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Montenegrin Sport Associations on Social Media - Quality of Performance Assessment

Suncica Rogic[1], Milica Vukcevic[1], Milica Muhadinovic[1] and Julija Cerovic Smolovic[1]

[1]Univesity of Montenegro, Faculty of Economics, Podgorica, Montenegro

Abstract

The aim of this study is to assess the quality of performance of Montenegrin national sport associations on Facebook. As sport is recognized as an activity of public interest, and social media are one of the main sources of information nowadays, given that social media in sport has delivered a new style of communication, authors will try to evaluate the engagement with the fans and the general public. In this paper, Facebook Assessment Index (FAI) methodology will be applied. This methodology involves the analysis of three components: popularity (25%), interactivity (40%) and content (35%). Each of the criteria is evaluated depending on the importance of the indicator on a scale from 0% to 100%. Coefficient value closer to 100% indicates higher quality of performance on Facebook. The results of our paper show the differences between the three categories of Olympic sports in Montenegro, taking into account their performance on Facebook. Social media, as a marketing tool can enhance the positioning of national sport associations by creating a meaningful connection with the fans and the public. Additionally, this connection may strengthen the feeling of devotion to the national team of Montenegro and incentivize younger generations to start training and competing. This study demonstrates which associations use this channel to portray their sport and results, with the aim of promoting sport and healthy lifestyle.

Keywords: *social media, sport marketing, FAI methodology*

Introduction

The exponential growth of social media users to the detriment of traditional media has also led to a change in the way they seek and collect information. Large commercial brands have recognized and capitalized on this trend, so the annual growth of digital media in the total advertising budget is 8.7%, and in 2020 it is estimated that about 102 billion US dollars have been invested in this way (Zote, 2020). Nearly a third of the world's population, 2.7 billion people is on Facebook (Statista, 2020). And in other spheres of life, whether it is politics, science or sports, social networks are an unavoidable communication channel with the public. Unlike traditional media, they enable interaction and two-way communication with its users.

Due to changes in the consumer behaviour and online communications, it was expected for businesses to turn to social networks for the marketing and promotion purposes. Social media enable the interaction with consumers, while also allowing the access to their needs, preferences, interests, as well as buying patterns. Additionally, Facebook provided a platform for faster communication and interaction which costs less than traditional advertising media (Ertugan, 2017). Additional marketing benefits include the unique possibility to precisely and accurately target the chosen audience and to customize the content to each defined segment. Therefore, in contemporary marketing literature, Facebook brand pages are recognized as an ideal way to engage with the target market (Logan, 2014).

The benefits of social media are recognized by sport organizations, which are now looking for effective ways of using them as a part of their communication strategies (Coyle, 2010). The popularity of social networks in sports

Correspondence:

S. Rogic
University of Montenegro, Faculty of Economics, Jovana Tomasevica 37, 81000 Podgorica, Montenegro
E-mail: suncica@ucg.ac.me

was first realized by sports clubs, which took the opportunity to increase their influence and make their brands global. For instance, football club Barcelona has over 100 million Facebook followers. There, its sympathizers can find not only information about the club, but also explore the online shop with Barcelona's memorabilia, peek behind the scenes with players, follow live trainings and press conferences, vote for the best players, communicate with them, watching matches in real time, etc. In this way, Barcelona expands its base of followers, connecting with them on a deeper level. From this typical example, it is clear that social networks can be used as a tool to raise brand visibility and awareness.

Similarly, non-commercial sports actors that have the primary mission of popularizing their sport, can use social networks as a medium through which to promote their activities and interact with their followers. Naraine and Parent (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from national sport associations from Canada, and explored value, use, and challenges of social media. They concluded that often national associations lack capacities, especially financial and human resources, which would enable them to have a higher quality social media presence.

The aim of social media use for sport organizations is providing team-related information, fostering fandom, and building team reputation (Miranda, Chamorro, Rubio, & Rodriguez, 2014). M. Argan, M. T. Argan, Köse and Gökalp (2013) looked into how Turkish football clubs use Facebook as a marketing instrument and indicated that clubs mostly use Facebook to promote activities and organize campaigns, gifts and discounts, while some used it as a shop by linking the page to their online stores. Additionally, the page was used to distribute news.

One of the ways of analysing the Facebook presence is using the FAI methodology, which will be described in more detail in the following section. In their research, Miranda, Chamorro, Rubio and Morgado (2013) applied the FAI index to evaluate the top 200 most valuable banking brands, based on the Brand Finance Banking 500 report. Their results indicated a low presence of banks on Facebook, as well as significant differences between those who are present, regarding the use of the network, which suggests that there is a possibility to improve the use of Facebook as a marketing tool in this industry.

The FAI methodology was previously applied in some studies in sport. In their study, Miranda et al. (2014) applied this methodology to assess the Facebook pages of European soccer teams and North American professional major leagues - NBA and NFL. Their results showed that only 2.9% of analysed teams (Barcelona, Manchester and Real Madrid) achieved over a half of the maximum score, while 30.39% achieved a score between 30 and 50 points, and the remaining 66.6% have not reached 30 points.

This study will apply the FAI methodology in order to asses and compare the performance of the national sport associations of Montenegro on this social network. Not many studies have treated the problem of analysing and assessing the use of social media networks by the national sport associations.

Methods

There is no universal methodology for measuring the quality of online appearance of subjects on the Internet, but the most common methodologies, are the Facebook Assessment Index (FAI), the Web Assessment Index (WAI) and Social media influencer index (Miranda, Cortés, & Barriuso, 2006; Miranda et al., 2013; Miranda et al., 2014; Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani, & Dwivedi, 2019).

According to Mateos, Mera, Gonzalez and Lopez (2001) the WAI evaluates the potential of organizational Web sites, allowing researchers and managers to compare attributes and elements of Internet sites in a particular sector, so as to be able to identify the drawbacks and opportunities. Xanthidis and Nicholas (2009) claim that Web Site Evaluation Index (WSEI) gives the opportunity not only to evaluate if a website is good or not, but also how good it is in comparison with other of similar quality. WSEI can be used to improve the rating system of certain website elements, which are not easily measurable, like attractiveness.

Pegoraro, Scott and Burch (2017) assert that sport associations' interaction with fans on social media can increase a fan's level of identification with the team and their loyalty. Thompson, Martin, Gee and Eagleman (2014) recommended to sports organizations planning to use social media, to be dedicated to a sustainable social media presence across all online profiles, and align those plans with funds able to support it.

In this paper, the performance of Montenegrin national sport associations is assessed. The associations are grouped into three categories, based on the categorization conducted by the Montenegrin Olympic Committee. At the moment of conducting the research, the current categorization was the one published in 2018. Since then, on January 18, 2021, a new categorization was adopted. For this study, authors chose to analyse only the national associations of Olympic sports (19 in total). However, a number of Olympic sports can be considered niche sports, because they do not receive mainstream media coverage on a daily basis.

In order to assess the quality of the performance of sports associations in Montenegro on the social network Facebook, the FAI methodology is applied. The research includes all sports associations that have an appearance on the social network Facebook. Pronschinske, Groza and Walker (2012) tested how are fans affected by Facebook page attributes and found that the number of fans on a Facebook page is determined by authenticity and engagement. They concluded that engaging with fans on Facebook is important for sport organizations, because it positively impacts interaction with a sport brand's content in terms of likes and followers.

In this article, associations are divided into three categories, as previously explained. The research was conducted in December 2020. FAI methodology is based on three components: popularity, interactivity and content (Miranda et al., 2006). Criteria, which construct FAI index, are rated on the scale from 0% to 100%, depending on the importance of criterion. Criterion Popularity accounts for 25%, Interactivity 40% and Content 35% (Miranda et al., 2013). The higher the value of FAI index the better the quality of appearance of sports federations on Facebook. The equation for calculating the FAI index is given below (Miranda et al., 2006):

FAI index = (w1) x Popularity Value + (w2) x Interactivity value + (w3) x Content value,

where w1, w2 and w3 are weights (25%, 40% and 35%) for each criteria.

For evaluation of Popularity, the number of followers on Facebook was taken into account. The distribution of points for this criterion is determined according to scale, formulated previously. The sport association with the most followers was given the total weight of this criterion, i.e. 25%, while other points were divided depending on the number of followers.

According to Miranda, Chamorro, Rubio and Morgado (2013), criterion Interactivity includes five indicators: number of wall posts made by the organization in the last 7 days; average number of "likes" per post, calculated from the last 10 posts; average number of comments per post, calculated from the last 10 posts; average number of shared posts, calculated from the last 10 posts and average number of user´s post answered by the association in less than 24 hours, calculated from the last 10 posts that need an answer. In order to distribute points for this criterion it was needed to divide the weight of 40% on five indicators, which means that each indicator got 8%. After that, each sport association is evaluated according to these indicators and the total value of the interactivity indicator for each association was obtained by summing up the values of that association for each indicator individually.

Last component of the FAI index - Content, was evaluated on the basis of fourteen indicators, in accordance with previous research (Miranda et al., 2014). The weight for this criterion of 35%, was divided by fourteen (number of indicators), i.e. each indicator was assigned 2.5%. Indicators, included in the evaluation of this criteria, are: information about organization, video, photos, marketing massage, events, polls, location, e-mail, other Facebook pages, claims and suggestions, website, coupons or specific offers, gamification apps/contests and phone contact (Miranda et al., 2014).

The value of the FAI coefficient was obtained for each sports association, summarizing the values of components, previously explained. The obtained result is given in the next section of the paper.

Results

First component of FAI index is the popularity criterion and it has been rated according to the number of followers on Facebook. The results obtained for this criterion are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Results according to criterion popularity

Categories	Link	Number of followers	SUM
First Category			
Water Polo Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/Vaterpolo-i-pliva%C4%8Dki-savez-Crne-Gore-WPOLO-Montenegro-1539314356307353	3000	20
Volleyball Federation of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/OdbojkaskiSavezCG	12092	25
Football Association of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/FudbalskiSavez	32507	25
Handball federation of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/rscg.me	4234	20
Montenegro Judo Federation	https://www.facebook.com/mnejudo	1239	20
Second Category			
Athletics Federation of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/Atletski-Savez-Crne-Gore-Athletics-Federation-of-Montenegro-104934657896698	268	5
Montenegro Sailing Federation	https://www.facebook.com/MontenegroSailingFederation	458	10
Karate Federation of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/karatesavezcg	401	10
Tennis Federation of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/TeniskiSavezCrneGore	555	10
Third Category			
Shooting Association of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/montenegroshooting	284	5
Table Tennis Association of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/stscg	555	10
Taekwondo Association of Montenegro	https://www.facebook.com/Tkdmne	291	5

Based on Table 1 it can be concluded that Football and Volleyball associations have the most followers and for this criterion they were given 25 points. Handball, Water Polo and Judo federations have considerably less followers, compared with football and volleyball, but much more than others federations from second and third category. They got 20 points for this criterion. Associations from second and third category have a small number of followers, which is the reason they got 10 or 5 points. This can be explained by the fact that football, volleyball, water polo and handball are the most popular sports in Montenegro and because of that they have the most followers. Associations from second and third category with most followers are Karate, Tennis, Sailing and Table Tennis and they got 10 points. Athletics and Taekwondo associations have the least followers and thus got 5 points for this criterion.

Criterion Interactivity is the second component of FAI index. It is important to emphasize that although this criterion includes five indicators, this research included only four. Indicator average number of user´s post answered by the company in less than 24 hours is not analyzed, because sport is a specific activity, so we cannot expect followers to have special questions as they would have if it was some other activity, such as trade, for example. The results obtained for criterion Interactivity are shown in Table 2.

According to this criteria, the Football Association has the

Table 2. Results according to criterion interactivity

Categories	Number of wall posts	Average number of "likes" per post	Average number of comments per post	Average number of shared posts	SUM
First Category					
Water Polo Montenegro	4	6	4	2	16
Volleyball Federation of Montenegro	8	2	6	0	16
Football Association of Montenegro	2	8	8	8	26
Handball Federation of Montenegro	6	8	4	6	24
Montenegro Judo Federation	0	4	2	6	12
Second Category					
Athletics Federation of Montenegro	2	2	2	6	12
Montenegro Sailing Federation	0	2	2	2	6
Karate Federation of Montenegro	0	4	2	6	12
Tennis Federation of Montenegro	4	4	4	2	14
Third Category					
Shooting Association of Montenegro	2	2	0	0	4
Table Tennis Association of Montenegro	4	2	2	4	12
Taekwondo Association of Montenegro	2	2	4	2	10

highest number of points, which is expected as this association has the most followers on Facebook. The Handball Federation has a slightly lower score, but much more compared to other sports associations. It can be concluded that federations from first and second category have an approximately similar number of points. The exception is the Sailing Federation. Associations from third category have a medium level of interactivity. The Shooting Association has the least points, according to this criterion. Although Football and Handball federations have the most points, it is insufficient considering the popularity of these sports.

The last component of the FAI index is the Content criterion, which is estimated on the basis of fourteen indicators, as previously explained, and each indicator is rated with 2.5 points. The results obtained for this criterion are presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. Results according to criterion content

Categories	SUM
First Category	
Water Polo Montenegro	22.5
Volleyball Federation of Montenegro	27.5
Football Association of Montenegro	25
Handball federation of Montenegro	30
Montenegro Judo Federation	22.5
Second Category	
Athletics Federation of Montenegro	22.5
Montenegro Sailing Federation	22.5
Karate Federation of Montenegro	22.5
Tennis Federation of Montenegro	25
Third Category	
Shooting Association of Montenegro	25
Table Tennis Association of Montenegro	27.5
Taekwondo Association of Montenegro	22.5

According to the Content criteria, the Handball Federation ranks first with 30 points. It is followed by Volleyball, Table Tenis and Football Asociation which scored 27.5, 27.5 and 25 points respectively. All other associations have 22.5 ponts. Results from this criterion are encouraging because the federations generally contain all the indicators that form it.

Finally, FAI index is obtained by summing the results from Popularity, Interactivity and Content criterion. The obtained results are given in the Table 4.

Table 4. FAI index

Categories	Popularity	Interactivity	Content	FAI Index
First Category				
Water Polo Montenegro	20	16	22.5	58.5
Volleyball Federation of Montenegro	25	16	27.5	68.5
Football Association of Montenegro	25	26	25	76
Handball federation of Montenegro	20	24	30	74
Montenegro Judo Federation	20	12	22.5	54.5
Second Category				
Athletics Federation of Montenegro	5	12	22.5	39.5
Montenegro Sailing Federation	10	6	22.5	38.5
Karate Federation of Montenegro	10	12	22.5	44.5
Tennis Federation of Montenegro	10	14	25	49
Third Category				
Shooting Association of Montenegro	5	4	25	34
Table Tennis Association of Montenegro	10	12	27.5	49.5
Taekwondo Association of Montenegro	5	10	20	35

Based on the Table 4, it can be concluded that the Football Association and the Handball Federation have the highest value of the FAI coefficient, 76 and 74 respectively, while the Volleyball federation is ranked third. All other federations have a score lower than 60 points, which is at an unsatisfactory level for the modern way of communication and doing business.

Discussion

We can state that federations from the first category scored better in terms of the FAI index, compared to the federations from second and third category. The largest differences among the categories are in popularity and interactivity. This conclusion points out to the need for better performance on social media. The federations should be more active by posting more in order to boost interactivity and gain more points in terms of criteria making up the FAI index. Also, additional reasons for development of comprehensive social media strategy include overcoming the issues of traditional marketing methods, significantly lower costs, creating group of loyal fans, as well as the ability for a cost-effective data analysis available on social media platforms.

When analyzing individual criteria our study showed that first category of sports achieved high results for popularity criterion with all associations achieving 20 points or more. On the other hand, second and third category of sports didn't perform as well. None of the associations reached 50% of the maximum popularity score. In this case, social media managers from the associations can use reach or brand-awareness campaigns which are two of eleven Facebook marketing goals. Brand-awareness campaign can introduce the association page to targeted audience, while reach campaigns allow for the advertisement to be shown to a larger number of Facebook users. It is important to note that these are paid advertisements and it needs to be taken into account when planning the marketing budget. In order to achieve significant results in the segment of interactivity, it is important to focus on building a loyal fan base. One of the most significant advantages of social networks is the possibility of communication with

users, and based on these results, we see that all associations have achieved the lowest results in this segment. Only football and handball achieved over 50% of the maximum interactivity score. This indicates that there are untapped opportunities to strengthen the relationship with the fan base as well as general public and sport lovers. When it comes to the content category, all associations achieved relatively similar results ranging from 20 to 30 points.

It is important to state that some of the associations do not have a Facebook page, such as Basketball and Judo. Having in mind the previously highlighted importance for the engagement with fans, it is recommended that these associations utilize this medium of communication.

Conclusion

As described in the Discussion, alarming shortcomings were observed which, above all, reflect the approach of sports federations to social networks. Namely, it is obvious that sports federations use social networks primarily as a substitute for a website - a bulletin board, where they inform their audience, without using all the benefits and potentials of social networks. These potentials include opportunities to interact and achieve two-way communication with the audience. While large and established organizations like the most popular sports associations have no need to invest in social networks in the short term, to smaller and less well-known sports federations, they represent a great chance to popularize their sports. Research has shown that this potential is completely untapped, and therein lies their chance. Indirectly, it can be concluded that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of social networks. Given the general lack of funding for sports federations, potential cooperation with commercial sponsors could be achieved if federations on social networks had the value of a segmented, engaged network, making them more attractive to sponsorships. Our results are in line with those obtained by Pegoraro et al. (2017). The authors stated that there is still a significant opportunity to improve the use of social networks as brand management tools, as information posted on Facebook can potentially increase

brand exposure and create positive brand associations for a sport organization.

One of the limitations of this study relates to the choice of organizations to be analyzed. Namely, exclusively national sports federations of Olympic sports were selected. As a recommendation for future research, the inclusion of other federations stands out, primarily those sports that are not on the program of the Olympic Games, but are recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Additionally, through the form of a comparative study, the performances of clubs on social networks can be analysed, in relation to associations, both from Montenegro and from the region.

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