

## Original Article

### Embracing social media in sport management education: perspectives for its use in the classroom

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Published online: December 30, 2020

(Accepted for publication: December 15, 2020)

DOI:10.7752/jpes.2020.06498

#### Abstract:

The rise of social media has reshaped today's society by affecting how people communicate and build social relationships. The sports industry has not been indifferent to these shifts and embraced these communication tools. Indeed, social media is an essential management element in the day-to-day routine of sports managers. Furthermore, athletes, coaches, clubs, professional leagues, federations, and other sport actors have also adopted the use of social media. Therefore, owing to the increasing prevalence and growing role of social media in the sports industry, the mastery of digital skills related to the use of social media is one of the aspects that is most sought after by employers. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has recently boosted these demands as well as having further accelerated the process of digitalization of the sport sector. Furthermore, owing to restrictions on citizens' mobility, the pandemic has also pushed distance learning methods (where social media serve as facilitators) to take on a more prominent role in the educational context. Nevertheless, there is a lack of comprehensive studies addressing the effect of these tools in the scope of sport management education; in addition, there are few studies that provide guidelines for teachers to incorporate social media into the different areas of the teaching-learning process. Thus, this article focuses on the inclusion that social media have in sport management studies and also presents a proposal for the classification and possible application of social media which, owing to their characteristics and educational/labor potential, are considered suitable for introducing them into sport management courses. Furthermore, this study aims to encourage the sport management teaching community to introduce social media into the dynamics of their courses, given their pedagogical value, and the positive effect they have on student education.

**Key Words:** digital technology, pedagogical resources, entrepreneurship, employability, sports industry, higher education

#### Introduction

Social media are increasingly present in people's daily lives and are an element that accompanies us, both in the professional and private spheres (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018), through the wide range of technologies and devices (e.g., tablets, smartphones, laptops, and smartwatches), which enable and facilitate access to their use (Al-Bahrani, Patel, & Sheridan, 2015; Ansari & Khan, 2020). Therefore, this increased presence of social media constitutes a real revolution that is changing the way humans behave, interact, communicate, and collaborate (Ahmed, Ahmad, Ahmad, & Zakaria, 2019; López-Carril, Villamón, & Añó, 2019).

Currently, we are witnessing the growth of new generations who have experienced the phenomenon of the rise of social media from a very early age; thus, we consider them as digital natives. Therefore, the number of social media users is growing. In 2020, it is estimated that there are approximately 3.6 billion social media users worldwide; this number is expected to reach 4.41 billion by 2025 (Statista, 2020). However, being born into a digital society does not in itself guarantee the acquisition of digital skills if specific education is not provided. Furthermore, the advancement of the Internet has created a world without borders where lessons are not necessarily limited to the physical space where they have been traditionally taught (Espinosa, 2015). This is a concern, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, there has been an acceleration in the processes of change towards education using online and digital formats (Kara, Çubukçuoğlu, & Elçi, 2020); "remote" forms of teaching and learning are becoming widespread owing to the closure of schools and universities (Williamson, Eynon, & Potter, 2020).

In the sport management field, organizations across different branches of the sport industry have successfully incorporated social media into their business models and communication strategies. Examples of the latter are the studies in the area of professional sports teams and leagues (Anagnostopoulos, Parganas, Chadwick, & Fenton, 2018; Klock, Tomanek, & Cieśliński, 2020; Kowalski & Łazorko, 2020), sports governing bodies (Li, Scott, & Dittmore, 2018), or sports brands (Do, Ko, & Woodside, 2015). The spreading of social media and its

extent of integration within human life leads to the growing presence of social media in the educational environment, which offers both opportunities and challenges for the entire school community (Montrieux, & Schellens, 2018; Krutka, Manca, Galvin, Greenhow, Koehler, & Askari, 2020). However, in area of sport education, social media studies are still limited (Lugueti, Goodyear, & André, 2019). Within the university context, the arrival of the Internet has transformed the way in which students, teachers, and university institutions interact (Scott & Stanway, 2015). Indeed, higher education institutions have embraced the adoption of these digital tools such as virtual learning environments or social media (Lacka & Wong, 2019). Regarding the benefits of introducing social media in the classroom, Greenhow and Chapman (2020) have outlined three potential uses of social media in the classroom, i.e., 1 – encouraging active learning, 2 – community building, and 3 – civic participation. Juhary (2016) has stated that current teachers should not teach students the way that they were taught; instead, they should adapt the changing way of learning that digital natives demand to better match their interests.

According to the European Commission (EC) (2018), digital technologies create new opportunities for both organizations and businesses. Among other things, they allow to reach more consumers, to be more efficient and competitive, or to create new products. Nevertheless, the EC states that although 90% of jobs currently require basic digital skills, 37% of the European working population has considerable shortcomings in terms of digital competences. For example, currently, there are approximately 350,000 jobs that require candidates to have appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Furthermore, 38% of companies claim that the lack of digital skills of their employees affects their productivity. In an attempt to reverse this situation, the EC launched the "Digital Opportunity Traineeships" initiative, which seeks to facilitate access to the labor market for young people through work placements in companies abroad where they are trained in digital skills (cyber security, Big Data, digital marketing, and software development).

Based on the effect that social media had on the sport industry (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015), both in the societal, educational, and professional fields, it is pertinent to (re)consider what specific formative actions are performed in the area of sport management education. This will allow to deliver a proper education that responds to the demands of the sport industry in relation to the mastery of digital skills. Furthermore, it is important to consider the possible interests of students in the possibilities offered by social media in terms of education and employment, which allows them to be better educated to achieve their career goals (López-Carril, Anagnostopoulos, & Parganas, 2020). Based on the above-mentioned information and owing to the lack of specific studies on the inclusion of social media in sport management education, this paper aims to present a proposal for the classification of social media, which, owing to their characteristics, are more likely to be successfully included in sport management studies. Thus, this study aims to encourage sports management faculty to include these tools in the dynamics of their courses.

**Contextualizing social media in sport management**

As a social phenomenon, social media has already received specific attention in the academic field of sport management. For example, among the scientific community, the bibliographical reviews conducted by Filo et al. (2015) and Abeza, O'Reilly, Séguin, and Nzindukiyimana (2015) are of particular interest. Nevertheless, despite the interest in the study of social media in sport management, there is currently a terminological confusion regarding the meaning of the term, both in social and academic fields, as several studies have point out (e.g., Carr & Hayes, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi, & Nerur, 2018; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Therefore, to identify a theoretical consensus that can guide future studies and practical applications of social media in sport management, López-Carril et al. (2019) have proposed a conceptualization of social media, as outlined in Fig.1 and embodied in the following definition: "Social media is an umbrella concept that embraces communicative tools, based on the internet and new media technologies, that allow organizations and/or individuals to interact, exchange information and content generated individually or shared, in real time or asynchronously" (p. 581).

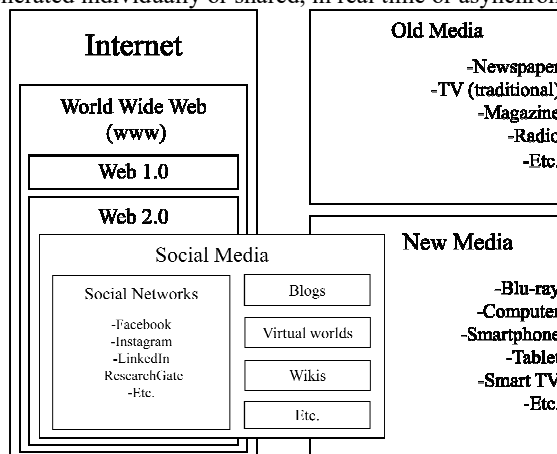


Figure 1. Conceptual clarification of social media and its link to other nearby terms (López-Carril et al., 2019)

### **Social media in sport management education**

The use of social media in sport management has generated a new way of communicating with stakeholders, as has been shown in several studies (Alonso-Dos-Santos, Rejón-Guardia, Pérez-Campos, Calabuig-Moreno, & Ko, 2018; García-Fernández, Elasmri-Eijaberi, Pérez-Tur, Triadó-Ivern, Herrera-Torres, & Aparicio-Chueca, 2017). Nevertheless, when it comes to sport management education, O'Boyle (2014) has suggested that the integration of social media into the university context has been slower compared to social media introduction into the professional sphere. Furthermore, although most universities currently have a presence through official profiles on the most popular social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube), there is still a long way to go before these tools are effectively incorporated into the day-to-day life of university classrooms.

Nevertheless, some studies (e.g., O'Boyle, 2014; Sanderson & Browning, 2015; Scott & Stanway, 2015) share practical experiences related to the introduction of social media for pedagogical purposes in sport management studies, where the results regarding the teaching–learning process are positive. These authors highlight the increasing level of student engagement in the courses, which is attributed to the creation of digital environments that facilitate interaction between students. In contrast, Adams et al. (2018) have indicated that the results regarding positive experiences of social media inclusion in sport management education are, in general, still ambiguous. Therefore, more studies are needed to provide conclusive results. Thus, contributions, such as López-Carril et al. (2020), offer useful insights for the educational community by providing a detailed guide for the incorporation of social media (e.g., LinkedIn) into the university course dynamics. These types of papers are valuable for the educational community because they can guide professors towards the inclusion of social media as a pedagogical tool in sport management courses.

### **Connecting education and industry. Social media, employability, entrepreneurship, and sport management**

Notwithstanding the positive practical experiences reported in the previous section of this paper, Lebel, Danylchuk, and Millar (2015) have indicated a mismatch between the digital pedagogies used in sport management studies, expectations of students, and the needs and requests of the sport industry. This is similar to the results of Sattler (2018), who, when investigating the training curriculum of sport management studies, have identified several learning experiences (e.g., professional internships, volunteering, or similar experiences) that connect sport management education with the demands of the professional sector.

As indicated in the introduction to this work, technology is increasingly integrated into physical activity and sport, both in the recreational and professional fields. Thus, employers are demanding candidates with specific disciplinary knowledge or technical expertise as well as skills in the management and use of social media (Yorke, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to prepare students at the educational stage with the highest set of skills and competences that will allow them to successfully gain access to the labor market, which will increase their opportunities to get a job or become an entrepreneur and create one.

Ratten and Jones (2018) have indicated that sports educators must be aware of the current employment prospects, be up-to-date with the evolution of the labor market, and incorporate educational initiatives that affect this issue, which may have positive repercussions on the future employment of students. Furthermore, the authors demand the application of an interdisciplinary approach in future studies, which connects sport education with other educational perspectives (e.g., business education) and leads to the establishment of new pedagogical practices in the context of sport education. Miragaia and Soares (2017) have performed a bibliographic review of the literature published in international journals between 1979 and 2014, in the context of sport management in higher education. The obtained results suggest that sport management education should be developed with a perspective of promoting self-employment through new educational initiatives that enable students to think critically.

Regardless of students' day-to-day use of social media in their private lives, in the context of sport management education, the level of knowledge about the use and management of these tools is far from what the industry demands. In fact, Bennett, Maton, and Kervin (2008) have shown that academic literature has already indicated that a small proportion of young people has been developing digital skills under the expected level of a digital native, which coincides with the data that have been previously presented by EC (2018). Similar concerns are also reflected in the work of Adams et al. (2018), who invites further researchers to explore the digital skills education that is offered in sport management studies.

Of note, social media also allows to create individual platforms to present oneself to peers on a professional level, which previously has been difficult to envisage (Richey, Gonibeed, & Ravishankar, 2018). Examples include LinkedIn, which is the best known professional social network, as well as Academia.edu, ResearchGate or Mendeley in the scholarly context. Using these social media platforms, researchers can disseminate their studies by connecting with the rest of the scientific community in a more dynamic way, which facilitates the exchange of work (Dal-Ré & Mahillo-Fernández, 2018). Both in professional or academic fields, a minimum amount of training is needed to harness the performative and educational potential of social media. Thus, several significant questions arise. 1) Where do professors and students learn to use social media properly? 2) At what point in the teaching–learning process can educators incorporate social media into their teaching practices to facilitate the development of professional skills that increase students' chances of success

in their careers? We believe that the university context and sports management courses are an ideal place to introduce social media from educational and professional perspectives. To encourage and help the teaching community to implement social media into the sport management courses, Fig.2 is presented. This figure shows a classification of several social media according to different elements that are part of the teaching process by identifying social media that, owing to their characteristics and potential, are estimated to be successfully included in sport management courses.

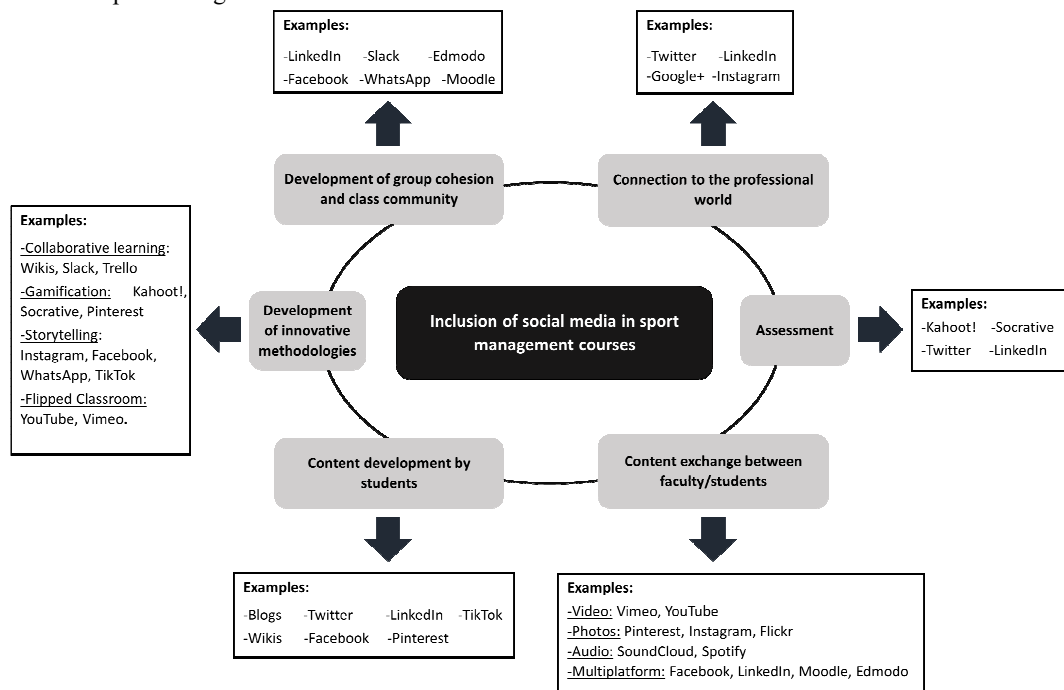


Figure 2. Proposal for the inclusion of social media in sports management lectures

We will develop each of the teaching areas, which are shown in Fig.2. It is relevant to consider that social media can be introduced into the dynamics of sport management subjects both collectively [more than one social media (e.g., using LinkedIn and YouTube)] and individually [introducing only one social media (e.g., using Twitter)]. Faculty can introduce social media in different areas of the teaching–learning process (e.g., using YouTube to share content and a private LinkedIn group to foster class cohesion) or for a particular purpose (e.g., using a private Facebook group to exchange content from the course syllabus). It is essential that sport management faculty incorporate social media into the dynamics of their courses by taking into account the characteristics and objectives to be developed throughout the course, the profiles of their students, and the technological resources they can access:

- **Content exchange between faculty/students:** social media offers opportunities to generate common spaces for professors and students to share content linked to the course syllabus. Social media allow to easily exchanging a wide range of files (e.g., videos, PDF documents, photographs, or audio), which complement what has been observed in class. In essence, social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, or Moodle) allow to generate private spaces, where multiplatform content can be shared; other social media are more oriented towards sharing specific file formats such as photos (e.g., Pinterest, Instagram, and Flickr), audios (e.g., SoundCloud and Spotify), or videos (e.g., Vimeo and YouTube).
- **Development of group cohesion and class community:** this social media functionality allows to extend the educational experience beyond the classroom during non-teaching hours. This provides greater flexibility in the teaching–learning process while offering the option of generating a feeling of belongingness to the group by creating specific private spaces for the course. In this regard, Facebook or LinkedIn are good options, although other social media (e.g., Moodle, Slack, or Edmodo) have more functionalities. Other social media, such as WhatsApp or Telegram, can be used if the main purpose is to reach students quickly and directly.
- **Content development by students:** this is one of the most interesting features that social media offer from a learning point of view. Without a doubt, one of the premises of social media is the interaction through individually or collectively generated content. In this respect, social media offers the option of learning by doing, where students create content that is linked to the course that can later be reviewed by both teachers and students and by creating spaces for co-evaluation. By doing so, students become the central protagonists of the teaching–learning process. In this area, the faculty is in charge of choosing the social media (e.g., blogs, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, Wikis, Facebook, and Pinterest) that better permits the type of content that students have to generate.

- Connection to the professional world: this perspective is one of the most important ones to develop with students. While students generally master the use of social media in the private setting, they do not know about its use from a professional viewpoint. Therefore, social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, or Google+) are an excellent option to be introduced, given their greater linkage or current use in the context of the sports industry. Therefore, students will acquire a series of knowledge that will later be demanded in the labor market.
- Assessment: assessment is one of the most relevant processes in the educational field, where students receive quantitative and qualitative feedback on the work developed throughout the course. Thus, each social media used in the classrooms must promote the development of an assessment rubric created ad hoc, which allows the teacher or the students themselves to assess the performed work. Beyond this, social media (e.g., Kahoot! or Socrative) offer assessment options that are simple to apply and are very useful.
- Development of innovative methodologies: owing to their versatility, social media can facilitate the development or application of innovative methodologies in the classroom, which expands teaching–learning opportunities. Some examples are collaborative learning, where Wikis, Slack, or Trello allow the generation of collaborative workspaces that are worthwhile for students. In addition, social media provides options for gamifying methodologies (Kahoot!, Socrative, or Pinterest are of particular interest) by generating playful spaces where the competitive component is essential. Other examples of methodologies are Storytelling, which is very popular among young people. Here, TikTok, Instagram to a greater extent, and Facebook and WhatsApp, to a lesser extent, offer learning opportunities, where students can generate storied content, which is very attractive for students. Finally, the flipped classroom methodology allows students to watch the theoretical content of the course at home through videos published on YouTube, Vimeo, or other platforms to take advantage of the time in the classroom to eliminate doubts, solve problems, or delve deeper into the given content.

### **Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for future studies**

Social media are, in essence, one of the most pervasive phenomena among university students since the emergence of the Internet (O'Shea, 2013). Furthermore, these tools have the potential to bring students together by fostering a sense of community that encourages interactive learning. Sport management educators must challenge themselves and be aware of new industry trends that offer opportunities for positive educational experiences that prepare students for life beyond the classroom by connecting the university with the world of work. Owing to the educational and professional potential that social media has, we suggest that sports management faculty should invest in incorporating social media as a teaching–learning tool. This will allow to directly affect digital skills, which are in high demand and in constant development during the 21st century. Thus, the main focus of this study is on the following aspects:

- Sport management faculty should be aware of the advances made in the sport industry and reflect these changes and work demands into what is taught in their lessons to prepare students for their professional careers.
- Social media facilitate the acquisition of digital skills, which are highly appreciated by sport industry employers.
- Social media provide multiple opportunities for sport management education, facilitate networking and interaction between students, teaching staff, and sport industry stakeholders by providing appealing and user-friendly tools for students.
- Currently, educational experiences of incorporating social media into sport management classes are limited. Therefore, it is necessary to invest in new educational experiences to share the results both with the academic and educational community.

Future studies and innovative educational experiences ought to further evaluate the above-mentioned statements by performing systematic studies that will allow us to identify in a more precise and generalizable way all positive aspects offered by social media for sport management both from educational and professional perspectives. At the same time, additional studies should be performed to investigate specific needs that are currently demanded by sport management employers as well as shortcomings detected among their workers concerning digital skills.

While this paper suggests that sport management faculty should incorporate social media into classroom dynamics, it has not explored whether the teaching community has the minimum knowledge necessary to enable them to successfully incorporate these tools into the classroom. Furthermore, there are no studies that explore in-depth the current degree of inclusion of social media into the sport management curricula nor are there official teaching guides for the sport management courses. Finally, the topic discussed in this study can be extended to other disciplines integrated into the sciences of physical activity and sport, which have not been addressed in this proposal but which, nevertheless, may provide positive experiences about social media incorporation into the classrooms.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, this paper shows successful experiences that already exist regarding the implementation of social media into the teaching–learning context of sport management studies. In addition, it proposes a classification for the incorporation of social media in different areas of the teaching–learning process. Because there are many social media, and those that are yet to be developed, it is essential to continue exploring educational potential that social media offers to be at the forefront of innovations both in professional and educational fields.

## Acknowledgements

The first author of this work is grateful for the support of the predoctoral contract “FPU15/05670” granted by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities.

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