

Mohammadkazemi, Reza; Falahat, Mohammad

## Article

# Leveraging social media for business development: an empirical analysis of fan loyalty and fan expansion

Cogent Business & Management

## Provided in Cooperation with:

Taylor & Francis Group

*Suggested Citation:* Mohammadkazemi, Reza; Falahat, Mohammad (2024) : Leveraging social media for business development: an empirical analysis of fan loyalty and fan expansion, Cogent Business & Management, ISSN 2331-1975, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, Vol. 11, Iss. 1, pp. 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2393739>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/326508>

### Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

### Terms of use:

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

## Leveraging social media for business development: an empirical analysis of fan loyalty and fan expansion

Reza Mohammadkazemi & Mohammad Falahat

To cite this article: Reza Mohammadkazemi & Mohammad Falahat (2024) Leveraging social media for business development: an empirical analysis of fan loyalty and fan expansion, Cogent Business & Management, 11:1, 2393739, DOI: [10.1080/23311975.2024.2393739](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2393739)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2393739>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 23 Aug 2024.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 3463



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 3 [View citing articles](#)

# Leveraging social media for business development: an empirical analysis of fan loyalty and fan expansion

Reza Mohammadkazemi<sup>a,b</sup>  and Mohammad Falahat<sup>c</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Entrepreneurship, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran; <sup>b</sup>Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark; <sup>c</sup>School of Marketing and Management, Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation (APU), Technology Park Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of social media in driving business development for Danish professional football clubs. It particularly examines how social media engagement impacts fan loyalty, fan size, and overall business growth. We employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze data from a total sample of 127 participants, collected through questionnaires distributed to club directors and fans across Denmark. The findings reveal that social media fan pages significantly contribute to business growth, with leading social media platforms playing a crucial role. Specifically, social media engagement enhances both fan loyalty and fan size, which directly impacts the overall business development of football clubs. Theoretically, this research introduces a new model elucidating how premier social media platforms influence fan loyalty, fan size, and the overarching business development of football clubs. It expands our understanding of brand loyalty and business growth within the social media context. Practically, it provides actionable insights for club stakeholders on effectively utilizing social media platforms to foster fan loyalty, grow their fan base, and achieve substantial business growth. This study makes a novel contribution to the academic literature on sports club business development through social media. It offers both theoretical and practical insights into effective commercial strategies that clubs can employ to leverage social media engagement, marking a significant step forward in football club commercial strategy.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 8 May 2024  
Revised 28 June 2024  
Accepted 1 August 2024

## KEYWORDS

Social media; business development; fan expansion; fan loyalty; football club

## SUBJECTS

Marketing; Advertising; Consumer Behavior; International Marketing; Internet/Digital Marketing/e-Marketing; Marketing Communications; Marketing Management; Relationship Marketing; Sports Development

## Introduction

The proliferation of social media has revolutionized many industries, including the world of sports. This paper delves into the impact of social media on the business development of football clubs, with a specific focus on the Danish football league. Brand loyalty, often perceived as a key metric of business development, is influenced significantly by social media interactions. However, to fully understand this relationship, it is imperative to consider other contributing factors.

In exploring this dynamic, we reference the strategy implemented by Liverpool FC, not as an isolated case but as an exemplar of the broader potential social media holds for football clubs. This case underscores how effectively leveraging social media platforms can enhance fan engagement and, subsequently, business development. We will contextualize this within the broader spectrum of social media's impact on sports marketing and fan interaction.

The choice of Denmark as our research setting is not arbitrary. The Danish Football League presents a unique blend of passionate fan bases and progressive social media usage, making it an ideal context to study the nuances of digital fan engagement and its effects on football clubs' business models.

**CONTACT** Mohammad Falahat  [Mohammad.falahat@apu.edu.my](mailto:Mohammad.falahat@apu.edu.my)  School of Marketing and Management, Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation (APU), Technology Park Malaysia, Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur, 57000, Malaysia.

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

The use of social media is pivotal in shaping the business development of Danish professional football clubs. This study delves into how these clubs leverage social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, not only to widen their fan bases but also to strengthen team loyalty. While acknowledging the general significance of social media in business strategies across various industries, as noted by Rodriguez et al. (2012), we focus specifically on the unique landscape of sports organizations.

Recognizing brand loyalty as a cornerstone of business development (Qualman, 2010), we examine the role of social media in enhancing business development within the context of football clubs. This is particularly relevant given Tsotsou's (2013) insights on promotional initiatives in sports teams aimed at nurturing fan interest and participation. The example of Liverpool Football Club, analyzed by Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015), serves as a model of successful social media strategy in football clubs, showing how a customer-centric approach can lead to substantial growth in international markets.

Recent studies have underscored the positive impact of digital media on customer loyalty in sports contexts, confirming the need for tailored strategies in sports marketing to optimize social media's influence (Chelladurai, 2013; Doyle et al., 2020). However, our research will not encompass the 'dark side' of social media engagement, as noted by Payne and Frow (2017), as it falls outside our study's scope.

While acknowledging the multifaceted nature of social media, this study focuses on its positive aspects, particularly in building and sustaining brand loyalty. The introduction of dark aspects of social media, while relevant, falls outside the scope of our current research. This study aims to investigate how social media engagement enhances fan loyalty and fan size, which in turn drives the business development of football clubs. We draw upon theoretical frameworks from previous research, such as Lim et al. (2015), Santos et al. (2019), and Yoshida et al. (2018), to develop our conceptual model and hypotheses.

## Literature review

The integration of social media in business strategies, particularly for sports organizations, has been a focal point of contemporary research. The initial conceptualization of social media as a business tool was broad, focusing mainly on its capacity to enhance customer interaction and brand exposure (Mohammadkazemi et al., 2020; Prodanova & Van Looy, 2019; Todd & Javalgi, 2007). While the role of information technology and communication infrastructure in global market development has been widely recognized (Todd & Javalgi, 2007), the specific impact of social media on football clubs' business growth demands a more nuanced examination. This review builds upon foundational studies (Lee et al., 2016; Prodanova & Van Looy, 2019) and explores three critical areas: the role of social media in business development, the influence of social media platforms on fan loyalty, and the influence of fan loyalty on business development.

### *Role of social media in business development*

Social media has become a pivotal element in modern business strategies, driving customer engagement, brand awareness, and ultimately business growth. Platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube enable businesses to reach a broader audience, facilitate direct communication, and build stronger relationships with customers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Studies have shown that social media marketing significantly enhances brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, and business performance (Akar et al., 2015; Casaló et al., 2010).

In sports organizations, social media is used not only for marketing but also for fan engagement and community building. By leveraging social media, sports clubs can interact with fans in real-time, share exclusive content, and create a sense of belonging among supporters (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). This interaction is crucial for sustaining fan interest and participation, which are key drivers of business development in sports clubs (Tsotsou, 2013). Recent studies highlight the potential of social media from a multi-platform perspective, underscoring its role in connecting with fans in the digital age (Fried & Mumcu, 2017; Hull & Abeza, 2021; Romero-Jara et al., 2023).

### ***Influence of social media platforms on fan loyalty***

Fan loyalty is a critical metric for the success of sports organizations. Social media platforms play a significant role in fostering this loyalty by providing fans with a direct line of communication with their favorite teams and players. Studies have highlighted the effectiveness of platforms like Facebook and Twitter in building a loyal fan base (Doyle et al., 2020; Vale & Fernandes, 2018).

Social media engagement enhances fan loyalty by allowing fans to interact with content, participate in discussions, and feel a part of the team's community. Research indicates that social media activities, such as liking, sharing, and commenting on posts, contribute to a fan's emotional and psychological connection to the team, thus increasing attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Gladden & Funk, 2001; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004).

### ***Influence of fan loyalty on business development***

The relationship between fan loyalty and business development is well-documented in the literature. Loyal fans are more likely to attend games, purchase merchandise, and engage in other revenue-generating activities, which directly contribute to the financial success of sports clubs (Mahony et al., 2000; Wu et al., 2012).

Fan loyalty also leads to positive word-of-mouth and advocacy, attracting new fans and expanding the club's reach. This expansion is crucial for business development, as a larger and more engaged fan base translates into higher ticket sales, sponsorship deals, and overall revenue (Oliver, 1999; Yun et al., 2020). Moreover, loyal fans provide valuable feedback and insights that can help clubs improve their offerings and better cater to their audience, further driving business growth.

Recognizing the potential endogeneity between social media engagement and fan loyalty, our conceptual model delves into the relationship where both elements can influence each other. This approach allows us to investigate the possibility of reverse causality and how fan loyalty might in turn shape a club's social media strategies.

### ***Conceptual framework and hypotheses development***

Based on the literature review, we developed a conceptual model to examine the relationships between social media engagement, fan loyalty, fan size, and business development. The model hypothesizes the following relationships:

**H1:** Social media engagement on Facebook positively impacts the business development of football clubs.

**H2:** Social media engagement on Facebook positively impacts fan loyalty.

**H3:** Social media engagement on Facebook positively impacts fan size.

**H4:** Social media engagement on Instagram positively impacts the business development of football clubs.

**H5:** Social media engagement on Instagram positively impacts fan loyalty.

**H6:** Social media engagement on Instagram positively impacts fan size.

**H7:** Social media engagement on Twitter positively impacts the business development of football clubs.

**H8:** Social media engagement on Twitter positively impacts fan loyalty.

**H9:** Social media engagement on Twitter positively impacts fan size.

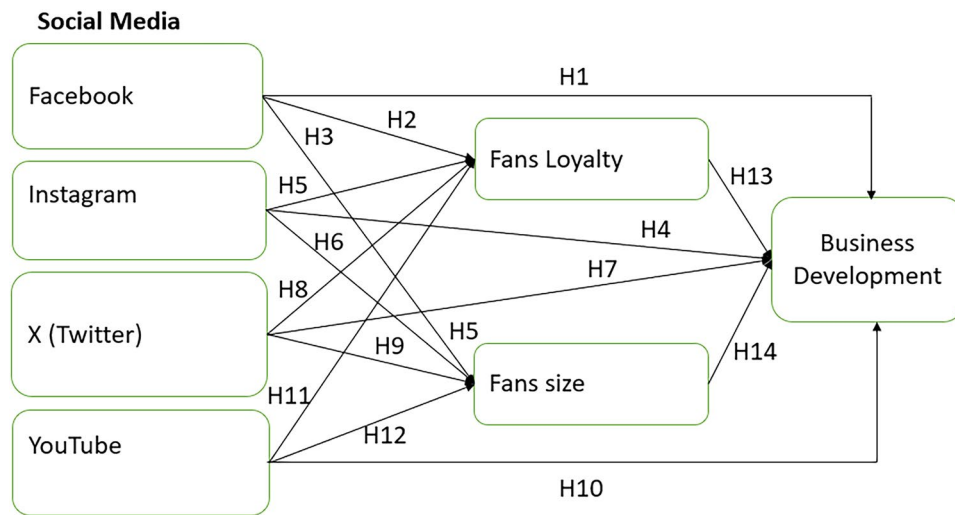
**H10:** Social media engagement on YouTube positively impacts the business development of football clubs.

**H11:** Social media engagement on YouTube positively impacts fan loyalty.

**H12:** Social media engagement on YouTube positively impacts fan size.

**H13:** Fan loyalty positively impacts the business development of football clubs.

**H14:** Fan size positively impacts the business development of football clubs.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model.

These hypotheses build upon the existing literature, aiming to fill gaps in understanding the specific mechanisms through which social media impacts the business development of football clubs (refer to Figure 1).

## Research method

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of social media on the business development of football clubs. This will be achieved by analyzing the loyalty of fans and the number of fans who engage with the teams on various social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Given the practical applications of this study in the context of football club business development, it is considered applied research. The research methodology is quantitative and descriptive, using a correlational approach with variance-covariance matrix analysis. The study's statistical population focuses on football club fans and directors in Denmark, with a statistical sample selected using the Cochran Formula.

## Data collection

Data for this study was collected through an online questionnaire targeting football fans in Denmark. The use of an online survey allowed us to reach a diverse and geographically dispersed sample, ensuring a wide representation of the fan base. The questionnaire was distributed through various channels, including social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), email newsletters, and official club websites. This multi-channel approach helped maximize participation and ensure a representative sample.

The questionnaire, adapted from Akar et al. (2015) and Gargone (2011), assesses fan motives and club engagement across a broad age range and educational levels. A total sample of 127 responses were received, aged between 10 and 70, with educational levels ranging from high school to advanced degrees. The age range was intentionally broad to capture the diverse demographic of football fans and ensure that the study reflects the engagement patterns across different age groups. Including a wide age range helps us understand how social media engagement may vary among different age cohorts and its impact on fan loyalty and business development.

## Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria for the study were as follows: (1) participants must be active fans of the football clubs included in the study, (2) participants must have an active social media account and follow the club on at least one platform, and (3) participants must be aged between 10 and 70 years to ensure a broad representation of the fan base.

### ***Representativeness of the sample***

The representativeness of the sample was ensured by comparing the demographic characteristics of the respondents with the general fan base of the clubs considered in the study. Demographic data, such as age, gender, and educational background, were collected and analyzed to ensure they matched the demographic profile of the clubs' fan base. This comparison confirmed that the sample was representative of the broader fan population, providing confidence that the findings can be generalized to the entire fan base.

### ***Measurement scales***

#### ***Business development***

The scale for measuring business development was designed to capture various aspects of how social media influences the growth and commercial success of football clubs. This scale includes items that assess factors, such as increased ticket sales, merchandise revenue, sponsorship deals, and overall financial performance. The items were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

#### ***Fan loyalty***

Fan loyalty was measured using a scale that captures both attitudinal loyalty (psychological commitment to a team) and behavioral loyalty (actions related to consumption and brand loyalty). This scale was adapted from Gladden and Funk (2001) and Iwasaki and Havitz (2004). The items were also measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

#### ***Fan size***

Fan size was measured by assessing the number of fans who actively engage with the team on social media platforms. This scale includes items, such as the number of followers on the club's social media pages, the level of interaction (likes, comments, shares) on the club's posts, and the growth rate of the club's social media followers over time.

These scales were validated through a pilot test, ensuring both reliability and validity. The Cronbach's alpha for all scales was above the 0.7 threshold, indicating good internal consistency. Additionally, factor analysis confirmed the constructs' validity, with all items loading significantly on their respective factors.

### ***Demographic information***

The sample consisted of 127 participants, with the majority being male (82%) and aged between 20 and 30 years (75%). Most participants were single (46%) and held an undergraduate degree (32%).

### ***Analysis and findings***

Our analysis unfolded in two phases. Initially, we examined demographic data from participants summarized in Table 1. This demographic breakdown, including gender, age, marital status, and educational level, provided a foundational understanding of our sample population.

In the second phase, we employed the Partial Least Squares Method (PLS), adhering to Hair et al. (2012)'s recommendations for both internal and external model assessments. Table 2 outlines the reliability and validity indexes, showing that each item's factor loading surpasses the 0.4 threshold, indicating strong item reliability. Constructs' Cronbach's alpha values exceed the 0.6 minimum (Moss et al., 1998), and composite reliability for all constructs is above 0.707, affirming construct reliability.

We evaluated convergent validity using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index, with all constructs meeting Chin (1998)'s minimum threshold of 0.5. Discriminant validity, assessed by comparing the square root of AVE for each construct against its correlation with other variables, is confirmed in Table 3.



**Table 1.** Demographic information.

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	104	81.9
	Female	23	18.1
	Total	127	100
Age	10–20	4	3.1
	20–30	95	74.8
	30–40	16	12.6
	40–50	11	8.7
	60–70	1	0.8
	Total	127	100
Marital status	Married	26	20.5
	Single	58	45.7
	Other	43	33.9
	Total	127	100
Education level	High school	18	14.2
	Some college	10	7.9
	Under graduate degree	41	32.3
	Master's degree	36	28.3
	Advanced degree (M.D. or Ph.D.)	22	17.3
Total		127	100

**Table 2.** Factor loadings, reliability, and validity indexes of items and constructs.

Construct	Item	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Facebook	FB1	0.859	0.863	0.902	0.649
	FB2	0.797			
	FB3	0.808			
	FB4	0.858			
	FB5	0.695			
Twitter	Tw1	0.933	0.958	0.967	0.856
	Tw2	0.960			
	Tw3	0.910			
	Tw4	0.918			
	Tw5	0.905			
Instagram	Ins1	0.918	0.964	0.972	0.874
	Ins2	0.912			
	Ins3	0.933			
	Ins4	0.938			
	Ins5	0.973			
YouTube	Yt1	0.779	0.929	0.947	0.783
	Yt2	0.825			
	Yt3	0.940			
	Yt4	0.942			
	Yt5	0.926			
Loyalty of fans	LYLT1	0.937	0.928	0.946	0.748
	LYLT2	0.923			
	LYLT3	0.944			
	LYLT4	0.929			
	LYLT5	0.744			
	LYLT6	0.670			
Number of fans	NumGr1	0.818	0.927	0.949	0.824
	NumGr2	0.951			
	NumGr3	0.929			
	NumGr4	0.927			
Business development of club	Dev1	0.799	0.962	0.967	0.746
	Dev10	0.920			
	Dev2	0.836			
	Dev3	0.899			
	Dev4	0.855			
	Dev5	0.922			
	Dev6	0.890			
	Dev7	0.882			
	Dev8	0.861			
	Dev9	0.762			

Our structural model analysis and hypothesis testing results are presented in [Table 4](#). A significant finding was the considerable impact of Facebook club fan pages on business development and fan numbers. Instagram emerged as influential for both business development and team loyalty, as well as fan numbers. Twitter notably affected team loyalty, while YouTube had a substantial impact on business development, team loyalty, and fan numbers.



**Table 3.** Discriminant validity of constructs.

	Business development	Facebook	Instagram	Loyalty of fans	Number of fans	Twitter	YouTube
Business development of club	<b>0.864</b>						
Facebook	0.568	<b>0.806</b>					
Instagram	0.441	0.759	<b>0.935</b>				
Loyalty of fans	0.632	0.731	0.861	<b>0.865</b>			
Number of fans	0.884	0.577	0.484	0.712	<b>0.900</b>		
Twitter	0.387	0.787	0.877	0.804	0.503	<b>0.900</b>	
YouTube	0.594	0.769	0.747	0.774	0.612	0.677	<b>0.885</b>

**Table 4.** Structural model analysis.

Hypothesis	Descriptions	$\gamma$	t-Value	Decision
1	Facebook => Business development of club	0.199	2.289	Supported
2	Facebook => Fans loyalty	-0.011	0.099	Not supported
3	Facebook => Fans size	0.226	2.280	Supported
4	Instagram => Business development of club	-0.157	2.107	Supported
5	Instagram => Fans loyalty	0.484	6.624	Supported
6	Instagram => Fans size	-0.181	2.048	Supported
7	X(Twitter) => Business development of club	0.155	1.794	Not supported
8	X(Twitter) => Fans loyalty	0.191	3.116	Supported
9	X(Twitter) => Fans size	0.175	1.815	Not supported
10	YouTube => Business development of club	0.402	3.732	Supported
11	YouTube => Fans loyalty	0.292	3.880	Supported
12	YouTube => Fans size	0.455	3.887	Supported
13	Fans loyalty => Business development of club	0.004	0.108	Not supported
14	Fans size => Business development of club	0.881	25.022	Supported

The demographic analysis revealed that 82% of respondents were male and 75% were aged 20–30 years. Additionally, 46% were single, and 32% had undergraduate education. These demographics provide context for understanding the social media engagement patterns observed in our study.

## Discussion

The emergence of social media has brought about a significant transformation in the sports industry. Platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have enabled sports businesses to communicate with millions of users and promote their brands effectively. The research presented in this paper aimed to investigate the impact of social media on the business development of football clubs.

The findings of this study demonstrate that Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have a significant positive impact on the business development of football clubs, while Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter significantly impact fan loyalty. The results also revealed that the number of fans has a significant positive relationship with the business development of football clubs. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that established the crucial role of social media in the football industry and how it positively influences brand loyalty and business development (Casaló et al., 2010; De Vries et al., 2012; Filo et al., 2015; Kardaras et al., 2003; McCarthy et al., 2014; MohammadKazemi, 2015; Wysocki, 2012).

Our research is a valuable contribution to the existing literature on sports club business development through social media activities. The study's theoretical implications are significant, as we developed a new model that demonstrates the positive impact of various social media platforms on fan loyalty, the number of fans, and the overall business development of football clubs. By testing our model on some of the top social media sports club fan pages within the context of football clubs in Denmark, we were able to demonstrate that social media activities can significantly enhance business performance and business development.

Our research also extends the concept of brand loyalty and business development to social media, emphasizing the unique characteristics of these platforms as highlighted by researchers, such as Hu and Kettinger (2008) and Soliman and Beaudry (2010). The study's practical implications are also significant, as it provides sports-related business practitioners with more insights into sports club business development activities within social media contexts. The findings of this research will aid sports businesses in creating and improving fan pages on social media platforms to increase the number of fans and enhance their loyalty, thereby positively impacting business performance and development.

### ***Managerial implications***

The findings of this study have several important implications for the management of football clubs, particularly in the context of leveraging social media for business development. The integration of social media strategies can significantly influence both fan loyalty and fan size, which are critical drivers of business growth. Below, we outline key managerial implications based on our research:

Football clubs should invest in robust social media strategies to engage with fans. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube offer unique opportunities to connect with fans in real-time, share exclusive content, and foster a sense of community. Engaging content, regular interactions, and exclusive insights can significantly enhance fan loyalty.

Our findings suggest that active engagement on social media platforms can lead to increased ticket sales, merchandise revenue, and new sponsorship deals. Clubs should harness the power of social media analytics to track engagement metrics, understand fan preferences, and tailor their marketing efforts accordingly.

By focusing on increasing fan size through targeted social media campaigns, clubs can attract new fans while retaining existing ones. Strategies, such as interactive posts, fan polls, and virtual events can help grow the fan base and maintain high levels of engagement. A larger fan base not only boosts match attendance but also expands the market for club merchandise and other revenue-generating activities.

Collaborating with influencers and brand ambassadors who have a significant following on social media can amplify the club's reach. These collaborations can introduce the club to new audiences, enhancing brand visibility and attracting potential fans. Influencers can also drive engagement through giveaways, live sessions, and behind-the-scenes content, which can foster a deeper connection with fans.

The dynamic nature of social media requires continuous monitoring and adaptation of strategies. Clubs should regularly assess the effectiveness of their social media campaigns and be agile in making adjustments based on fan feedback and engagement data. For instance, analyzing the types of posts that generate the most engagement can help clubs refine their content strategy to better meet fan expectations.

Personalized interactions and addressing fan concerns promptly can strengthen the emotional bond between the club and its supporters. A strong connection with fans can lead to increased loyalty and advocacy, which are vital for long-term business success. Clubs can use social media to highlight fan stories, celebrate fan milestones, and create exclusive fan experiences, further deepening fan loyalty.

Clubs should provide comprehensive training for their social media teams to ensure they are well-versed in the latest trends, tools, and best practices. A well-trained team can effectively manage the club's online presence and engage with fans in a meaningful way. Training should cover content creation, community management, crisis communication, and data analytics to ensure a holistic approach to social media management.

The type of content shared on social media significantly impacts fan loyalty and engagement. Clubs should focus on creating a mix of content types, including live updates, player interviews, behind-the-scenes footage, and interactive content like polls and quizzes. High-quality visuals and videos can capture fan attention and encourage sharing, thereby increasing the club's reach.

Encouraging fans to create and share their own content related to the club can foster a sense of ownership and community. Clubs can feature fan-generated content on their official pages, hold contests, and create hashtags for fans to use. This not only increases engagement but also provides valuable social proof, showcasing the club's active and enthusiastic fan base.

Implementing loyalty programs that reward fans for their engagement can further enhance fan loyalty. These programs can offer exclusive access to events, discounts on merchandise, and special

recognition for top fans. By rewarding loyal fans, clubs can maintain high levels of engagement and ensure sustained support.

By implementing these strategies, football clubs can maximize the benefits of social media engagement, leading to enhanced fan loyalty, expanded fan size, and overall business growth. The strategic use of social media not only drives immediate business outcomes but also builds a strong foundation for long-term success in the competitive sports industry.

## Limitations and suggestions for future research

In this paper, our focus was on investigating the relationships between social media, business development, fan loyalty, and the number of football clubs. Our research was carried out within a limited context, and future studies could include other moderating and mediating variables that may affect the relationships between social media, business development, fan loyalty, and the number of supporters. Factors, such as brand type, culture, characteristics, and facilities of fan pages on social media could be explored to generate deeper insights into how these relationships hold up in different situations.

Furthermore, other research may explore how different social media platforms, beyond the four only investigated in our study (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube), impact sports business development in different ways. Finally, further research could investigate how social media affects new forms of sports media consumption, such as e-sports or virtual sports events.

Our research is a valuable contribution to the existing literature on sports club business development through social media activities. The study's theoretical implications are significant, as we developed a new model that demonstrates the positive impact of various social media platforms on fan loyalty, the number of fans, and the overall business development of football clubs. By testing our model on some of the top social media sports club fan pages within the context of football clubs in Denmark, we were able to demonstrate that social media activities can significantly enhance business performance and business development.

In addition, it is relevant to consider the resources and makeup of the league in relation to social media engagement. Given the resources and characteristics specific to the football clubs in Denmark, it is important to assess if they have the personnel and capacity to support the added activity of social media engagement. This aspect can provide further insights into the practical implications of our research and offer guidance for sports-related business practitioners in effectively utilizing social media platforms to enhance fan loyalty, increase the number of fans, and drive overall business development.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to elucidate the intricate relationship between social media engagement and business development in football clubs, with a specific focus on the Danish football league. Our findings indicate that social media platforms play a crucial role in enhancing fan loyalty and fan size, which in turn drive the business development of football clubs.

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive model that demonstrates the positive impact of social media on both fan-related outcomes and business performance. The theoretical and practical implications outlined in this paper offer valuable insights for football club managers and stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of strategic social media use.

Future research could explore additional factors influencing social media effectiveness and compare the impacts across different sports and regions. Additionally, examining the long-term effects of social media engagement on business development could provide deeper insights into sustainable growth strategies for sports organizations.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation (APU) for their generous sponsorship of the Article Processing Charges (APC) associated with the publication of this paper. This support has been instrumental in enabling the dissemination of our research findings to a wider audience. We deeply appreciate APU's commitment to fostering academic and scientific research.

## Ethical approval

We confirm that all the research meets ethical guidelines and adheres to the legal requirements of the study country approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Faculty of Entrepreneurship, Tehran University with approved no H73REA110.

## Informed consent

On the first page of the questionnaire, we provided information about the consent procedures, and study objectives, and assured respondents of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. We requested respondents to indicate 'Yes' or 'No' to indicate agreement or disagreement for participating in the survey (written consent). We also expressed our gratitude for their participation in advance.

## Author contributions

Conceptualization and design, RM and MF; methodology, RM and MF; validation, RM; analysis and interpretation of the data, MF and RM; writing—original draft preparation, RM; writing—review and editing, MF; visualization, RM; funding acquisition, MF; and the final approval of the version to be published, MF and RM; and all authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

There are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to report. No funding was received.

## About the authors

**Professor Dr. Reza Mohammadkazemi** is a Full Professor of Entrepreneurship and Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair at the Faculty of Entrepreneurship, University of Tehran. He has published over 90 scholarly publications in the fields of entrepreneurship, marketing, and sports marketing. In addition to his academic contributions, Professor Mohammadkazemi possesses extensive expertise in developing marketing strategies for service-oriented companies across the Middle East. Furthermore, he held a visiting professorship at Aalborg University in Denmark during the course of this research project.

**Professor Dr. Mohammad Falahat**, honored with the Gold Medal Award from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for his doctorate, possesses a Doctorate in International Entrepreneurship from USM and an MBA in Technology Management from Multimedia University (MMU), Malaysia. Currently, he serves as a professor and director of the Strategic Research Institute (SRI) at Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (AP U) and adjunct professor at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). His research efforts have garnered substantial funding from prestigious entities such as the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MP C), including projects from the Private Pension Administrator (P PA), MASA Policy Development Programme (MP DP), MCA Belt and Road Centre, and more. His scholarly work has been published in notable journals such as *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* (SSCI: 8.74), *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* (SSCI:5.8), *Journal of International Management* (SSCI:3.8), and *International Marketing Review* (SSCI: 2.9), among others.

## ORCID

Reza Mohammadkazemi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5442-7857>

Mohammad Falahat  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0423-984X>

## Data availability statement

The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions by the source. The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## References

- Akar, E., Yüksel, H. F., & Bulut, Z. A. (2015). The impact of social influence on the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook. *Journal of Internet Applications and Management*, 6(2), 5–27. <https://doi.org/10.5505/iuyd.2015.40412>
- Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Guinalíu, M. (2010). Relationship quality, community promotion and brand loyalty in virtual communities: Evidence from free software communities. *International Journal of Information Management*, 30(4), 357–367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2010.01.004>
- Chelladurai, P. (2013). A personal journey in theorizing in sport management. *Sport Management Review*, 16(1), 22–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2011.12.003>
- Chin, W. W. (1998). The partial least squares approach for structural equation modeling. In G. A. Marcoulides (Ed.), *Modern methods for business research* (pp. 295–336). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- De Vries, L., Gensler, S., & Leeflang, P. S. (2012). Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: An investigation of the effects of social media marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 83–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003>
- Doyle, J. P., Su, Y., & Kunkel, T. (2020). Athlete branding via social media: Examining the factors influencing consumer engagement on Instagram. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 22(4), 506–526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1806897>
- Filo, K., Lock, D., & Karg, A. (2015). Sport and social media research: A review. *Sport Management Review*, 18(2), 166–181. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2014.11.001>
- Fried, G., & Mumcu, C. (2017). *Sport analytics: A data-driven approach to sport business and management*. Routledge.
- Gargone, D. (2011). *A study of the fan motives for the varying levels of team identity and team loyalty of fans from selected Facebook college football team fan pages* [Doctoral dissertation]. United States Sports Academy.
- Gladden, J. M., & Funk, D. C. (2001). Understanding brand loyalty in professional sport: Examining the link between brand associations and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 3(1), 54–81. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSM-03-01-2001-B006>
- Hair, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Mena, J. A. (2012). An assessment of the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling in marketing research. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 40(3), 414–433. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-011-0261-6>
- Hu, T., & Kettinger, W. J. (2008). Why people continue to use social networking services: Developing a comprehensive model. In *ICIS 2008 Proceedings* (p. 89).
- Hull, K., & Abeza, G. (2021). Introduction to social media in sport. In G. Abeza, N. O'Reilly, J. Sanderson, & E. Frederick (Eds.), *Emerging issues and trends in sport business: Vol. 2. Social media in sport theory and practice* (pp. 1–28). World Scientific Publishing Company.
- Iwasaki, Y., & Havitz, M. E. (2004). Examining relationships between leisure involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty to a recreation agency. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 36(1), 45–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2004.11950010>
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Kardaras, D., Karakostas, B., & Papathanassiou, E. (2003). The potential of virtual communities in the insurance industry in the UK and Greece. *International Journal of Information Management*, 23(1), 41–53. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0268-4012\(02\)00067-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0268-4012(02)00067-1)
- Lee, Y. K., Kim, S. Y., Chung, N., Ahn, K., & Lee, J. W. (2016). When social media met commerce: A model of perceived customer value in group-buying. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 30(4), 398–410. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-04-2014-0129>
- Lim, J. S., Hwang, Y., Kim, S., & Biocca, F. A. (2015). How social media engagement leads to sports channel loyalty: Mediating roles of social presence and channel commitment. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 46, 158–167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.01.013>
- Mahony, D. F., Madrigal, R., & Howard, D. A. (2000). Using the psychological commitment to team (PCT) scale to segment sport consumers based on loyalty. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 9(1), 15–25.
- McCarthy, J., Rowley, J., Jane Ashworth, C., & Pioch, E. (2014). Managing brand presence through social media: The case of UK football clubs. *Internet Research*, 24(2), 181–204. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-08-2012-0154>
- MohammadKazemi, R. (2015). Sports marketing and social media. In *Handbook of research on integrating social media into strategic marketing* (pp. 340–358). IGI Global.
- Mohammadkazemi, R., Ebrahimi, B. P., & Shiri, M. (2020). Mobile marketing influence on football fan behavior: The case of FC Persepolis. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 20(5/6), 405–427. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSM.2020.115122>
- Moss, S., Prosser, H., Costello, H., Simpson, N., Patel, P., Rowe, S., Turner, S., & Hatton, C. (1998). Reliability and validity of the PAS-ADD Checklist for detecting psychiatric disorders in adults with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 42(Pt 2), 173–183. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2788.1998.00116.x>
- Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 63(4\_suppl1), 33–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429990634s105>
- Parganas, P., & Anagnostopoulos, C. (2015). Social media strategy in professional football: The case of Liverpool FC. *Choregia*, 11(2), 61–75. <https://doi.org/10.4127/ch.2015.0102>

- Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2017). Relationship marketing: Looking backwards towards the future. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 31(1), 11–15. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-11-2016-0380>
- Prodanova, J., & Van Looy, A. (2019). How beneficial is social media for business process management? A systematic literature review. *IEEE Access*, 7, 39583–39599. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2019.2903983>
- Qualman, E. (2010). *Socialnomics: How social media transforms the way we live and do business*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Rodriguez, M., Peterson, R. M., & Krishnan, V. (2012). Social media's influence on business-to-business sales performance. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 32(3), 365–378. <https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320306>
- Romero-Jara, E., Solanellas, F., Muñoz, J., & López-Carril, S. (2023). Connecting with fans in the digital age: An exploratory and comparative analysis of social media management in top football clubs. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 858. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02357-8>
- Santos, T. O., Correia, A., Biscaia, R., & Pegoraro, A. (2019). Examining fan engagement through social networking sites. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 20(1), 163–183. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-05-2016-0020>
- Soliman, M. A., & Beaudry, A. (2010). Understanding individual adoption and use of social computing: A user-system fit model and empirical study. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 61(9), 1795–1807.
- Todd, P. R., & Javalgi, R. R. G. (2007). Internationalization of SMEs in India: Fostering entrepreneurship by leveraging information technology. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 2(2), 166–180. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17468800710739234>
- Tsiotsou, R. H. (2013). Sport team loyalty: Integrating relationship marketing and a hierarchy of effects. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 27(6), 458–471. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-01-2012-0002>
- Vale, L., & Fernandes, T. (2018). Social media and sports: Driving fan engagement with football clubs on Facebook. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 26(1), 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2017.1359655>
- Wu, S. H., Tsai, C. Y. D., & Hung, C. C. (2012). Toward team or player? How trust, vicarious achievement motive, and identification affect fan loyalty. *Journal of Sport Management*, 26(2), 177–191. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.26.2.177>
- Wysocki, M. (2012). *The role of social media in sports communication: An analysis of NBA teams' strategy* [Dissertation]. American University.
- Yoshida, M., Gordon, B. S., Nakazawa, M., Shibuya, S., & Fujiwara, N. (2018). Bridging the gap between social media and behavioral brand loyalty. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 28, 208–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2018.02.005>
- Yun, J. H., Rosenberger, P. J., & Sweeney, K. (2020). Drivers of soccer fan loyalty: Australian evidence on the influence of team brand image, fan engagement, satisfaction, and enduring involvement. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 33(3), 755–782. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-07-2019-0444>