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Social Media Marketing of Football Clubs
A Study with Benfica, Porto, and Sporting

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Dissertação para obtenção do Grau de Mestre em
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Resumo

As várias plataformas de social media existentes, têm como objetivo a interação e conectividade entre utilizadores, dentro de comunidades online através de produção e partilha de conteúdo, desta forma, semelhante ao mundo do desporto, social media permite aos utilizadores obterem experiências que muitas vezes mexem com a emoção. Este estudo empírico alia a componente do futebol ao social media, em que, através de uma regressão linear múltipla, avalia-se a performance de posts nas redes sociais, Facebook, Instagram e Twitter, dos três maiores clubes portugueses: Benfica, Porto e Sporting.

Esta investigação revê a literatura do fanatismo desportivo, da estrutura e conteúdo de posts, aliada a uma análise bibliométrica sobre social media, que permite a compreensão deste vasto tema em quatro compontentes: Social media engagement, User Generated Content, Comunidades Online, e Marketing de Conteúdo.

Através da testagem das hipóteses redigidas para esta investigação, foram obtidas conclusões assertivas sobre a performance de posts de social media no âmbito desportivo, tais como, a relevância de posts visuais, face a posts textuais; a eficácia de posts que remetem à nostalgia do adepto; e a determinação da rede social mais indicada para o acompanhamento de um jogo de futebol a decorrer ao vivo.

Palavras-chave

Redes socias; Marketing Desportivo; Regressão Linear Múltipla; Análise Bibliométrica.

Abstract

The various existing social media platforms aim at interaction and connectivity between users within online communities through the production and sharing of content. Similar to sports, social media allows users to obtain experiences that often stirs emotion. This empirical study combines the football component with social media, in which, through multiple linear regression, the performance of posts on social networks, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, of the three biggest Portuguese clubs, is evaluated: Benfica, Porto and Sporting.

This research reviews the literature of sports fanaticism, the structure and content of posts, combined with a bibliometric analysis of social media, which allows the understanding of this vast theme in four components: Social media engagement, User Generated Content, Online Communities, and Content Marketing.

Through the testing of the hypotheses written for this research, assertive conclusions were obtained about the performance of social media posts in the sports field, such as, the relevance of visual posts, compared to textual posts; the effectiveness of posts that refer to the nostalgia of the supporter; and the determination of the social network most suitable for the accompaniment of a live football match.

Keywords

Social Media; Sports Marketing; Multiple Linear Regression; Bibliometric Analysis.

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Introduction

Social media can be broadly defined as websites and applications that allow users to share content. Thus, being a form of media that allows interaction between people (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Sports, on the other hand, also allows interpersonal relationship and sharing, and as Collins, (2015) wrote in *The Oval World*: *"Sports connects friends and families, grandparents and grandchildren, allies and acquaintances, and offers a profound sense of belonging and kinship. (…) such deep bonds are not easily broken or lost."*. The current study, joins the capacities and advances of social media, with the world of sports, more properly with the structure and typology of posts that are practised in Facebook, Instagram, Twitter of the three main clubs at the highest level of Portuguese football league, Sport Lisboa e Benfica; Futebol Clube do Porto and Sporting Clube de Portugal.

To understand social media, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the term "Web 2.0". Web 2.0 is a combination of open source and user-controlled Internet applications that promote experiences, collaboration and knowledge for participants in business and social contexts. It supports the creation of networks of ideas, information and expertise, promoting innovation and creativity, allowing the dissemination, sharing and editing of content (Constantinides, 2014). Although the is no consensus on the scope of social media the majority of definitions suggest that social media consists of media that is published, created and shared by individuals on the Internet, such as images, videos and other materials (Rob Stokes, p.183, 2008), allowing the dissemination of user-generated content (Constantinides, 2014). This dissemination is done through applications such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, to name a few. These applications are inserted in a Web 2.0 platform, which allows the creation and distribution of information, mostly through user-generated content, mentioned before (Weinberg & Berger, 2011). Social media facilitate relationships between people and entities, and for this reason, official social media pages of have become a useful tool to improve brand image for organisations and for the sports industry (Osokin, 2019).

Social Media allows a platforms to build social experiences and symbolic value for the user. Consumer engagement can be measured by metrics such as Likes, Comments and Shares (Coursaris & Balogh, 2016). These metrics take the form of one-click social plugins, where through a click or button on a social media platform or even in websites, network users can share, comment on and like content with their friends. This way, one-click social plugins present a way to stimulate the Word of Mouth (WoM) effortlessly (Swani, Milne, & P. Brown, 2013). The purpose of brands when posting on social networks is to generate reactions from fans, because the greater the interactivity,

the more likes and comments are expected (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Likes and comments end up going hand in hand when it comes to social media metrics, so a "like" shows agreement before a certain post without verbal expression, while a comment is expressing the user's opinion before a post, verbally (Anagnostopoulos, Parganas, Chadwick, & Fenton, 2018). The act of giving a like in a social media post, allows users to show appreciation, pleasure or identification with the content without leaving a comment (Li & Xie, 2020). Similarly to the dynamics of likes and comments, likes and shares also go hand in hand, although sharing is more visible and indirect. After all, the content is shared with all the followers of the individual who shared. However, liking is more private and direct because it presents a direct statement to the posted content but does not propagate it directly (like shares) to the followers of the user (Li & Xie, 2020).

This study explores the literature on social media for understanding the relationship between the social media platforms and sports and the fanship associated, such as metrics, the type of media used, and ways to classify the various types of posts inserted in football club platforms. In addition, a bibliometric analysis of social media engagement, user-generated content, online communities, and content marketing is offered with the aim of understanding and cementing the various components of the social media literature, and understanding metrics, such as citations, authors, and sources on the topic.

To test the relationships and validate the study hypotheses a multiple linear regression was conducted. Additionally the regression allowed to assess the performance of posts, through the analysis of social media metrics (Likes, Comments and Shares), to evaluate which work better across the three main social networks, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Sport Fanship

In sports, the relationship that fans generate with teams and clubs is special since fans are willing to sacrifice time and resources to support the teams, thus creating a high involvement. Raney, (2006) affirm that the emotional reactions of sports fans are triggered by their affective mood (fanship) and the content of the event itself. As everyone has noticed or experienced, the emotions of sports fans change during a game, consequently, these emotions refer to different facial and body expressions, however, with Internet access, these emotions can be transmitted via social media post (Yu & Wang, 2015). Social media platforms are used by sports fans for various reasons, including emotional liberation (Wang, 2013, 2015). In retrospective, social media in the

midst of sports organisations, it identifies content that is of common interest to its users, to stimulate the growth of likes, comments and shares (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

Research on Social Media

Previous research on social media was assessed using bibliometric analysis and combined with the review of the content of the articles which allowed the proposal of the research hypotheses. The results of the bibliometric analysis provide a basis for a better understanding of social engagement, user-generated content, online communities and content marketing. The bibliometric analysis uses quantitative analysis of empirical data in the published literature to study patterns within a certain area of research (De Bellis, 2016). Through the analysis of most cited documents, sources with more publications and authors with more impact, it is possible to trace a pattern of how the state of the literature in these areas is.

The data were collected from the Web of Science database in May 2020, through the research equation - "social media engagement" OR "user-generated-content" OR "user-generated content" OR "online community" OR "content marketing". A total of 5841 were obtained from the Web of Science database.

The software used for the treatment and analysis was the *R software*, through the *biblioshiny* functionality, which allows the analysis of several metrics and understanding the evolution of scientific production of social media. The metrics that will be analysed from this database are:

- Citations;
- Authors;
- Sources.

Social Media Engagement

The terms "engage" and "engagement" describe the nature of participants' interactive experiences (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Although there are several definitions, Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012) considers customer/consumer engagement as the intensity of participation and connection of individuals with the activities of organisations. Besides, Brodie et al. (2013) consider customer/consumer engagement as a way to create, build and enhance consumer relationships. However, consumer engagement is very dependent on the context in which it is perceived, and is then considered a subjective phenomenon, depending on the position of the consumer (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011).

Social Media is built to enhance user interaction and engagement (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016). It is also one of the most predominant channels through which consumers engage with a brand or company. Consequently, companies are recognising the need to engage, where potential and current customers, pay the most attention (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). The engagement increases sales and profit, being both considered a key point in the strategy of several companies (Brodie et al., 2013).

On the other side of the engagement, spectrum are the lurkers. Khan, (2017) defines lurkers as passive users who read but do not post in social media. Muller, Shami, Millen, & Feinberg (2010) defines "lurkers" as social media users who are dormant and have little (or no) contribution to other users.

Engagement is associated with addressing issues rather than avoiding them, thus being directly linked to proactivity and awareness (Smith, Wagaman, & Handley, 2009).

User Generated-Content

User-Generated Content (UGC) is defined as media content available to the public that is created by end-users and it is seen as the main reason why people use social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Hundreds of millions of Internet users are constantly publishing UGC (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahnt, & Moon, 2007). Comparing UGC and non-UGC content, UGC content may be produced faster than non-UGC content (professional content) (Cha et al., 2007). Non-UGC content can also be considered as MGC (marketer-generated content), which implies the production of the content generated by marketers and their respective companies for use in social media and sometimes create engagement with consumers (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013).

Sites with UGC are creating new standards of social interactions, giving users the power to be more creative and develop new business opportunities (Cha et al., 2007). That same power is causing researchers to be delegating their attention to the UGC (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2008).

Content Marketing

When it comes to content marketing, in social media the concept is termed "digital content marketing". This concept was introduced by Koiso-Kanttila (2004), noticing that both the entity and delivery of the product were digital.

Progressively, new definitions began to appear, more appropriate to the times in which they were published. For example, Kilgour, Sasser, & Larke, (2015) stated that content marketing is the active participation of the consumer by sharing and participating in a media platform that becomes of their interest, concluding that the delivery of consistent and valuable content for the consumers stimulates them to action. Ahmad, Musa, & Harun, (2016) defined content marketing as sharing information about products and brands to attract other users to participate in purchasing initiatives that subsequently create an engagement relationship between companies and consumers.

Online Communities

Online communities provide opportunities for consumers who share common interests to come together and discuss opinions and share information. Brands use these online communities to interact with their consumers and also to understand their needs for creating value for them. Social media communication is very important to create value for the users in these communities, so interaction and engagement are crucial components by the brands that gather consumers in a community. In this way, organisations use online communities as a crucial tool to set their new goals according to users, fostering engagement, sharing, collaboration and conversation once again (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011).

The appearance of these online communities is also due to the lack of geographic limitations, because social media is global and allows the participants of these communities to group around certain brands or interests and thus share information relevant to that interest (Plume, Dwivedi, & Slade, 2016).

Through online communities, contact between consumers and the brand itself is also stimulated, thus making the established relationship of knowledge and learning for both, thus creating the best value for consumers (Chen, Xu, & Whinston, 2011; Di Maria & Finotto, 2008; Mathwick, Wiertz, & de Ruyter, 2008; von Hippel, 2005).

Results of the Bibliometric Analysis

Data

Using the Web of Science database, scientific articles were collected starting from 1985 until 2020. In that period, the annual growth of scientific production, relative to the social media field, was 19.74% according to the data. Figure 1 shows that the trend in this area is one of great growth. This growth is supported since about 96% of this sample were scientific production from 2006 to 2020, in which the total annual growth of scientific production was increasing year after year (not assuming 2020 since the data was gathered in May 2020). In this way, the exponential growth in the areas of social media engagement, user-generated content, content marketing and online communities.

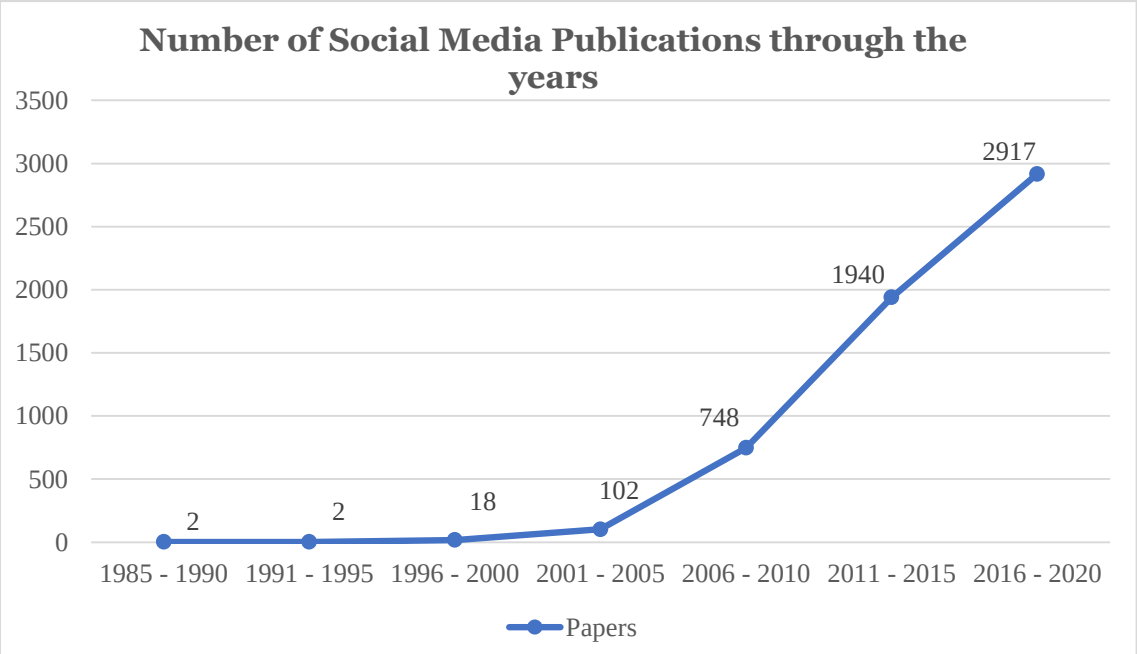

Figure 1 - Chart alluding to the scientific production of social media publications over the years.

Citations

A citation is an acknowledgement that an article receives in another paper (Narin, 1976) and it is an important metric for scientific articles as it indicates its relevance. Therefore, the analysis of citations allows to assess the most important contribution in a certain research field. The ten most cited articles in the current sample are:

1. *User of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010): 4248 total citations and 386,2 citations per year.
2. *Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media* (Kietzmann et al., 2011): 1276 citations and 127,6 citations per year.
3. *Production, Consumption, Prosumption The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital "prosumer"* (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010): 773 citations and 70,3 citation per year.
4. *Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis* (Brodie et al., 2013): 748 citations and 93,5 citations per year.
5. *Does the internet increase, decrease, or supplement social capital? Social networks, participation, and community commitment* (Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001): 670 citations and 33,5 citations per year.
6. *Word of mouth communication within online communities: Conceptualising the online social network* (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007): 613 citations and 43,8 citations per year.
7. *Examining the relationship between reviews and sales: The role of reviewer identity disclosure in electronic markets* (Forman, Ghose, & Wiesenfeld, 2008): 590 citations and 45,4 citations per year.
8. *I Tube, You Tube, Everybody Tubes: Analysing the World's Largest User Generated Content Video System* (Cha et al., 2007): 518 citations and 37 citations per year.
9. *Imagined communities: Awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the Facebook* (Acquisti & Gross, 2006): 498 citations and 33,2 citations per year.
10. *Users like you? Theorising agency in user-generated content* (Van Dijck, 2009): 438 citations and 36,5 citations per year.

The relevance of the most quoted article in the sample is significant, with almost four times more citations than the second most quoted article. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) clarify the concept of "Social Media" by relating and differentiating with concepts such as "User Generated Content and Web 2.0". They provide a characterisation of groups within the social media culture and present advice for companies that decide to invest in this topic.

The social media phenomenon can be a challenge for companies. (Kietzmann et al., 2011) presents the panorama of what is social media using seven constructs: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. The different activities and interactions within what are social media are always directly involved with one or more of these blocks. Kietzmann et al., (2011) alsoshows and recommends strategies for companies to monitor, understand and respond to the various activities within the social media realm.

Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) characterises the emergence of prosumist capitalism. Prosumism involves both production and consumption. Through the emergence of online user-generated content, this dynamic becomes a reality.

Despite the wide variety of social media literature, the terms engagement still have several components to explore. Brodie et al. (2013), presents a netnographic methodology to study engagement in online brand communities. As engaged consumers convey loyalty, satisfaction, empowerment, connection and emotional ties, the continued study of this area within the social media spectrum is central.

Wellman et al. (2001) study how the Internet impacts social capital through a questionnaire conducted in 1998 on the website of the National Geographic Society. Although it is a 2001 study, it is central to the perception of participation in voluntary organisations and politics, thus concluding something that is still present today, which is the use of the Internet to be standardised and used in daily routine.

Brown et al., (2007) reveals the importance of word-of-mouth communication in online consumer interactions, evidenced in online communities. The study involves a qualitative component through interviews, followed by social network analysis of an online community. Combining these results, it is possible to conclude that online communities influence individual identification.

When studying the relationship between reviews and sales Forman et al., (2008) realise that in the context of an online community, the consumer's description for a product can complement or even replace the product information itself. Consumers are biased by reviews and these influence purchasing decisions. Furthermore, the importance of shared geographic location in e-commerce is concluded.

User-generated content is changing the way people watch TV or any other audiovisual. In this way, Cha et al., (2007) analyse Youtube, the largest User Generated Content system, and all the dynamics involved.

Acquisti & Gross, (2006), through a questionnaire, addressed to Facebook users of a U.S. university obtains the information that then compares with the information present on the social network itself in order to analyse privacy and security.

Van Dijck (2009) uses YouTube as a case study, studying user-generated content and understanding the role of the user as a creator of content, and how he consumes the content of others.

Authors

The affiliation of the author is a very important bridge of his film production. Academic institutions offer favourable conditions for the execution of research relevant to science.

Table 1 - Affiliations with more publications in the fields of social media engagement; user-generated content; content marketing; online communities (May 2020). N = number of publications per affiliation

Affiliation	N
University of Michigan	103
University of Washington	86
Nanyang Technological University	85
University of Maryland	81
Tsinghua University	78
University of Florida	70
University of Minnesota	70
Penn State University	69
Carnegie Mellon University	66
Stanford University	61
Indiana University	60
University of Sydney	60
City University of Hong Kong	57
Hong Kong Polytechnic University	57
National University of Singapore	57
University of Pennsylvania	57
University of Texas	57
Michigan State University	55
University of Amsterdam	54
University of North Carolina	52

Out of the 5841 documents in the sample, written by 12735 authors, 1335 documents are in the top 20 institutions in terms of the scientific production, thus resulting in a total of about 23% of the total documents. The scientific output of the top 20 institutions in this sample is 66% from the United States of America, 25% from Asia, 5% from Australia and the remaining 4% from Europe, more particularly the University of Amsterdam.

Table 2 - Most citations by authors in the fields of social media engagement; user-generated content; content marketing; online communities (May 2020). N = Total citations per author

Author	N
Haenlein M.	4768
Kaplan Am.	4543
Ghose A.	1785
Hermkens K.	1276
Kietzmann Jh.	1276
McCarthy Bs.	1276
Law R.	999
Ipeirotis Pg.	938
Lewis Sc.	809
Rodriguez P.	780
Moon S.	773
Jurgenson N.	773
Ritzer G.	773
Cha M.	762
Brodie Rj.	748
Hollebeek L.	748
Ilic A.	748
Juric B.	748
Kwak H.	746
Ahn Yy.	746

Analysing the authors with the most quotations within the sample, it is noticed that many had already been mentioned previously, in the documents with the most quotations. However, as scientific production is a constant process, the authors accumulate citations to their name, and this is an impacting metric. It should be noted that the authors with the most citations are also the authors who wrote the most cited article in this sample – “User of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Sources

Table 3 - Publications made in the fields of social media engagement, user-generated content, content marketing, online communities. N = Publications per source.

Source	N
Computers in Human Behaviour	81
New Media & Society	69
Journal of Medical Internet Research	49
Informations Systems Research	38
Tourism Management	32
Econtent	31
Online Information Review	31
Decision Support Systems	30
Information Communication & Society	26
Marketing Science	25
Sustainability	24
Digital Journalism	23
IEEE Access	23
Information Society	22
International Journal of Communication	22
Journalism Studies	22
Plos One	22
Telematics and Informatics	22
Journal of Interactive Marketing	21
Public Relations Review	21

Regarding the sources with the largest number of publications, the journal "Computers in Human Behaviour" does indeed have a large domain of the topics addressed in this sample.

However, it is worth mentioning the diversity of areas in this top 20, from Health, Journalism, Marketing, Information Systems, Tourism, among others. In this way, we can see that social media is indeed an area with much versatility and progress in scientific production.

Table 4 - Most citations made in the field of social media engagement; user-generated content; content marketing; online communities. N = Total citations per source

Source	N
Business Horizons	6223
Computers in Human Behaviour	3223
Information Systems Research	2767
Journal of Interactive Marketing	2240
New Media & Society	2140
Tourism Management	1763
Journal of Medical Internet Research	1571
Marketing Science	1418
Journal of Business Research	1273
Management Science	1042
American Behavioral Scientist	909
Information Communication & Society	889
Information Society	886
Decision Support Systems	878
MIS Quarterly	848
International Journal of Information Management	826
Journal of Consumer Culture	817
Journalism Studies	801
Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication	769
Media Culture & Society	747

Once again, it is possible to see the diversity of several areas of study and several scientific journals with different content. Thus, it is worth mentioning the magazine "Business Horizons", highly regarded and in this sample has a total of 6223 citations, twice the citations of the previous magazine.

Limitations of the Bibliometric Analysis

In this analysis, some limitations were found, existing in clarity of certain data. Due to the biblioshiny software powered by RStudio, it does not support certain types of referencing, thus affecting citations, authors, and sources. However, due to this loss of data representing a very small part of this sample, the analysis made portrays the reality of scientific production in the area of social media engagement, user-generated content, content marketing, online communities.

Social Media Posts

Post Structure

Over the years, there has been a shift in social media platforms, where content has moved to a visual focus rather than a text focus. This trend is due to the change in users' habits thanks to the popularity of smartphones and the improvement of the mobile experience. This way, users realise that it is easier to share a picture now through the smartphone's high-resolution camera than writing a status on a small mobile keyboard (Li & Xie, 2020). In this way, the social media world becomes more and more visual.

The three clubs included in this study, in the business context, are also brands. Thus, online brand communities provide various forms of expression, such as video, writing and images, in which all these forms culminate in a platform aimed at facilitating the use and expression of consumers, therefore posts on social media can be featured by text, images and videos (De Vries et al., 2012; Plume et al., 2016). Thus, in this study, the type of media refers to posts considered as such: "Image"; "Video"; and "Written Post". All posts in this analysis correspond to one of these variables.

Assessing the social networks studied, about the media type, Facebook is mainly a hybrid plaque that combines images and text in a similar proportion (Machado, Martins, Ferreira, Silva, & Duarte, 2020). Twitter is mostly a text-only platform, on which it was initially possible to post content with a limit of 140 characters; however, from November 2017 it was doubled to 280 characters. However, in addition to the focus on the text, users can post images and videos (Li & Xie, 2020). Instagram is famous for having a high engagement through its nature and visual content, having no textual component (Li & Xie, 2020; Machado et al., 2020).

A brand post with only text is not considered interactive, especially in the face of video that is more vivid than an image, because it not only stimulates vision but also stimulates hearing. In the world of sports, Weimar, Holthoff, & Biscaia, (2020) realised that fans of the German football league (Bundesliga), perceive content related to sponsorship in a more positive way, when it is delivered via video, compared to when it is transmitted by image or text, so basically we can consider that text is more abstract than visual images (Pittman & Reich, 2016). However the old saying "A picture is worth a thousand words" has become a new motto within the universe of managers and marketers and social networks (De Vries et al., 2012; Li & Xie, 2020).

Being the image such a pillar within the social networks, in terms of hypothesis, we formulate:

H1: Image posts perform better than Written posts.

H1.1: Image posts perform better than Written posts on Facebook.

H1.2: Image posts perform better than Written posts on Twitter.

H2: Image posts perform better than Video posts.

H2.1: Image posts perform better than Video posts on Facebook.

H2.2: Image posts perform better than Video posts on Twitter.

H2.3: Image posts perform better than Video posts on Instagram.

Post Content

In this research, posts from the three-social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) from the three clubs (SL Benfica, FC Porto and Sporting CP), were assigned to identifying classes. These classes are **Informative**, **Personal**, **Promotional** and **Game Tracking**. In the Informative class, are included the posts that provide information to the social network user. In the Personal class, are included posts referring to any figure of the club (coach, player, former player, etc.), or posts that appeal to the feeling of the user. By Promotional class, are included the posts that are sponsored directly by a brand. Finally, the Game Tracking class includes the posts that report the events of the matches of the various modalities inserted in the clubs to be analysed.

Informative

Searching for information is an important reason why people use social networks (Lin & Lu, 2011) and therefore, social media users are subject to an overflow of information (Li & Xie, 2020). In a post about a brand's information, fans of that brand will be motivated to participate or consume that same content (De Vries et al., 2012). Social media offers a mechanism for the dissemination and sharing of information, which enables consumers to be empowered (Hwang & Kim, 2015), in this way, it also allows consumers to use the online medium daily to obtain information that assists their purchasing decisions (Plume et al., 2016). In social networks, information can be content production, which allows users to create their content to share valuable insights about a brand, for example. However, it can also be content consumption, which refers to the ease with which users can obtain information about a brand through their connections within the social network (Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick,

Novak, & Hofacker, 2013). This study, the posts analysed, are more focused on content consumption, because although users disseminate information (through comments and other tools), the posts included in the category “Informative”, refer to posts that the club in question shared some kind of information for fans.

In the context of sport in the social media world, information is important. From a team perspective, fans turn to social media to have access to up-to-date information about the team, players, and other related aspects. In this way, by providing this type of information, the team allows fans to be satiated and satisfied before a match, for example (M D Meng, Stavros, & Westberg, 2015). Weimar et al. (2020) conclude that posts related to pre-game information and related news about players generate more reactions.

Thus, in terms of hypotheses related to the Informative category, we can formulate:

H3: Informative posts increases performance.

H3.1: Informative posts perform better on Facebook.

H3.2: Informative posts perform better on Twitter.

H3.3: Informative posts perform better on Instagram.

Personal

Organisations are beginning to adapt their relations with consumers more socially, seeking their needs and collaborating with them in a more personal way, so they can deliver what they want (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). In addition to the more emotional side of the category, posts that include birthday wishes to players and coaches team, recognition of sporting achievements (Osokin, 2019), and posts that aspire hope in fans, like player/coach announcements (Stavros, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014) are also included in this category. A prime example of that: Embury-Dennis, (2015) found that Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp in becoming the coach of the English team, caused a great deal of commotion in the social networks and the term "Klopp" became trendy. Not only posts about players or coaching staff, but posts that embellish the characteristics of the stadium, influence the behaviour of fans, using the nostalgia of the consumer experience when they visit the stadium (Kerr & Gladden, 2008).

In their study of a football club, P Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, & Chadwick, (2015) noted that posts related to star players and team success generate the greatest number of engagement among fans, both during and outside the sports season.

Furthermore, Weimar et al., (2020), in his study, concluded that player-related news generated more reactions than other posts.

In this study, the category of "Personal" encompasses both club personalities and posts that pull the emotions of their fans, so it is possible to formulate:

H4: Personal posts increases performance.

H4.1: Personal posts perform better on Facebook.

H4.2: Personal posts perform better on Twitter.

H4.3: Personal posts perform better on Instagram.

Promotional

Today, social media are present in the lives of users and organisations. Yet, Mangold & Faulds, (2009), at the beginning of this boom, left it present that social media has to be an integral part of the promotional strategy of organisations in order to achieve greater and different goals. Sponsors look at the versatility of social media platforms, and the possibilities to interact with sports fans (O'Reilly & Lafrance Horning, 2013).

Sports brands use social media to promote merchandise, tickets and other additional products and services (Hedlund, 2014; Kriemadis, Terzoudis, & Kartakoullis, 2010). Linking these commercial practices with fan satisfaction, Abosag, Roper, & Hind, (2012) found that the more a sports consumer is satisfied and their needs met, the more likely they are to consume products related to the brand itself.

In a similar study, analysing posts with NBA (National Basketball Association) categories, Matthew D. Meng, Stavros, & Westberg, (2015) named a "Marketing" category, which represented not only tickets, merchandising, but also special events with opportunities to meet players and exclusive pre-sales. This category shows the whole spectrum of what is commercial in a sports brand, and it is through this category that we can formulate:

H5: Promotional posts increases performance.

H5.1: Promotional posts perform better on Facebook.

H5.2: Promotional posts perform better on Twitter.

Game Tracking

The game itself is the central part of any sports team, Weimar et al., (2020) found that the games represent the moment that most fans expect. Social media

currently brings the component of being able to follow the game through the information debited in posts.

Concerning game tracking, social media also has an important role as it does not limit geographically, i.e. it allows fans to follow their favourite team anywhere in the world and be updated to the second (Gibbons & Dixon, 2010).

Also, the game tracking of matches in the social media field has synergy with promotion with other brands, for example in the English Premier League (EPL), which is the highest level of English football, when a team makes a post about a match, the presence of the league brand is inherent, thus creating a perfect opportunity for branding activities (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018). About social networks, the most acclaimed one for following games is Twitter, due to its nature and the fact that it allows users to tweet about their teams or what is happening in the game itself (Erp, Hage, Hollink, Jameson, & Troncy, 2011).

Overall, despite the volatility, posting after a victory will influence positive thinking (Weimar et al., 2020), and so we can formulate:

H6: Game Tracking posts increases performance.

H6.1: Game Tracking posts perform better on Facebook.

H6.2: Game Tracking posts perform better on Twitter.

H6.3: Game Tracking posts perform better on Instagram.

Methods

The term "performance," previously mentioned in the research hypotheses of this study, translates into posts with more metrics (likes, comments, and shares) in the hypothesis's context to be analysed. These metrics are of proportional importance in testing each hypothesis.

In order to analyse the results of this study, the IBM SPPS Statistics 26 software was used. The technique used is multiple linear regression, which explains the behaviour of a dependent variable with the behaviour of a set of independent variables.

Three dependent variables (DV) are analysed, Likes, Comments, and Shares in different models. The independent variables (IV) to analyse are Key Explanatory Variables, verified in Table 5. All these metrics were taken from the social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) of the three biggest clubs currently playing in the Portuguese Premier League, concerning the number of followers, Futebol Clube do Porto (FCP), Sport Lisboa e Benfica (SLB), and Sporting Clube de Portugal (SCP), as the table 5 indicates.

As we can see from table 6, only the dependent variables have metric values. The independent variables take the dichotomous form. Specifically, in explanatory variables, the variable "Image" is a dummy variable, because all the analysed publications can be classified by one of the control variables.

As for the time perspective of the data, they were taken from the social networks of the clubs included in this study, between 1 March and 31 March 2020. For the SLB and SCP, all the posts on the three social networks in this study were analysed. For FCP, all Instagram and Facebook posts in this timeline were analysed, but Twitter posts were analysed from 7 March to 31 March 2020. This change was because tweets before 7 March were not available at the time of data extraction.

Table 5 - Ranking of the number of followers, of the clubs participating in the main football league in Portugal. The numbers are related to social networks, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Data were taken from each club's official pages (26/09/2020).

Ranking	Football Club	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Total
1	Futebol Clube do Porto	4 073 782	1 250 434	1 560 218	6 884 434
2	Sport Lisboa e Benfica	3 726 116	1 322 879	1 655 770	6 704 765
3	Sporting Clube de Portugal	2 543 223	767 681	965 190	4 276 094
4	Sporting Clube de Braga	305 341	173 984	122 826	602 151
5	Vitória Sport Clube	177 218	45 112	106 014	328 344
6	Boavista Futebol Clube	145 534	43 565	46 206	235 305
7	Rio Ave Futebol Clube	116 206	34 877	43 246	194 329
8	Clube Sport Marítimo	130 201	13 859	23 130	167 190
9	Clube Desportivo Nacional	43 942	14 797	98 887	157 626
10	Portimonense Futebol SAD	77 750	8373	57 402	143 525
11	Futebol Clube Paços de Fereeira	89 208	20 307	24 208	133 723
12	Futebol Clube de Famalicão	56 859	7 050	59 553	123 462
13	Clube Desportivo Tondela	62 661	17 688	27 991	108 340
14	Clube Desportivo Santa Clara	46 211	2 119	26 348	74 678
15	Gil Vicente Futebol Clube	40 941	4 259	23 445	68 645
16	Sporting Clube Farense	42 845	1 432	18 763	63 040
17	Moreirense Futebol Clube	34 141	11 480	17 298	62 919
18	Belenenses Futebol SAD	5 827	1 218	7 947	14 992

When it comes to entering data, the values of the metrics "Comments" and "Shares" have been divided by 1000, to share the same unit of measurement as the metric "Likes".

Table 6 - Description of the variables used in this study, their description and type.

Variable	Description	Type
Dependent		
Likes	Number of times a social media user "likes" a post	Continuous
Comments	Number of times a social media user comments on a post	Continuous
Shares	Number of times a social media user shares a post	Continuous
Explanatory		
Informative	Posts that provide any information related in any way to the club (1 = yes 0 = no)	Binary
Personal	Posts that refer to a special moment, player or personality of the club (1 = yes 0 = no)	Binary
Promotional	Posts that promote a brand or product (1 = yes 0 = no)	Binary
Game Monitoring	Posts that report the events of a game (1 = yes 0 = no)	Binary
Video	Posts that include video (1 = yes 0 = no)	Binary
Image	Posts that include image (1 = yes 0 = no)	Binary
Written Post	Publications that only include writing (1 = yes 0 = no)	Binary

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 7 reports the descriptive statistics of the total sample under analysis. From these data, it is possible to draw several conclusions. We see that in these three different social networks analysed, Twitter has a much higher sample number than the other social networks; that is, a larger number of posts were made in the period of analysis. It should be remembered that in the metrics of dependent variables, the values were divided by 1000 to facilitate the treatment and subsequent analysis of the data. Thus, we note that there is a balance between sharing and likes on Twitter, a highlight in comments on Facebook, and an astonishing number of likes on average on Instagram.

The remaining variables are dichotomous, so they can be valued at 1 or 0. In this way, we highlight personal publications and in a less significant way, promotional publications. As for the predominant type of publication, the publications in this sample are classified as "Image".

Table 7 - Descriptive statistics of the dependent variables.

	Twitter			**Facebook**			**Instagram**		
Variable	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Likes	1125	401,18	736,00	512	2534,00	2220,85	302	21121,00	10919,00
Comments	1125	5,96	162,52	512	532,53	6551,04	302	373,54	3933,75
Shares	1125	556,30	158,14	512	126,82	210,37	302	-	-

Regression Results

The results obtained from the multiple linear regression performed were divided into models for a more effective analysis. These models correspond to the variable's dependent on each social network analysed (Table 8).

Table 8 - Structure of the models corresponding to the dependent variables of the study.

Model	Metrics	Social Media
1.1	Likes	Facebook
1.2	Likes	Twitter
1.3	Likes	Instagram
2.1	Comments	Facebook
2.2	Comments	Twitter
2.3	Comments	Instagram
3.1	Shares	Facebook
3.2	Shares	Twitter

Before analysing the results of this study, it is relevant for the research to mention the R^2 values, which for each model are: Model 1.1 (0.090); Model 1.2 (0.105); Model 1.3 (0.094); Model 2.1 (0.004); Model 2.2 (0.011); Model 2.3 (0.025); Model 3.1 (0.038); Model 3.2 (0.043).

Regarding the linear regression data for the Media Type section of this article, we find that Model $1.1_{\text{Written Post}}$ ($\beta = -0.0575$; $p > 0.05$) and Model $2.1_{\text{Written Post}}$ ($\beta = -0.079$; $p > 0.05$) are predictors that the Image variable has more performance than the Written Post variable. Model $3.1_{\text{Written Post}}$ ($\beta = 0.003$; $p > 0.05$) allow us to verify that concerning Shares in Facebook, the performance of posts relative to the Image variable is similar to the performance of the Written Post variable. Although the results indicate a better performance of the Image variable than the Written Post variable, the p values are not statistically significant. Therefore **H1.1** is not supported. On Twitter, the Image variable has a higher performance than the Written Post variable since Model $1.2_{\text{Written Post}}$ ($\beta = -0.175$; $p < 0.01$), Model $2.2_{\text{Written Post}}$ ($\beta = -0.003$; $p < 0.01$), and Model $3.2_{\text{Written Post}}$ ($\beta = -0.023$; $p < 0.01$) are predictors of this, thus supporting **H1.2**.

About the Video variable, on Facebook, looking at Model 1.1_{Video} ($\beta = 0.061$; $p > 0.05$), Model 2.1_{Video} ($\beta = 0.772$; $p > 0.05$), and Model 3.1_{Video} ($\beta = 0.083$; $p < 0.01$), we concluded that the video component has better performance in Facebook Shares, so the opposite effect of **H2.1** is supported**.** Moving on, on Twitter, although Model 2.2_{Video} ($\beta = -0.002$; $p > 0.05$) is not statistically significant, Model 1.2_{Video} ($\beta = 0.124$; $p < 0.05$) and Model 3.2_{Video} ($\beta = 0.022$; $p < 0.05$) prove that the opposite effect of **H2.2** is supported, so as far as Likes and Shares are concerned, Twitter Video has

better performance than Images. About Instagram, Model 1.3_{Video} (β = - 6.707; $p < 0.01$) strongly shows that Images perform better than Video, however Model 2.3_{Video} (β = 0.465; $p > 0.05$) is not statistically significant, so **H2.3** is partially supported.

Table 9 – Models' results.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Constant	1,869	0,420	23,444	- 0,036	0,009	1,530	0,083	0,063
Promotional	- 0,641		1,642	0,022		- 1,359	- 0,031	
Informative	0,208	- 0,054	- 4,441	0,268	- 0,002	- 1,425	- 0,003	- 0,014
Personal	1,236*	0,200*	0,953	0,480	- 0,003***	- 1,586	0,033	0,017
Game Tracking	0,819***	- 0,198*	1,697	0,352	- 0,001	- 1,502	0,020	- 0,032**
Video	0,061	0,124***	- 6,707*	0,772	- 0,002	0,465	0.083*	0,022***
Written Post	- 0,575	- 0,175*		- 0,079	- 0,003**		0,003	- 0,023***
N	512	1125	302	512	1125	302	512	1125
R Square	0,090	0,105	0,094	0,004	0,011	0,025	0,049	0,043
Adjusted R Square	0,079	0,101	0,079	- 0,007	0,007	0,008	0,038	0,039
Df regression	6	5	5	6	5	5	6	5
Df residual	505	1119	296	505	1119	296	505	1119
F	8,314	26,217	6,29	0,369	2,474	1,497	4,346	10,057

Notes: $p \leq 0{,}001$*; $p < 0{,}01$**; $p < 0{,}05$***

For the independent *Informative* variable, in all the social networks analysed in this study, and in all the factors, the relationships did not show statistical significance i.e. [Model $1.1_{Informative}$ (β = 0.208; $p > 0.05$); Model $1.2_{Informative}$ (β = - 0.054; $p > 0.05$); Model $1.3_{Informative}$ (β = -4.441; $p > 0.05$); Model $2.1_{Informative}$ (β = 0.268; $p > 0.05$); Model $2.2_{Informative}$ (β = - 0.002; $p > 0.05$); Model $2.3_{Informative}$ (β = - 1.425; $p >$0.05); Model $3.1_{Informative}$ (β = - 0.003; $p > 0.05$); Model $3.2_{Informative}$ (β = - 0.014; $p > 0.05$)]. Thus, throughout all the metrics, it was not possible to support any of the **hypotheses 3.1**, **3.2** and **3.3**.

On the *Personal* variable, on Facebook, there was a strong performance in the Likes section, i.e. Model $1.1_{Personal}$ (β = 1.236; $p < 0.01$) partially supporting **H4.1** since Model $2.1_{Personal}$ (β = 0.480; $p > 0.05$) and Model $3.1_{Personal}$ (β = 0.033; $p > 0.05$) are not statistically significant. Then, on Twitter, the Model $3.2_{Personal}$ (β = 0.017; $p > 0.05$) corresponding to Shares (in this case Retweets), is not statistically significant. However, Model $1.2_{Personal}$ (β = 0.200; $p < 0.01$) supports the performance of Personal posts, on the other hand, Model $2.2_{Personal}$ (β = - 0.003; $p < 0.05$) supports the opposite of the hypothesis. Thus, since Model $1.2_{Personal}$ is more significant, **H4.2** is partially supported. In Instagram, the data of Model $1.3_{Personal}$ (β = 0.953; $p > 0.05$) and Model

$6_{Personal}$ (β = - 1.586; p > 0.05) are not statistically significant, so **H4.3** cannot be supported.

As with the Informative variable, it was not possible to analyse the data because they were not statistically significant, the same happens for the *Promotional* variable i.e. [Model $1.1_{Promotional}$ (β = - 0.641; p > 0.05); Model $1.3_{Promotional}$ (β = 1.642; p > 0.05); Model $2.1_{Promotional}$ (β = 0.022; p > 0.05); Model $2.3_{Promotional}$ (β = - 1.359; p > 0.05); Model $3.1_{Promotional}$ (β = - 0.031; p > 0.05). Model 1.2, Model 2.2 and Model 3.2 are not present as there were no promotional posts on twitter in the sample analysed. Thus, through the metrics, none of the **5.1** or **5.2 hypotheses** could be supported.

Finally, about the variable *Game Tracking*, on Facebook, the data once again are not statistically significant, on Model $2.1_{Game\ Tracking}$ (β = 0.352; p > 0.05) and Model $3.1_{Game\ Tracking}$ (β = 0.020; p >0.05), therefore Model $1.1_{Game\ Tracking}$ (0.819; p < 0.05) supports Game Tracking posts performance, so **H6.1** is partially supported. On Twitter, Model $1.2_{Game\ Tracking}$ (β = - 0.198; p < 0.01) and Model $3.2_{Game\ Tracking}$ (β = - 0.032; p < 0.05) show that Game Tracking retweets (shares) don't have the best performance, however, Model $2.2_{Game\ Tracking}$ (β = - 0.001; p > 0.05) is not statistically significant, thus the results support the opposite of **H6.2** sharing wise. In Instagram, Model $1.3_{Game\ Tracking}$ (β = 1.697; p > 0.05) and Model $2.3_{Game\ Tracking}$ (β = - 1.502; p > 0.05) are not statistically significant, so they do not support **H6.3**.

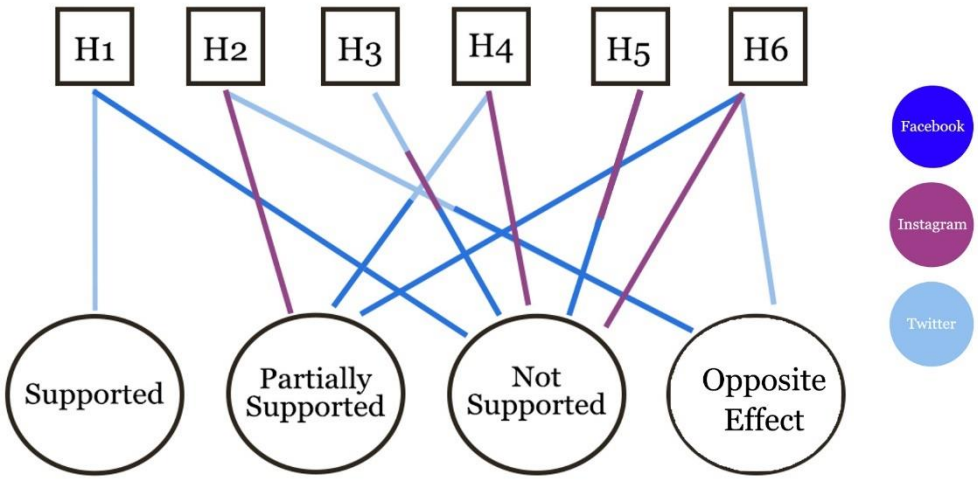

Figure 2 - Summary of the outcome of the study hypothesis.

To summarise the results of this study, figure 2 represents the outcome of the proposed hypotheses. The only hypothesis fully supported was **H1.1**, corresponding to posts with Images performance better than Written Posts. However, several hypotheses were partially supported, as for one hypothesis to be fully supported, metrics (Likes, Comments and Shares) would have to perform better on all social networks (Facebook,

Twitter and Instagram), depending on their context. There are also hypotheses in which its alternative was supported, contrary to the hypothesis initially drafted, thus stating consistent conclusions that contribute to the study. Finally, the figure also represents that most of the assumptions made were not supported because certain coefficients did not have significant statistical values.

Discussion

This study puts the three biggest football clubs in Portugal under analysis and ends up showing that the line of posts is similar among them. It is important to note that the data collected between 1 and 31 March were inserted at a different time for all organisations, not only football clubs, which was the global pandemic of COVID-19, not least because, on 13 March, Portugal was in a state of emergency, thus limiting sports practices in general. Due to this conjecture, different and more diversified content was created by the marketing teams of these clubs under analysis. It is important to note these facts, hence the opening of post classes, i.e. (Informative, Personal, Promotional, Game Tracking), because in this way it allowed to meeting all the events in the timeline of analysis.

Concerning the hypotheses tested in this study, we found that most of the stipulated hypotheses were not supported. However, looking at **H1.2**, we see that on Twitter, the Images perform better on the three dependent variables analysed, being Likes, Comments and Shares. Considering that the **H1.2** of this study was supported, there are studies in the literature on social media and media types, which show the superiority of image-based content related to text-related content. Pittman & Reich (2016) questioned whether an image in Instagram was worth more than a thousand words on Twitter and confirmed that image-based social media platforms generate more happiness and less loneliness in young adults. On a similar note, Li & Xie, (2020) also wanted to prove if an image was worth more than a thousand words, through an empirical study on image content and social engagement on Twitter and thus concludes that the simple presence of an image in a tweet, translates into increased social media metrics.

On the other hand, **H2.3** has been partially supported, a hypothesis which refers to Instagram. It was partially supported that Images had a higher performance than the video component of Instagram, this can be explained by the fact that in the analysis made the posts with Images had more likes than posts with video in this social network. However, we suggest that this aspect is due to the very layout of the social network, in which, in publications with a video component, it does not directly show the likes in the publication. However, the views of the video, not biasing the user to

"like" the publication. Nonetheless, there is literature that supports that video is outperforming image type content, per example, Romão, Moro, Rita, & Ramos, (2019) affirm that the video format on social networks like Instagram and Facebook is one of the best ways to distribute content to consumers, having better reach and engagement. De Vries et al., (2012) and Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, (2014) claim that types of media such as image and video are responsible for a positive influence of social media metrics. The literature that supports the video format as superior on social networks cements the fact that **H2.1** and **H2.2** support the opposite of their initial hypothesis. **H2.1** state that on Twitter, retweets that integrated video performed better than retweets that integrated images. Similarly, **H2.2** has superior performance on Likes and Share on Facebook, in video posts versus image posts.

Regarding Personal posts, and the hypothesis that comes with it, **H4.1** and **H4.2** were partially supported, on Facebook and Twitter, respectively. Both hypotheses were partially supported in Likes' performance, with superior strength on Facebook (Table 9). Osokin, (2019), noted in a study analysing social media posts from European football associations, that in one particular post from the Football Association of Northern Ireland on the legendary footballer George Best generated 1300 likes, while the average of likes in the sample on that Facebook page was 230. In the same study, Osokin (2019), also concludes that the followers of this type of football Facebook pages, take the opportunity to congratulate players, staff and other members, through posts by the association that include birthday wishes, recognition of sporting successes, and personal events about their favourite athletes. As the good performance of likes in this study coincides, we can state that followers of sports pages (in this case, football) encourage engagement in personal posts.

About Game Tracking posts, concerning performance on Facebook, **H6.1** was partially supported, so it was supported concerning Likes. On the other hand, as far as Twitter is concerned, the opposite of the hypothesis written in the Shares component has been proved (**H6.2**). About **H6.2** where it was proved the opposite of the hypothesis, we suggest that about sharing on Twitter, the results are not "retweetable" type of posts, not least because Twitter is the social network where its characteristics allow the monitoring of games (Erp et al., 2011). Because of this, the number of tweets concerning the monitoring of games is much higher than other classes of Tweets, so it becomes little "unique" to be retweeted on a large scale. On the other hand, on Facebook, the clubs published match follow-up posts, only at the beginning of the game and at the time of the final result. Hence, the posts had a more restricted component, promoting metrics like likes, corresponding to **H6.1**.

To conclude the discussion of the results of this study, unfortunately, the remaining hypotheses written do not present significant statistical data to be considered. Therefore, **H3** and **H5**, corresponding to Informative posts and Promotional posts, were fully not supported. Certain sub hypotheses are also categorised as unsupported, such as **H1.1**; **H4.3**; **H6.3**, because the data are not statistically significant.

Conclusion

This study presents a varied analysis of the main social network posts in sport, to classify these types of posts and to understand to what extent, metrics related to social media, can manipulate the performance and engagement of posts.

The suggestions to football clubs include not standardising strategies for the three main social networks (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). For example, through this study, it was conclusive that personal posts, which involve nostalgic moments of former club figures, and birthday wishes of former and current players, work more effectively on Twitter and Facebook. Through the hypotheses drafted, there was an opportunity to draw interesting conclusions, aimed at a growing trend of audiovisual media regarding written publications, showing that, in the social network which is more suited to writing (Twitter), posts that included images had a better performance than written posts. In practical terms, the posts that report the game to the fan via social network, on Twitter happened the opposite effect to the written hypothesis, allowing us to perceive that there are no positive performative indexes in this social network. Instead, on Facebook, these same publications had higher performance, and the condition that changed in the different realities was the number of publications. On Twitter, the clubs make several publications that transmit various moments of the game. At the same time, on Facebook, they only indicate the beginning, interval and end of the game, this being a form more oriented to the increase of performance.

In general, this study made it possible to study the vast literature on social media, and crucial components for its understanding. In terms of future directions, studies like this, in different contexts, be they different clubs, different leagues, different countries, different time-lapses and even different sports. Moreover, the addition of demographic components to this type of study will allow the narrowing of conclusions and the understanding of performance on social networks at a deeper level. These alternatives and suggestions have the potential to bring and cement conclusions about the types of posts written on social media platforms and to present standards of publications for the improvement of media strategies of sports organisations.

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