IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SPORTS CLUBS DEVELOPMENT

D. Ilieva*

National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski", Sofia, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

The challenges sports clubs face today make social networks one of the critical components of their development. Social media has revolutionized the sports industry by changing the way athletes, coaches, clubs, federations, sport companies and other industry actors interact. Sports organizations are essential to the sporting world and significantly influence societies' health, culture, and economics. **The aim** of this research was to examine and analyze the impact of social media on the development of sports clubs working in the field of sport for all. Main tasks are: to analyze the importance of interactive digital means in the work of sports organizations; to investigate the satisfaction and evaluation of target groups regarding social networks as a means of communication and their influence on clubs; to analyze the need of people in social networks as an opportunity for more effective development of sport for all clubs.

The study was conducted among people practicing sports, members of sports clubs – sport for all, members of the Bulgarian Sport for All Federation, who use social media. **The subject** of the research was the influence of social media on the development of sports clubs.

To fulfill the research tasks, it was created an online marketing questionnaire about various aspects of using social media in relation to the sports clubs "sport for all". The research was also based on observing the sports clubs' work, conducting an Internet-based survey, using mathematical-statistical methods, and analyzing specialized scientific sources.

The analysis of this research would enable us to establish the degree of satisfaction and evaluation of the target groups regarding the use of social media as a means of communication and its influence on the activities of the clubs "sport for all".

Key words: management, sport, media, digital marketing

INTRODUCTION

Sports and social networks are developing extremely fast nowadays. Sports organizations are essential to the sporting world and significantly influence societies' health, culture, and economics. At the same time, social networks transform the way people communicate, share information, and create online communities. Integrating sports and social media raises various questions and challenges requiring in-depth research and analysis (1, 2).

Well-known platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter (already „X"), Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and TikTok, offer unique opportunities and functionalities to their users

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*Correspondence to: *Desislava Ilieva, National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski", Bulgaria, 1700 Sofia, 21 Acad. "Stefan Mladenov", e-mail: d.ilieva_nsa@abv.bg, Tel. +359887198064*

(3). Knowing the possibilities of social networks, their algorithms, and how they interact with the end user guarantees the successful promotion of sports organizations.

In 2018, T. Nisar et al.(4) surveyed social media not only as a venue where people communicate but also as a platform for working with potential clients, quick response, waging promotional campaigns to attract target customers, disseminating ideas, and promoting activities—everything that could add value for the end user. According to W. Akram (5), there are some positive aspects of social media, such as search speed, easy communication and exchange of information, groups based on interests, accessibility to celebrities, popularization of events, creativity, career and business opportunities, education, and self-education. The author also examined some negative aspects leading to developing addiction, deteriorating health conditions, or losing

working motivation. Nevertheless, social networks can be a natural phenomenon when used moderately and thoughtfully. They provide significant benefits, including constant communication with followers, adherents, and sports services clients (6).

N. Atanasova (7) also researched sports clubs that used social media as a powerful instrument for communication, marketing, and interaction with various social groups. These interactions happen through the dissemination of information (posting news and results, sharing photos and videos, selling tickets, promotions and marketing campaigns, and video streaming). Sports clubs stimulate interactivity, which increases users' engagement. They create partnerships and provide feedback and dialogue with the community (8).

METHODS
The challenges sports clubs face today make social networks one of the critical components of their development. In this relation, sports clubs need to take into account the extent of the influence and use of social media as a communication tool in their activities related to "sport for all". The main aim of this research was to examine and analyze the impact of social media on the development of sports clubs working in the field of sport for all. The study was conducted among 140 people practicing sports, members of sports clubs – sport for all, members of the Bulgarian Sport for All Federation, parents, or sports fans of different ages who use social media. The subject of the research was the influence of social media on the development of sports clubs, and the field of study was the management of sports organizations.

To fulfill the research tasks, we created an online marketing questionnaire that included specialized close-type questions. The questions cover various aspects of using social media in relation to the sports clubs "sport for all". The research was also based on observing the sports clubs' work, conducting an Internet-based survey, using mathematical-statistical methods, and analyzing specialized scientific sources.

RESULTS
The analysis of this research would enable us to establish the degree of satisfaction and evaluation of the target groups (members or fans of sports clubs) regarding the use of social media as a means of communication and its influence on the activities of the clubs "sport for all".

The answers to the initial questions of the questionnaire showed a balance between men and women. However, the age differences were great **(Figure 1).** The users between 25 and 34 comprised the most considerable percentage— 38.6%—followed by the generation aged 18-24 —31.4%. The percentage of users aged between 35 and 44 was the lowest - 24.3%. Parents and club members constituted a more significant part of the people in this age group. The respondents aged under 18 years were the fewest – 2.9 %.
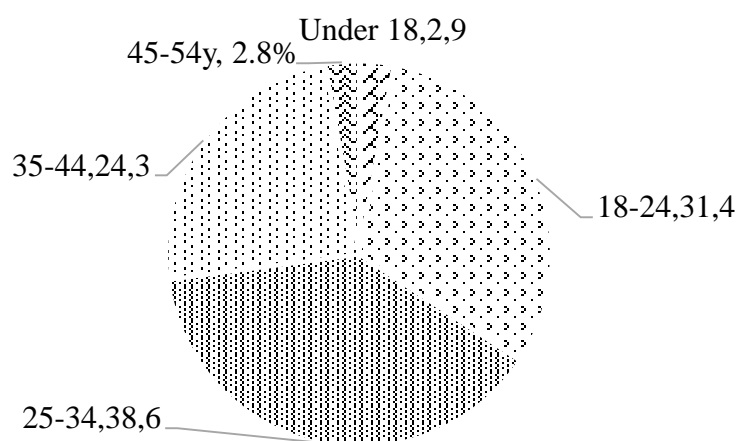

Figure 1. Age distribution.

The data analysis shown in **Figure 2** emphasizes respondents' high engagement in social networks regarding sports clubs. The respondents (81.4%) confirmed their active media use to find information about sports organizations. As few as 17.1% confessed they did not follow the clubs online, and only 1.4% were unsure.
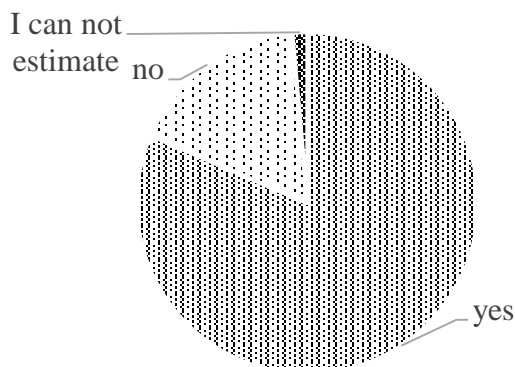
Figure 2. Engagement in social media regarding sports clubs.

The most preferable social networks to obtain information about a sports club were Instagram (74.3%) and Facebook (71.4%). The predominantly high percentage is due to the fact that most sports clubs do not have their own web page. They rely primarily on social media applications. It is interesting to note that Google was mentioned by only 25.7%. The reason could probably be found in the fact that it is used to find information and other social media. Another part of the respondents (20%)

answered that they preferred TikTok. This platform has gained much popularity in the last few years, and sports clubs have succeeded in attracting more members and supporters by using it. Others (1.4%) use networks such as Dir.bg and Linkedin or are given information by acquaintances **(Figure 3).**

The sum of the answers is more than 100% because there is a possibility to provide more than one answer.

Facebook — 71,40%
74,30%
TikTok — 20%
4,30%
Google — 25,70%
1,40%
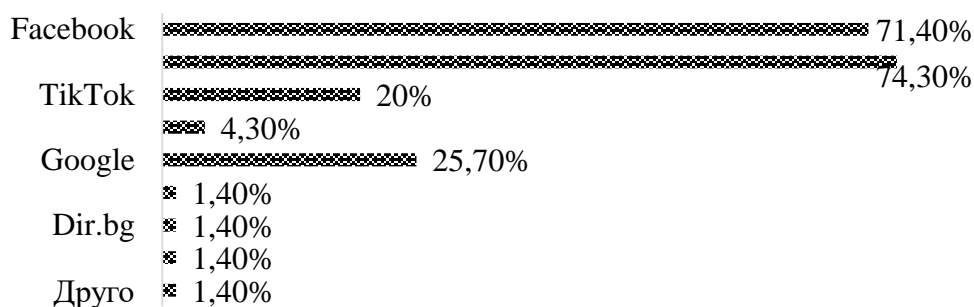Dir.bg — 1,40%
1,40%
Друго — 1,40%

Figure 3. Preferred social media concerning sports clubs.

Sharing information on the users' personal profiles is an essential prerequisite for the social development of the target sports clubs. A significant part of them (35.7%) admitted they had never shared information about a sports club in their personal profiles on social media. Approximately half of them shared information from time to time or more rarely, and only 4.3%

confirmed they always shared the information **(Figure 4).** Most frequently, the information is shared only if it personally concerns the individual (a picture of them or their child/friend/acquaintance, an event they are going to take part in or participate in, a thing they want to show their friends, etc.).
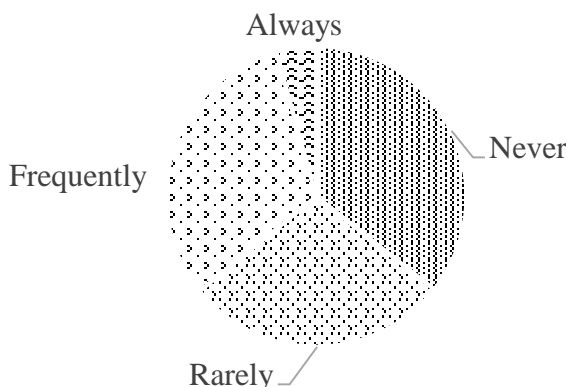

Figure 4. Sharing information about sports clubs in personal profiles.

The users' preferences **(Figure 5)** for information content on the sports club's social media are videos (74.3%) and pictures (61.4%).

One of the main topics was "providing information and schedule of the training process" (48.6%).
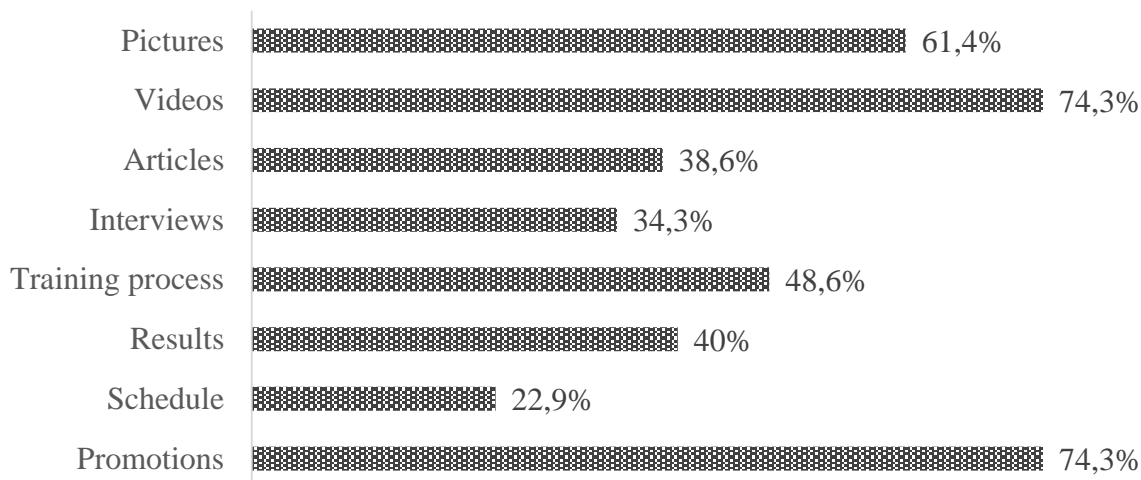

Figure 5. Preferred contents**.**

We should point out the respondents' opinions about the influence of social media on their choice of a sports club. Over half of the users **(Figure 6)** thought they would be influenced by social networks to a certain extent (61.4%) when choosing a sports club. There is a widespread belief that the information on social media is often different from reality, which leads to a certain disbelief in the information provided by sports organizations.

Nevertheless, 28.6% had decided to use the services provided by a particular sports club under the influence of social media. Only 8.6% answered that they would not be influenced, and 1.4% would never make a decision based on the social presence and information about the sports club.
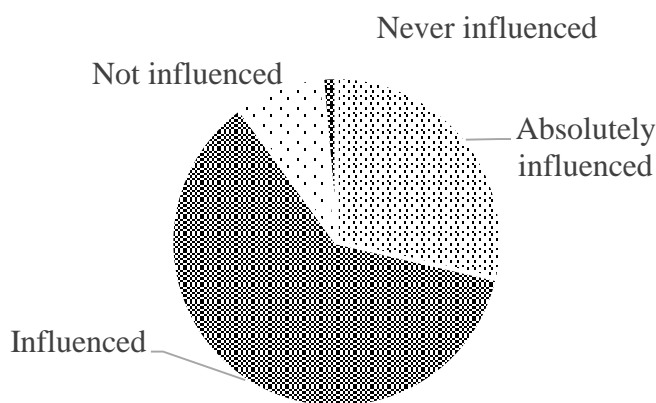

Figure 6. Influence of social media on the choice of sports club.

The researched individuals (62.9%) believed that social media helped attract sports club fans and generate income from clubs engaged in social activities **(Figure 7).** Some (30%) believed they helped to a certain extent, and

7.1% were not sure the media had any particular impact. However, no respondents claimed that social networks did not affect sports clubs in any way.
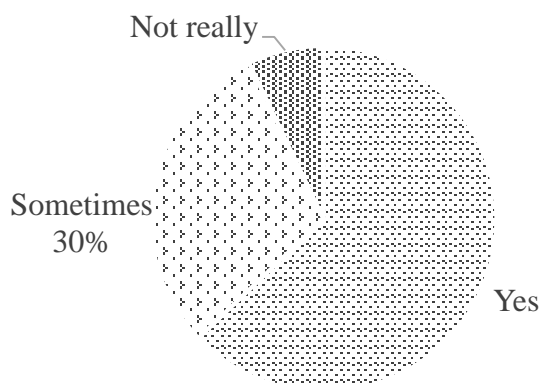
Figure 7. Opinion about the influence of networks on attracting fans.

The majority of the respondents confirmed that there were positive changes after increasing a sports club's social media activity—62%. They shared that they had noticed a greater interest in the club, new members, new sponsors helping the club, and the preparation of its members.

Part of the respondents (23.9%) thought to an extent that there had been some changes, and 10% had not noticed whether there were changes or not. Only 2.9% were of the opinion that there were some changes, but they were negative **(Figure 8).**
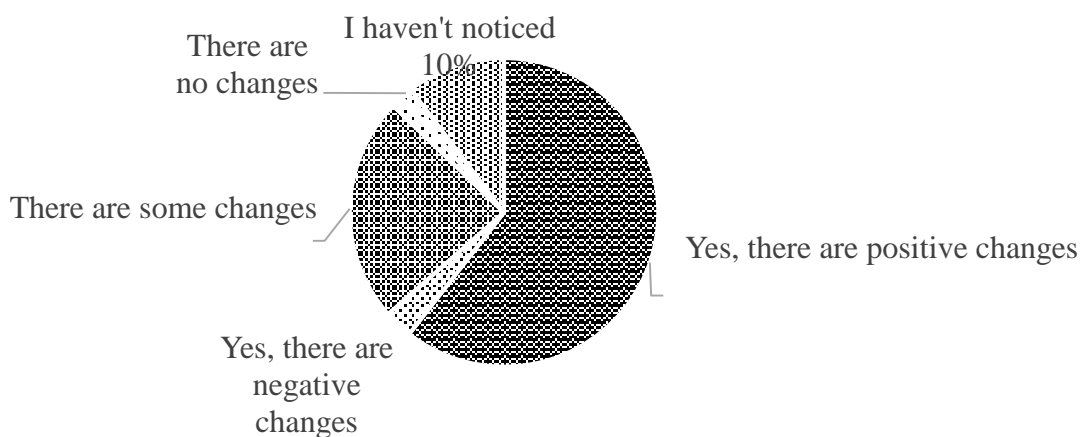

Figure 8. Changes in the club after increasing its online activity.

The analysis of **Figure 9** shows that, according to the respondents, "the regular posting of information" (70%) and "promoting events and campaigns organized by the sports club" would positively influence attracting new members. According to 45.7%, "the emphasis on posts related to the members' success" was truly important. Due to the age distribution and the claim that a significant part of the respondents

were parents of club members, "the posts related to their success" are a matter of pride and make them share the information in their personal profiles. This inevitably leads to the increased popularity of the club. Even though the percentage was low (17.1%), posting online training sessions is also a favorable factor for development.

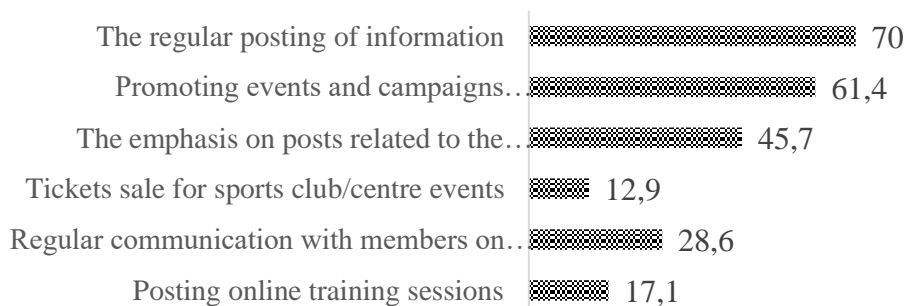|	
The regular posting of information	70
Promoting events and campaigns…	61,4
The emphasis on posts related to the…	45,7
Tickets sale for sports club/centre events	12,9
Regular communication with members on…	28,6
Posting online training sessions	17,1

Figure 9. Methods of using social media.

The most significant advantages the sports clubs have when using social media, according to the users, were "making the sports club popular" (82.9%), "accessibility to the users" (71.4%), and "creating the club's image" (52.9%). The sports club can reach a broad audience by providing current information, news, and events through social networks, thus increasing its income and attracting new members and supporters. The adaptability of communication and interaction with the fans create an active society and improve the efficiency of their use. The personification of the contents adds to the club's appeal in the virtual environment (**Figure 10**).
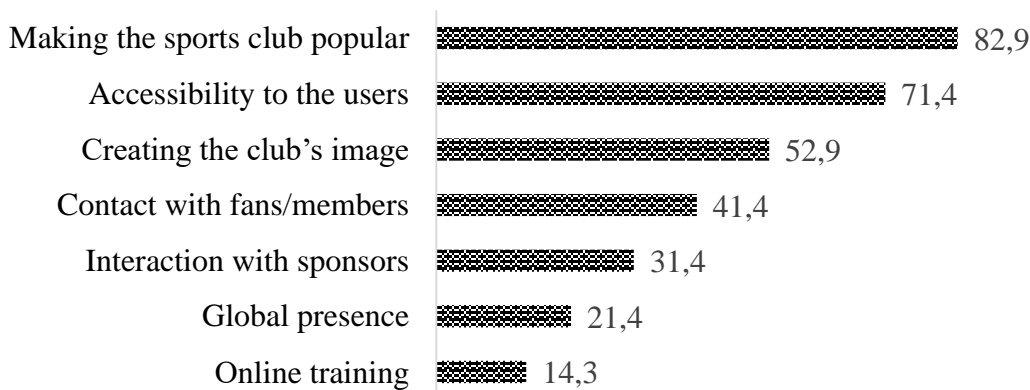
Making the sports club popular — 82,9
Accessibility to the users — 71,4
Creating the club's image — 52,9
Contact with fans/members — 41,4
Interaction with sponsors — 31,4
Global presence — 21,4
Online training — 14,3

Figure 10. Advantages of the club's using social media**.**

According to the users (**Figure 11**), the most significant disadvantages of using social media were conflicts and negative comments (47.1%), excessive information (41.4%), and fake profiles (35.7%). Negative comments can badly influence the club's image. The risk of abuse and dissemination of fake news requires constant attention and control. Problems regarding personal data protection and the need for constant information updates impede social media management.
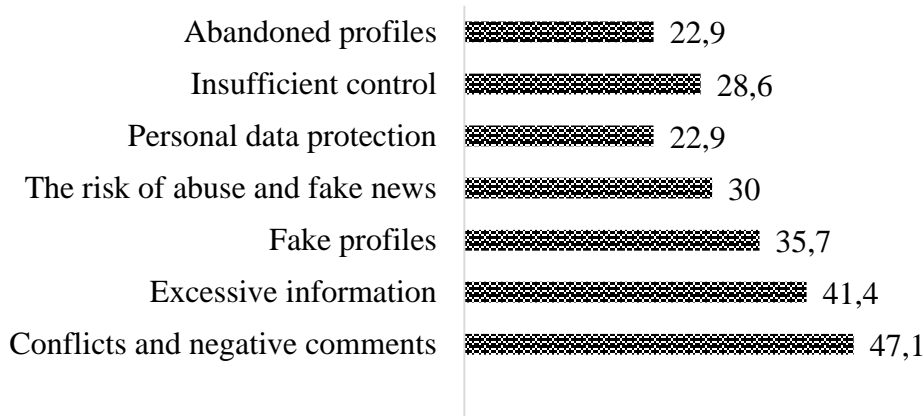
Abandoned profiles — 22,9
Insufficient control — 28,6
Personal data protection — 22,9
The risk of abuse and fake news — 30
Fake profiles — 35,7
Excessive information — 41,4
Conflicts and negative comments — 47,1

Figure 11. Disadvantages of the club's using social media.

Based on the presented results, we could say that sports clubs use social media as a precious instrument that provides an overall mechanism for interaction with the fans and enriches the community. A balanced and strategic approach is required, focused on maintaining the relationship with the audience while managing the negative aspects.

DISCUSSION
Social networks have become a major communication channel and interaction between sports clubs and their fans. They enable the vast dissemination of information and closer contact with the community, strengthening the links and loyalty of sports service users.

This research aids sports clubs and their managers in adapting their strategies and programs and creating more robust and stable communities of fans and users who actively support the clubs on social media. This will inevitably lead to the social and economic development of sports clubs that work in the field of sport for all.

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