

ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USER SEGMENTS AS PART OF CONTENT MARKETING IN SPORT

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Purpose: The main aim of the article will be to accurately characterise the user groups of social networks in order to tailor information messages to them through these media. It is assumed that there are significant differences between the audiences of the same content depending on the qualitative criteria adopted.

Methodology: As part of the methodology to achieve the intended goal, i.e. the non-interventional observation of the activity of three user groups of the most popular social networks (Meta, Instagram and TikTok) on 25 June 2024. This day is the last performance of the Polish national team at the European Football Championship in Germany. A qualitative method using covert observation was applied here. 250 observational data from each medium were collected. These were then analysed in terms of the content posted. The language of communication, discussion activity, emotional engagement, use of emoticons and content culture were examined.

The data will be analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The data was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The choice of subject was dictated by the European Championships 2024 and the related interest in the Polish national football team.

Findings: The result of the study is the identification of target segments among users (fans) of social networking sites and an attempt to determine the possibility of using the diversity of these segments in social media content marketing.

The main limitations of the study are the variety of forms of expression and the potential difficulty in indicating differences between groups.

Practical implications: The practical application of the study may concern social media communication units. Awareness of different categories of users will allow them to manage content appropriately, modify their own messages, and treat specific groups of users.

Social implications: This article aims to show the natural behavior in public spaces under the influence of sports emotions. It can influence self-reflection on what is posted on the Internet and that there can be moral consequences for any activity.

Originality/value: The novelty of the article is to present an assessment of natural social behaviour on the Internet. The applied method of observation using a covert technique and qualitative analysis allows for a real and not declarative assessment of human behaviour on social media.

Keywords: marketing in sport; social media; segmentation.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The development of modern information and communication technologies, and the consequent significant increase in their importance in the lives of modern consumers, means that they play an increasing role in marketing activities. One of the informational and real-world processes carried out in and through the enterprise, in its market environment, is marketing communication, which is an important integral instrument of the marketing strategy and practical implementation of the enterprise's market objectives (Wiktor, 2001).

Marketing communication can be defined as a set of signals emitted from various sources to the marketing environment and a set of signals collected by the company from this environment (Mruk, 2001). Thus, marketing communication should be treated as activities by means of which the enterprise transmits information, of varied form and content, about itself and its market offer to different groups of addressees, and as activities aimed at registering and providing feedback, which is an expression of the recipients' reaction to the actions taken (Pilarczyk, Wańkowski, 2010).

They enable companies to interact multichannel with current and potential buyers. Therefore, more and more companies are using them in the sphere of creating, delivering and communicating value to customers (Kieźel, Wiechoczek, 2020). In the modern economy, it is impossible to imagine a company functioning without communicating with market environment actors. In the literature, it is possible to encounter opinions that an enterprise exists through the transmission of information and communication, and that its nature is expressed in the processes of communication with entities of the environment (Bajdak, 2013).

There is a division of communication tools into classic and modern ones. Examples of classic communication tools include: billboards, TV spots, radio, newsletters, newsletters, etc. Modern tools include: blogs, emails, text messages and social media channels.

Marketing communication is defined in the literature as the process of information exchange between an enterprise and its environment for the implementation of a specific marketing strategy by an enterprise (Czarnecki, 2003).

Unlike promotion, where the stream of information flows mainly from the enterprise to the buyer, marketing communication implies a free flow of information in both directions, and is therefore a broader concept than promotion in its classical formulation. In recent years, the marketing communication environment has experienced two main changes:

1. The fragmentation of traditional media (the emergence of satellite TV, digital, thematic channels targeting a narrow audience).
2. The emergence of new modes of communication (e.g. product placement, interactive electronic media).

Marketing communication should be an interactive dialogue between a company or institution and its external internal environment (Lachiewicz, Mateyun, 2009). More and more companies are engaging in a variety of communication projects to encourage consumers to contact the company directly and, in the process, show that the brand is active and strives to connect with customers. This is being done, among other things, through online exchange platforms (e.g. launched as part of the companies' own websites and/or fanpages on social networks), which allow for multi-channel interactions with customers and often between consumers themselves. Through these so-called company profiles, forums or social networks, they are invited to express (e.g. in the form of posts, photos, videos) their opinions about the company and its offerings, their experiences and experiences with the products or to make suggestions.

Companies that use marketing communication are also sports organisations (primarily sports clubs). They are in the business of creating conditions for and supporting sport. It is through them that fans can watch sporting events and discuss them, and sponsors can use sporting events for promotional purposes. It should be noted that none of the actors mentioned in the model can do without communicating with other market players. Each uses different tools and methods to do so and does so with varying frequency (Smith, 2008).

Sports organisations need to build their image and encourage fans to use the service offer they have prepared, as well as to purchase material goods that represent an extended level of the sports product. Activities of an informational or strictly promotional nature are an inseparable part of the management system of these organisations and should take the form of a continuum. The communication activities of sports organisations are carried out in two areas (B2C and B2B) and must therefore select a different set of tools and forms for this purpose.

In recent years, integrated communication tools based on CRM solutions have become increasingly popular for developing relationships with fans and creating loyalty attitudes among them. The Internet and mobile telephony are primarily used for this purpose (Wańkowski, 2008). Social media play a special role here.

On the one hand, athletes, clubs, federations and sports brands, especially in the high performance area, have positively embraced the emergence of social media since its inception, using it as a way to develop their personal brand (Geurin, Burch, 2017). On the other hand, fans can now show and share their emotions and feelings through these new channels (Chang, 2019) instantly and in front of a wide audience, democratising the structures of sports consumption (Watanabe et al., 2017).

Over the past decade, the presence of social media has grown tremendously, changing the way we behave and communicate with others (Abeza et al., 2019; López-Carril et al., 2019). These tools are constantly accompanying us, both personally and professionally, through various technologies and devices such as tablets, smartphones or laptops that facilitate their use (Alalwan et al., 2017; Kolokytha et al., 2015).

Social media has also modified the way they offer a sports product, fostering fan engagement (Vale, Fernandes, 2018). Thanks to the development of social media, fans can now play a more active role in content creation (Armstrong et al., 2016), before, during or after a sporting event, across multiple platforms and markets (Billings et al., 2019; Li et al., 2019).

Given the popularity and importance of social media in both society and the sports industry, sports science research is already addressing the topic of social media. Studies here explore the use of social media and opportunities in the context of sport (López-Carril et al., 2019). Studies focusing on social media platforms include: Facebook (Osokin 2019; Achen et al., 2018), Twitter (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2017; Delia, Armstrong, 2015; Hasaan, 2019), Instagram (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Siguencia et al., 2017), or Pinterest (Conlin et al., 2014; Hambrick, Kang, 2015) show the great potential and importance of these tools for sports organisations. In addition to this, it is important to emphasise the enormous potential and value that social media offers to sports science researchers by enabling them to access in an accessible way the large amount of data that is produced on these platforms (Chang, 2019).

Social media is an active part of the current dynamics of society, where an ever-increasing amount of information is available and easier to access. Both researchers and practitioners of a particular research discipline or research topic may find themselves in a situation where a vast amount of scholarly literature on the topic is available (van Nunen et al., 2018).

Given the importance of social media in management, it is also important to find methods to segment this volatile market (Naraine et al., 2019), which is also the aim of this article.

In scientific research on social media, the most important behavioral approach. In the world users' motivations are mainly examined, without quantitative analysis (Mochla et al., 2023; Abeza, 2023). Similarly, in research in Poland, the authors focus on the analysis of Internet users' behavior (Gąsior, 2016; Noga, 2023).

An additional important issue in the aspect of social media management is determining the segments of sports users. The segmentation process in sports focused mainly on spectators. In Poland, there are no such studies, because marketing in sports is still a scientifically neglected field. However, in the world you can find, for example, analyzes by spectators (Aleksandrisand Tsotsu, 2012; Hyatt et al., 2018). Scientists also undertook tasks related to the analysis of participants communicating via social media (Behrens, Uhrich, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2016). The combination of social media, the language of communication, sports and segmentation is practically unheard of, and this article is an attempt to distinguish individual forms of social media and their subsequent application in the marketing management process.

2. Methods

Research on social media user segments can be conducted differently. They can also concern different entities. The aim of this study is to determine the characteristics of active social media users on the basis of content left as a reaction to a sports organisation's post.

It should be emphasized that the method used in this article in relation to social media in sports has not been used in Poland. Similarly, around the world, mainly aspects of the division of sports fans were dealt with, without including them in social media. In this respect, the presented research is intended to be an innovative attempt to find differences in the behavior of users of particular forms of social media.

The hypothesis of the article assumes that there are significant differences among the recipients of the same content provided by a sports organization, which are determined by the adopted quality indicators. These indicators include the length of comments, the frequency of use of emoticons, the level of culture of expression and the intensity of interaction with other users. The above-mentioned qualitative indicators can serve as criteria for the segmentation of users engaged in activities in social media.

The method of non-interventional observation of the activity of three groups of users of the most popular social networking sites (Meta, Instagram and TikTok) on June 25, 2024 was used here. This day is the last performance of the Polish national team at the European Championships. A qualitative method was used here. 250 observational data each were collected. These were then analysed in terms of the content posted. The language of communication, discussion activity, emotional engagement, use of emoticons and content culture were examined.

The data were subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis. The subject of the study was the information contained on the „Łączy Nas Piłka” portal website. The choice of subject was dictated as the European Championships 2024 and the interest in the Polish national football team related to the event. The increased number of activities influences the accuracy of the conclusions.

The result of the study is the identification of target segments among social media users in terms of their real activity and an attempt to determine the diversity of these segments in social media content marketing.

The entire analysis serves the appropriate management of social media content by sports organisations, clubs and sports-related sites.

The social media with the highest interest on 25 June 2024, namely Meta, Instagram and TikTok, managed by the Polish Football Association under the name „Łączy Nas Piłka”, were selected for the study. Each medium was subjected to observation on the day, after the last match of the Polish national football team at EURO2024. The following sites were subjected to the study:

1. <https://www.facebook.com/LaczyNasPilka/> (1.2 million likes).
2. <https://www.instagram.com/laczynaspilka/> (1.3 million observers).
3. <https://www.tiktok.com/@laczynaspilka> (1.6 million observers).

The “Łaczy Nas Piłka” page on the Meta portal mainly contains images and animations that relate to current affairs at the time of content creation. These are mainly sports results, player presentations, fan competitions and current news.

The “Łaczy Nas Piłka” page on Instagram is primarily made up of posts featuring photos, so-called reels (reels, or short videos) and page tags by other Instagram users.

The “Łaczy Nas Piłka” page on the TikTok portal consists primarily of short videos recorded by footballers, coaching staff and people connected with the Polish national team. Each page has a wide, daily reception, so posts on portals similar in terms of content and publication date will be selected for analysis.

Due to the amount of data and the variability of the subject of the study (different content), the day of 25 June, after the hour of the end of the last match of the Polish national team at the European Championships in Germany, was chosen for the analysis. The final sites were:

1. Meta: www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1011867543639914&set=a.819279436232060
2. Instagram: www.instagram.com/p/C8pfhGMAQ1X/
3. TikTok: www.tiktok.com/@laczynaspilka/photo/7381208626972724512

From these three sites, the first 250 comments were selected and assigned to categories so that each comment was only in one of them. The commentary was attributed at the discretion of the authors, according to the criteria adopted and the prevalence of predetermined characteristics. The results of this allocation and conclusions are presented later in the article.

3. Results

According to the methodology presented, data was collected to determine that the vast majority of recipients of content published by the Polish Football Association on social media are men.

In the course of the research, it emerged that women make up a relatively small proportion of the active audience of content on social media. The data collected on the basis of fan activity by gender is presented in Figure 1.

The data in Figure 1 shows that among users who are active and involved in commenting on sports pages, women only account for between 10 and 20%. Additional observation also showed that, despite the increasing interest in sport, women hardly engage in discussions on sports topics.

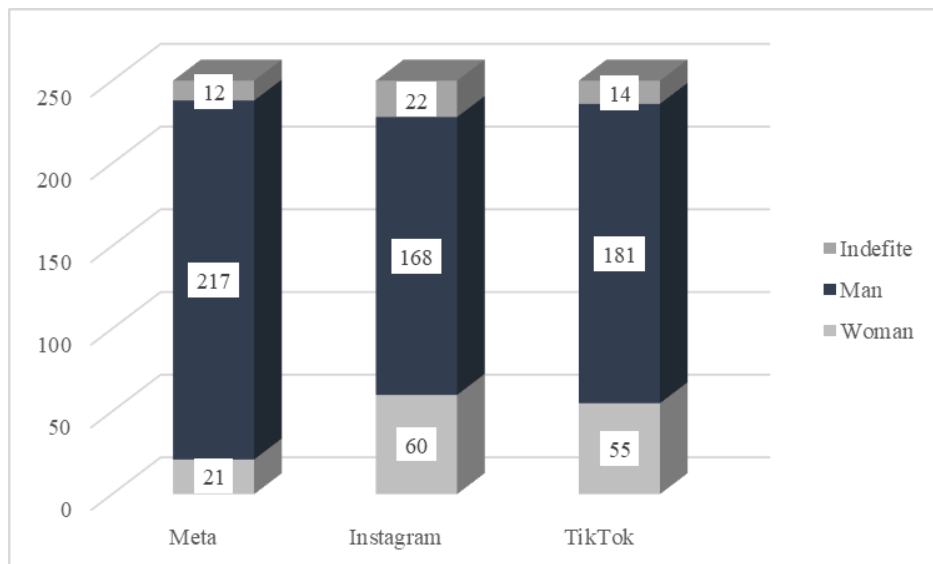


Figure 1. Gender structure of active social media users of the website “Łaczy Nas Piłka”.

Source: Own research.

Table 1. shows the number of comments, passive reactions and the percentage of reactions to comments (active reactions) from 25 June 2024. This indicates the engagement rate of passive and active reactions to content shared on various social media.

Table 1.
User engagement rate on social media

	Meta	Instagram	TikTok
Reactions	16000	75763	43700
Comments	1941	434	597
Comments/Reactions	12,13%	0,57%	1,37%

Source: Own research.

The information in Table 1 shows that the Meta portal is definitely regarded as a portal for exchanging opinions and interacting with other users. Despite the lower number of passive reactions, the percentage of engagement in discussions under posts is more than ten times higher than on other social media (more than 10% of active reactions compared to passive reactions). On Instagram, it is only around 0,5%, and on TikTok just over 1%. This means that younger media (Instagram, TikTok) with older users perform differently in the communication process via social media.

In the next step, data from all pages (in the form of comments) from the social media of the Polish Football Association (“Łaczy Nas Piłka”) were assigned to one of seven categories: *Jokers, Critics, Experts, Optimists, One Sentence, Rudes* and *Emoticons*. These differ in the length of the statements (*One Sentence, Critic, Expert*) and emotional involvement (*Optimists, Rudes, Jokers* and *Emoticons*). The results of the assignment to categories are presented in Figure 2.

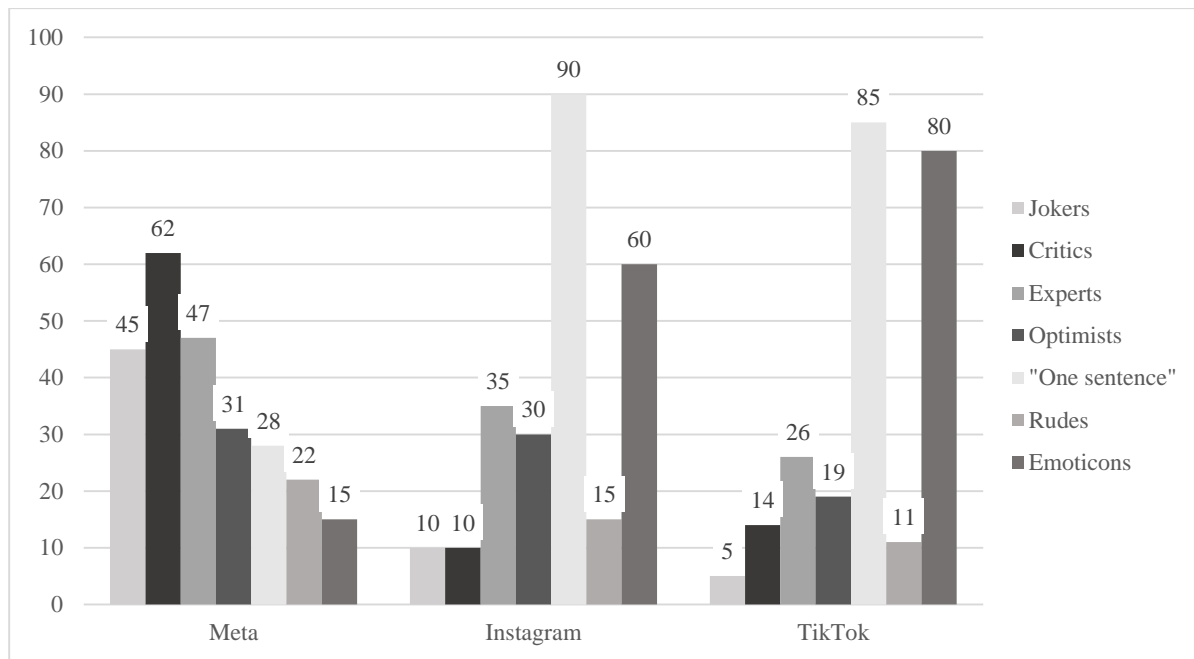


Figure 2. Categories of active social media users of websites “Łaczy Nas Piłka”.

Source: Own research.

As can be seen from the data in Figure 2, despite the differences in social media and their purpose, there are people who comment in very similar ways on each. The only differences are in the intensity of people from a particular category on a given medium.

Of the social media studied, the Meta portal is the most diverse and provides the greatest opportunities for different audiences. The high number in the *Jokers* category on the Meta portal is due to the possibility of freely adding viral marketing elements (memes, demots, reels and others). Also, the significant number in the *Critics* and *Experts* category on this portal is a result of the opportunities provided by Meta. It is a portal where people want to talk or give vent to their emotions in a longer form than a single sentence or emoticon. Consequently, rude and offensive statements also appear on Meta.

In the case of Instagram, users commenting with emotionicons and one sentence make up the largest share. For the most part, they do not expect any interaction or return to the page. Their engagement with the topic is cursory and shallow. There are also not many critics or jokers on Instagram. Nor do users treat it as a space for offensive comments. In part, this is due to the design of the portal, as well as the potentially lower reception of content.

The TikTok portal is the youngest of the popular social media. It gathers, in effect, a younger audience than Facebook and a less emotionally engaged audience than Instagram. For this reason, there is an increase in the number of comments in the form of emoticons and *One sentence*, and fewer longer statements of a *Critics* or *Optimists* nature. Here you can see a clear difference between this portal and others. On TikTok, relationships are quick and comments are short. Users do not require interaction with the others, they do not write relatively long sports or tactical analyses.

4. Discussion

The segmentation process depends on the point of view of the researcher. In sports marketing, this process mainly concerned fans of a sports team, the spectators of a sports event. Individual researchers created criteria by matching them to the results of the face-to-face surveys and creating individual sports fan segments. Social media users were also classified in this way, as in the research mentioned in the introductory section of this article. The research mainly involved the analysis of face-to-face surveys in the form of interviews using questionnaires. This provided a declarative picture based on the participant's own perception of themselves as an active social media user in sport.

This resulted in a research gap in the form of a failure to identify real rather than declarative responses to specific posts. This study was based on covert observation, where none of the users knew they were being observed. Therefore, the reactions were natural.

Hence, the conclusions are that all social media studied have a specific role in the online activities of their users. Depending on the portal, these roles vary and include:

- giving joy and a smile (*Jokers*),
- critically analysing a sporting event or team (*Critics*),
- demonstrating knowledge and being an online expert (*Experts*),
- giving comforting comments and looking for hope for the sporting future (*Optimists*),
- expressing one's own opinion quickly and briefly (*One sentence*),
- externalising own negative emotions (*Rudes*),
- showing momentary emotions (*Emoticons*).

Jokers are those for whom the motive for an active response is to introduce a viral marketing element. They are most often memes or demotivators taken from humour sites. Their importance in the communication management process of a sports organisation is negligible.

Critics are a group in which individuals make a brief but objective assessment of the content provided by a sports organisation. From a communication management point of view, their opinion can be valuable, as the degree of emotional involvement is at a medium level. Their numbers are high, especially on the Meta portal.

Experts brings together a relatively small group of people who analyse content or a sporting event in a professional manner. Most often, they do not give in to emotion. They practically bypass Instagram and TikTok, focusing on the Meta portal, due to the limitations of the other portals.

Optimists are a group characterised by faith and hope for a better future for the team being commented on. They are emotionally involved, but with a positive attitude. They are the largest group on the Met portal and lose relevance on the others.

One sentence is the most numerous group on Instagram and TikTok, characterised by a very short, one-sentence message, often accompanied by an emoticon. They are not emotionally involved, they do not waste time discussing, and what matters to them is leaving a mark on the page.

Rudes are a dwindling group of uncultured people who use the opportunity to comment to leave negative comments. Their behaviour calls for decisive action from managers.

Emoticons react most frequently on the TikTok portal. A characteristic feature is the use of emoticons only. This is most often the case with young people who do not want to engage in discussion in any way.

The information collected and defining these groups can also serve those in charge of social media in the sports organisation as a basis for social media content management. Although some of the user comments are an element of at least two categories, these are cases that do not affect the overall conclusions.

The problem to be solved for the future is to create a model that does not include one characteristic date, but is more universal and more comprehensive. The volume of this study does not allow for a broader coverage of this topic for the time being.

5. Summary

The article aimed to divide social media users in sport into relatively homogeneous groups. The research was conducted using a method of covert observation, supported by qualitative analysis. Three user groups of the Meta portal, Instagram and TikTok were studied. Each group consisted of the first 250 comments posted under the Polish Football Association's page posts (advertising slogan: 'Łączy Nas Piłka') from 25 June 2024. This was the date of the Polish national team's relegation from the European Football Championship in Germany.

The 750 units were finally divided into user groups, and the sizes of the user groups and their activities were presented in figures and tables. These groups were then described in terms of their behaviour on the study sites. This resulted in seven social media user groups (*Jokers, Critics, Experts, Optimists, One sentence, Rudes, Emoticons*). The basic characteristics of social media channels in terms of their users' behaviour were also identified.

The article achieved the objectives set. It was assumed that there were significant differences between the audiences of the same content depending on the qualitative criteria adopted. The qualitative criteria in this case were: comment length, excessive use of emoticons, level of personal culture, interacting with other users.

As a result of the qualitative analysis, it was confirmed that all of these behaviours are differentiators for the division of users engaging in social media activities and differences in the reception of the same content were found to exist.

The results of the research, the considerations and the categories described are intended to be helpful for communication management in sports organisations.

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