based technologically and ideologically on Web 2.0 and allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content  |
| W. Gogolek (2017)             | a form of natural, unrestricted online exchange of information between individuals on common interests                                       |

Source: Own compilation based on (Stawarz, 2017).

The proliferation of social networks means that their functionality is expanding all the time. Social media make it possible to present oneself, a company or the products one offers. Profiles can contain all kinds of information on the subject, as well as enabling contacts to be made, information to be exchanged and relationships to be maintained with members of the site. In this way, companies can maintain relationships with their customers, as well as receive feedback from them containing opinions on products or services. Social media also allow for the observation of activities undertaken by users, and therefore provide an opportunity for businesses to present their activities, investments or volunteering. In this way, they are becoming a tool for creating a corporate image. Each service, although providing similar functions, is based on the different nature of the links and contacts that exist between its users.

## **2. Use social media for marketing**

One of the biggest advantages from the point of view of entrepreneurs is the possibility to use social media for marketing. The term social media marketing (SMM) has emerged, which is defined as promotion through social media consisting of running profiles, publishing posts, organising competitions, etc. Social media are a way to implement your marketing strategy and promote yourself. They make it much easier and quicker to find customers and reach them with advertising. Through social media, companies maintain relationships with their customers as well as selling their products and services. These media are also used to build a brand-customer relationship, create a corporate image and present the company's activities (Grębosz et al., 2016). In addition, it is possible to build a contact and customer base, initiate cooperation between companies, and find sponsors. Paid activities in social media, on the other hand, constitute ongoing advertising campaigns using dedicated marketing tools.

The use of social media and its use in business management also depends on generational differences (Karasek, Hysa, 2020).

Social media engagement can be understood in many ways. Each social media can also be assessed separately. Engagement is then examined as the intensity of interactions and their implications, towards the offers and activities of a brand, product or company, regardless of whether the initiator is an individual or a company.

Alongside traditional marketing channels, social networks are integrated as part of the marketing mix. Social media have changed the dynamics of interaction between companies and consumers that favour this relationship.

Among the methods of studying online consumer behaviour, the predominant ones measured are through so-called online engagement metrics, including the number of users, click-through rates, page views, content likes and comments, depending on the platform (Muñoz-Expósito et al., 2017). It is also possible to take as a basis the motivation of the

individual resulting from their experience with the object, manifested in object behaviour, and viewer engagement understood as the attitude towards the brand in terms of likes, comments and shares (Segijn et al., 2019). This approach will be the basis for this article.

The diversity of approaches to social media engagement confirms that there is no uniform approach to measuring social media engagement.

Research on social media engagement metrics can be grouped and divided into different categories (Trufno, Rossi, 2021).

One of these is the most widely described 'quantitative metrics'. These predominantly assess the impact of social media engagement based on the number of comments, likes, shares, followers, etc. (Yoon et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2019; Medjani et al., 2019). This approach is also the method used in this article.

The second group of studies are those that identify indicators of social media engagement by developing a 'set of indicators'. These may be using three social media metrics to measure engagement with a particular behaviour, for example conversation. In detail, conversation rate measures the number of comments or reviews in response to a post, amplification rate measures the amount of online content. (Li et al., 2019).

The third group of studies are 'normalised metrics', where an average measure of user engagement is obtained by dividing the sum of interesting shares by the total number of posts or other factors like liking, sharing or commenting. (Zanini et al., 2019; Osokin, 2019; Mariani et al., 2018).

The last group of engagement studies is a qualitative approach, where contemporary social media and social research indicators are considered (Abuljadail, Ha, 2019).

This article is intended to include elements of the approach and methodology of mainly the first group of studies, especially as there have been few attempts to date to quantitatively analyse stakeholder engagement on club profiles based on standardised characteristics.

Research subjects can be different organisations. Against this background, sports companies are specific subjects, as they hardly compete with each other. The primary method of communication management here is benchmarking, a method that involves comparing the processes and practices of one's own entity with those of companies considered to be the best in the field being analysed. Another peculiarity of sports organisations is the high level of activity on social media. This is due to the nature of the content viewer (fan), for whom sport is associated with personal emotions. Social media satisfies the need to be close to sporting events related to the club and its current activities. Mostly in other companies this need is not present.

### 3. Research methods

The basis of the consideration is to determine the level of development of the clubs' communication with stakeholders through the social medium of Facebook (Meta).

Statistical indicators were used in the analysis regarding:

- number of posts,
- number of reactions to posts,
- number of comments on posts,

The datasets cover the activity of the three leading football clubs in Poland on the most popular social media (Instagram, TikTok, Youtube, Meta). The study period is 1 to 31 July 2023. Bearing in mind that the activities of the football clubs surveyed are similar to each other and that they are mainly active in sporting events, it is not necessary to extend the time span. As it can be seen from our own research, the activity of the sports clubs is similar in later and earlier periods.

All necessary calculations were carried out in an Excel spreadsheet using its calculation capabilities.

The statistical method used in the study is taxonomic analysis.

This procedure consists of the following steps (Bak, Szczecińska, 2013):

- preparation of numerical data,
- selection of variables for analysis,
- ordering and grouping.

For the construction of the taxonomic measure of development, the benchmark method in the classical approach was used. The classic measure is based on standardised  $z_{ij}$  values of diagnostic characteristics.

$$z_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij} - \bar{x}_j}{S_j}, \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, n, \quad j = 1, 2, \dots, m). \quad (1)$$

The distances of each test object ( $d_i$ ) were then determined with the form shown in the Formula (2).

$$d_i = \sum_{j=1}^m |z_{ij} - \varphi_j|, \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, n), \quad (2)$$

where:

$\varphi_j = \max z_{ij}$  for stimulants,

$\varphi_j = \min z_{ij}$  for destimulants.

It should be recalled here that a stimulant is a statistical characteristic whose increase in value leads to an increase in the value of the explanatory variable. A destimulant, on the other hand, is a statistical characteristic whose increase in value leads to a decrease in the value of the explanatory variable.

The final step was the calculation of the synthetic measure of development - Formula (3).

$$\mu_i = 1 - \frac{d_i}{d_-}, \quad (3)$$

where:  $d_-$  - a variable calculated as the sum of the arithmetic mean of the coordinates of the distance vector ( $d$ ) and the doubled value of the standard deviation of these coordinates.

This procedure was also used to determine synthetic measures of development for the communication activity of the three leading football clubs in the Polish Ekstraklasa (Raków Częstochowa, Legia Warszawa, Lech Poznań), in order to determine how the effectiveness of individual clubs on social media (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Meta) evolved over the indicated period. In addition, the effectiveness of these media in managing stakeholder communication on social media was determined.

#### 4. The study results

The research was conducted in two stages, in relation to the two research objectives (club ranking and media ranking). The first stage of the research was the presentation of basic information on the activity of the surveyed football clubs on social networks. In the second part of the research, a method of data standardisation was applied based on the statistics of the three mentioned clubs of the Polish Ekstraklasa. It standardised selected data such as the number of posts, reactions to these posts, comments and its links to data on the clubs' communication with stakeholders on the portals. This procedure was repeated for both research objectives. This made it possible to find out which club is using social media most effectively and which media is currently the most effective.

It presents the medians and standard deviation of their posts, comments and reactions on Instagram, YouTube and Meta. The data relates to the three clubs surveyed from 1 to 31 July 2023, and was obtained through the use of Web scraping, a technique that involves manually or automatically downloading data from the Internet. The figures are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.***Factors related to the communication of selected sports clubs on social media*

|                   | Number of posts | Median of reactions | Median of comments | Standard deviation of reactions | Maximum of reactions | Minimum of reactions |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Instagram         |                 |                     |                    |                                 |                      |                      |
| Raków Częstochowa | 62              | 4313                | 9                  | 3055                            | 4962                 | 383                  |
| Legia Warszawa    | 53              | 5244                | 39                 | 2512                            | 16000                | 2199                 |
| Lech Poznań       | 192             | 1185                | 13                 | 900                             | 22500                | 192                  |
|                   |                 |                     |                    |                                 |                      |                      |
| TikTok            |                 |                     |                    |                                 |                      |                      |
| Raków Częstochowa | 23              | 2473                | 75                 | 4839                            | 21900                | 974                  |
| Legia Warszawa    | 10              | 6295                | 115                | 2950                            | 11700                | 1141                 |
| Lech Poznań       | 9               | 1944                | 67                 | 2386                            | 7047                 | 1366                 |
|                   |                 |                     |                    |                                 |                      |                      |
| YouTube           |                 |                     |                    |                                 |                      |                      |
| Raków Częstochowa | 29              | 221                 | 24                 | 84                              | 419                  | 89                   |
| Legia Warszawa    | 10              | 874                 | 41                 | 119                             | 1000                 | 654                  |
| Lech Poznań       | 12              | 703                 | 37                 | 2386                            | 7047                 | 1366                 |
|                   |                 |                     |                    |                                 |                      |                      |
| Meta              |                 |                     |                    |                                 |                      |                      |
| Raków Częstochowa | 73              | 347                 | 21                 | 581                             | 2900                 | 73                   |
| Legia Warszawa    | 53              | 778                 | 27                 | 885                             | 536                  | 0                    |
| Lech Poznań       | 83              | 609                 | 31                 | 1024                            | 7000                 | 90                   |

Source: Own compilation based on data from social media of Ekstraklasa S.A. clubs.

In the first approach (Table 3), three leading football clubs were studied - Polish Champion Raków Częstochowa, Legia Warsaw, and Lech Poznań. Despite the similarity of the message, the most effective club in social media is Legia Warsaw with a standardised  $\mu$ -index of 0.60. The next club is Lech Poznań ( $\mu = 0.38$ ), and the last is Raków Częstochowa ( $\mu = 0.22$ ). The calculated standardised indices therefore show a very large difference between the use of opportunities by the clubs studied.

The second approach (Table 4) considered social media (Instagram, TikTok, Youtube, Meta) and the differences in their use in the communication strategy of the indicated clubs (number of posts) and the effects of their use (number of reactions and comments). The results of the calculation of the standardised development index indicated that Instagram and TikTok are the most effective in July 2023 ( $\mu = 0.66$  and  $\mu = 0.57$  respectively). In third place is Meta ( $\mu = 0.35$ ) and the least effective is YouTube ( $\mu = 0.17$ ). Significant differences can be observed between these groups, which allow us to conclude that short forms of communication that do not require a lot of time and commitment are increasingly important for active audiences.

The results of the calculations are presented in Table 3 and Table 4 and the calculated indicators show that, despite significant similarities between the communication strategies of the leading Ekstraklasa S.A. sports clubs, there are significant differences in the effects of social media activities. This is probably influenced by the size of the centres' tradition of being active in the media by fans. However, the research focused on two approaches. The first is the approach from the competitive side between clubs and the second is the effectiveness of individual social media.



**Table 3.***Synthetic development indicator for Ekstraklasa S.A. clubs in terms of social media*

|                   | Social media of sports clubs |                     |                    |                 |                     |                    |                 |                     |                    |                 |                     |                    | sum of indicators d | synthetic development index $\mu$ |
|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                   | Instagram                    |                     |                    | TikTok          |                     |                    | YouTube         |                     |                    | Meta            |                     |                    |                     |                                   |
|                   | number of posts              | median of reactions | median od comments | number of posts | median of reactions | median od comments | number of posts | median of reactions | median od comments | number of posts | median of reactions | median od comments |                     |                                   |
| Raków Częstochowa | 62                           | 4313                | 9                  | 23              | 2473                | 75                 | 29              | 221                 | 24                 | 29              | 221                 | 24                 | 15,58               | 0,22                              |
| Legia Warszawa    | 53                           | 5244                | 39                 | 10              | 6295                | 115                | 10              | 874                 | 41                 | 10              | 874                 | 41                 | 8,03                | 0,60                              |
| Lech Poznań       | 192                          | 1185                | 13                 | 9               | 1944                | 67                 | 12              | 703                 | 37                 | 12              | 703                 | 37                 | 12,36               | 0,38                              |

Source: Own compilation based on data from social media of Ekstraklasa S.A. clubs.

**Table 4.***Synthetic development index for social media in terms of selected Ekstraklasa S.A. clubs*

|           | Sport clubs       |                     |                    |                 |                     |                    |                 |                     |                    | sum of indicators d | synthetic development index $\mu$ |
|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
|           | Raków Częstochowa |                     |                    | Legia Warszawa  |                     |                    | Lech Poznań     |                     |                    |                     |                                   |
|           | number of posts   | median of reactions | median od comments | number of posts | median of reactions | median od comments | number of posts | median of reactions | median od comments |                     |                                   |
| Instagram | 62                | 4313                | 9                  | 53              | 5244                | 39                 | 192             | 1185                | 13                 | 8,61                | 0,57                              |
| TikTok    | 23                | 2473                | 75                 | 10              | 6295                | 115                | 9               | 1944                | 67                 | 6,85                | 0,66                              |
| YouTube   | 29                | 221                 | 24                 | 10              | 874                 | 41                 | 12              | 703                 | 37                 | 16,56               | 0,17                              |
| Meta      | 73                | 347                 | 21                 | 53              | 778                 | 27                 | 83              | 609                 | 31                 | 13,05               | 0,35                              |

Source: Own compilation based on data from social media of Ekstraklasa S.A. clubs.

The results of the research indicate that an image (Instagram) and a short, mostly entertaining video (TikTok) are increasingly important to social media audiences, while forms that require more attention and sometimes even more engagement are less and less important. Further research, more extended by qualitative analysis or quantitative analysis based on other factors, also offers great research opportunities.

## 5. Discussion

The research has shown that with the method used, it is possible to measure the effects of communication by showing differences in the effectiveness of different clubs on social media and differences between these media.

The aim of the article was to create a tool to measure the effects of communication. In this case, the subjects of the study were the leading football clubs playing their matches in the top division - Ekstraklasa SA. The research shows that the use of social media by the currently strongest sports clubs is changing. Each media has a different use in the club's communication. The result is a different management of these media. The research shows that over time there is a shift away from static media (YouTube, Meta) in favour of flexible and fast media (Instagram, TikTok). Further monitoring using the methods used here will help confirm such a trend.

Noteworthy in the article is the statistical method used for the first time in Poland by the Author of the article. It is the result of research into the effectiveness of social media activities. While the topic has been addressed by other Authors, this is the first time in sport that the statistical method of synthetic development index has been applied in Poland. Much of the research to date has focused exclusively on content, a qualitative approach. This article shows that this can be deepened by quantitative capture and the use of statistical methods.

The use of these statistical methods makes it possible to continuously monitor the ranking in cyclical studies based on the same factors in other periods. By calculating the synthetic development index, you can determine your place in the competition and also manage your communication by modifying your online activities. In this way, specific, mostly ineffective actions can be taken, modified or not taken.

An additional aim of the article was to create a tool to measure the effects of communication. In this case, the subjects of the study were leading football clubs playing their matches in the top division - Ekstraklasa S.A.

As a result of the research, it was shown that in addition to ad hoc results, the research method can be used as a basis for comparing communication management activities in social media. The statistical method used can also be used to measure the effectiveness of reaching and communicating with stakeholders. It should also be noted that the acquisition of competitor

data can be done using specific algorithms (scraping), which is simple and only requires periodic reprogramming of the data.

Among the advantages of the method are:

- high flexibility in the use of data sets,
- possibility to compare one's communication policy with similar actors,
- the possibility of systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of communication activities over different time intervals,
- the ease of obtaining data, which are publicly available and there is the possibility of automating the system of their acquisition,
- ease of application of the method to other forms of online communication activities,
- the possibility of comparing the effectiveness of other social media.

The drawbacks of the method, on the other hand, are the difficulty in selecting data relevant to the identified problem and the high variability of the studied environment. The researcher must have specific objectives in mind. Depending on what is to be investigated, specific data can be substituted, while maintaining the principles of logic, representativeness and objectivity. Thus, this method can be used in sports clubs when studying communication, their sporting effects, factors influencing attendance, etc.

There is no phenomenon of increased competition in the sports club market. The method used in the article provides an opportunity to compare one's communication policy with similar entities.

In applying the method, it is important to use variables that are relevant to the problem and to recognise the variability of the environment. For communication management, it is worth mentioning that during the off-season, interest in a sports club used to be much lower than during games (Kowalski, Łazorko, 2020). This is now changing and social media management is a year-round job.

The method used is an attempt to fill a research gap and can be successfully applied to manage the way sports clubs communicate with their environment, to use the free tools available online effectively. The need to use them more effectively stems from the fact that the internet is not so much about being on the internet, but about directing attention to the information desired by communication managers.

In further steps, an attempt should be made to improve the method by automating it (Web scraping tools) and incorporating it into an automated application that allows for the ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of individual activities. Through research, in the future, a tool can be obtained for modifying one's activities and adjusting to the competition (benchmarking).

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