



**Cape Peninsula
University of Technology**

**SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR WESTERN
PROVINCE SUPER LEAGUE RUGBY CLUBS**

By

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ABSTRACT

Social media has revolutionised the way athletes, clubs, and fans interact with each other, making their growing importance in sport inevitable. Digital platforms support sport entities to interact with consumers/fans promptly and directly by delivering a setting for sport brands to strengthen their outlooks and identities. This demonstrates that social media allows sport teams to expand their market and brand reach, hence increasing overall brand recognition and experience. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the use of social media as a marketing communication (MC) tool for Western Province Super League (WPSL) rugby clubs in a dynamic sporting and technological environment.

The South African sport sector has grown in recent years, owing mostly to large financial investments in the country's key sporting codes of soccer, rugby, and cricket. Consequently, this study addressed the research gap by providing knowledge on the South African sport market. Hence, it was essential to evaluate the extent to which social media marketing may be effectively applied in a non-professional rugby club environment in South Africa. This exploratory research explored the motivations and level of social media use among WPSL rugby clubs. In addition, it examined how WPSL rugby teams might maximise their strategic use of social media and how social media was used as an MC method during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

A cross-sectional and multiple-case study design was chosen, with twelve semi-structured interviews serving as the primary data collection technique. Through an examination of the recent literature on the adoption and usage of social media as an MC tool among sport organisations, secondary data was gathered. This study employed the qualitative data analysis tool ATLAS.ti (version 9) to identify and code common research-related themes. The Ethics Committee of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology Business and Management Sciences Faculty granted permission to conduct the research and fieldwork, and participating respondents provided consent prior to taking part in the study.

This study found that brand awareness, sponsor attraction, relationship building, information sharing, and communication were primary drivers for social media use. Findings also revealed that social media usage challenges included reach, activity frequency, cost, content population, time, and negative reactions. Further, the effects of COVID-19 on rugby club social media use led to restricted and restrictive content that had a detrimental influence on social media engagement.

This investigation made a connection between the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), behavioural intention, and motivation for utilising social media as an MC tool. The findings of this research strengthen the current foundation of TAM in the domains of social media and sport. In light of this, the inquiry took into consideration external variables such as positive and negative influences, perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) positive and negative

factors, behavioural intention, positive and negative to use of social media, and the factors promoting the actual use of social media within a sport setting.

Ultimately, the study advances knowledge and awareness of the relationship between South Africa's sport marketing and social media. Through its contribution to the TAM and expansion of the body of knowledge on consumer behaviour, sport, and digital marketing in South Africa, this research has significant theoretical and practical significance. The investigation is valuable as it will aid sport organisations, non-professional sport clubs, and social media marketers to enhance the effectiveness of MC strategies by ensuring that their target audiences are better defined and adapted to technological advancements. Both academics and professionals may benefit from these insights. The research was able to discern an association between social media use by rugby clubs and the effective outcomes attained while employing these media as a strategic MC tool. Therefore, the research objectives for the study were achieved and it can be concluded that WPSL rugby teams utilise social media as an MC tool.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19

Marketing communication

Social media

Sport marketing

Technology Acceptance Model

Western Province Super League

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

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TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Consumer engagement	Consumer engagement is the activity of brands or organisations communicating with customers across various channels to build a meaningful connection (Coleman, 2021; Aboul-Dahab, 2022).
Coronavirus (COVID-19)	COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (World Health Organisation, 2020).
Digital marketing	Digital marketing is the practice of promoting goods or services through the use of digital technology, primarily the Internet, mobile devices, display advertising, and other digital channels (Desai & Vidyapeeth, 2019; Aboul-Dahab, 2022).
Marketing communication (MC)	MC's core objective is to educate, persuade, and remind a specific audience of a brand's product or service. Advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, internet and digital marketing, and personal selling are all examples of MC that improves relationships with its stakeholders (Mayo, 2022).
Perceived ease of use (PEOU)	PEOU represents the degree to which individuals feel a specific system is easy to use (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).
Perceived usefulness (PU)	PU indicates the extent to which people intend using a given method to increase their efficiency (Davis, 1989).
Social media	Social media is a diverse set of online, word-of-mouth platforms that includes blogs, internet community forums, company sponsored content, social networking websites, and consumer product reviews websites (Green, 2016). It is also a term that refers to the application of technology and web-based tools to enable people and/or organisations to connect with each other, transferring information and content created individually or shared, in real-time or asynchronously (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; López-Carril et al., 2019).
Sport marketing	Sport marketing is described as the process of planning and carrying out processes for the manufacturing, pricing, promotion, and distribution of sporting goods in order to suit the needs of customers and achieve organisational objectives (Smith & Stewart, 2015; Thompson, 2016; Mamo et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022).
Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	TAM was developed to describe how people respond to new technology. There are several key predictors of new technology adoption: Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude towards use, behavioural intention to use and actual usage (Davis et al., 1989).
Western Province Super League (WPSL)	The WPSL forms part of the Western Province Rugby Union's club rugby structure. The Super League is the top tier and consists of Super League A, B and C divisions (WP Rugby, 2021).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the core elements and structure of this study. A concise background is conveyed first, accompanied by the recognition of the research gaps and the problem statement. In this chapter, the study objectives are stated, and research questions are also described in detail. Subsequently, an introductory literature review is presented on the sport industry and social media's influence on sport marketing.

Additional sections will also discuss the specifics of the research methodology and design, the reliability and validity of the research measurement tool and results, the scope of the study and ethical considerations. Lastly, the significance of the study is presented in terms of its contribution to the body of existing knowledge, followed by an outline of the thesis chapters.

1.2 Background to the research problem

1.2. Research necessity

Today, sport is not only a variety of competitions, but it is also widely considered a robust industry (Krzyżowski & Strzelecki, 2022; Mendizabal et al., 2022) that unites millions of people at one time and has a unique way of allowing people to experience the feeling of personal identity and social identification (Joseph, 2011; Rees et al., 2015; Hirshon, 2020; Kahiya et al., 2022). In sport, the connection between supporters and sport clubs is unique because fans are prepared to sacrifice their time and resources to support the teams, resulting in a high level of engagement (Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Pereira et al., 2022). Sport has been cited as a prime example of a strong shared interest for building effective online communities (Popp & Woratschek, 2016; Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Krzyżowski & Strzelecki, 2022), in light of existing fan bases and their degree of sport enthusiasm. As a result of this unifying nature, sport is considered an industry that has acquired a great deal of interest and attention in recent years (Argan & Katirci, 2015; Jones, 2021; Obaid & Kishore, 2022). On a global scale, the sport industry is valued at over US\$500 billion (Business Research Company, 2021) predominantly due to an increase in professional team sport (Plunket Research, 2017; Sport Business Group, 2019).

Rugby's growth internationally demonstrates the sport's ability to inspire and engage a global audience. Rugby is a major sport in South Africa, with a devoted fan base of approximately 10 million people (SA Rugby, 2023). The semi-professional and professional provincial teams in South Africa often recruit players from the club teams, making club rugby an extremely important component of the sport. For the sake of this examination, it is important to keep in mind the centrality of the club rugby system in South African rugby, since it is the clubs that make up the South African rugby unions' and provinces' amateur system. Rugby unions in South Africa have

developed into huge commercial operations as a result of the implementation of strategic business models that produce large and sustainable amounts of annual revenue. Despite the advancement in professionalism in rugby, there is a lack of research on non-professional sport in South Africa; the current study thus aimed to fill the research need by delivering an overview of the non-professional sport industry inside the South African rugby environment.

The growing engagement in sport organisations from a fan and a professional standpoint, as well as the expansion in the number of people employed, have enabled the sport sector to grow in significance (Shank & Lyberger, 2015; Milovic & Vojvodic, 2021; Aboul-Dahab, 2022). Sport has been described as essential to national and global economy, especially in countries that host major athletic events and competitions (Belfiore et al., 2019; Lukinović et al., 2022). The globalisation of sport is evidenced in the fact that professional sport teams now prioritise the international market above the domestic markets (Milovic & Vojvodic, 2021; Mendizabal et al., 2022). In recent years, sport has grown increasingly professionally and commercially oriented, with many sports bodies functioning as fully-fledged organisations as opposed to only being sport institutions (Moyo et al., 2020; Mendizabal et al., 2022). While assessing the degree of professionalism in sport is significant, the current research focused on the amateur level, at which the Western Province Super League (WPSL) teams compete.

Kavanagh et al. (2020) argue that digital technologies have reshaped how people communicate and interact and have a tremendous impact on every part of people's life; social networking websites and technology are always available through smartphones and desktop computers. In 2022, there were an estimated 7.9 billion people on earth of whom 5.4 billion are internet users (Internet World Stats, 2022; World Population Review, 2022). Based on these statistics, a significant portion of the global population has access to the internet. An increase in internet accessible devices and the evolution of sport channels may steer the growth of sport organisations' use of marketing communication (MC) tools (Businesswire, 2019; Kuntevich, 2019). The Internet is a valuable tool that is utilised in many sectors, notably sport, since it allows teams to communicate with fans in a way that meets their demands (Bickel, 2012; McHugh & Krieg, 2021). As a result, it has become the standard for the majority of sport teams in the industry to communicate with their supporters online in order to capitalise on commercial sporting possibilities and trends (Skinner et al., 2018; Leszczyński et al., 2021; Mendizabal et al., 2022). This investigation looked at South African amateur rugby teams' online communication tactics and use in the light of the rugby scenario in particular.

Although digital sport marketing is regarded as a comparatively modern area in the study and practice of marketing, marketing through sport has been present for many years (Sahin et al., 2020; Angosto et al., 2023). Over the last several years, sport marketing has evolved due to the digital age of social media and communication technology. Marques et al. (2018) points out that

one of the numerous business sectors using new media to sell goods and services to customers on a competitive basis today is sport marketing.

Social media marketing is a significant instrument for team promotion and is regarded as a vital element for sport marketing. Ratten and Thompson (2021) highlight that the sport sector is the principal proponent of digital marketing; hence, its impact on the development of digital marketing strategies must be acknowledged. Thus, Huang and Hsu (2017) assert that social media is now widely used in various sport codes, particularly amongst professional teams and elite athletes. Further, Newman et al. (2017) agree that many sport teams and organisations have used social media for public relations and marketing strategies to communicate with both stakeholders and fans. Additionally, Sahin et al. (2020) recognise that through social media usage, sport teams can make economic contributions to both sport clubs and the industry at large.

Sport marketers have become increasingly reliant on social media platforms to promote their brands and engage with fans (Maderer et al., 2018). In recent years, the concept of social media, particularly social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, have aided sport marketing organisations (Roberts et al., 2016; Capriotti & Ruesja, 2018; Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Naraine et al., 2019; Osokin, 2019; González et al., 2021; Naraine et al., 2022). The majority of sport clubs have official websites as well as a presence on numerous social media platforms.

The social media setting is revolutionising consumer-brand interactions, particularly the creation, distribution, and consumption of brand-related content in sport (Ristevska-Jovanovska, 2021; Ernstsson, 2022; Naraine et al., 2022; Yoon & Pedersen, 2022). Sporting organisations are fast adopting the use of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram due to their minimal cost and great ability (Billings et al., 2017; Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; López-Carril & Anagnostopoulos, 2020; Doyle et al., 2022). These digital platforms enable sport teams to communicate with fans in a fast and direct manner, as well as to broaden their marketing impact and reach (Pereira et al., 2022) by creating a unique setting for sport brands to enhance their perspectives and identities (Irianto & Kartikasari, 2020). This suggests that social media enable sport teams to broaden their market and brand reach, enhancing overall brand identification and experiences. Furthermore, Parganas et al. (2017) concur that social media platforms provide an efficient means for sport brands to express desired brand connections and brand identity to their followers.

1.2.2 Research gap

Following a significant surge in social media and sport marketing literature worldwide, several studies have primarily focused on professional sport teams in American football (Abeza et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2018; King & Wiltshire, 2021; León-Quismondo, 2021); basketball (Armstrong et al., 2016; Naraine, 2019; Benito-Colio et al., 2022); and football (Krzyżowski & Strzelecki, 2022; McCarthy et al., 2022; Metelski & Leszczyński, 2022; Pereira et al., 2022). However, limited

research can be found on rugby teams' usage of social media. Research that has been conducted on rugby and social media predominantly focus on US, New Zealand and United Kingdom professional rugby cases (Harris & Jenkins, 2001; Kocher, 2014; Kucharski, 2015; Mackreth & Bond, 2021; Byon et al., 2022; Kahiya et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2022), which indicates a gap in research pertaining to amateur sports. In this regard, Barbu et al. (2019) contend that future research is essential to investigate the importance of social media in different types of sport.

Maderer et al. (2018) note that it could be beneficial to increase the range of social media tools, which are popular in different geographic areas. As the literature shows, there have been very few studies conducted on sport teams' usage of social media as an MC tool in South Africa, thus a research gap exists (Abon & Adebayo, 2020), which made the current study important in the South African sport setting. Furthermore, Ong and Leng (2022) recommend that future studies should investigate if other types of social media sites (apart from Facebook) are more efficient at influencing attitudes and behaviours of an intended target audience. Hence, the current research addressed this research gap and examined how other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp were employed by the rugby clubs. Research by Andreski (2022) highlighted that an alternative research approach would be to investigate sport teams without an established fan base and see how they acquire fans and followers. The present inquiry looked at non-professional club rugby teams in the Western Cape which do not have a large fan base across social media in comparison to other sport codes, therefore making the current investigation necessary. In support, Maderer et al. (2018) endorse that research should look into sport clubs with lesser brand value, which would potentially provide a further understanding of the various social media tactics or strategies employed by the sport clubs. Machado et al. (2020) suggest that in future studies, it is imperative to select a diverse range of respondents who follow their sport clubs on social media platforms. Annamalai et al. (2021) suggest that future research could look into the Coronavirus (COVID-19) period when live sport was prohibited in 2020, but include the three main social media platforms in the sport context (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) to ascertain if the social media strategies employed were a deviation from the norm. This inquiry thus fulfilled the above-mentioned research gap and investigated how social media platforms were adapted and used during the COVID-19 pandemic when live sport was prohibited. Annamalai et al. (2021) further suggest that future studies should endeavour to investigate the social media strategy of sport clubs or individual sports other than cricket. Therefore, there was a need for a study to consider other sport codes such as rugby, on which this investigation focused.

Additionally, a German study by Schallhorn et al. (2022) proposed that it would be useful to investigate how the pandemic impacted sport club communication in countries with less established amateur sport. Therefore, this study addressed the above research gap by providing empirical insight into how non-professional WPSL rugby clubs dealt with MC during the pandemic. Agrawal et al. (2018) have encouraged the employment of qualitative analysis in future studies to

get a better understanding of using social media platforms that have already found a place in the marketing and promotion strategies of various multinational corporations, such as Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn, to assist sport marketing practitioners in using social media in a more effective and efficient manner to achieve desired results.

Sport organisations are continuously experimenting with new strategies to promote their brands and interact with fans, and technology advancements are essential to these campaigns. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was created by Davis et al. (1989) specifically to describe how consumers adopt technology, and it is most commonly used to explain how technology is employed (Princi & Krämer, 2020). Numerous studies focused on how useful TAM is for determining user activity in sporting environments (Goebert & Greenhalgh, 2020; Wu, 2020; Uhrich, 2021; Ojomo & Olomjobi, 2021; Fujak & Karg, 2022). A research gap exists within the use of TAM as an MC tool for rugby clubs in South Africa; therefore this research used TAM to investigate social media's external variables, preferences, usage factors and motivations.

Moreover, this study examined if the selected sport teams fit the pattern of other international sport marketing practices or if there are unique aspects in South Africa that call for an adaption of these practices. The study addressed the aforementioned research gaps as there is a need to analyse how social media as an MC tool is used by WPSL rugby clubs, particularly in terms of rugby in South Africa.

1.3 Problem statement

The distinctiveness of sport performed in South Africa may be attributed to the country's diversified population, and it is often linked to the nation's history and legacy (Knott & Swart, 2014). Participation in sport and club membership develops a feeling of belonging as well as social capital manifested in trust, which is a very strong characteristic at the community level in South Africa, where the value of sport as a social link is a very strong attribute at the community level (Burnett, 2021). A report by the Western Cape Government in South Africa, showed that sport has contributed more than 2.2% of the Western Cape's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which equates to an amount of R8.8 billion since 2012 (Sanders, 2019). Furthermore, the sport sector provides around 60 000 jobs in the province with further opportunities to increase economic growth and tourism, while also promoting social inclusion and physical activity (Sanders, 2019). Sport and recreation have a significant influence on social development, favourably impacting health, education, human and social capital, and notably youth.

The aforementioned clarifies the importance of sport in the Western Cape, and therefore the present inquiry was conducted on non-professional rugby clubs that are largely supported by their local communities.

Social media is transforming the way sport personalities, clubs, and fans actively engage with each other, which make the essential role of social media in sport inescapable. Social media is

accepted as an imperative medium of communication for both individual users and companies, particularly over the last ten years due to the development in technology and innovative approaches in consumer behaviour (Akkaya & Zerenler, 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2021; MacPherson & Kerr, 2021). With the amount of social media users increasing year on year (Kemp, 2023), the two-way communication stream of social media has created a greater communication environment between fans and sport clubs (Sahin et al., 2020; Szczepkowski, 2021; Wang, 2021; Andreski, 2022; Ernstsson, 2022; Krzyżowski & Strzelecki, 2022; Obaid & Kishore, 2022; Pereira et al., 2022). The evolution of social media has been vast over the past decade, as with its relationship with sport marketing.

Previous international studies have focused on customer engagement in sport (Theocharis et al., 2019); relationship marketing in social media (Abeza et al., 2017; Andreski, 2022); brand image of professional sport teams (Pegoraro et al., 2018; Joanna & Zuzanna, 2020). Further international research has concentrated on sport fan engagements in sport (Marques et al., 2018; Barbu et al., 2019; Machado et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2022); using social media for sport events (Li et al., 2017; Ristevska-Jovanovska, 2021; Scott et al., 2021; Boricheva, 2022; Yoon & Pedersen, 2022); brand image in sport (Na et al., 2019); digital transformation of soccer clubs based on social media (Metelski & Leszczyński, 2022; Petersen-Wagner, 2022); and measuring social media activity in female sport (Piché & Naraine, 2022). Additionally, research studies on the influence that sponsorship has on user engagement on social media have been conducted (Barbu et al., 2021; Burton et al., 2021; Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Koronios et al., 2022; Mastromartino & Naraine, 2022; Naraine et al., 2022; Weimar et al., 2022).

While the above-mentioned studies have improved our knowledge of social media's relationship with sport marketing literature, to date several studies linked to these topics have only focused on European sport (Siguencia et al., 2017; Marques et al., 2018; Nisar et al., 2018; Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Barbu et al., 2019; Kuntcevich, 2019; Sahin et al., 2020; Machado et al., 2020; Guzmán et al., 2021; Maguire, 2021; Faria et al., 2022; Krzyżowski & Strzelecki, 2022; McCarthy et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2022) and North American sport (Abeza et al., 2017; Scelles et al., 2017; Yoon et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2019; Naraine, 2019; King & Wiltshire, 2021; León-Quismondo, 2021; Benito-Colio et al., 2022). Although the value of studying these factors is clear, there is a lack of literature within the South African context addressing sport teams' use of social media as an MC tool. Therefore, this research provided an African and South African rugby-centric overview of social media usage as an MC tool.

Previous South African research within the sport marketing context has concentrated on sport sponsorship as an MC tool (Sephapo, 2017); sport event sponsorship and brand extension (Zhou & Steenkamp, 2010); brand equity of South African rugby teams (Gerber-Nel, 2004); stakeholder and visitor perceptions of South Africa's sport brand positioning (Hemmonsby & Tichaawa, 2021); and investigating the link between corporate social responsibility and the marketing

success of South African professional sport organisations (Moyo et al., 2020; Moyo et al., 2022a; Moyo et al., 2022b; Moyo et al., 2022c). In addition, studies have previously been conducted on leveraging brand opportunities through sport events (Knott et al., 2016); brand strategy of sport teams (Gerber & Cant, 2010); marketing as a competitive advantage technique among aspiring and professional soccer teams in KZN (Abon & Adebayo, 2020); the effects of major sports events on destination branding (Hemmonsbeey & Tichwaawa, 2018); and COVID-19 and sport in South Africa (Knott & Hemmonsbeey, 2023). Though the above-mentioned studies have focused on the South African sport market, they have not addressed social media usage with direct reference to club rugby teams. In South Africa, there is also a scarcity of literature on sport marketing. Sport marketing and social media have been highlighted as a rising sector, hence there is a need to explore and contribute to the literature on this issue.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant influence on many aspects of society, including sport. Social distancing policies and the closing of sporting facilities created particularly difficult challenges for local sport groups, which rely on joint activities and member social interaction. During the COVID-19 pandemic when no rugby was played, players used this as opportunity to be creative and interact with fans through social media (Thomas, 2020).

An array of theoretical framework and models was established by academics to gain a greater perspective of user acceptance of technology (Weerasinghe & Hindagolla, 2018). TAM (Davis, 1989) demonstrates how external influences impact people's behaviour while employing new technology. TAM has been used in sport-related studies but the positive and negative influences of perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of usefulness (PEOU), behavioural intention, and the factors promoting the actual use of social media as a construct for non-professional sport in particular rugby have not been considered, which this study addressed.

Maderer et al. (2018) recommends that future research should investigate sport teams' application of social media as an MC and branding tool in more depth. Moreover, Pegoraro et al. (2017) agree that future studies should comprise qualitative interviews with key participants at sport organisations to ascertain their brand management objectives for using social media platforms. The present study therefore explored the research gap by providing an understanding of why and how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool.

1.4 Overview of sport marketing and social media

In this section, the relevant literature related to sport marketing and social media is reviewed and considered. The subsections also include an outline of the evolution of sport marketing and social media as an MC tool. The section also provides a summary of social media's engagement with sport organisations, and lastly, the use of the conceptual framework of the TAM within the study.

1.4.1 The evolution of sport marketing

Da Silva and Casas (2017) identify sport marketing as the activity of planning and executing procedures for the manufacturing, pricing, promotion, and distribution of sport products in order to meet the requirements of consumers and fulfil the goals of the organisation. In the marketing sector, digital technologies such as customer analytics, mobile marketing, social media marketing, and relationship marketing have all had an influence on sport marketing methods, including sponsorship (Garza Segovia & Kennett, 2022; Koronios et al., 2022; Mamo et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022; Angosto et al., 2023). Despite the fact that sport marketing is a relatively recent sector of marketing, sport has been either promoted or utilised as a tool for marketing for hundreds of years (Saritaş, 2017; Pourzarnegar, 2022). In addition to conventional deployment and evaluation methods, sport marketing initiatives are being conducted on new digital channels.

Furthermore, sport marketing is defined as more than simply advertising or branding; it entails locating potential customers, analysing their requirements, and developing methods to meet those demands (Smith & Stewart, 2015; Thompson, 2016; Kuntcevic, 2019; Mamo et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022; Angosto et al., 2023). Pizzo et al. (2018) suggest that current sport marketing literature may be adopted and enhanced to investigate e-sport customer behaviour. In addition to the financial value of sport marketing, sport organisations utilise it to establish connections with their consumers and supporters, and to enhance customer loyalty. The idea of social media, particularly the utilisation of social networks like Twitter, has recently improved marketing, particularly sport marketing for organisations (Roberts et al., 2016; Capriotti & Ruesja, 2018). Sport marketing is an essential part of global sport innovation since it is crucial for corporate survival and advancement (da Silva & Casas, 2017; Mamo et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022). Marketing-driven techniques enable sport to better adapt to the requirements of its fans and reach an even larger audience (Sahin et al., 2020). This study examined how the concept of sport marketing was implemented by WPSL rugby clubs and to what extent marketing through sport was prevalent.

1.4.2 Social media as an MC tool

Given the large potential audience accessible, who spend several hours a day using social media across many platforms, marketers have embraced social media as MC (Appel et al., 2020). A fundamental change has occurred in the manner in which marketing professionals all over the globe communicate as a direct result of the proliferation of MC channels made available to consumers by social media (Johnston et al., 2018). Academically, social media has also been embraced, with a large body of research on social media marketing and related issues such as online networks (Abdourazakou et al., 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021; Doyle et al., 2022). Regardless of what academics and practitioners have studied and learned over the last 15-20 years on this topic, the future of social media in marketing may not be merely a continuation of what we have already seen due to the fast-paced and ever-changing nature of social media, and

how consumers use it. As a result, this study established how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy. The emergence of social media, and how it has influenced both consumer behaviour and marketing practice, has been largely driven by the platforms themselves (Chawinga, 2017; Abeza et al., 2019; Kumar & Rana, 2020).

Even though the rise (and fall) of various types of social media channels have been crucial for comprehending the social media landscape, the researcher believes that understanding the current state of social media, at least from a marketing standpoint, lies further in what users do on these platforms, rather than in the technologies or services they provide (Appel et al., 2020). In the beginning, most social media activity was limited to specific social networking sites such as My Space, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (or their now-defunct precursors). However, a number of websites and apps that primarily fulfil distinct functions have seized the chance to integrate social media capabilities into their user interfaces (Filo et al., 2015; Karami et al., 2018). Conversely, all mainstream mobile and desktop operating systems include social media integration (for instance, Apple's iOS includes sharing functions). This has made social media pervasive, if not powerful, and has expanded the ecosystem beyond particular platforms (Chawla & Chodak, 2021). While the usage of social media has been extensively investigated around the world, few investigations have looked into the use of social media as an MC tool in South African sport clubs and leagues.

1.4.3 Social media in sport marketing

The widespread usage of social media by spectators, in addition to the use of social media for marketing purposes by sport organisations, has heightened scholarly interest in the topic (Watkins & Lee, 2016; Yoon et al., 2017; Maderer et al., 2018; Machado et al., 2020). Social media has revolutionised the way fans engage with their teams, athletes, and clubs; many fans are active on social media, and this activity is vital in their life (Popp & Woratschek, 2016). Social media's growth has led to clubs investing much time and money into finding their most active online supporters (Seifi et al., 2019). Although engaging with fans, supporters and other stakeholders online can be challenging for a sport team, it is worthwhile to use these platforms with its many beneficial activities (Naraine, 2019).

The sport industry would not have the mainstream success that allows it to generate big earnings if it did not benefit from excellent promotion. As a result, promotion and communication are crucial in sport marketing (Belfiore et al., 2019; Smith, 2019; Machado et al., 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021; Jacobs et al., 2022; Mamo et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022). The evolution of the social media environment over the last decade has had a dramatic impact on every aspect of contemporary life, and the sport sector is no exception (Barbu et al., 2019). Nowadays, social media and sporting events are inextricably linked. We are living in a period in which each and every sport team, league, and association has at least one social media profile on which they post

all their relevant information (Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Andreski, 2022; Ernstsson, 2022).

Barbu et al. (2019) indicate that in many contexts, social media platforms are seen as a method to attain insights and avoid traditional ways of conducting market research. Through social media platforms, sport clubs may reach their target audiences whenever and wherever they desire and they can develop closer relationships with them. Furthermore, it has been shown that among the factors influencing fans' sport club social media usage and engagement is perceived corporate credibility (Esen et al., 2021). Social media increases positive feelings including credibility and trust by making the distribution process more accessible. Faria et al. (2022) found that the majority of Facebook social media marketing efforts have a favourable impact on supporters' contentment and engagement. Strong brands are crucial for sport clubs because they define their relationship with their supporters (Florea et al., 2018; Pourzarnegar, 2022). Hence, in this study, social media MC is examined together with sport marketing to ascertain the usage, behavioural intentions and factors promoting social media usage by WPSL rugby clubs.

1.4.4 Social media and sport organisation engagement

Many organisations use social media to engage their fans and consumers (Lee et al., 2018; Ordenes et al., 2019; Aboul-Dahab, 2022), which has resulted in an increase in research on brand engagement in an SM environment (Jones, 2021; Obaid & Kishore, 2022). Furthermore, sport organisations are investigating new interactions with their present and future consumers via digital platforms in order to create appropriate brand communities (Su et al., 2020; Frederick et al., 2021; Abeza et al., 2022; Ernstsson, 2022). Organisations that provide followers with unique immersive experiences are more likely to acquire loyal and engaged supporters (Belot et al., 2016). It has been found by Wang and Chan-Olmsted (2020), Li et al. (2021), Verma and Yadav (2021), and Jacobs et al. (2022) that the desire to feel a part of the brand's community through interactions with the brand and other fans is strongly correlated with active involvement. Due to the growth of social media, sport clubs have been spending a great deal of money to start online engagement using their supporters' extremely active personalities (Filo et al., 2015; Aboul-Dahab, 2022).

With social media being the medium in which most spectators interact with their favourite sport team (Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Barbu et al., 2019; Sahin et al., 2020; Guzmán et al., 2021), sport organisations must actively communicate with their target demographics in order to retain and grow their fan and support base.

The rising fan involvement within social media platforms can potentially generate more options for companies, resulting in higher sales and spectators for the sport team (Nisar et al., 2018). Social media is a crucial platform that athletes use to establish strong and distinct identities. It has provided athletes with a way to engage consumers and achieve global exposure (Doyle et al., 2022), in fact, analysing fan involvement on social media is seen as a top priority

among sport practitioners (Filo et al., 2015; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are the most frequently used platforms by sport clubs and athletes in a variety of settings around the world, according to multiple studies (MacDonald, 2017; Hussain et al., 2021; Andreski, 2022; Doyle et al., 2022; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022; Ma et al., 2023).

Online platforms may meet a wide range of customer needs due to the participatory aspect of social media, which connects consumers to brands (Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Massonos, 2019; Turková, 2021). Spectators are an excellent example of devoted supporters who remain with their team regardless of its performance, which is often evident across the team's social media channels (Yoon et al., 2017; Iriantoa & Kartikasari, 2020; Byun, 2020; Areiza-Padilla et al., 2021; Maguire, 2021). With today's technologically mediated information, sport teams may learn about their fans' habits, motivations, values, and grievances, and fans can connect directly with the teams they support (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). Consequently, this study explores the influence and level of engagement on social media when used in MC by rugby clubs.

1.4.5 Technology Acceptance Model

TAM was created as a framework to explain how people react to new technologies (Davis et al., 1989). Two major determinants of new technology adoption were identified: PU and PEOU. Academics studying the adoption and usage of social media as an MC by corporations have adopted this model. Furthermore, the framework has been used to illustrate the initial acceptance and persistence of utilizing new technology, products, or services (Zhong et al., 2021). Due to the degree of PU and PEOU in acquiring information about the sport team and its members, social media may be considered by sport teams as an effective means of interacting with their audiences. The results of this investigation established a connection between the motivation and behavioural intent to use social media as an MC tool and the TAM (Davis et al., 1989).

The findings of this study add to the present foundation of TAM in social media and sport contexts. As a result, there are several components to the current framework, including social media external factors, PU of social media, PEOU of social media, and social media behavioural intentions all of which connect to variables that promote social media usage. It is essential to note that the concepts presented here are derived from the TAM (Davis et al., 1989), which has been adapted to correspond with the current inquiry.

1.5 Research questions

- Why are WPSL rugby clubs using social media as part of their MC strategy?
- How do WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool?
- What social media MC strategies can be identified to maximise the clubs' marketing efforts?
- How were social media MC practices adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic when sport was prohibited in South Africa?

1.6 Research objectives

- To determine why WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as part of their MC strategy;
- To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as an MC tool;
- To establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy; and
- To analyse how social media were used as an MC tool during COVID-19.

1.7 Research design and methodology

1.7.1 Research paradigm

Research paradigms, or shared beliefs, are an important part of any research study (Brown & Dueñas, 2020). A research paradigm is described by Brown and Dueñas (2020) as the collection of common beliefs and understandings among scientists on how issues need to be recognized and addressed. In order to meet the goals of the study, the interpretivist philosophy was chosen as the most efficient way to access rich empirical data and different points of view from the respondents about their relationship with sport and social media as an MC tool.

1.7.2 Research approach

Brown and Dueñas (2020) propose that it is appropriate to adopt the selected paradigm to determine a suitable methodology that aligns most closely with the assumptions of the phenomena under investigation.

Qualitative research is commonly accepted as an inductive method that involves organising data into themes or categories and finding connections between those themes or categories (Yadav, 2022). Basias and Pollalis (2018) assert that the qualitative research allows researchers to get to know the individuals who participate part in the study and learn more about what is being studied. It was critical for this study to obtain meaningful data from stakeholders' experiences and expertise; thus, the inquiry selected a qualitative research approach. Furthermore, in order to be compatible with the study objective and to investigate and comprehend the participants' ideas, the inquiry used a qualitative research approach.

1.7.3 Research strategy and design

Employing an exploratory research technique yields rich data that assists in answering the objectives of a study's research questions (Penwarden, 2014; Joseph, 2022). Furthermore, given that there are few studies on South African sport teams' use of social media, the selected research strategy aided in gathering new insights into the study topic (De Beer & Stander, 2016). This study

utilised a cross-sectional and multiple case study methodology, which necessitates only obtaining data on a phenomenon from many cases once.

A cross-sectional approach is suited for the current study because data was retrieved and detailed from several sources in the selected sample of important stakeholders from Cape Town WPSL rugby clubs. A multi-case research approach was used in the current study to collect data from twelve instances (rugby clubs) in Cape Town. The decision was taken to focus on marketing stakeholders because they were directly involved in the organisation, execution, and evaluation of social media operations for rugby clubs.

1.7.4 Sampling

1.7.4.1 Population and sample frame

Barnsbee et al. (2018) and Ravikiran (2022) assert that the target population consists of groups of people that a research project aims to investigate and draw conclusions about. This study was aimed at WPSL rugby clubs and the social media platforms they used. The sample frame was made up of participants from rugby clubs in this population who meet the criteria for social media use and are easy to reach. The individuals who were chosen to take part in the study had access to data and a high level of understanding of the subject and questions of the study. The investigation utilised a data saturation strategy to select interviews based on the number of rugby clubs that are engaged on social media sites. Saunders et al. (2018) argue that using a data saturation technique is valuable for the validity of the data to make sure that the standard of the qualitative research remains high.

1.7.4.2 Sample size

The sample size was established by collecting data until the saturation point was attained, at which point no new data from interviews or analysis was added (Saunders et al., 2018). In this case, data saturation was reached at twelve interviews. Kemppainen (2023) conducted ten semi-structured interviews to investigate Instagram influencer marketing for sport sponsorship. Moreover, Thompson (2016) sampled eleven stakeholders to evaluate brand and fan engagement through social media. In addition, a qualitative inquiry by Zinn (2015) interviewed five professional sport teams in the United States (US) to analyse their social media strategies.

South African qualitative sport studies by Moyo et al. (2020), Moyo et al. (2022a), Moyo et al. (2022b), and Moyo et al. (2022c) used a sample size of six organisations to determine the link between professional sport organisations' marketing performance and corporate social responsibility. This investigation determined that a sample size of twelve was appropriate by taking into account the aforementioned qualitative international and South African sport marketing-related studies that used smaller sample sizes.

The reason why so few interviews were done was due to the homogeneity of the participants; therefore, no new data emerged from the tenth interview, after which the researcher did two more interviews to ascertain and substantiate that data saturation had occurred (De Vos et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2011).

1.7.4.3 Sample unit

Ullah (2013) describes sample units as individuals in the population who are assessed during sampling. Furthermore, sample units are distinct and non-overlapping entities. Key stakeholders responsible for the social media promotion of WPSL rugby clubs (such as the social media representative, media liaison, and social media manager) were chosen as the sample unit for the interviews from the specified demographic. The selected sample units for the interviews were relevant because they were directly involved in operating the rugby club's social media platforms. These participants were best placed to contribute insights that would address the study's research questions.

1.7.4.4 Sampling method

As part of the sampling procedure, preliminary research and analysis was conducted to determine whether WPSL rugby clubs had a presence on social media. The sample for the study was chosen using a non-probability sampling technique and a judgemental (or purposive) sampling method. Judgemental sampling performs effectively when it is employed to focus on parts of a population that are pertinent and easy to access (Kent, 2007). In a method known as judgmental sampling, the researcher selects the sample unit to represent the population being studied based on his or her own prior experience, as well as any relevant expert information. As a result, it was appropriate to conduct judgemental sampling for this investigation since the participants were purposefully selected due to their direct participation in the social media platforms and marketing activities of the rugby clubs. The participants were identified and contacted via email, whereby permission and interest to participate were received. The contact information for each of the rugby clubs examined was accessible on their respective websites.

1.7.5 Data collection instruments

1.7.5.1 Semi-structured interviews and interview guide

Semi-structured interviews are a technique of data collecting that allows the researcher to pose more free-form questions to the participants. Due to the requirement for relevant content on the participants' thoughts and opinions and the desire to probe into unexplored territory, semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In this study, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted using an interview guide as a data collection instrument. The researcher was able to acquire insights into the viewpoints and perspectives of using social media as an MC tool by implementing this interview method for data

gathering. Semi-structured interviews with rugby clubs' marketing stakeholders were undertaken to gain their viewpoint on social media deployment and usage.

This strengthened the interpretive framework that governed this research.

The interview guide helped ensure that questions were pertinent and logically connected, while in some cases, the interviewer adapted or rephrased questions to confirm that participants understood them.

1.7.5.2 Data collection

CIn (2013) asserts that data collection is an integral element of the research process, and that data collection methods enable researchers to obtain pertinent data about their population and research design. For data collection, the study used a multi-method strategy. Primary data was gathered through online and telephone interviews, while secondary data was gathered through a literature study.

The online video platform Google Meets was used to conduct six of the twelve interviews. The other six interviews took place through telephone calls. Due to the strict COVID-19 laws in South Africa at the time of data collection, online and telephone interviews were the preferred and most suitable way for conducting the semi-structured interviews.

Participants gave their approval for the interview to be recorded prior to the interview. Interviews were chosen as the study's method of data collecting because they helped the researcher get a comprehensive overview in order to attempt to meet the study's objectives and research questions.

In order to conceptualise the research topic, secondary data research was undertaken. Data was gathered from published and unpublished journal sources, blogs, dissertations, books, yearly reports, and information that has been analysed and is available on pertinent websites.

1.7.6 Data coding and analysis

To effectively process and analyse data, it is essential that the data be organised in a form that is simple to interpret and comprehend. This study used the qualitative data analysis application ATLAS.ti (version 9) to detect and code common themes related to the research investigation. For the classification procedure, categories that aligned with the study's objective and research objectives were outlined.

1.8 Trustworthiness and validity of the research

To assure the credibility of this study and the dependability of its conclusions, it was vital to address issues of credibility. The credibility of a research inquiry is determined by the degree of confidence in the data gathered and the techniques used to obtain the data, including the analysis. Data credibility, reliability, rigor, and transferability were all deemed important in the context of

this inquiry, despite the fact that trustworthiness methodologies and criteria differ per subject (Welman et al., 2005; Elo et al., 2014; Kumar, 2014; Daniel, 2019; Jones, 2022).

1.9 Delineation of the research

The data collected for this study was limited to the opinions, suggestions, and activities of WPSL rugby clubs at the time of the interviews. As a result, no longitudinal cohort quantified follow-up interviews were done to gauge usage trends. The research was limited to the WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town, South Africa. Other tiers and divisions within the Western Province club rugby systems were not taken into account, which limited the population and sample unit. Moreover, the results may not apply to other social media sites except those used by the respondents. Due to the fact that participation in the study was voluntary, it is possible that key informants who declined to participate for personal reasons prevented the study from collecting more meaningful data. Despite this, the saturation technique of the sample, which regulated the introduction of new data to the study, may have alleviated this problem.

1.10 Ethical considerations

Before beginning the interview procedure, participants were made aware that their consent was a prerequisite for data collection prior to the primary data collection. Thereafter participants provided consent to be interviewed. Furthermore, permission letters or email confirmations were obtained from the participating rugby clubs providing access to the population sample to undertake the semi-structured interviews. The Faculty Higher Degree Committee (FHDC) and Research Ethics Committee of Cape Peninsula University of Technology provided ethical approval for the research investigation. The ethical clearance certificate number (2020FOBREC805) can be found in Appendix B. It was made explicit in the study that the information submitted by participants would not be shared with a third party. Furthermore, the participants' identities were not made public. Participants were informed ahead of time about the information that would be gathered from the interviews and confidentiality was maintained. The collection of data was done honestly, professionally, and with no fabrication. In addition, all participants were informed that the research was voluntary and for academic purposes. They could withdraw at any time, refuse to answer a question, or not participate at all.

1.11 Significance of the research

This study makes a link between the findings about why and how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool based on the TAM (Davis et al., 1989). As a result, the findings of this study add to the current foundation of TAM in social media and sport contexts. By concentrating on rugby in South Africa, this inquiry fills a gap in the research that has not been populated by studies of other sport like soccer, baseball, American football, cricket, baseball, and hockey. This study is distinctive in that it is the first to empirically evaluate the social media usage of non-professional rugby clubs in Cape Town, South Africa, despite the fact that many sport-related scholars have

emphasised the importance of professional sport organisations embracing social media as an extension of traditional marketing.

The study's findings may be useful for managers or marketers in various sport teams and organisations as they investigate the function of social media and how to incorporate them into marketing strategies. The findings, in particular, provide key strategic insight and understanding for team marketing professionals looking to use an online brand community on social media to attract sponsors, determine the most effective social media platforms, reach a wider audience, develop relationships with current fans, or connect with future fans.

1.12 Outline of the study

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Figure 1.1 below depicts a summary of the study's layout.

Chapter 1: Introduction and research background. The chapter introduced the research topic and provides an overview of the subsequent chapters. Particular to this chapter are the study's background, problem statement, research questions, and objectives.

Chapter 2: Literature review: sport marketing is discussed in detail, as are the sport sector from both a South African and international standpoint. This chapter also provides an outline of digital sport marketing practice and its impact on sport branding and its many parts. The impact of COVID-19 on worldwide and South African sport marketing during the epidemic concludes this chapter.

Chapter 3: Literature review: this chapter examines social media and sport marketing in South Africa and around the globe. It then addresses social media and sport organisation engagement, its impact on sport marketing, and its challenges. This chapter also discusses social media as an MC tool and the chosen theoretical model for this investigation is discussed.

Chapter 4: Research methodology: this chapter provides an overview of the research paradigm, research approach, research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5: Findings: the primary data that was compiled, coded, and analysed is provided in this chapter. The chapter clearly discusses the specifics of each code and category as well as how they relate to this investigation.

Chapter 6: Discussion of results: the study's data is assessed and compared with similar studies in the literature to draw conclusions about their similarities and differences in this chapter.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations: the findings are summarised. Management implications, limitations, and future research are emphasised and conclude the study.

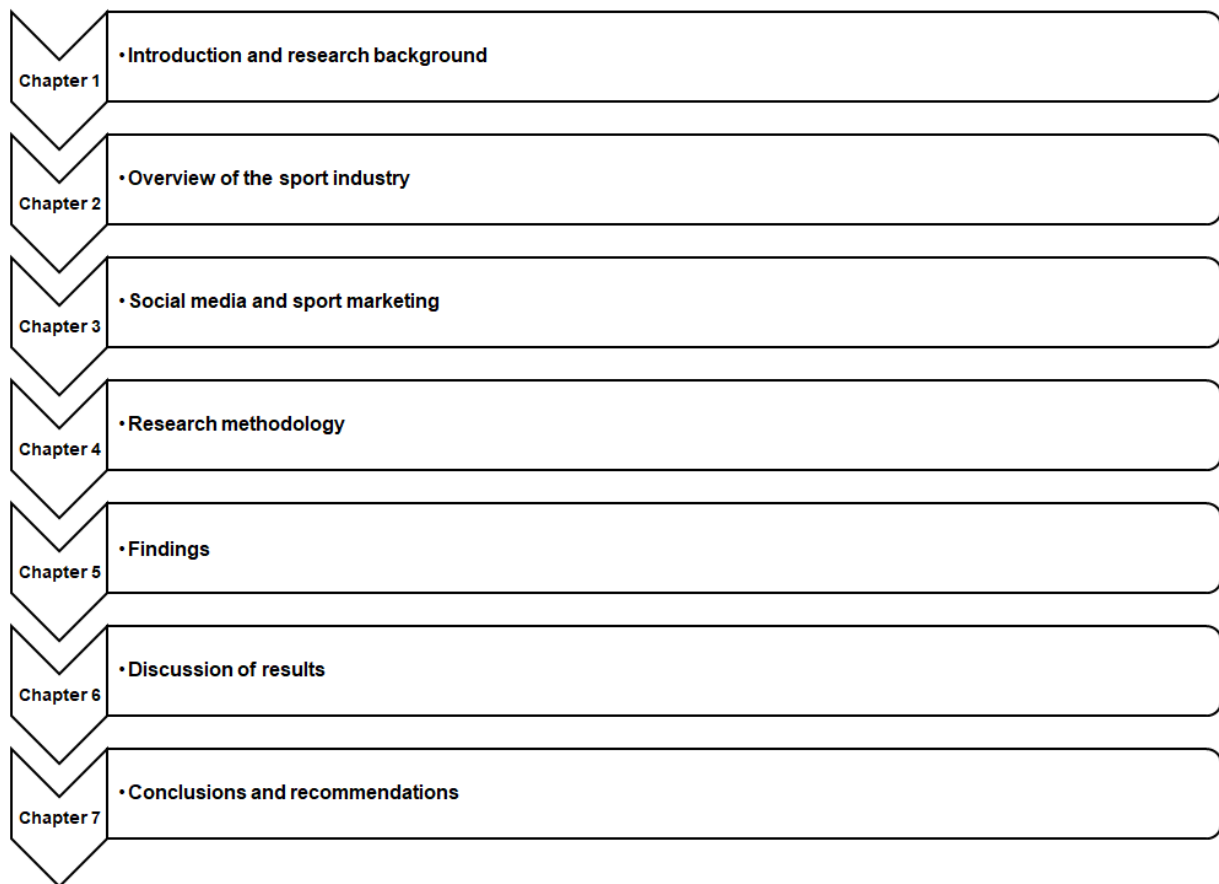


Figure 1.1: Outline of thesis

1.13 Summary

This chapter describes the study's objectives and argues for its value and relevancy. This chapter initiates the investigation and details the measures used to achieve the objectives specified by the research questions. The problem statement is informed by the research background of the study. Following that, the literature research focuses on the sport industry, with an emphasis on its expansion and development as well as its usage of social media as an MC tool. The research design and methodology are presented and justified in terms of the study's importance. The study's theoretical and practical contributions are outlined, as is the knowledge gap that has been identified about the link between WPSL rugby clubs and social media as an MC strategy.

CHAPTER 2

THE SPORT INDUSTRY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an understanding of the sport industry from both a South African and global perspective. It commences with a brief introduction and definition of sport, and then provides an overview of the local and global sport industries, highlighting its relevance for this study. Further, this chapter provides insight into the main sport codes in South Africa and provides an in-depth discussion on South African rugby levels, structures and the professionalism and commercialisation of South African rugby. It proceeds with a discussion on sport marketing theory and identifies the sport marketing mix elements applicable to this study. In addition, an overview of digital sport marketing practice is provided as well as the influence on sport branding and its various elements related to this study. Sport merchandising and storytelling are also considered. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the impact of COVID-19 impact on global and South African sport marketing during the pandemic, and lastly social media usage by sport teams during COVID-19.

2.2 Defining sport

Jenny et al. (2017) acknowledge that sport must include play, must have some form of organisation, must be competitive, must be based on skill rather than chance, include fitness, and achieve institutionalisation. However, sport is also considered as an industry that has acquired a great deal of interest and attention in recent years (Argan & Katirci, 2015; Su et al., 2020; Ernstsson, 2022) and, at the same time, it is viewed as a business (Abeza et al., 2022). Pedersen et al. (2017) define sport as an extensive concept that symbolises all people, organisations and activities that are responsible for creating any experience that is focused on sport products, recreation or leisure.

Since the 1970s, sport has played an increasingly important role in the globalisation of business and social events as sports participants, capital and labour move around the world (Zhang et al., 2018; Ong & Leng, 2022). Sport is embedded within the sociocultural cloth of many nations and has the potential to attract and maintain extremely recognised and invested purchasers throughout a large variety of demographic groups (Westberg et al., 2018; Joanna & Zuzanna, 2020; Andreski, 2022). Thus, sport offers an attractive marketing channel for brands and organisations, particularly when aligned with the collaborative landscape of social media.

2.3 Overview of the sport industry

Hirshon (2020) and Kahiya et al. (2022) define the sport industry as a new line of business which largely focuses on investment and generates a profit by considering both micro and macro procedures which embody the combination of numerous factors. This is characterised as individuals who buy and those who sell sport products and services, organisers of sporting events, operators of the sport market and users of sport information. Moreover, the sport industry is a market in which the products offered are directly related to sport, fitness products and leisure (Savić et al., 2018; Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Yarmoliuk, 2021; Krzyżowski & Strzelecki, 2022). This study acknowledges that the sport industry consists of various sporting codes. Therefore it is necessary to understand an overview of the industry to apply it to the direct case of rugby which this study is investigating.

Being one of the most financially flourishing industries in the world today, the sport industry is the second fastest growing sector for brands, outperforming the GDP growth percentage of most countries (Qara, 2019; Millington et al., 2022). The primary contributors of revenue for this industry are merchandising, match ticket sales, sponsorship deals and media rights. This lucrative industry merges various factors, activities, and segments and identifies these factors as management, marketing, sport results and media advertising (Vitolla et al., 2022). Therefore, it is recognised that the sport industry is a particular and unique branch that is provisionally distinct from other established industries (Savić et al., 2018; Esen et al., 2021; Lenten & Kendall, 2022).

Today, sport is vital to national and global economies particularly where nations host large scale sporting events and tournaments. The increased involvement in sport organisations both at professional and spectator levels, along with the surge in sport publications and employees in the industry, has given the sport industry the ability to gain another facet (Shank & Lyberger, 2015; Mastromartino & Naraine, 2022). Examples of the increase in sport investment would include purchasing broadcasting rights and sponsorships in major sport competitions such as Olympic Games, World Cups, and other regional championships i.e. African Cup of Nations across various sporting codes (Savić et al., 2018).

Sport infrastructure is recognised as important for the development of the sport industry, although it is difficult to build them because of the immense capital needs; subsequently, hosting a large-scale event appears to be the most practical way to secure large events explicitly for emerging economies with fewer sporting facilities (Zhang et al., 2018; Obaid & Kishore, 2022). Additionally, there is a need to concentrate on the rapidly growing trends within the sport industry, which are essential for attaining the best outcomes (Zhang et al., 2018; Zakizadeh et al., 2022). Current social relations are illustrated by trends in the sport industry.

The Sport Industry Outlook Report 2022 (Deloitte, 2022) suggests some fundamental trends estimated to initiate growth for the sport industry:

- Data collection and analytics, e-sports, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), and immersive technologies will drive the real-digital convergence.
- College sports will undergo some of the most significant transformations in its history, with student athletes exerting more self-determination.
- Block chain enabled developments may expand fan marketplaces beyond memorabilia.
- Companies will pursue new clients as sport betting becomes more prevalent.
- The role and responsibility of sport in society will continue to be highlighted, with an emphasis on sustainability and mental health.

Table 2.1 reviews the list of the world's ten most popular sport based on the estimated number of global fans.

Table 2.1: 2023 world's ten most popular sport

Rank	Sport	Estimated fans	Regional popularity
1	Soccer	4 billion	Europe, Asia, South America, Africa
2	Cricket	2.5 billion	Indian sub-continent, UK, Australia
3	Field Hockey	2 billion	Africa, Europe, Australia, Asia
4	Tennis	1 billion	Americas, Asia, Europe
5	Volleyball	900 million	Europe, Australia, Asia, Americas
6	Table Tennis	875 million	Asia, Europe, Americas, Africa
7	Basketball	825 million	US, Cuba, Japan, Dominican Republic
8	Baseball	500 million	US
9	Rugby	475 million	South Africa, France, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia
10	Golf	450 million	Asia, America, Canada, Europe

Source: Adapted from SportyTell (2023)

From the table above, rugby is reported as the ninth most popular sport globally with an estimated 475 million fans worldwide, and will be the focus for this study.

2.3.1 Global sport industry

From a global perspective, sport has emerged as a major contributor to economic growth, job creation, attracting investment from corporate organisations and promoting consumer consumption (De Burca et al., 2015; Rees et al., 2015; Maderer et al., 2018; Belfiore et al., 2019; Jones, 2021; Mendizabal et al., 2022; Obaid & Kishore, 2022). In a recent report conducted by Business Research Company (2021), the global sport industry is valued at over \$500 billion. This significant increase is due to organisations reorganising their operations and recuperating from

the impact of COVID-19. The market dropped from \$458.8 billion in 2019 to \$388.3 billion in 2020, primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and social distancing regulations enforced by countries, which resulted in a global economic slowdown (Business Research Company, 2021).

Despite challenging economic times and tight competition from other forms of entertainment, the global sport industry progresses to not only sustain but succeed against all odds. The latter is owed to the continuous advancements in technology and the way that sport is being presented to the fan and end users (Dias & Monteiro, 2020; Wang, 2021; Krzyżowski & Strzelecki, 2022; Mendizabal et al., 2022; Zakizadeh et al., 2022). The increased participation in sport organisations from both fan and professional perspectives, and the rise in the number of employees within the industry, has allowed the sport sector to gain further importance (Shank & Lyberger, 2015; López-Carril & Anagnostopoulos, 2020; Behrens & Uhrich, 2022; Lukinović et al., 2022).

Table 2.2 below reveals the top ten most valuable and profitable teams globally in 2022.

Table 2.2: World's most valuable and profitable sport teams

Rank	Team	Sport	Country	Value
1	Dallas Cowboys	National Football League (NFL)	US	\$8 billion
2	New England Patriots	National Football League (NFL)	US	\$6.4 billion
3	Los Angeles Rams	National Football League (NFL)	US	\$6.2 billion
4	New York Yankees	Baseball	US	\$6 billion
4	New York Giants	National Football League (NFL)	US	\$6 billion
6	New York Knicks	National Basketball Association (NBA)	US	\$5.8 billion
6	Chicago Bears	National Football League (NFL)	US	\$5.8 billion
8	Golden State Warriors	National Basketball Association (NBA)	US	\$5.6 billion
8	Washington Commanders	National Football League (NFL)	US	\$5.6 billion
10	Los Angeles Lakers	National Basketball Association (NBA)	US	\$5.5 billion

Source: Adapted from Forbes (2022)

It is worth noting that all ten aforementioned sport teams are located in the US. In addition NFL, basketball, and baseball dominate the above rankings. Evidently professional rugby teams have not reached the same level of monetary value as other sporting codes around the world.

Naraine and Bakhsh (2022) further reported that social media have had a considerable role in the growth of the industry in the last few years. Moreover, the increase of different sporting codes to

new markets globally and the compelling interest shown by the public to engage with sport has strengthened the sport industry.

In a recent Middle East sport survey report conducted by Deloitte (2022), findings suggest that the Middle East will be the fastest-growing region in the sport industry compared to 50 countries across the world by 8.7% within the next three to five years. Practical examples of world-class sporting events in the Middle East include the annual Formula One Grand Prix in Bahrain and Abu Dhabi, as well as the 2022 FIFA World Cup that took place in Qatar. Sport during the second half of the twentieth century underwent substantial structural changes (Zhang et al., 2018; Na et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020; Esen et al., 2021; Lukinović et al., 2022).

Mancuso and Addo (2021) reported that the international sport labour movement has expanded under the realm of globalisation. Sport leagues and clubs in emerging nations are now able to attract international players and coaches who are able to provide greater skills and credentials that improve teams and the quality of the matches. Moreover, sport consumers in emerging countries have opportunities to attend stadiums and watch high quality matches of international well-known teams. Many professional sport teams have implemented a global marketing strategy whereby they decide to host pre-season matches in foreign countries in the hope of attracting a more global fan base for the team. Global trends in sport, advancement of the technology of sport training, and the robust development of the sport industry all embody the foundation of the future of sport (Singh & Nimkar, 2020; Nayyeri et al., 2021; Faria et al., 2022; Ong & Leng, 2022).

It is imperative to note that the global sport industry is governed by the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF). GAISF is the authority for all global sport organisers and institutions of international sport events. Founded in 1967, it acts as an important support for the broader sport movement and is responsible for promoting its 128 Members, Associate Members and observers, which include both Olympic and non-Olympic sport organisations (GAISF, 2022).

Although this study focuses on the South African sport industry, it is worth establishing insight into the global sport industry to identify the South African context aligns with it.

2.3.2 South African sport industry

South Africa is a sport-loving country. Sport in South Africa is enjoyed both from a participant and spectator perspective and across diverse demographics (Sangoco, 2021).

Due to the diverse population of South Africa, the sport performed is distinct and often associated with South Africa's history and heritage (Knott & Swart, 2014). The value of South African sport as a social connection is a very strong attribute at the community level, and participation in sport

and club membership fosters a sense of belonging and social capital expressed in trust (Burnett, 2021; Moyo et al., 2022a).

In a culturally diverse society like South Africa, sport of various types draw a support base from everywhere (Trifocus Fitness Academy, 2022). Conversely, for several socio-cultural motives, such as social class, traditions and race, some sport has attracted sponsorship and participation within various areas of the South African society (Knott & Swart, 2014; Abon & Adebayo, 2020).

Sport has always been a fundamental fragment of South African culture and in recent times has become a progressively vital part of the economy. A report by the Western Cape Government in South Africa showed that sport contributed more than 2.2% of the Western Cape's gross domestic product (GDP) which equates to an amount of R8.8 billion since 2012 (Sanders, 2019). Furthermore, the sport sector provides around 60 000 jobs in the province with further opportunities to increase economic growth and tourism, while also promoting social inclusion and physical activity (Sanders, 2019).

Ultimately, sport adds an additional industry that the South African government can benefit from to diversify its economy and empower local job creation. The South African sport industry has experienced growth primarily due to major financial investments in its top sporting codes of soccer, rugby and cricket, and to being a country with passionate sport followers. Sport sponsorships are the leading contributor to the growth of sport in South Africa (Sephapo, 2017; Blake et al., 2019). Spending on advertising and sport sponsorship is estimated to be at approximately R45 billion in 2018 (Nielsen, 2018).

Like rugby, soccer in South Africa has experienced substantial commercial growth in the last few years. This is demonstrated by continued investment from the private sector, such as organisations like the broadcasting body SuperSport, which invested R1.6 billion to have exclusive distribution rights to the Premier Soccer League (PSL) (De Beer & Stander, 2016). In addition, large firms such as MultiChoice, MTN, DSTv, GladAfrica and Nedbank contribute to the sport through lucrative sponsorships in an attempt to strategically influence the football clubs and target their huge fan base (PSL, 2021). Moreover, the e-commerce, sport and outdoor divisions in South Africa were estimated at \$429 million in 2020, though further growth is expected within the industry at an annual rate of 11.6% through to 2024 (Global Africa Network, 2021).

Despite these achievements there remains a deficiency of inquiry on non-professional sport in South Africa. The present study will therefore attempt to address the research gap by providing an understanding of the non-professional sport industry within the South African rugby context. An overview of the three main sport codes in South Africa is provided below.

The top three sporting codes within the South African sport industry are displayed in Figure 2.1 below.

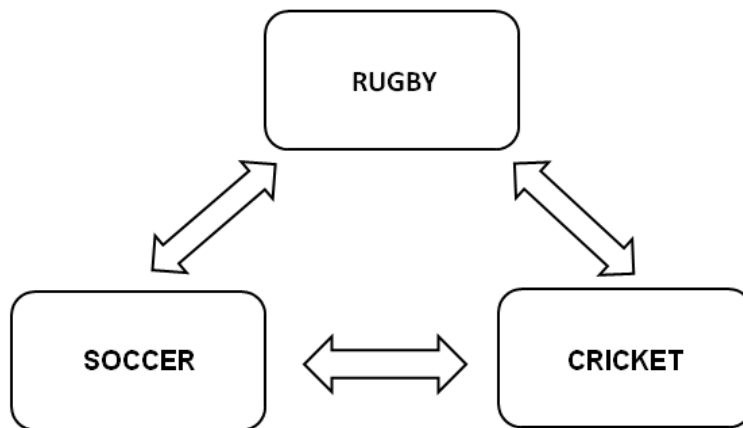


Figure 2.1: Main sport codes in South Africa

Source: Wood (2015)

2.3.2.1 Rugby in South Africa

Rugby, which represents a minority in South African society, has long been a significant part of South African culture, as noted by the Department of Sport and Recreation (2013). Rugby continues to be a very popular sport around the world with the World Rugby union (WR) representing 102 national member unions (World Rugby, 2023). It is reported that there are currently 405 438 registered rugby players in South Africa, which is the second highest in the world after France (Rees, 2020). These players form part of the national, provincial, university, club and school level structures.

As the present study focused on rugby in the South African sport context, it is essential to comprehend the origins of rugby in South Africa, the various formats, and the level of professionalism. Rugby is a very prominent sport in the country with a strong and passionate following of nearly 10 million people (SA Rugby, 2023), and the national team, the Springboks, have excelled in international competitions by winning the 1995, 2007, and 2019 Rugby World Cups (Wood, 2015; Rugby World, 2019).

The sport is played at various levels in South Africa, from school to the professional level (Smit, 2011) and South Africa possesses resilient school, club and league franchise systems (Knott & Swart, 2014).

It is worth reporting that South African rugby also participates in other rugby formats internationally such as sevens rugby and women's rugby, respectively. The current study focuses on the amateur and club rugby level within the South African rugby structures. In South Africa, club rugby

plays a vital role, as semi-professional and professional provincial teams often recruit players from the club teams.

Figure 2.2 below provides a summary of the various rugby structures in South Africa and highlights the club level, which the present study will focus on.

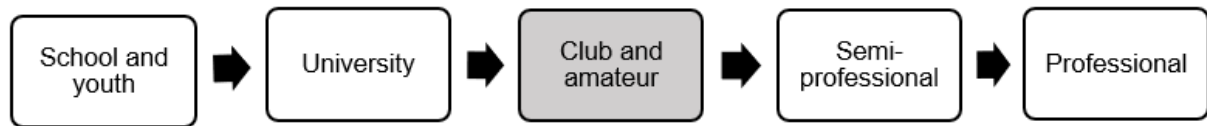


Figure 2.2: Rugby levels in South Africa

Source: Adapted from SA Rugby (2023)

2.3.2.2 History of South African rugby

It is vital to have an understanding of the rich history of South African rugby in order to comprehend how the sport has attained its present level of popularity. In addition, this insight will further enhance the study by illustrating the formulation of the South African rugby system. Apartheid is a complex element of the history of South African rugby, and while some may argue that sport and politics should be kept apart, they are intimately interlinked.

The first formal rugby match in South Africa took place in 1862 in Green Point, Cape Town and was contested between the civil service and the army (South African History Online, 2020). In addition, on this day only White British and Afrikaners were able to participate in this match (Black & Nauright, 1998). Rugby Football History (2007) verified that the first rugby club, Hamilton's Rugby Football Club, was founded in 1875, and the South African Rugby Football Board was also established.

The first White rugby governing body was established in 1889 and not long after that, Coloured and Black rugby unions were also formed (South African History Online, 2020). In 1992, the South African Rugby Football Union (SARFU) became the sport's first non-racial regulatory organisation. Despite the establishment of SARFU, rugby during this period was still seen as an instrument of apartheid. However, the Springboks, along with the country's other sporting codes, were readmitted to international sport competitions in 1992 (Höglund & Sundberg, 2008). Conversely, South Africa finally began to unite around rugby after hosting the World Cup in 1995 (Black & Nauright, 1998). After Apartheid, South African rugby gained popularity, and this is attributed to many local and international rugby achievements.

Over the last ten years, the South African Rugby Union (SARU) and the game of rugby itself have led change in the South African sport landscape, whereby management structures and tactics have changed to keep up with developments and difficulties (SA Rugby, 2023).

2.3.2.3 Major rugby tournaments

Table 2.3 below illustrates the most notable rugby tournaments in which top South African rugby teams participate.

Table 2.3: Notable rugby tournaments in which South African rugby teams participate

Vodacom United Rugby Nations Championship	International	Annually	15 man rugby
Vodacom Super Rugby Unlocked	Provincial	Annually	15 man rugby
Pro14 Rainbow Cup SA	Provincial	Annually	15 man rugby
Guinness Pro 14 Rainbow Cup	International	Annually	15 man rugby
Carling Currie Cup Premier Division	Provincial	Annually	15 man rugby
Carling Currie Cup First Division	Provincial	Annually	15 man rugby
The SuperSport Rugby Challenge	Provincial	Annually	15 man rugby
Women's Premier Division	Provincial	Annually	Women's rugby
Women's First Division	Provincial	Annually	Women's rugby
World Rugby Under-20 Championship	International	Annually	15 man rugby
Under-20 International Series	International	Annually	15 man rugby
SA Rugby Under-21 Championship	Provincial	Annually	15 man rugby
SA Rugby Under-20 Cup	Provincial	Annually	15 man rugby
HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series	International	Annually	7s rugby
Rugby World Cup Sevens	International	Every 4 years	7s rugby
Olympic Games Sevens	International	Every 4 years	7s rugby

Source: Adapted from SA Rugby (2023)

2.3.2.4 Gold Cup

The Gold Cup is SA Rugby's premier national championship for non-university clubs, and features the top ranked teams from the fourteen provincial unions in South Africa. In 2016 the competition expanded to include club rugby teams from Namibia and Zimbabwe (Rugby 15, 2019). Today the competition is tightly contested between twenty rugby clubs and includes teams from the WPSL A division.

2.3.2.5 Rugby structures in South Africa

Rugby infrastructure in South Africa is considered as among the greatest in the world, and the local Currie Cup event is regarded as one of the world's oldest, with the first matches played in 1889 (TheSouthAfrican.com, 2021). It is probable that the popularity of rugby in South Africa is

mostly attributable to the sport's sturdy infrastructure, vast number of players, and South Africans' pride in their national side, the Springboks. Coetzee (2016) acknowledges that South African rugby at all levels has the infrastructure required to compete internationally.

South African rugby is governed by SARU, and consists of fourteen provincial unions as indicated in table 2.4 below. The present study will focus on the Western Province Rugby Football Union within the South African rugby union structure.

Table 2.4: South African rugby unions

Union name	Location
Blue Bulls Rugby Union (BBRU)	Pretoria
Border Rugby Football Union (BRFU)	East London
Boland Rugby Union (BRU)	Wellington
Eastern Province Rugby Union (EPRU)	Gqeberha
Free State Rugby Union (FSRU)	Bloemfontein
Golden Lions Rugby Union (GLRU)	Johannesburg
Griffons Rugby Union (GRU)	Welkom
Griqualand West Rugby Union (GWRU)	Kimberley
KwaZulu-Natal Rugby Union (KZNRNU)	Durban
Leopards Rugby Union (LRU)	Potchefstroom
Mpumalanga Rugby Union (MRU)	Nelspruit
South Western Districts Rugby Football Union (SWDRFU)	George
Valke Rugby Union (VRU)	Boksburg
Western Province Rugby Football Union (WPRU)	Cape Town

Source: Adapted from SA Rugby (2023)

All of the above-mentioned unions manage a professional rugby team that takes part in the locally contested SuperSport Rugby Challenge and Currie Cup competitions. Moreover, the fourteen unions are accountable for amateur rugby within their province. These rugby clubs take part in provincial leagues annually administered by each of the unions whereas university teams participate in the Varsity Cup competitions. It is worth noting that the top ranked amateur clubs from each union participate in the annual Gold Cup competition.

2.3.2.6 School/youth rugby

Rugby Onslaught (2019) argues that the top rugby schools in the world have traditionally come from South Africa, with schools such Paarl Boys High School and Grey College among others producing some of the most competitive schoolboy rugby teams in the world. Robinson et al. (2019) agree that South African high school rugby is severely contested and mirrors the contemporary professionalism of the sport. The financial infrastructure of certain schools, an increase in sponsorships and the number of televised matches are some of the factors contributing to the highly competitive nature of South African school and youth rugby.

Provincial youth rugby competitions, such as the Craven Week, are considered to be among the best youth competitions for schools worldwide (van der Berg, 2011). Currently, both high school and primary Craven Week competitions are held each year, with provincial school teams selected to compete against teams from other areas.

2.3.2.7 Varsity Cup rugby

The FNB Varsity Cup is a South African annual inter-university rugby tournament, initially introduced in 2008 that features the top nine universities in the country (Varsity Cup, 2023). The Varsity Cup has generated a great deal of interest in university rugby structures and cultures in South Africa (Donkin et al., 2020). This suggests that the Varsity Cup has developed into one of the greatest rugby tournaments at university level for full-time students who follow a full academic programme.

In recent years, the Varsity Cup tournament concept had expanded into additional competitions such as the FNB Varsity Shield and the FNB Res Rugby competitions which focus on the second-division university teams and university residence teams, respectively. Many of the Varsity Cup, Varsity Shield and Res competition players move up the ranks to higher honours to play for a top club rugby or provincial rugby team.

In addition, these tournaments offer a distinctive opportunity for sponsors to associate with the university community through entertainment initiatives and sport (Nthangeni et al., 2021). Sponsor brand awareness will be discussed further in the literature review and forms part of the present study.

2.3.2.8 Club rugby in South Africa

The majority of South Africa's rugby playing population comprises amateur players who play for rugby clubs across the fourteen unions (Viljoen et al., 2017). Moreover, Coetzee (2016) suggests that club rugby in South Africa plays a crucial role in cultivating rugby players to eventually play provincial rugby. In addition, SARU'S constitution states that the club rugby system maintains the largest share of players in South African rugby (SA Rugby, 2023). SARU have also recently launched a training course programme, ClubWise, which focuses on educating and upskilling club rugby administrators in an attempt to develop rugby at the amateur level (Rugby15, 2021). Furthermore, the ClubWise course addresses every facet of club administration from governance, club goals, fundraising, player welfare, financial management and marketing activities. The Gold Cup is the most notable tournament for amateur rugby clubs in South Africa.

For the sake of this research, it is important to understand that the club rugby system is important in South African rugby since clubs constitute the amateur framework of the South African rugby unions and provinces. The current study focused on the club rugby system and in particular the WPRU leagues. Although Sheldon (2015) investigated the off-field management of WPSL A

rugby clubs, and Painczyk et al. (2018) reported on performance analysis systems for WPSL rugby club coaches, limited research is found on WPSL rugby club social media usage as an MC Tool.

The WPRU administers the annual club league competitions across the Western Cape which involves over 110 rugby clubs in the region. The league is subdivided into two main categories, namely the Super League clubs and the regional league clubs, and is grouped into nine league divisions highlighted below. The present study focused on rugby clubs that participate in the Super League A, B and C divisions.

The Super league clubs are sub-divided into three leagues namely:

- Super league A (15 teams)
- Super League B (15 teams)
- Super league C (15 teams)

The base prerequisite for a club to contend in the Super League division is that it ought to have more than ninety registered players (Painczyk et al., 2018).

The regional league has six subdivisions, namely:

- The City league (12 teams)
- The Northern league (11 teams)
- The Southern league (11 teams)
- The Paarl Region (11 teams)
- The Simonsberg region (11 teams)
- The Sunday league (10 teams)

In addition to the above-mentioned leagues, there are league competitions in the Reserve, Women, Golden Oldies and Under-20 divisions, respectively. The club rugby season in the Western Cape starts in April to September, while pre-season matches and training usually commence from January to March each year (Cape Town Magazine, 2021).

Each Super League (A, B and C) rugby club is required to enter an Under-20 team in their respective division. The Super League consists of a single round-robin format whereby each club plays each other within their league once. WP Club Rugby (2021) notes that team placements at the end of the last round determine club promotion and relegation for the following season. In recent times, WPRU has focused on Women's Rugby across the club structures to steer the growth of Women's Rugby in alignment with SA Rugby (WP Club Rugby, 2021).

A significant addition in the promotion of Western Province (WP) club rugby has been the introduction of the rugby television show, Cape Rugby TV. Since its launch, the show has had a major influence on the lives of spectators and rugby players in the Western Cape region (Cape

Rugby TV, 2022). The television show revitalised club rugby in the Western Cape and has provided a platform for clubs to gain opportunities and exposure alike. Furthermore, the show provides valuable insight from a panel of experts that allow clubs to develop a strong system from which to cultivate their players.

2.3.3 Professionalism and commercialisation of South African rugby

There may have been an increase in rugby involvement in South Africa as a consequence of the sport's popularity and several Rugby World Cup victories. Rugby professionals, in some cases considered the elite, are those playing at national or international level, while amateur players play at club level (King et al., 2017).

Professionalism in rugby is a fairly new concept in comparison with other sports, for instance soccer, cricket and tennis. The sport entered the professional era in 1995 (Ryan, 2008) as demands on players increased, accompanied by a significant surge in media and broadcasting rights on a global scale. The growth of rugby has transformed the sport and the social and financial situation of players around the world (Basson, 2003; Coetzee, 2016). The South African Rugby Union reported R1.26 billion in annual revenue in 2018, and R1.28 billion in 2019 (SARU, 2020) which may indicate the increased level of commercialisation and professionalism in South African rugby.

South African rugby unions have emerged into extensive commercial operations by implementing strategic business models to generate large sustainable revenues annually. Growing interest in local players from top international clubs has resulted in unions and franchises affording larger player salaries than ever before to keep the players in South Africa. Coetzee (2016) pointed out that although this is good for professional players, it does place financial pressure on South African unions and franchises to compete with their international counterparts with a weaker currency.

In addition, rugby offers a short professional career, and naturally, players are attracted to earn larger salaries in yen, euros, or pounds to create financial sustainability beyond retirement.

With this universal expansion of professional rugby it is imperative to comprehend reasons as to why South African professional players have in the last decade represented other international countries and clubs (Cardinelli, 2021). In a recent survey conducted by MyPlayers (2020) on why South African professional rugby players move overseas, financial reasons were top of the list followed by factors such as the political situation in South Africa and the desire to experience different cultures. As previously discussed in this chapter, many amateur rugby club players have the ambition to move from club level to provincial level and possibly beyond. Although it is essential to assess the level of professionalism in South African rugby, the present study concentrated on the amateur level where the WPSL clubs participate.

2.4 Sport marketing

2.4.1 The evolution of sport marketing

Smith (2008) defines sport marketing as the process of marketing sport goods, services and products through sport organisations by the application of marketing concepts. The two main strategies used in sport marketing are identified as marketing of sport and marketing through sport. Marketing of sport refers to the practice of promoting sport as a product itself and using the marketing mix to increase overall participation and spectatorship (LaurenSports, 2014; Seibl, 2014; Osokin, 2019; González et al., 2021). The above strategy ties in with the present study as the focus is on the usage of social media as an MC tool by sport teams. However, marketing through sport is the use of sport elements by organisations to promote products or services to a specific target audience. In addition, these products or services are not always related to sport. Examples of this concept are traditional marketing, and the use of sponsorship deals which include endorsements and brand image (Barbu et al., 2021; Burton et al., 2021; Naraine et al., 2022; Angosto et al., 2023).

Though sport marketing is considered a relatively new field in the study of marketing practice, marketing through sport has been in existence for years (Sahin et al., 2020; Garza Segovia & Kennett, 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022; Angosto et al., 2023). Sport marketers have benefited tremendously from the growth of sport industry on a global scale as more and more brands have turned to marketing through sport activities and initiatives with the aim of reaching a larger target audience (Pourzarnegar, 2022). Sahin et al. (2020) indicate that businesses are willing to invest a significant amount of money to advertise their products and services through both local and international sport, particularly in the form of public relations and sponsorship agreements. Moreover, sport marketing is identified as more than just advertising or branding; it involves discovering prospective consumers, identifying their needs and creating strategies to satisfy those needs (Smith, 2012; Abeza et al., 2020; Koronios et al., 2022; Mamo et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022; Angosto et al., 2023).

2.4.2 The sport product

Shank (2005) describes the sport product as a good or service which is offered to a consumer to satisfy their need for sport as a viewer, spectator or participant. Sport organisations can provide imperceptible benefits such as a belief system as the sport product to a consumer (Mihai, 2013). The sport product has unique characteristics that differentiate it from other types of products across diverse industries (Constantinescu, 2011). These differences need marketing campaigns to be strategically developed to suit the field of sport. Constantinescu (2011) notes that the sport product is known to have unpredictable characteristics, and this leads to a higher psychological participation level from its supporters, stakeholders and players involved.

This study will identify the product that is produced by club rugby teams. Mackreth and Bond (2021) state that the team sport product is the actual game and the league that the team partakes in. Offering an attractive sport product to consumers requires collaboration among the clubs that form part of the same league through the quality of performance, competitiveness and overall match experience of the league. Digitisation of sport products through the use of new technologies can affect how diverse generations inform themselves about sport products (Leszczyński et al., 2021).

2.4.3 The sport consumer

For sport organisations, customer acquisition and retention are critical areas to determine in achieving organisational goals. Individuals can be directly involved in sporting activities as participants or spectators. Participants included as spectators are sometimes referred to as consumers (Sahin et al., 2020). Rizvandi et al. (2019) believe that understanding the sport consumer is a crucial factor in ensuring the continuity of the sport industry. This inquiry involves identifying sport consumers from a social media perspective for WPSL rugby clubs and determining how they are being communicated and engaged with. The significance of word of mouth (WOM) in sport marketing has substantially increased due to social media becoming a key platform for sport consumers to engage and share their experience (Abeza et al., 2017). It is possible to suggest that word of mouth has an impact on sport consumer's behaviour.

From a sport consumer's outlook, an opportunity presents itself to engage with their sporting interests through social media commentary (Sharpe et al., 2020). However, Spanberg (2016) argues that sport organisations are concerned about sport consumers' decision-making instead of the number of followers they have on social media. At the same time, the connection between sport customers and has shown distinct behaviors when compared to other consumer products (Fujak et al., 2018).

Team identification and passion that make sport consumers unique could make certain sentiments more conspicuous (Coakley, 2017). The influence that emotion has on sport consumers' valuation of satisfaction is noteworthy, as emotional responses can influence cognitive decisions (Brown et al., 2018). Sport consumers are highly involved and support their teams to the greatest lengths and this is inspired by attachments, behaviours and preferences. It is critical for sport clubs to ascertain what makes sport consumers decide to watch and return to matches, in order to communicate with them effectively. This study will look at how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool to attract and retain their fan base.

2.4.4 The South African sport consumer

The advancement of South African sport is highly subjected to extensive economic, social and political dynamics (Swart et al., 2017). Understanding South African sport consumers is more challenging compared to those of many other countries primarily due to the rich historical

background of Apartheid. The Apartheid period saw sport in South Africa adjusted along racial lines (Coetzee et al., 2021). Lately, South Africa has turned to sport as a uniting element in a country which had previously been divided by inequitable policies. South Africans are well known for being a passionate sporting nation and avid sport participants both from playing and supporting perspectives. Cupido (2015) agrees that sport will always be significant and a part of South Africans' lives. South African sport consumers have a tendency to create a strong emotional connection with their selected teams and to use them to proclaim their social identity (Moyo et al., 2020). This study will look at the South African sport consumer within the unique rugby context.

2.4.5 Fan engagement and fan relationship management

As sport plays an imperative part in the daily lives of millions of people, most sport fans are engaged with their favourite team in one or many ways (Popp & Woratschek, 2016; Benito-Colio et al., 2022; Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Koronios et al., 2022). Many sport organisations are actively building relationships with their current and prospective consumers through digital platforms to develop suitable brand communities (de Vries et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2019; Andreski, 2022; Kemppainen, 2023). Organisations that create unique interactive experiences for fans are more likely to attract loyal and engaging followers (Belot et al., 2016; Su et al., 2020; Finch et al., 2022; Koronios et al., 2022). Because of the popularity of social media, sport teams have been investing significant resources to initiate online engagement, using the very invested personalities of their fans (Filo et al., 2015; Agrawa et al., 2018; Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Faria et al., 2022). Loakimidis (2010) believes that social media have transformed the way supporters are engaging with athletes, other fans and sport teams. Fan engagement and fan relationship management may be a motivator for social media usage by sport teams, therefore it is vital for this study to understand this concept thoroughly.

With social media being the platform that most sport fans turn to when interacting with their favourite sport team (Thompson et al., 2014; Eddy et al., 2021), sport organisations need to actively communicate with their target groups to retain and increase their fan and support base (Pegoraro, 2010; Finch et al., 2022). Nisar et al. (2018) believe that the increased use of fan interaction within social media platforms will potentially create further opportunities for companies, resulting in an increase of sales and an increase in spectators for the sport team. Sport is well known to enact itself within a competitive environment (Hopkins, 2013; Meng et al., 2015; Naraine et al., 2019), therefore implementing strategies to improve fan commitment is imperative. Thompson et al. (2014) report that sport teams that fail to engage innovatively with their fan base will risk losing fans and simultaneously the opportunities for social media usage. Fan relationship management is critical in identifying the motivations and gratification of sport consumers who use social media (Filo et al., 2015; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022).

With the interactive nature of social media, which links consumers to brands, online platforms can satisfy a wide range of consumer needs (Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Piché & Naraine, 2022). Highly

engaged fans may develop positive word-of-mouth (WOM); engage in fan communities and sharing information about the team to friends and family (Popp & Woratschek, 2016). Sport fans are a good example of loyal supporters who maintains a relationship with their team, regardless of good or poor results that the team achieves (McHugh & Krieg, 2021). Today's advanced technology allows sport teams to learn fan habits, motivations, values and dissatisfaction (Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Annamalai et al., 2021). Moreover, new technologies could amplify fan engagement by adapting experiences to the individual sport fan desires (Leszczyński et al., 2021; Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Koronios et al., 2022). This study will also investigate how fan engagement is determined through the use of social media as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs.

2.4.6 Digital sport marketing practice

Sport marketing has transformed in recent years owing to the digital era of social media and communication technologies. Ratten and Thompson (2021) and Pourzarnegar (2022) reported that the sport industry has been a primary inheritor of digital marketing, thus it is imperative to acknowledge its influence on the advancement of digital marketing practices. Yüce et al. (2017) agree that traditional sport marketing practice have been affected by the new digital era. The introduction of new technologies and rapidly evolving trends require a profound understanding of sport consumer needs (Stefanović & Alčaković, 2020; King & Wiltshire, 2021; León-Quismondo, 2021; Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Benito-Colio et al., 2022; Mamo et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022; Angosto et al., 2023). It is important to note that previous studies of digital sport marketing indicate that traditional methods of sport information are being substituted by new digital technologies. Therefore, this study explores how sport marketing is impacted in today's digital world through social media as an MC tool. This permits a greater understanding about the evolution of digital sport marketing that incorporates a direct sport theory to digital marketing practices (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Ratten & Thompson, 2021; Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Mamo et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022; Angosto et al., 2023; Kempainen, 2023).

Social media is producing new ways of communication with key stakeholders within the sport context; teams, athletes, sponsors and sport fans. Stefanović and Alčaković (2020) argue that information technology is implemented in nearly every aspect of the sport industry.

For the purpose of understanding social media as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs, it is in the interest of this investigation to emphasise sport alignment with digital marketing practice. Traditionally, media rights and TV broadcasting were the leading revenue streams for elite sport teams and organisations, but the adoption of digital sport practice has created unique consumption of sport (Ramon & Rojas-Torrijos, 2022). Leszczyński et al. (2021) acknowledge that the potential for digitised sport is enhanced by the significant increase in economic value of media rights. Globally, digital sport media rights possess preeminent growth potential in the coming years, projected at 11.5% whilst traditional television broadcast rights are projected to increase by 3.2% (Leszczyński et al., 2021; Machado et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2022). The above

statistics indicate that sport fans are no longer just interested in the matches and teams alone, they desire a distinctive experience that is enhanced by technology.

2.5 Sport branding

The idea of presenting a sport team as a brand has become more customary in the sport industry (Geurin & Burch, 2017; Park et al., 2020). Moreover, branding plays a central role in distinguishing a sport club from a competing club, and by influencing sport consumers preferences. Inherently, facets of sport marketing can be regarded as unique occurrences of marketing a particular brand. For sport consumers, winning is the greatest conclusive argument for the dominance of the preferred sport brand over another (Wetzel et al., 2018; Sharifzadeh et al., 2021). This study considers each of the WPSL rugby clubs as a unique brand as they each have their own identity and structure. Schäferhoff (2016) pointed out that branding of sport teams enhances opportunities for sport consumers to resonate with the team and feel a part of the supporter base. In addition sport branding involves communicating the sport team's core values to its audience. The brand of the South African rugby team, the Sharks, is described as exciting and entertaining (The Sharks, 2022). Thus, sport teams' brand managers are advised to recognise brand values of their team and fans to increase brand value and awareness.

In the online sport branding context, social media have evolved and amplified sport brands across the spectrum. As a consequence, sport companies are scrutinising how brand content is created and presented to sport fans (Tsai & Men, 2013; Kahiya et al., 2022), while sport firms and athletes are increasingly using social media for their high level of efficiency (Osokin, 2019). Sport marketing studies have also demonstrated that social media support sport organisations and athletes alike in developing brand awareness (Pegoraro et al., 2017; Na et al., 2019). Further research has shown that social media provide sport brands with opportunities to engage with their consumers more comprehensively than other MC tools (Thompson et al., 2014; Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Doyle et al., 2022). The present inquiry will further investigate the aforementioned in a South African rugby context. The following section discusses brand awareness in a rugby context.

2.5.1 Brand awareness

Keller (1993) describes brand awareness as a critical characteristic in the decision-making process for a consumer and includes brand recall and brand recognition. Moreover, Keller (2003) further points out that brand awareness is the consumer's ability to identify a brand under various conditions. Within sport marketing literature, brand awareness is essential for consumers to recognise a sport brand within a specific product category, which determines their familiarity with the brand (Pegoraro et al., 2017; Latif et al., 2019). Belfiore et al. (2019), Jones (2021), and Obaid

and Kishore (2022) agree that familiarity is one of the aspects that point to brand awareness. Thus it is possible to suggest that consumer loyalty can influence the level of brand awareness of a sport brand. In addition, historically, consumers were cognisant of a sport brand if it was prominent or trendy (Ma, 2018; Maderer et al., 2018; Latif et al., 2019; Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Finch et al., 2022).

In this study, aspects related to brand recall and brand recognition were identified to capture brand awareness. Keller (2008) explains that social media platforms can develop both scale and strength of brand awareness. The internet provides brands with the opportunity to create a targeted approach to previously hard-to-reach audiences to increase brand awareness. Singh and Nimkar (2020) and Abeza et al. (2022) indicate that social media benefit sport by building brand awareness in a dynamic way that effectively engages passionate sport consumers.

Gerber-Nel (2007) states rugby teams should first and foremost concentrate on building awareness of the rugby team's overall brand before engaging with brand-related MC activities. Moreover, rugby unions in South Africa have not fully comprehended sport consumers' views on their rugby teams' brands in spite of the increase in sport branding phenomena (Gerber-Nel & Cant, 2010).

2.5.2 Sponsor brand awareness

Cornwell and Kwon (2020) consider sponsorship as a critical source of revenue for sport brands, which use it as a strategic marketing initiative. Sponsors are willing to participate in sport clubs both locally and internationally as sport is a natural area of sponsorship with a large audience with strong ties to brands and products (Burton et al., 2021; Koronios et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022; Weimar et al., 2022). For organisations to gain benefits from sponsorships, an evaluation and activation strategy should be developed to assess return on investment. Sponsorship has emerged as an excellent tool in sport marketing to create a positive image for organisations and raise brand awareness of the company and its products. Crompton (2015) found that sponsorship plays a very important role in raising voluntary awareness. This is especially true among sport consumers who have not had direct involvement with the sponsor's brand.

Tsordia et al. (2018) and Eddy et al. (2021) suggest that return on investment for sport sponsorships could be assessed in a variety of ways through brand awareness activities, direct sales, or brand equity. In the last few years, sponsors have placed focus on online and digital platforms (Meenaghan et al., 2013), and more particularly through social media campaigns to analyse effective return on investment (Abeza et al., 2014; Chanavat & Desbordes, 2014; Naraine et al., 2022; Weimar et al., 2022). Moreover, social media provides excellent opportunities for sponsorships (Singh & Nimkar, 2020; Mastromartino & Naraine, 2022).

Relevant content is the key to activating partnerships with sponsors and attracting consumers. Much of the content is pre-planned and specific details are often negotiated under partnership or sponsorship agreements (Garza Segovia & Kennett, 2022; Mastromartino & Naraine, 2022). Relevant content for sport organisations includes key messages, and match highlights with sponsor logos or taglines to initiate and influence partnerships. Uzma (2019) states that sport club supporters are aware of the sponsor's reputation and general commitment to sponsorship. The credibility of sponsors has a strong influence on the decisions of each sponsor's supporters (Barbu et al., 2021). Maanda et al. (2020), Koronios et al. (2022), and Kemppainen (2023) agree that sport sponsorships have a critical role in developing brand awareness for sport brands.

As stated previously, sponsorships are evident in all forms of sport in both an international and local setting, and in South Africa, it is no different. Sponsorship has emerged in the South African rugby industry due to its affirmative affiliation among the sponsored organisation and the sponsor brand itself (Sephapo, 2017; Scott et al., 2021). In the Western Cape, the international logistics company DHL serves as the title sponsor for Western Province Rugby until 2024, and has been the longest sponsorship partner for the union ever since 2011. In the case of this investigation, it is noteworthy to mention that many WPSL rugby clubs have sponsors on board in one way or another.

2.5.3 Brand image

Keller (1993) identifies brand image as the level of brand association instilled in a consumer's mind and it is frequently used conversely with brand associations (Bauer et al., 2005).

Sport marketing literature has acknowledged the influence of managing brand equity for professional sport teams to produce lasting fan loyalty (Brunello, 2018; Byun, 2020; Finch et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022) through generating and preserving their brand image (Irianto & Kartikasari, 2020; Frederick et al., 2021). This indicates that the expression of a team brand image can institute behavioural loyalty in the form of purchasing team merchandise and engaging with the team (Keshtidar et al., 2018; Joanna & Zuzanna, 2020; Finch et al., 2022).

Social media afford a direct association with consumers and can thus allow organisations to exploit a particular brand image (Wallace et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2018). Maderer et al. (2018) concur that social media networks have become an essential tool for sport marketers to showcase their brand image and reach their fan base. Brands targeting fans are also likely to get positive reviews regardless of whether they win or lose, which may build a stronger brand image (Maderer et al., 2018). One of the world's most reputable sport brands, Nike, places emphasis on brand image promotion through social media marketing platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and other marketing media, and attains great success (Zhang et al., 2018).

It is worth suggesting that social media influence brand image, while traditional media have a stronger effect on brand awareness. Further, social media have a significant part to play in efficient brand image, while user-generated social media content also has a major impact on brand image (McCarthy et al., 2014; Dessler, 2020). As noted by Na et al. (2019), the digital environment is vital for the advancement of sport organisations' brand image. By addressing the study's research questions, the researcher aimed to provide an understanding of WPSL rugby clubs' use of social media, and the level of digital engagement used by the rugby clubs with their fans.

2.5.4 Storytelling

In comparison with traditional marketing, marketers use social media strategically to build in-depth relationships through engagement and storytelling with consumers (Geissinger & Laurell, 2016). The role of storytelling in an organisation's marketing strategy has evolved and presented opportunities, largely due to the advancement of digital technology (Adamson, 2008). Social media platforms are highly appropriate in telling stories and appealing to consumers (Tarvainen, 2013) and storytelling is a prevalent way to build long term relationships with consumers. Anyone with access to the internet and digital platforms may act as a storyteller and influence viewers globally. Organisations may aim to increase the depth of their content by establishing a social media discussion in which consumers can actively participate in.

Hamer (2021) states that storytelling is a traditional sport marketing strategy. For example, the human story of an athlete's rejection and overcoming adversity can be used to inspire fans and create positive connections between consumers and brands. Kelly (2020) adds to this point that authentic storytelling can assist in positioning and differentiating a sport brand. Marketers are aware that the most influential brands tell the best brand stories. Sport can increase viewership through relevant branded content in a way that aligns with the story. This results in enthusiastic fans, new viewers, and other media opportunities.

From a marketing viewpoint, product placement may also be considered an integral part of any sport story. Live storytelling draws the viewer's attention and interlinks exciting, varied, unscripted stories through live sport events that stay with the viewer for extended periods of time (Hamer, 2021). Combining powerful stories with strong brands ignites the fan base, attracts fans, and encourages them to join the journey (Penceo, 2019).

The New Zealand national rugby team, The All Blacks, always use powerful storytelling to support its valued brand, harness its rich history and heritage, and modernise it with the next generation into today's sustainable brand (Kelly, 2020). In addition, the rise of para-athlete sport and women's sport also provides a strong platform for memorable storytelling within the sport

marketing setting. In relation to this investigation, the researcher ascertained how storytelling is utilised through social media for WPSL rugby clubs.

2.5.5 Sales and merchandising

Machado et al. (2020) and Pereira et al. (2022) indicate that sport brands may use social media for promoting online merchandise catalogues, match ticket sales and special online promotions. Warren (2016) agrees that sport brands predominantly depend on social media to expedite sales through fans purchasing team merchandise or match tickets. Furthermore, sport personalities or professional athletes use social media not only to engage with their fans but also as a sales tool to endorse their club or brand's merchandise (Singh & Nimkar, 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021). In line with the rapid growth of the sport industry, sport teams and brands are always seeking innovative ways to generate more income. Social media is seen as an integral part of digital marketing and sport brands are aware of the target market audience that they can reach online by implementing strategies to generate sales. Through video marketing and social media, sport organisations can engage a substantial target audience by effortlessly promoting themselves and their sport merchandise to millions around the world (WanderGlobe, 2020; Ristevska-Jovanovska, 2021).

With the sport apparel industry being an attractive and ever-evolving industry it is worth suggesting that social media may be a convenient tool to market new products (Manna, 2019; Piché & Naraine, 2022). Companies that operate in the sport apparel industry rely heavily on digital innovation and place a key focus on the digital needs of their consumers when conceptualising marketing strategies and campaigns (Stangl, 2020; Pereira et al., 2022).

Many professional sport brands are seen promoting their merchandise offerings across various social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Many consumers are under the impression that digital marketing increases the reach of the sport industry to promote their merchandise (Machado et al., 2020; Maguire, 2021; Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022). This inquiry will ascertain if amateur and semi-professional WPSL rugby clubs make use of merchandise sales through social media marketing.

2.6 The impact of COVID-19 on live sport

The COVID-19 virus swept across all aspects of life, including sport, causing a worldwide upheaval in the sport business that had not been seen since World War II (United Nations, 2020). In most countries, all non-essential industries were closed indefinitely, and public gatherings were restricted.

Due to fear and apprehension rampant throughout the world, sport understandably took a back seat (Majumdar & Naha, 2021). By March 2020, COVID-19 had also affected the global sporting calendar, with professional leagues and competitions across the world being suspended promptly to combat the spread of the deadly virus. This was the immediate effect of COVID-19 on live sport. Krnjaic (2020) and Areiza-Padilla et al. (2021) indicated that the 2020 edition of the world's most-watched sporting event, the Summer Olympic Games, had to be postponed to 2021. The disruptions had global implications across the sporting community for a wide range of sport, particularly for athletes, organisations, spectators and coaches (González et al., 2021; Szczepkowski, 2021; Hayes, 2022; Li et al., 2022).

The greatest benefit of sport is to generate interest, gather fans into stadiums, evoke emotions and create a sense of community. Consequently, the cancellation or postponement of key international tournaments led to players having limited or no matches to play and sport consumers having limited sport to watch. The COVID-19 pandemic and global lockdown regulations had a significant impact on professional, semi-professional and amateur sport (Ramagole et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022; Kahiya et al., 2022; Radmann & Karlén, 2022). Thus, as a result of the lack of live spectators, professional sport teams and organisations experienced immediate financial losses. Simmons et al. (2020) further point out that the postponement of live sport due to the pandemic impacted several sport industry stakeholders. In Australia, sport across all levels started and stopped on multiple occasions in the past year, with no certainty from month to month (Atkinson et al., 2021).

Despite logistical and operational challenges presented by COVID-19, the sport industry showed exceptional leadership in resuming sport quickly. Data shows, however, that television ratings declined across all sport codes after live matches resumed (Hall, 2021). MacInnes (2021) confirmed that sport fans in England were required to display a COVID pass or a negative COVID test result before attending live sport matches or events.

Table 2.5: Major international sporting events postponed or cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tournament name	Sport type
2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo	Multi-level
UEFA Euro Championship	Soccer
Boston Marathon	Road running
The London Marathon	Road running
Six Nations Rugby	Rugby
2020 Masters Golf Tournament	Golf
Wimbledon, US Open, and Roland Garros Tennis tournaments	Tennis
The African Nations Championship 2020	Soccer

Source: Adapted from ESPN (2020)

2.6.1 The economic impact of COVID-19 on the global sport industry

As the Coronavirus spread around the world, more and more major sporting events and games were postponed or cancelled to protect the health of athletes, spectators and other stakeholders. Moreover, from athletes, teams and leagues to sponsorship, sport retail, hospitality and media coverage, everything in sport was affected (Hall, 2020; Staley et al., 2021; Andreski, 2022; Knott & Hemmonsby, 2023). Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the sport industry also suffered an economic crisis due to the reduction in direct income from cancelled sport events and a decrease in indirect income resulting from the suspension of media rights.

In addition to small sport organisations and sport clubs facing major financial predicaments, the pandemic impacted the entire sport industry value-chain, including gyms, marketing agencies, event organisers and sport equipment manufacturers, among others. On the professional sport front, one of the most profitable sport leagues in the world, the English Football Leagues, reported to be financially stressed (Starling, 2021). BBC Sport (2021) also revealed that the Rugby Football Union (RFU) advised if no sport fans were allowed to attend the upcoming Six Nations Rugby tournament or the Nations Cup, the union would lose near £60 million. A decision by the International Olympic Committee to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympics by a year cost an estimated £2 billion (van Gaalen, 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 affected those who make a living from the sport industry, including professional athletes, who lost the ability to earn prize money and incentives. As a consequence of salary cuts and financial constraints, sponsor companies had to re-evaluate their contracts with players and agents (van Gaalen, 2020; MacInnes, 2021; Staley et al., 2021; Hayes, 2022). In the absence of spectators and viewers, corporate sponsors found it difficult to justify their investments, which had an adverse effect on future spending.

It was estimated that COVID-19 could have had a negative impact on GDP of almost €60 billion (£52bn) in Europe and could lead to the loss of over a million jobs in the sport sector (Ecorys, 2021; Schallhorn et al., 2022). In relation to this study, the South African sport industry was also impacted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

2.6.2 The impact of COVID-19 on South African sport

South Africa, like the majority of countries around the world, had to contend with the numerous consequences of the pandemic. Ramagole et al. (2020) note that South African sport faced major issues in combating COVID-19 that had the potential to change the landscape of professionalism of sport in the country. Rugby, soccer and cricket in South Africa all experienced a drastic decline in revenues as a result of the absence of live sport in 2020 (Forbes Africa, 2020; Pillay et al.,

2020; Matikiti-Manyevere & Rambe, 2022; Knott & Hemmonsbe, 2023). Noteworthy, from a sport participation standpoint, provincial rugby teams did not recommence play, and in some instances, modified domestic competitions until after numerous months of inactivity (Knott & Hemmonsbe, 2023). Consequently, in 2020 and 2021 sporting venues were underused, as sport teams played in empty stadiums with the absence of spectator attendance placing additional strain on the sporting industry (Knott & Hemmonsbe, 2023). South African Rugby was the first to advocate the reopening of stadiums to spectators, although in low numbers, in an attempt to acquire revenue which was reduced from industry spending due to the impact of COVID-19 on sport (Mohamed, 2021).

The deteriorating economic issues in the country resulted in 2.8 million job losses and less disposable income for locals (Business Tech, 2021; Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Hemmonsbe et al., 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022). Cancelling subscriptions to pay sport broadcaster channel, SuperSport, was one of the long term impacts of the pandemic for the South African sport industry (Forbes Africa, 2020; Bahdur et al., 2022). Some of the best rugby players in the country lost up to 43% of their monthly salary by the end of 2020 after South African Rugby announced that it would reduce its budget by R1.2 billion (RugbyPass, 2020). This was achieved through a variety of interventions, including cancellation of junior competitions and restrictions on other operations such as coaching courses, and non-essential tasks (Forbes Africa, 2020). It is worth noting for the purpose of the study that WPSL rugby leagues and tournaments were also suspended in 2020 and 2021. The sporting landscape certainly changed from 2020 to 2022 but by all accounts, stakeholders, such as WP Club Rugby (2021), managed to adjust and reinvent themselves to keep competitive and stay connected with their members.

Major sport events in Cape Town such as the HSBC Rugby Sevens and Two Oceans Marathon were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 which undeniably had a detrimental impact on the Western Cape's economy. Particularly in the Western Cape region, sport tourism events play a significant role in the economy (Swart & Maralack, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022; Knott & Hemmonsbe, 2023).

Conferring to the then Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Nathi Mthethwa, a maximum of 2 000 spectators could watch a sporting event outdoors and 750 spectators could watch it indoors (IOL Sport, 2022). The change followed the country's shift to Level 1 of the Coronavirus Disaster Management Act (IOL Sport, 2022).

Gleeson (2021) noted in late November 2021, due to the imposition of travel bans following the detection of a new Coronavirus variant in South Africa, the country's sport was shut down, with rugby teams and golfers scrambling to leave.

2.6.3 Marketing of sport during COVID-19

One of the biggest challenges for sport organisations during the present COVID-19 pandemic was maintaining team and fan identification (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Ramagole et al., 2020; MacInnes, 2021; Staley et al., 2021; Andreski, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Smith & Skinner, 2022). At a time when many sport teams around the world had to play in empty stadiums, some of the teams found creative ways to involve fans to still feel part of the action as far as possible. Some sport teams offered supporters the opportunity to purchase to have images of their faces appear on mannequins within the stadium, with the proceeds going to the battle against COVID-19 (Krnjaic, 2020; Keshkar et al., 2021). The interruption of live sport in early 2020 gave stakeholders a challenging opportunity to re-imagine and transform the sporting experience. Against the backdrop of COVID-19, sport organisations had to ascertain virtual and socially distanced environments in which to engage their brand communities and develop marketing strategies in empty stadiums that could still resonate with absent fans (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Schallhorn et al., 2022).

The growth and increase in e-sports viewership is encouraging for the sport industry, but it is not clear yet on how e-sports events are replacing traditional sport when searching for live content. The absence of physical sport provides an opportunity for virtual technologies to develop and present a new technique to engage fans and generate income (Hall, 2020; Sajjadi et al., 2021; Manoli et al., 2022; Smith & Skinner, 2022). Moreover, there is limited evidence that these events promote and engage the branding community of sport teams.

In the past, sport organisations were unable to keep in touch with fans outside of stadiums but during the pandemic they were forced to invest in digital channels to communicate with fans. This directly relates to the current inquiry as sport clubs in South Africa are to looking at ways to utilise digital channels to engage with fans online. Stefanović and Alčaković (2020) and Radmann and Karlén (2022) describe digital stadiums as a new phenomenon that offers sport fans an entirely new experience from the comfort of their homes.

As a result of content shortages, teams and leagues throughout the world have gone through several strategies to stay engaged with audiences and improve upon their pre-pandemic social media objectives and strategies. Past matches highlight packages and replays as well as broadcasting of e-sports events were two of the most prominent tactics implemented by sport organisations (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Areiza-Padilla et al., 2021).

Further, Grix et al. (2021) suggest that fitness tutorials online are growing exponentially and in the coming years, e-sports will likely have a lasting impact on sport and physical activity

production and consumption. One of the research objectives of this study is to analyse how social media were used as an MC tool during COVID-19, which the following chapter will discuss further.

2.7 Summary

The chapter commenced with a discussion on the sport industry in its entirety. Literature revealed that global sport emerged as a major contributor to economic growth, job creation, attracting investment from corporate organisations, and actively promoting consumer consumption. The South African sport industry in recent years has experienced growth primarily due to major financial investments in its top sporting codes of soccer, rugby and cricket. It was necessary to gain an insight into the rich history of South African rugby to understand how it has achieved the current level of popularity across all levels and how it fits into this inquiry. Moreover, the WPSL club rugby structure and system was introduced as it is fundamental to this study. Aspects of the sport marketing mix, unique sport consumer and sport product were outlined and discussed, with this study identifying the sport product that is produced by club rugby teams. Social media is producing new ways of communication with key stakeholders within the sport context: teams, athletes, sponsors and sport fans. This led to fan engagement and relationship management being identified.

The chapter concluded with a summary of the impact of COVID-19 on the sport industry when no live sport was able to take place. One of the biggest challenges for sport organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic was maintaining team and fan identification. Interestingly, the absence of physical sport provided an opportunity for virtual technologies to develop and present a new technique to employ fans and generate income.

The subsequent chapter considers social media and its implementation as an MC tool.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SPORT MARKETING

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines social media and explores its influence on sport marketing from a South African and an international perspective. The chapter begins with a brief background and definition of social media, and consequently provides an outline of the emergence of the phenomenon by emphasising its relevance for this study.

Further, this chapter provides insight into the relevant social media platforms used within the study and provides a detailed discussion on social media as an MC tool, its adoption within South African sport marketing and usage by sport organisations.

It proceeds with a discussion on social media and sport organisation engagement, followed by the impact of social media on the development of sports marketing and, finally, the challenges faced. The selected theoretical model for this study is outlined as well. The chapter concludes with a discussion on social media usage by sport teams globally and locally during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2 The concept of social media

3.2.1 Background of social media

Researchers have been studying the phenomenon of social media since the early years of the 21st century with multiple definitions emerging (Appel et al., 2020).

As a result of social media, the communication landscape and consumer behaviour online have changed, brands are now able to reach consumers globally and rapidly (Klepek & Starzyczná, 2018). Over the last decade social media has received numerous definitions.

An overview of the definitions proposed by researchers is provided in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Social media definitions

Author	Definition
Mangold and Faulds (2009)	Multimedia technologies allowing instantaneous, real-time communications, using a variety of delivery platforms (Facebook, YouTube, and blogs, for example), with global reach capabilities.
Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)	A variety of internet-based applications that use Web 2.0 technology to allow users to create and share user-generated content (UGC).
Chan and Guillet (2011)	A set of internet-based applications based on the Web 2.0 platform and facilitating global interaction, communication, and the sharing of ideas, thoughts, experiences, opinions, information, and relationships between Internet users from all over the world.
Neti (2011)	A method of advertising services and products using social networks, blogs, and other digital media.

Hoffman and Novak (2012)	The creation and sharing of content that enables and facilitates consumer conversations, facilitated by the use of web-based tools, including mobile applications.
Ryan and Jones (2012)	An all-inclusive term for web-based applications and services which enable users to interact with other individuals.
Manning (2014)	A new form of media that involves interactive participation.
Green (2016)	Social media consists of a diverse series of online, WOM platforms including blogs, electronic mail, internet community forums, company-sponsored content, social networking websites and consumer product ratings websites.
López-Carril et al. (2019)	A term that encompasses the use of technology and web-based tools that enable individuals and/or organisations to engage with one another, exchanging information and content generated individually or shared, in real-time or asynchronously.

A commonality amongst some of the above authors' definitions of social media is the use of web-based application tools and their ability to encourage user engagement or interactions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Hoffman & Novak, 2012; Ryan & Jones, 2012; López-Carril et al., 2019). Taking into account the above-mentioned proposed definitions, this study adopts López-Carril et al.'s (2019) version which posits using technology and other web-based tools to allow people and/or organisations to connect, exchange information and content, either individually or collaboratively, in real time or asynchronously.

Minardi (2021), Madison Taylor (2022) and Nielsen (2022) outline significant social media and digital sport marketing trends expected to influence the market in 2022:

- Sport fans seek deeper experiences which suggest that social media teams will be more active with their audiences and there will be an increase in user-generated content.
- The development of social media and other technology-enhanced media has greatly expanded the audience for sport influencers.
- Athletes have demonstrated a greater ability to engage with fans, with 26 percent of avid social media sport fans indicating that athletes are a wonderful way to connect with companies and sponsors.
- 40.7 percent of all global sport fans are streaming live sport via digital platforms due to the growth of connected devices.
- For brands to develop new fan engagement strategies in a world where linear broadcasting is being over taken by streaming services.
- Social media posts with videos often perform better than those with static photos.
- The use of social media by users has increased dramatically. This is attributed to social media being consumed for approximately 145 minutes a day on average.

- Social commerce and revenue generation is projected to continue to grow as engagement increases.
- As businesses utilise social media marketing, user-generated content (UGC) plays an increasingly important role.
- Social media is becoming more popular; however, the average user spends less time engaging with individual posts.

The above trends are reported from a global point of view and this inquiry will determine if any of the trends are prevalent within a South African context. Consequently the present study could highlight or adopt certain trends where applicable as best practice measures.

Table 3.2 below reviews the ten most popular social media platform based on global monthly active users.

Table 3.2: The ten most popular social media platforms for 2022 world-wide

Rank	Social media platform	Estimated monthly active users	Launch year
1	Facebook	2.9 billion	2004
2	YouTube	2.5 billion	2005
3	WhatsApp	2 billion	2009
4	Instagram	1.4 billion	2010
5	WeChat	1.2 billion	2011
6	TikTok	1 billion	2016
7	Facebook Messenger	988 million	2011
8	QQ	574 million	1999
9	Weibo	573 million	2009
10	Kuaishou	573 million	2011

Source: Adapted from Statista (2022)

Aligned to the most popular global social media trends, in the South African context, Facebook maintains its position as the most popular social networking site in the country with approximately 22.15 million users (Kemp, 2023). 11 million people use LinkedIn in South Africa, while there are 11.83 million users of TikTok in the country (Kemp, 2023). Moreover, Instagram and Snapchat are the other most popular social media platforms in the country with 5.65 million and 5.85 million active users respectively (Kemp, 2023). The top social media platforms used by WPSL rugby clubs in this study are discussed below in this chapter.

3.2.2 The global emergence of social media for general consumers

Over the last two decades, social media have become a valuable tool of communication, affecting a wide range of sectors and regions (Uzma, 2019; Guzmán et al., 2021; McCarthy et al., 2022). Consumers have grown more reliant on the internet for information because of its technological

developments and accessibility (Bae & Zamrudi, 2018). Social media sites have emerged as an advanced web-based platform for community communication with the growth and spread of the internet (Thompson et al., 2018; Kumar & Rana, 2020; Mastromartino & Naraine, 2022). As social media network usage continues to grow in everyday life, social media networks have also enhanced their services either to stay competitive in the market or maintain their position (Waheed & Sanaullah, 2019; McCarthy et al., 2022). Moreover, Thompson (2016) and Annamalai et al. (2021) argue that social media have increasingly become central to any discussion about online activities due to the shift toward user-driven technologies. With the advent of the new century, and especially over the last decade, social media presence has grown tremendously, changing how we communicate and interact (Abeza et al., 2019; Nayyeri et al., 2021; Faria et al., 2022). Chawinga (2017) agrees that social media diversify, expand, evolve, and grow rapidly in number and functionality.

Kemp (2023) notes there are 4.76 billion social media users globally, which represent more than 50 percent of the world's total population. The number of social media users has increased by more than 10 percent over the last 12 months, with 424 million new users joining during 2021. The aforementioned statistic indicates the remarkable growth and the need for digital adoption in the world. King and Wiltshire (2021) and León-Quismondo (2021) believe that social media has received significant attention from academics and practitioners alike due to its popularity and cultural impacts. Social media has established itself as a fast-emerging online tool and will continue to grow along with its number of users (Karami et al., 2018; Park et al., 2020; Leszczyński et al., 2021) as it offers greater opportunity for relationship development with the consumer (Nisar et al., 2018; Stefanović & Alčaković, 2020; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022). While social media is seen to provide countless benefits to the consumer, this study will contribute to understanding how it is being utilised from a sport marketing perspective.

3.2.3 Social media and consumer engagement

In social media, consumer engagement refers to the interaction between consumers and brands (Lee et al., 2018; Li et al., 2021; Verma & Yadav, 2021). As previously stated, social media platforms allow for integration of unique features that make consumer engagement more efficient. However, it is still challenging for organisations to engage consumers on social media, despite the fact that social media platforms are designed to facilitate interactions (The CMO Survey, 2016; Content Marketing Institute, 2016).

Hollebeek and Macky (2019) found that consumer engagement with brands is influenced by the content of social media messages. Though brand content is important to engaging consumers,

research has just begun to identify the characteristics of brand messages that drive engagement with consumers (Lee et al., 2018; Ordenes et al., 2019; Machado et al., 2020; Abeza et al., 2022).

On social media, consumers can interact in a number of ways. They can follow brands, leave comments on brands' posts, or share brand messages with friends and family (Pezzuti et al., 2021). This suggests that brands are progressively attempting to engage consumers because engagement results in significant marketing results. Orders et al. (2018), for example, found that consumers are more likely to share brand messages that express themselves and provide objective information about a brand, whereas research by Davis et al. (2019) investigated how the interaction between readability of tweets and brand enjoyment influences customer engagement.

Moreover, Pezzuti et al. (2021) affirm that when a brand message expresses certainty, it seems more powerful and increases the likelihood of consumer engagement on social media. As a result, consumers whose power distance beliefs are stronger should moderate the effect of brand power on consumer engagement; those who place more value on brand power are also more likely to engage with brands (Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Andreski, 2022; Ernstsson, 2022). As brands engage with consumers and encourage them to participate in the marketing process, social connections result not only in shared content but also in commercially driven relationships. In order to integrate their social media presence with consumers' lifestyles, brands often engage in subtle or routine ways (Westberg et al., 2018; Yüce et al., 2021; Behrens & Urich, 2022). The present study focused on the level of consumer engagement across WPSL rugby club social media platforms.

3.2.4 Social media usage by South African consumers

The use of social media in South Africa has continued to grow, specifically with reference to the number of users and the intensity of use by current social media members. In South Africa, users aged 25-34 account for 47.9 percent of social media users (Lama, 2020). Among social media users in South Africa, the 18-24 age group is close behind, accounting for 40.4 percent (Lama, 2020). As of January 2023, South Africa had 25.8 million social media users while 43.48 million South Africans had access to the internet, which equates to an estimated 72 percent of the total population (Kemp, 2023). Bosch (2021) suggests South Africans are increasingly using mobile devices for accessing social media. Approximately 85 percent of South Africans access social media via a mobile phone or tablet, and the majority claim that their mobile devices are the main way to access social media. Figure 3.1 below indicates the year-on-year social media users in South Africa from January 2018 to January 2023.

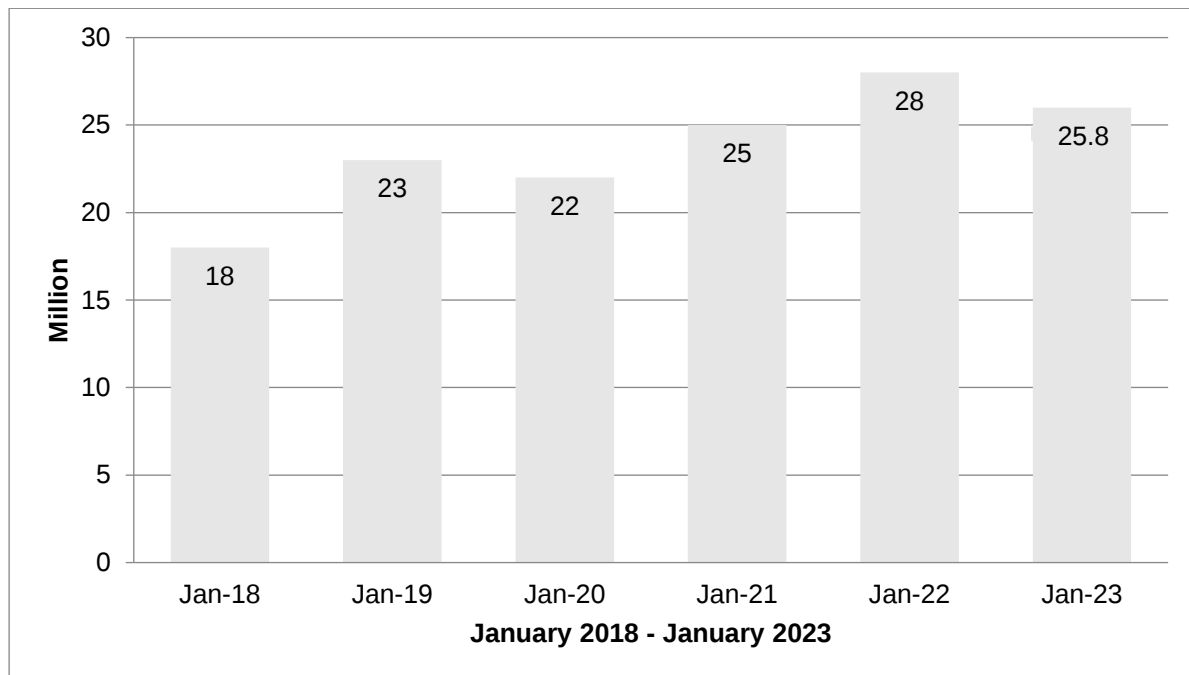


Figure 3.1: Social media users in South Africa

Source: Adapted from Kemp (2023)

Data from the above figure suggests a decrease in social media users from January 2022 to January 2023. While the use of social media for sport teams and leagues has been researched comprehensively globally, limited studies have explored the use of social media as an MC tool by South African sport teams and leagues.

3.2.5 Social media usage by global organisations

Communication strategies in businesses have notably evolved in line with the evolution of social media MC to improve brand awareness (Smith, 2019; Jones, 2021; Turková, 2021; Obaid & Kishore, 2022). Dwivedi et al. (2021) argue that the digital transformation of businesses is greatly influenced by social media nowadays. Prior studies have revealed how social media use assists organisations with a variety of activities, with a specific focus on their potential to help organisations reduce marketing and sales expenditure (Kumar et al., 2017; Sahin et al., 2020; Andreski, 2022). A number of studies on social media over the last two decades have highlighted their rising relevance for businesses, particularly in the context of direct marketing in today's digital economy (Chawla & Chodak, 2021). An organisation may utilise a variety of posts and material on their social media platforms to inform customers about different products and deals. For example, Facebook fan pages are often used to offer special promotional offers, communicate information about promotions, and conduct contests with rewards for customers, all of which have proven to be successful (Radzi et al., 2018; Machado et al., 2020). By 2022, businesses are set to spend \$15 billion on influencer marketing, with 72.5 percent of marketers in the US alone

expected to utilise influencer marketing (Tien, 2022). Social media offer a rich source of insights that businesses can utilise to enhance their social initiatives.

With the introduction of social listening technologies, it is now relatively simple for anyone to have access to this information (Geyser, 2022). To evaluate in depth the efficacy of an organisation's social media efforts, it is not sufficient to analyse its presence on social media only. It is imperative to take into account its strategic use, which this inquiry will observe.

3.2.6 Social media usage by South African organisations

In South Africa, 49.5 percent of businesses spend less than R10 000 a month on social media marketing (Lethole, 2021). The number of businesses investing R50 000 or more on social media advertising is likely to rise over the next twelve months (Lethole, 2021). Chilli Media (2022) indicate that most businesses in South Africa social media spend typically have a monthly advertising budget and a customised advertising plan for one or more social media platforms. As per World Wide Worx (2021), Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook are the top four social media channels where companies are extremely engaged in South Africa.

Lethole (2021) reports that the most prevalent business trend is organisations seeking assistance from social media consultants, marketing firms, and public relations teams. This may suggest that organisations that are strongly focusing on social media advertising are investing resources towards these activities. South African brands have also seen an increase in brand loyalty, inbound traffic, market share, and better customer contentment since brands are easier to find, which makes it accessible for customers and businesses to engage with each other (World Wide Worx, 2021). Social media are now a way for businesses to sell products and services and maintain communication with customers; the present study looked at how sport organisations in particular use social media.

3.3 Zones of social media

Tuten and Soloman (2012) proposed four zones in which similar social media platforms can be grouped together in order to help simplify the selection process for social media usage. The four zones are illustrated in Figure 3.2 below. Additionally, the social media zones reveal unique information on how various social platforms engage with their users. Each zone is discussed hereafter to clarify how each platform engage with their users.



Figure 3.2: Social media zones

Source: Adapted from Tuten and Soloman (2017)

3.3.1 Social community

In social communities, people gather with others who share the same interests and build relationships together. Batista (2020) notes that in social media, social communities are channels of communication in which brands engage with customers by creating a social and conversing experience; Singh and Nimkar (2020) believe that social communities are largely based on participants sharing their experiences through images, videos, and messaging. Communication, experience sharing, and conversation within social communities need to take place in more than one way. Within the social community zone one will find social networking sites, forums, message boards and wikis. Online communities are available for consumers to choose from and join. Consumers, marketers, and third parties can form online communities (Ramyasree et al., 2019). Those who engage in these activities within social communities are primarily interested in collaborating and interacting in order to maintain and build relationships with each other (Batista, 2020).

Social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram all form part of this zone. This inquiry predominantly falls within the social community zone as it examined and provides an understanding of why and how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool.

3.3.2 Social publishing

Social publishing enables content to be distributed to multiple audiences and includes a wide range of platforms including blogs and video sharing sites, podcasts, photographs, and music (Ramyasree et al., 2019). Social publishing is primarily driven by commercial, editorial and user-

generated content. This zone allows brands to showcase their products and services to their audience, and to show them what they can offer. Social media platforms such as Flickr, Tumblr, BlogSpot and YouTube are all forms of social publishing (Batista, 2020). Further examples of social publishing sites are illustrated in Figure 3.3 below. While social publishing has the ability to distribute content to multiple sources and attract large audiences, it is worthy to determine if this is considered by sport teams in South Africa as part of their MC strategies.

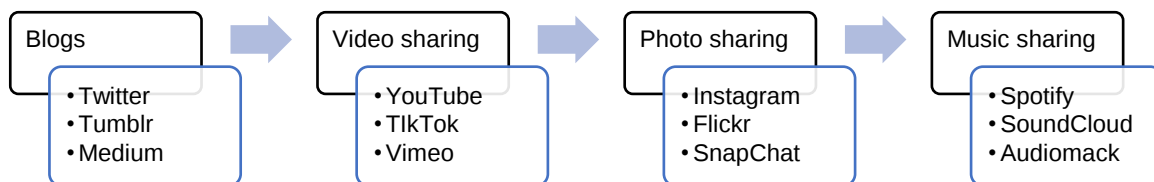


Figure 3.3: Social publishing sites

Source: Author (2022)

3.3.3 Social entertainment

Social media channels that offer play and entertainment are considered social entertainment. Games, music, and art are the main components of social entertainment (Batista, 2020; Lukinović et al., 2022; Zakizadeh et al., 2022). Marketers predict entertainment communities will evolve around more traditional topics like sport, art, and films in the future. A few of the social media channels in this zone include Second Life, Myspace, uGame and Come2play, and some of the entertainment channels are Pandora and Spotify. Moreover, considering the value that MySpace provides in terms of networking with musicians and bands, the site is seen as a social entertainment service offers (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Despite the importance of social entertainment in new industries such as sport, limited research is available on the direct case of rugby, which is the focus of this study.

3.3.4 Social commerce

The objective of this zone is to facilitate online transactions between individuals and groups that facilitate the buying and selling of goods and services (Zamora, 2017). With social commerce, businesses are able to reach millions of consumers around the world, which has in turn led to increased earnings. During the shopping process, social commerce enables online shoppers to interact and collaborate. In addition, a social commerce site can be a review site or a branded e-commerce site, a retailer that operates on a social network such as Facebook, and deal feeds that aggregate deals (Batista, 2020; Ristevska-Jovanovska, 2021; Piché & Naraine, 2022). From a South African context, platforms such as Takealot, Superbalist, Hellopeter and Hyperli all form part of the social commerce zone. However, with social commerce being mostly revenue focused it will be interesting to see if this study includes aspects of it as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs.

3.4 Social media platforms

Over the last decade, social media platforms have grown to become a significant tool for obtaining and disseminating information in several fields, including business, entertainment, crisis management, and politics (Hruska & Maresova, 2020). The rise of social media platforms (such as Twitter and Facebook) has profoundly changed the marketing environment. With the rise of social media platforms, customers have gone from being passive recipients of content to active participants. They are now co-producers of content through their online communication and attitudes (Lee et al., 2018; Dolan et al., 2019).

3.4.1 Social networking sites

Social networking sites refer to web-based services that allow users to create public profiles within a specified group of people who have similar interests and viewpoints and to interact with their connections within these communities (Kümpel, 2019). The way individuals communicate has altered drastically as a result of social networking sites (Verduyn et al., 2020). Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, enable users to build their own web pages for sharing personal information and interacting with other users in real and virtual life (Kunja & Gvrk, 2020).

3.4.1.1 Facebook

In 2004, Facebook was initially built as an exclusive social network for Harvard University students only; however, it quickly grew into an open network, offering access to people from around the world (McFadden, 2020; Hussain et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2023). A user can upload images, videos, and web links on Facebook. Additionally, users have the capability to connect to virtual groups and cultivate applications (Pegoraro et al., 2017; Boyd, 2019; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022), facilitating real-time message interchange (Osokin, 2019; Frederick et al., 2021; Byon et al., 2022). In the early days, Facebook operated as a social network, allowing users to create profiles online and share their own content with friends.

By December 2004, Facebook already had 1 million users registered, which indicated great growth potential for the platform. Moreover, in 2006, Facebook had started allowing organisations the opportunity to become site users (Boyd, 2019; Moreau et al., 2021; Chawla & Chodak, 2021) and introduced Facebook Business Page which saw more than 100 000 organisations signing up before the end of 2007 (Boyd, 2019). At this point, it was evident that Facebook had plans to grow revenue through making advertising accessible for businesses of all sizes. Figure 3.4 below indicates the number of global Facebook users' year-on-year from 2017-2022. In 2022 Facebook had 2.96 billion users around the world (Oberlo, 2022).

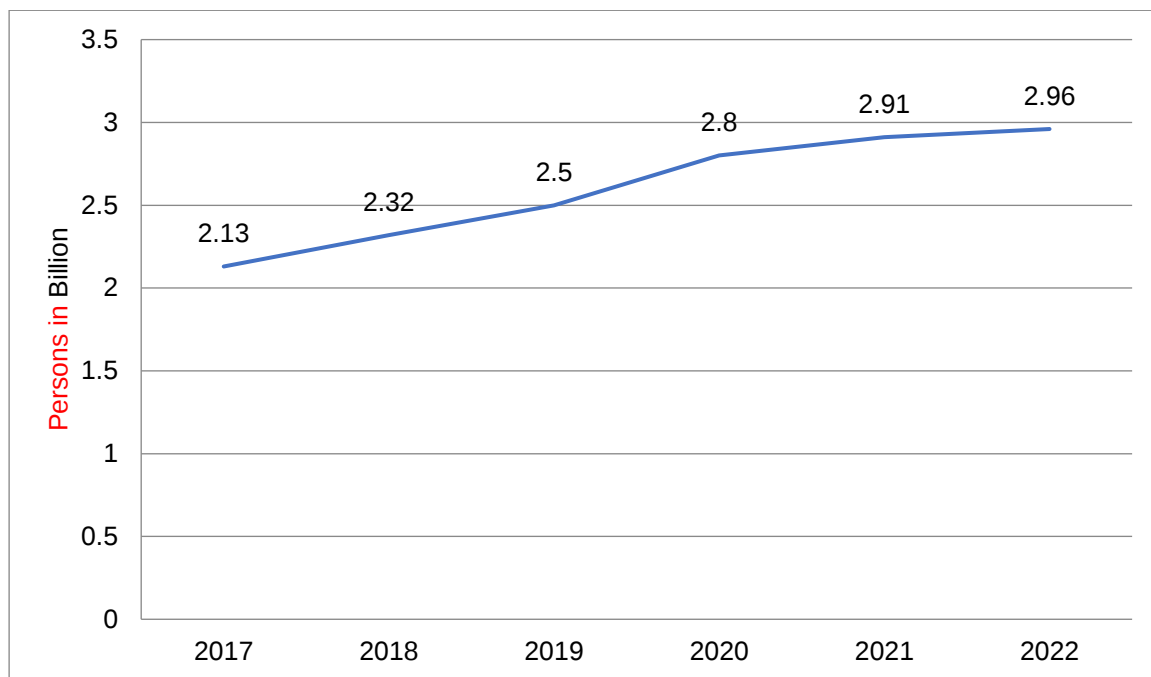


Figure 3.4: Global Facebook users from 2017-2022

Source: Adapted from Oberlo (2022)

As a result of the growing use of Facebook year-on-year (as indicated in Figure 3.4), many sport organisations are establishing a social media presence too. Within the present study, Facebook was investigated as a social media usage platform among WPSL rugby clubs. Prior research investigated fan motives for communicating and participating on Facebook. For example, Machado et al. (2020) examined the motives for engaging with sport brands on Facebook and Instagram, while Chawla and Chodak (2021) examined the promotion of websites organically on Facebook. In addition, studies have analysed Czech professional athletes' Facebook content and audience reactions (Turková, (2021), brand awareness (Pegoraro et al., 2017) and driving forces for fan engagement (Vale & Fernandes, 2018).

As previously stated, Facebook is the most popular social networking site in South Africa with 22.15 million users in early 2023 (Kemp, 2023). In addition, in January 2023, Facebook's advertising reach in South Africa was comparable to 36.8 percent of the local internet user base (Kemp, 2023). In the start of 2023, 50.8 percent of Facebook's advertising audience was female while 49.2 percent was male.

Celebrities, media organisations, sport teams, and politicians are among the top Facebook pages in South Africa. The SuperSport Football page is currently the most followed social media page in South Africa with 9.6 million followers, followed by the Nelson Mandela page with 7.5 million followers. Given the current South African social media statistics, developing an effective plan may benefit sport organisations in enhancing brand exposure and visibility. As a result, this study's findings and recommendations are intended to aid social media marketing professionals in sport teams in developing best practices for strategic social media usage.

3.4.1.2 LinkedIn

Reid Hoffman, Allen Blue, Konstantin Guericke, Eric Ly, and Jean-Luc Vaillant founded LinkedIn in 2002. Today, LinkedIn has 310 million monthly active users (Jezequel, 2022). LinkedIn has been defined as a social media platform that goes beyond Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, but according to both research and various articles, LinkedIn is better suited for business purposes (Amin, 2019). This platform allows professionals to share their work experiences or build a professional network by connecting with each other. López-Carril et al. (2020) believe that LinkedIn is one of the most popular social media sites for professional development and career advancement. It is worth noting that a significant part of LinkedIn's success lies in its popularity as a business-to-business marketing tool. Globally, LinkedIn is utilised as an efficient MC tool for organisations to illustrate their workplaces, environment, and products, which can attract both consumers and other businesses (Amin, 2019). LinkedIn (2023) reports that over 900 million users are registered on the platform from more than 200 countries; nearly 50 million companies and 90,000 universities are listed with over 20 million jobs listed on the platform. Moreover, López-Carril et al. (2022) predict that globally LinkedIn will reach over 1 billion users by 2025, which indicates steady growth for the social network platform.

Kemp (2023) reported that in early 2023 LinkedIn had 11 million users in South Africa which is equivalent to 18.3 percent of the country's total population. For additional context, the advertising reach of LinkedIn in South Africa at the start of 2022 was equal to 27.5 percent of the local internet user base. Further reports suggest that 51.9 percent of LinkedIn's South African ad audience were male, and 48.1 percent were female (Kemp, 2023).

There are several cases of athletes and former athletes who are starting to view LinkedIn as a platform where they may begin to transition into the business world, develop connections, and seek sponsors for future ventures (Johan Cruff Institute, 2022). Lloyd (2020) agrees that LinkedIn provides an opportunity to highlight that sport professionals are more than athletes and to educate them to make the best choices for life after sport. A sport-related study by López-Carril et al. (2020) suggests that LinkedIn is a beneficial addition to a sport management course because of its unique features. It helps make connections between the university and the professional world, which is a good first step for students' future careers. Kuzior (2019) found that Polish Football Association managers with the best self-presentations on LinkedIn were those with the most years of work experience.

With several recent sport related social media studies focusing on platforms such as Facebook (Annamalai et al., 2021; Moreau et al., 2021; Faria et al., 2022), Twitter (Fenton et al., 2021; González et al., 2021; Guzmán et al., 2021; Yoon & Pedersen, 2022) and Instagram (Li et al., 2021; Nayyeri et al., 2021; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022), this inquiry will establish if LinkedIn is considered as an effective MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs.

3.4.2 Microblogging

Microblogging refers to a combination of blogging and instant messaging, allowing users to create short messages and share them online with an audience (Nations, 2019). Buechel & Berger (2018) suggest that microblogging makes it possible for users to communicate with many potential communication partners simultaneously without addressing any one specific person. Microblogging differs from face-to-face communication as it is written and does not require any physical interactions. Thus, microblogging can be particularly useful to socially apprehensive individuals because it allows them to reach out widely, eliciting social interaction without approaching anyone directly. While direct messages on Twitter or sharing on a friend's Facebook wall are targeted at a particular user, microblogging capabilities enable people to communicate broadly without being too specific about whom they are reaching out to (Buechel & Berger, 2018).

Microblogging platform Twitter has become one of the most important and influential platforms today because of its role and influence in the interaction between people (Paul et al., 2021).

3.4.2.1 Twitter

Weinberg (2009) defined Twitter as a 'free microblogging service which allows its users to communicate via short text messages, known as "tweets", that initially could not exceed 140 characters in length. In 2018, Twitter doubled its character count to 280 and according to Perez (2018) and González et al. (2021), this did not have a significant impact on the length of Twitter posts by its users. A tweet might link to a news story, a blog or an image and show up in a follower's timeline. In addition to being ranked among the top 10 most popular websites in the world, Twitter is the most popular microblogging site globally (Antoniadis et al., 2015; Philander & Zhong, 2016; Wang, 2021). As a social media platform, Twitter possesses both high brand awareness (Fan et al., 2020; Yoon & Pedersen, 2022) and high brand value (Naraine et al., 2019; O'Hallarn et al., 2019).

In South Africa, 85 percent of users access Twitter via a mobile phone or tablet, and most users access social media primarily through mobile devices (Bosch, 2021). More recently, Twitter had 3.65 million users in early 2023, with approximately 6.1 percent of South Africa's internet users seeing Twitter advertisements (Kemp, 2023).

While originally designed as a communication tool for individuals, Twitter has evolved into an essential marketing resource for businesses and brands across all industries. Within the sport context, Twitter has emerged as a prominent MC tool for athletes, sport clubs and media. Recent sport-related Twitter studies examined Twitter's user engagement (Naraine et al., 2019), effect on sport journalism (Oelrichs, 2020), as a communication tool (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020) fan usage during sport events (Fan et al., 2020) and its impact on sport during COVID-19 (González et al., 2021). A rugby-related study by Hendricks et al. (2016) evaluated the impact of using two

distinct Twitter-related targeting strategies to administer a web-based concussion survey to rugby players and trainers.

Athletes use social media sites like Twitter to keep their supporters up to speed on their activities and plans. Athletes also use social media, particularly Twitter, to obtain sponsorships and sponsorships deals and to build a large fan following that allows them to communicate with millions of people. Professional footballer, Cristiano Ronaldo, is currently the most followed athlete in the world with 93.4 million Twitter followers on his account (Das, 2022). The aforementioned benefits of Twitter usage within the sport industry suggests the importance of this study to determine how South African non-professional rugby teams use Twitter as an MC tool.

3.4.3 Instant messaging

Instant messaging is a kind of communication that allows users to send and receive brief text messages in real time. Instant messaging technology is still functioning as an initial network application with the primary goal of creating and transmitting information, for example WhatsApp, WeChat or Messenger (Hall, 2023). Midway through the 1990s, advances to chat rooms and instant messaging opened up real-time communication through the internet to a larger audience (Murray et al., 2023).

3.4.3.1 WhatsApp

WhatsApp Messenger, also referred to as WhatsApp, is a cross-platform messaging service that allows users to send and receive texts, voice, video, and images. Brian Acton and Jan Koum launched WhatsApp in 2009 with the goal of making communication and the sharing of multimedia messages easier and faster (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). Chopdar et al. (2018) suggest that the application (app) has significantly transformed consumers' experience in mobile commerce while it also affords a communication method that allows quite a bit of flexibility (Nain et al., 2019). In addition, the main objective of this app is to replace SMS messages with a cross-platform mobile messenger accessible via the internet (Sharma & Shukla, 2016).

Though WhatsApp started in 2009 it is imperative to note that the platform has undergone an array of updates to improve its overall user experience and functionality, which now makes it one of the most popular instant messaging platforms in the world. In 180 countries, WhatsApp has a user base of more than 2 billion, making it the most used messaging app in the world outperforming Facebook Messenger and WeChat. Originally a simple messaging app, it has developed into a multimedia platform where users can share videos and voice messages, make payments (in select countries), share images, share videos and make business accounts (Mboua, 2021). By making user interaction more intimate, this platform satisfies their desire to connect to others in a meaningful way (Karapanos et al., 2016). Private communications, especially via WhatsApp, have become very important for people to stay in touch with their friends and family.

Over the past few years, messaging apps like WhatsApp have proved to be a more attractive alternative to SMSs in countries where SMSs are cost-prohibitive. That might help explain why the app is so popular in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Rollason, 2021). More than 5 million businesses have been using WhatsApp Business since its launch in January 2018. The platform allows businesses to serve their customers, grow their businesses, and interact with their targeted communities globally. Africa's first WhatsApp Business rollouts were in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa. Mboua (2021) argues that WhatsApp may be an excellent marketing tool for small and medium-sized businesses in Africa. Also, as the world becomes more globalised, WhatsApp and other messaging platforms offer a simple and cost-effective way to stay in touch with family and friends on the other side of the world.

Because WhatsApp is such a vital part of almost everyone's lives around the world, an update to privacy settings forced the company to do damage limitation to reassure users their data was secure, even delaying the deadline for signing up to the update (Rollason, 2021).

A study by Garaba (2018) reported that members of sport clubs preferred to interact via WhatsApp. Weimann-Saks et al. (2020) investigated how Israeli soccer fans utilised WhatsApp while watching the FIFA World Cup and discovered a link between sport spectators' participation on a second screen and their delight in watching the broadcast. Moreover, a research paper by Borghi et al. (2021) revealed that WhatsApp is a popular platform for managing sport training in COVID-19. This study will examine if WhatsApp is utilised as an MC tool among WPSL rugby clubs to communicate with club members on a regular basis.

3.4.4 Video sharing

A video sharing platform allows for low-cost access to a worldwide audience (Kumar et al., 2014). Implicit cyber communities on online video sharing services, such as blogs and forums, may be characterised by interactions among users with similar interests, such as commenting, linking, or subscribing (Xiang & Chae, 2022). Over the past few years, there has been a huge growth in the quantity of videos published to the internet, particularly on video sharing sites where these recordings might be live for an extended period of time (Khan & Shao, 2022).

3.4.4.1 YouTube

The video sharing platform YouTube has changed significantly since it was established in 2005. A number of advertising concepts were presented to companies by YouTube in 2006 so they could use the platform as a marketing tool. Duffett (2020) agrees that in the past, YouTube served as a digital video channel for entertainment and information; however, in recent times, it has become a considerable marketing platform, which includes conduits, celebrity brand ambassadors and influencers, in addition to promotions, advertising, and product placement. In today's competitive video advertising world, marketers have increasingly turned to YouTube as a platform to reach the generation of YouTube users and social media enthusiasts (Ghosh, 2016;

Byun, 2020). As a result it is possible to suggest that this has translated into YouTube generating \$19.7 billion in revenue in 2020 thanks to 2.3 billion monthly users and a 30.4 percent growth year on year (Igbal, 2022).

The purchase of YouTube by Google in October 2006 marked the beginning of YouTube's development into a revenue-generating product (Gerhards, 2019), with a model that noticeably focused on advertising. With the rapid emergence of video-produced marketing, it seemed inevitable that advertisers and marketers alike would begin to recognise the potential of the platform for monetisation opportunities. The platform has grown in importance as a result of the growing focus on online video and social media. It now integrates both streaming and social amenities into its media offerings (Xiao et al., 2018). YouTube offers a variety of advertising formats today, including displays advertisements, non-skippable video advertisements and skippable advertisements (YouTube Help, 2023). In a recent social media report (Kemp, 2023), YouTube's advertising reach locally accounted for 42.9 percent of South Africa's entire population. These figures represent 59.3 percent of all South Africans (regardless of age) who used the internet in January 2023.

As opposed to traditional TV advertising, YouTube allows brands to take charge of their messaging with less time and fewer creative limitations while enabling new forms of interaction (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020). The research outlined above suggests that in recent years, YouTube has grown to be an online community where people can share experiences and communicate with a broad group of people by creating, posting, and sharing content related to their interests. Duffett et al. (2019) add that organisations and brands can share video content, both new and existing, via an interactive communication technology platform like YouTube.

In a study that is relevant to the present inquiry, Zimmerman et al. (2011) investigated the potential for setting agendas using YouTube for sport leagues. Mahoney et al. (2013) evaluated emerging niche sport YouTube exposure using the Psychological Continuum Model as a tool. Further, Kang et al. (2019) revealed how YouTube is used to navigate CrossFit sport challenges. Research by Byun (2020) indicated that users of YouTube's sport content viewership have a positive brand attitude, brand image and brand loyalty.

The current study will ascertain to what extent video marketing is used as an MC tool for WPSL rugby as part of its overall social media usage.

3.4.5 Photo sharing

Photo sharing gives users the capacity to share content on both the photo sharing platform as well as other sites. Instagram, which is now the most popular platform for photo sharing, provides its users with an experience that is image-driven (Sheldon et al., 2021).

3.4.5.1 Instagram

In addition to its photo-sharing service, Instagram allows users to share both private and public images and videos through social networking sites such as Facebook. The user can register for free and share photos immediately, like other social media platforms. They can also follow other users and view their uploaded photos, share videos, create stories and share photos and videos with followers through direct messaging. Instagram now has more than 1 billion active users, which makes it three times bigger than Twitter and arguably the best platform for brands since its launch in October 2010 (Sharma, 2022). Kemp (2023) asserts that in January 2023, South Africa had 5.65 million Instagram users. It is worth noting that Instagram's advertising audience in South Africa by January 2023 was 46 percent male and 54 percent female.

Additionally, the popularity of Instagram among global brands for the purpose of brand recognition and awareness has been noted by several industry insiders (Li et al., 2021; Sharifzadeh et al., 2021). There is no doubt that Instagram has become one of the most powerful social media platforms, which explains why more people are becoming involved in promoting themselves or their brands on this platform.

The popularity of Instagram among athletes and sport organisations worldwide is growing exponentially within the social media context (López-Carril & Anagnostopoulos, 2020; Scott et al., 2021; Doyle et al., 2022; Kemppainen, 2023). There has been recent research on how Instagram is used by professional athletes (Smith & Sanderson, 2015), as an engaging tool for fans for sporting, social purpose and business (Kim & Hull, 2017) and by Olympic athletes as a medium to brand themselves (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016).

A study by Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) found that sport brands that use their Instagram accounts to share user-generated content receive higher engagement when the posts have a strong product focus. Because of its popularity and capacity to distribute media material, Instagram is a very useful tool for sport teams (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018). Instagram, as part of the larger social media spectrum, has the potential to favourably influence fan loyalty to their clubs (Popp & Woratschek, 2016). Moreover, Nayyeri et al. (2021) examined how an Iranian sport team used social media for branding.

Prior research indicates that sport teams can utilise Instagram to reach present and potential fans, increase interaction with the sport's product, and nurture favourable brand connotations. The current study considers the motive for Instagram usage by WPSL rugby clubs within the non-professional rugby setting in South Africa.

A substantial number of studies have been undertaken on the use of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube as social media MC tools across various sporting codes from a global viewpoint. Limited research is available on South African sport team's usage of social

media; consequently, this research is essential to understanding how sport and social media interact in South Africa.

3.5 Social media marketing

3.5.1 Social media in strategic marketing

The social media revolution has placed a new emphasis on marketing strategy; businesses used to dictate what was said about their brands to a passive audience, but now consumers are the ones creating and disseminating these messages (Shimpi, 2018). The role social media play in strategic marketing can be understood as a way for both firms and customers to exchange resources (Li et al., 2021; Beissel et al., 2022; Kemppainen, 2023). Moreover, Hollebeek et al. (2019) suggest that while customers can devote resources and knowledge to enterprises, interactions with customers are also crucial, particularly for higher levels of customer engagement (Fehrer et al., 2018).

Prior studies have shown that organisations that have adopted social media marketing strategies experience a positive impact in obtaining marketing knowledge on consumer trends and product performance (Belfiore et al., 2019; Jones, 2021; Obaid & Kishore, 2022). More recently, the growth of social media and their application to the scope of marketing has had a noteworthy influence on business operations, resulting in a transformation of marketing strategies and dynamics (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

The adoption of social media strategies as an MC channel has given organisations the ability to expand on their traditional marketing to maximise promotional efforts. However, previous studies have experienced difficulty in defining the effectiveness of return on investment and sales revenues based on social media adoption because of complexities in online communities (Kim et al., 2015; Wu, 2016). Tafesse and Wien (2018) agree that organisations struggle to use social media effectively to drive strategic marketing initiatives. It is worth noting that few empirical models have been employed for measuring an organisation's social media efforts (Galati et al., 2017).

Multiple factors contribute to social media effectiveness through social media strategy development. In addition to increasing goal commitment and better decision-making, a social media strategy establishes clear goals and performance expectations (Ong & Leng, 2022; Beissel et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2022). Moreover, social media goals are predominantly dependent on an organisation's strategic marketing goals (Effing & Spil, 2016). Li et al. (2021) acknowledge that social media can develop into an increasingly important tool for communication; as well as gaining insight into customers and markets, marketers can strategically utilise social media resources based upon existing resources and capabilities. Faria et al. (2022) indicate that businesses are realising the drastically growing number of internet and social media users as an opportunity to communicate in a timely and personal way. Furthermore, businesses are developing strategic

marketing plans that enhance interpersonal relationships with end-users to increase brand awareness and loyalty to their products and services. Additionally, the achievement of the numerous social media advertising techniques will depend upon an organisation's capacity to perceive and leverage customer-owned resources, as in the case of remodelling clients from passive receivers of the firm's social media services to lively fee contributors (Annamalai et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). It will correspondingly depend on an organisation's readiness to distribute resources in order to nurture collaborative conversations, enrich customer relationships and improve appropriate responses (Abeza et al., 2020). Some innovative methods to market a sport brand include using social media to provide frequent updates on the team and players, creating blogs and video channels, and organising community projects.

Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015) examined the role of social media marketing strategies for professional soccer teams. Findings indicated that developing social media strategies further could lead to short-term and long-term organisational benefits for a sport team. European and British soccer teams, in particular, have incorporated social media marketing into their marketing strategies and have become some of the most-followed online brands in the world, capitalising on the sport's global popularity (McCarthy et al., 2022). This may suggest that European sport teams are actively adopting social media strategies to maintain brand equity and awareness. Research by Doyle et al. (2022) into the Athlete Branding model via social media, provide sport professionals with a tool they may implement to drive their social media strategy. Further, a study by McCarthy et al. (2022) indicated that sport clubs consider social media marketing strategies to be crucial to their communications with fans. Abdourazakou et al. (2020) argue that by effectively implementing marketing strategies, teams must consider age disparities, the availability of various platforms, and distinct types of content for various audiences. Though these studies have enriched our understanding of the convergence of sport and social media strategies, the majority of the studies have concentrated on European sport. Therefore this study will address the research gap of providing knowledge on the South African sport market. It is worth noting that one of the research objectives of this inquiry is to establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy.

3.5.2 Social media as an MC tool for organisations

Consumers are currently more connected than ever before, and a significant number of hours are spent online on a daily basis, increasing the dependency of people on social media. Almost all new online platforms provide features for social interaction, such as profiles, ratings, comments, sharing, etc. This offers an excellent opportunity to gather opinions from relevant people, namely customers, potential customers, and employees (Barišić & Vujnović, 2018). In recent years, social media have become an increasingly important tool for MC, and several studies have examined the role social networks serve in facilitating consumer interaction with brands (Martínek, 2021).

For example, Fraccastoro et al. (2021) maintain that regionally and worldwide, businesses are increasingly using social media as a base for their MC strategies.

Organisations are acknowledging the necessity to design their presence on social media channels to regulate their brand marketing and to gather insights into consumer-generated content about their brand (Su et al., 2020; Frederick et al., 2021; Beissel et al., 2022; Ernstsson, 2022; Kemppainen, 2023). Abeza et al. (2022) agree that social media allows brands to communicate with consumers faster, cheaper, and more interactively. As social media marketing has become more popular, many brands now allocate a large segment of their marketing budgets to it (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018; Ernstsson, 2022). With increased awareness and impatient audiences, rising competition, and increased costs, communicating for social media is an entirely different concept (Shimpi, 2018).

Social media has increased the number of MC platforms accessible to consumers, which has led to a paradigm shift in how marketing professionals are communicating around the world (Johnston et al., 2018; Joanna & Zuzanna, 2020; Andreski, 2022). Since social media allow for two-way communication, they are beneficial relationship-building channels for marketers who opt to use them to interact with customers (Achen, 2017; Sahin et al., 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021; Jacobs et al., 2022). This study focused on how and why WPSL rugby clubs use social media platforms as an MC tool.

Marketing with traditional media has primarily been about delivering a key brand message while social media and other interactive digital conduits allow for a two-way process of having a conversation with the audience. A result of social media is that many businesses are implementing interactive digital marketing strategies and using social networking platforms to attract new visitors (Duffett, 2015). Barišić and Vujnović (2018) point out that a large number of products are available on the market that allows social media monitoring and data analysis. Conversely, due to the impact of increasing privacy legislation on social media, such as the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) in South Africa (Kruger, 2021), it is imperative to be cognisant of restrictions regarding keeping or evaluating data collected from social media (Kruger, 2021).

As previously stated, social media marketing is implemented across numerous industries and sectors and has a particularly strong presence within the sport industry. Thus, it is worth noting that the impact on social media on the sport industry from a global and South African context will be outlined later in this chapter to give perspective on its use as an MC tool. The table below shows a few instances of studies that have explored the impact of social media usage by sport teams.

Table 3.3: Studies concentrating on the use of social media among sport teams (presented chronologically)

Author	Topic	Location	Methodology	Key findings
Armstrong et al., 2016	Embracing the social in social media: An analysis of the social media marketing strategies of the Los Angeles Kings	US	Qualitative Research: Case Study analysis	Results indicate that the social media strategy of the Los Angeles Kings exemplifies how an organisation, and its customers may work together in a social media environment. The relationship between a brand and its consumers allows organisations to develop and promote brand communities.
Pegoraro et al., 2017	Strategic use of Facebook to build brand awareness: A case study of two national sport organisations	Australia and Canada	Mixed methods approach using content analysis	The findings have practical significance for non-profit sport organisations looking to cultivate a strong brand image, increase fan interaction, and eventually generate brand ambassadors using Facebook.
Maderer et al., 2018	Brand-image communication through social media: The case of European professional football clubs	Europe	Quantitative study with content analysis of social media pages	The findings of this study provide insights from a large data set spanning three seasons and allowing for comparisons in terms of brand qualities utilised, usage dates, and nations.
Vale and Fernandes, 2018	Social media and sport: Driving fan engagement with football clubs on Facebook	Europe	Quantitative study using content analysis and web based surveys	Consumption, participation, and creativity are all driven by the demand for information, empowerment, and brand love, according to the research. Furthermore, one of the key motives for connecting with sport clubs on Facebook was the need for integration and social engagement. As a result, the study shows that social media's interactive and collaborative character might encourage new, specialised, and more 'social' motives.
Barbu et al., 2019	Sport clubs' interaction with the fans using social media communications. Case study at SCM Craiova	Romania	Qualitative research: Surveys/ bibliographic study	The study revealed that the fans would like a deeper involvement of the clubs in online communication with the fans.
Sahin et al., 2020	The effect of social media on sport marketing:	Turkey	Quantitative research using a questionnaire	This study discovered a favourable and significant link between acquiring

Author	Topic	Location	Methodology	Key findings
	Konyaspor Football Club case			information from Konyaspor Football Club's social media platforms and supporters' consuming behaviour inclinations.
Machado et al., 2020	Motives to engage with sport brands on Facebook and Instagram–The case of a Portuguese football club	Portugal	Quantitative analysis Self-administered online survey	The findings suggest that the most compelling reasons for consumers to engage with brand-related material on Facebook are social influence, amusement, information seeking, and rewards.
Annamalai et al., 2021	Social media content strategy for sport clubs to drive fan engagement	India	Mixed-method approach Netnography, content analysis and sentiment analysis methods	This study revealed that specific content strategies are necessary for refining the capacity and valence of sport fan engagement. It also highlights that online content MC strategies need to different during in- and off-seasons.
Guzmán et al., 2021	Understanding a football club's social media network: An exploratory case study of Manchester United	England	Quantitative study with content analysis of Twitter page	Key results demonstrated that the popularity of tweets on various themes is dependent on the types of influencers engaged.
Nayyeri et al., 2021	Branding through social media (Case study: Instagram page of Tehran Esteghlal F.C.)	Iran	Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was conducted	It was found that Esteghlal F.C.'s Instagram page demonstrates two brand attributes, including product-related factors and non-product-related factors.
Beissel et al., 2022	"Winning the women's world cup": Gender, branding, and the Australia/New Zealand As One 2023 social media strategy for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023™	Australia and New Zealand	Quantitative and qualitative data content analysis of Twitter pages	The application of Twitter was strategic and tailored, using famous FIFA storylines to develop an emotional 'legacy' vision to obtain support from FIFA Council voting members.
Faria et al., 2022	Understanding the effect of social media marketing activities on football fans' satisfaction and engagement: A study of Portuguese 2nd League professional football clubs	Portugal	Quantitative research using a questionnaire	Findings show that the majority of Facebook social media marketing campaigns contribute positively to the satisfaction and engagement of supporters.

Author	Topic	Location	Methodology	Key findings
McCarthy et al., 2022	Social media marketing strategy in English football clubs	England	Qualitative research using semi-structured interviews	The findings indicate that sport clubs consider social media marketing strategies to be crucial to their communications with fans.
Naraine and Bakhsh, 2022	Optimising social media engagement in professional sport: A 3-year examination of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts	Canada	Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews	Results indicate little social media governance or strategic control, yet board and executive employees appear to agree. It is troublesome if neither party sees value in bringing social media debate to a governing level given its repercussions for marketing communication efforts.
Ong and Leng, 2022	Social media marketing strategies of football clubs: limitations of social influence	Singapore	Quantitative inquiry using a survey	Fans that were more active on social media reacted to remarks by ranking the calibre of players and coaches higher. The impact was restricted to influencing the sense of quality rather than intention to watch subsequent matches.
Burgers et al., 2023	How live Twitter commentaries by professional sports clubs can reveal intergroup dynamics	Netherlands	Quantitative study with content analysis of Twitter pages	Findings reveal that clubs tweeted more often after they won compared to after drawing or losing a match.
Kemppainen, 2023	Utilisation of influencer marketing in sport sponsorship on Instagram	Finland	Qualitative research using semi-structured interviews	Findings indicate that athletes' success affects social media cooperation, meaning corporations approach athletes more often. Low-key posts on social media get exposure throughout the season.
Ma et al., 2023	Analysing sport fan Facebook pages: Influences of post characteristics and brand attributes on fan engagement	Taiwan	Quantitative study with content analysis of Facebook pages	Results indicate that photos and links seem to be the most popular methods for conveying and maintaining the team brand.

It is interesting to note that sixteen of the above research studies were conducted in Europe and in developed countries. In each instance researchers focused on professional sport teams and the majority on soccer (Maderer et al., 2018; Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Sahin et al., 2020; Machado et al., 2020; Guzmán et al., 2021; Beissel et al., 2022; Faria et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2022; Ong & Leng, 2022; Burgers et al., 2023). In contrast, this study will provide an analysis of social media usage from a South African and rugby perspective.

3.6 Social media practice in sport

3.6.1 Social media in sport marketing

Sport marketers have become increasingly reliant on social media platforms to promote their brand and engage with fans (Maderer et al., 2018; Abeza et al., 2020). In recent years, the concept of social media, particularly social networks such as Twitter and Facebook have aided sport marketing organisations (Roberts et al., 2016; Capriotti & Ruesja, 2018; Burgers et al., 2023). Research by Abeza and O'Reilly (2018); David et al. (2018); and Thompson et al. (2018) affirm that social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are increasingly used by athletes and organisations in sport marketing. It is worth noting that society has changed dramatically over the past decade with the growth of smartphone users and social media. This includes how consumers engage with sport.

Furthermore, social media has influenced sport in various ways, particularly as a communication strategy and sport branding opportunity (Ma, 2018; Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Verma & Yadav, 2021). This suggests that social media can offer sport clubs and organisations the opportunity to reach a wide range of supporters at low cost, to interact, and to provide brand awareness. Moreover, sport clubs are able to use online communities to access their fans that attend matches, and their online fans. Social media have profoundly affected the way sport is delivered and consumed; the sport industry has become not only a major source of entertainment, occupation, and lifestyle, but also a good source of revenue (Belfiore et al., 2019; Lukinović et al., 2022; Zakizadeh et al., 2022).

Frederick et al. (2021) and Ernstsson (2022) believe that sport organisations should make use of social media to strengthen fan interactions with the sport products and with the teams that they support. Hence, sport organisations are able to obtain a greater insight into their fans, which may equip them to adapt their marketing plans. Although engaging with fans, supporters and other stakeholders online can be challenging for a sport team, it is worthwhile to use these platforms with their many beneficial activities (Naraine, 2019; Trivedi et al., 2020; Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020). Belfiore et al. (2019) report that by engaging fans via social media, sport rights holders can develop innovative communication networks with their audience that may be measured and valued as a brand new business prospect with sponsors. Companies that engage with social media promotions and sponsorships can amplify brand loyalty and affinity (Belfiore et al., 2019; Singh & Nimkar, 2020; Sharpe et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2021; Koronios et al., 2022; Kemppainen, 2023).

Sporting organisations are rapidly adopting the use of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram because they are relatively low-cost and highly effective (Billings et al., 2017; Osokin, 2019). Machado et al. (2020) claim that pages on Instagram and Facebook have the ability to foster social identity among sport fans that ultimately build brand communities. Therefore, sport brands should ensure that their marketing strategies include brand communities on Facebook and Instagram (Horowitz, 2019; Lupinek, 2019; Sharifzadeh et al., 2021; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022).

This indicates that social media allows sport brands to extend their market and brand reach which amplifies overall brand identity and experiences. Additionally, social media platforms offer sport brands an effective way to communicate preferred company brand associations and brand identity to their supporters (Sahin et al., 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021).

Social media can be used by sport brands to promote information and activities, to enhance sales, provide online catalogues of their merchandise, book match tickets, post information on ticket availability, and promote additional products, corporate hospitality or travel services (Maguire, 2021; Annamalai et al., 2021; Ristevska-Jovanovska; 2021; Pereira et al., 2022). In order to reach a wider audience, brands can expand their relations with consumers over social media and can encourage continuous consumer interactions that create cross-selling opportunities across different target audiences sharing the same platform (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Abeza et al., 2020; Abon & Adebayo, 2020). The rise of mobile phone users and social media has changed the way we look at various things in today's society, including our engagement in sport. The impact of social media on sport marketing is a critical topic for the purpose of the study as it directly aligns within the digital sport marketing mix.

3.6.2 Social media and sport organisation engagement

As an industry, sport has a number of unique characteristics. For example, the product is unpredictable, which results in the marketer having limited control over it. As a result, sport brands must satisfy a variety of stakeholders; but it is also a very personal experience linked to identity and self-image which contributes to a high degree of consumer loyalty and engagement (Machado et al., 2020). For sport brands, customer loyalty is imperative as sport fans are highly unlikely to change their level of engagement, and generational brand loyalty is the standard. Joanna and Zuzanna (2020) reported that owing to the degree of assurance of sport fans, sport brands are in a unique position to form robust and durable relationships with people. Sport brands need to develop long-term relationships with their fans in order to maintain their loyalty and

commitment beyond sport results. This is because good match results are no longer enough to maintain a loyal following.

Prior studies by Pegoraro et al. (2017) and Barbu et al. (2019) suggested that online platforms such as social media can play a vital role in improving the relationship between sport brands and their fans. In order to maintain positive consumer behaviour, it is important that sport organisations regularly engage with their fans on social media. It is therefore crucial that sport organisations identify the types of social media content that appeal to users' common interests and generate shares, likes, and comments (Sahin et al., 2020; Turková, 2021; Kemppainen, 2023; Ma et al., 2023). Consumer-brand interactions are changing significantly due to the social media landscape (Massonos, 2019), especially with regard to how content is created, distributed, and consumed. The present inquiry determined the level of frequency of WPSL rugby club engagement with their target audience and fan base across their preferred social media platforms.

3.6.3 Social media practice in South African sport and international rugby

3.6.3.1 South African sport social media use

With over 17 million Instagram followers, former South African cricket player, AB De Villiers, is the most followed individual not only in South African sport but in the country as a whole (Gracia, 2022). Social media engagement in sport is particularly well suited for franchises in South Africa, as they have some of the country's largest followings on social media (Wakefield, 2016).

In the cricketing front, Cricket South Africa is making good use of social media as a marketing channel to promote the Proteas brand extensively (Wakefield, 2016).

In South African soccer, Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates are traditionally considered to have the largest fan bases; expectedly, they also lead in terms of social media participation, with 77 percent of all likes on Facebook and 73 percent of all followers on Twitter among the PSL teams (Media Update, 2016). It is evident that the high social media following of the two teams can also be attributed to the efforts they have made to create their social media communities. There is no surprise that footballers are among the top social media trending topics in South Africa, with football being the most popular sport in the world. Players can benefit from social media by raising their profile, and some have even taken advantage of their popularity to make money. This makes it understandable why Kaizer Chiefs goalkeeper Itumeleng Khune is the uncontested social media king of South African football with over 2.4 million followers across Instagram and Twitter (Motshwane, 2021). It is important to communicate with followers at an emotional and personal level when trying to build large social media fan communities. With their Twitter handle being

@Masandawana, Mamelodi Sundowns use language that is part of their team dialect to connect with their fans (Media Update, 2016). Their use of this type of language encourages fans to feel they belong to the community and want to be a part of it.

After a victorious 2019 Rugby World Cup campaign, the Springboks gained a surge in popularity with the team now able to charge advertisers up to R58 000 per sponsored post on social media (de Villiers, 2019). The Springboks had the advantage of using low-production-value content which the team generated during the tournament to increase engagement and ultimately amplified their brand value after the tournament. Interesting enough, Springbok coach Rassie Erasmus has taken the trend of social media so seriously that he imposed a loose ban on the players using social media during the course of the tournament to ensure they focus on playing for their nation (Caldwell, 2019).

In the lead up to a recent United Championship rugby match between the Stormers and Bulls, both sides' social media teams engaged in friendly banter on Twitter to ignite anticipation for the big match (Mothoagae, 2022). A regional brand like the Blue Bulls, but with a national presence, understands the importance of social media (Wakefield, 2016). Using channels like social media has enabled the Blue Bulls to become more distinctive than they were in the past. As a result, the team can now communicate directly with their stakeholders, hence better understanding their wants and needs. While The Sharks (2022) report that they pride themselves on providing interactive engagements that keep fans informed and entertained and will continue to strive to bring new ideas to their fans. However, this investigation examines to what level social media marketing can successfully be implemented within a non-professional club rugby setting in South Africa.

3.6.3.2 Social media adoption in international and South African rugby

Football has the most followers on social media globally, and rugby still has some way to go to get into the top ranked list (RugbyPass, 2020). The All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby team, are without a doubt the most popular rugby team in the world (Pledge Sports, 2020), with 1.9 million followers on Instagram, 1 million followers on Twitter and 4.6 million followers on Facebook. The South African national rugby team, The Springboks, currently have 1.34 million Facebook followers, 659 000 followers on Instagram and 782 000 followers on Twitter. Retired New Zealand rugby player, Daniel Carter, has 2.6 million social media followers which makes him rugby's most influential athlete globally.

Table 3.4: Ten most followed professional rugby clubs on social media platforms

Rank	Rugby club name	Country	Total social media followers (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
1	Stade Toulouse	France	1 174 000
2	The Sharks	South Africa	814 000
3	Crusaders	New Zealand	788 000
4	Toulon	France	744 000
5	Stormers	South Africa	694 000
6	The Chiefs	New Zealand	653 000
7	ASM Clermont Auvergne	France	652 000
8	Leinster	Ireland	641 000
9	Hurricanes	New Zealand	630 000
10	Stade Francais	France	595 000

Source: Dickens (2022)

Taking into account the data from the above table, it is imperative to note that this is in a South African rugby context. The Sharks and the Stormers are amongst the top ten most followed rugby clubs in the world and hold the number one and two spots respectively in South Africa. The Sharks currently have over 814 000 social media followers across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, respectively. At the SA Sports Industry Awards 2018, the Sharks were named winners for the Best Digital Platforms which attests the value of social media usage for the rugby team. Meanwhile Wakefield (2016) confirms the primary MC tool for the Vodacom Bulls is social media, followed by conventional platforms. This indicates that South African professional rugby teams consider social media as part of their MC strategy and plans. The Former Springbok coach, Rassie Erasmus, acknowledged that during the 2019 Rugby World Cup, outsiders could stay connected to the rugby action via social media (SA Rugby, 2020). #StrongerTogether was the name of the social media campaign the Springbok rugby team implemented to give supporters and the media some insight into how the team handled themselves at the World Cup, and also to help them realise that in a team sport such as rugby, it is not always about the best player; there are many other factors to consider as well (SA Rugby, 2023).

Globally, World Rugby and the 2019 Rugby World Cup social media platforms generated nearly 2.1 billion views of match and non-match video content, more than six times the number at 2105 Rugby World Cup (World Rugby, 2019). New rugby fans also doubled the engagement rate, increasing their interest both on and off the field. In addition to the established nations, Asia and the US were among the most active 60 nations in generating more than 5.5 million Tweets about the #RWC2019 conversation (World Rugby, 2019). Moreover, on Instagram and YouTube, 1.8 million new followers were gained, from a 48 percent and 29 percent growth respectively (World Rugby, 2019).

The aforementioned suggests that rugby's growth in global engagement demonstrates the sport's ability to both inspire and engage a global audience on a much bigger scale than just match

content alone. Hence, it further indicates the importance of social media usage as an MC tool for rugby, which is investigated by this study.

3.6.3.3 Social media sport campaigns in South Africa

From a South African sport context, The Proteas, #ProteaFire campaign, thrives on social media, and is utilised successfully to publicise the team culture, message, and brand ethos. Social media brings fans closer to the Proteas (Wakefield, 2016). In closer relation to the current study, the Springbok team's official hashtag is "#StrongerTogether" has been utilised to unify the nation during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Meltwater (2019) reported that In October 2019 alone, the #StrongerTogether hashtag was cited 3 640 times in the press and 213 000 times on social media around the world. That hashtag reached 5.33 million individuals on social media. While many South Africans have used the #StrongerTogether hashtag to demonstrate their support for the Springboks, Japan was the leading nation in adopting the hashtag across their social media posts (Meltwater, 2019).

The TikTok trend #RugbyFever reached new audiences during the 2019 Rugby World Cup tournament with Japan and Cambodia leading the top five views and 45 percent of all views coming from female fans. World Rugby and TikTok collaborated to create #RugbyFever, which was the number one performing trend worldwide during the tournament.

Despite the absence of rugby in 2020, SA Rugby continued to promote a variety of causes, for example, the #StrongerTogether for R32-12 initiative, in which the Springbok Rugby World Cup team donated some of their most prized possessions as raffle prizes, with all revenues benefiting hunger relief organisations Gift of the Givers and Food Forward SA. A series of Lockdown Diaries, in which fans were given an insight into the lockdown life of top players and referees, were among the engagement campaigns across SA rugby digital channels (SA Rugby, 2023). The country's best women's players also earned much-needed exposure via World Rugby's #Unstoppables campaign, with ten player articles published in October to December 2020 (SA Rugby, 2023). The aforementioned provides evidence of the use of social media campaigns within South African rugby. However limited research is available on how non-professional or amateur league rugby clubs in South Africa use social media as an MC tool.

3.7 Factors inducing the level of social media usage by sport organisations

3.7.1 Budget and paid advertising

Pegoraro et al. (2017) pointed out that using social media allows less well-endowed sport organisations, such as the National Olympic Committees (NOC), to reach potential supporters despite their lower budgets and lesser fan interest levels. Securing adequate budget for social media campaigns remains a great challenge for many marketers across many industries around the world.

The types of content found on social media are generally paid and organic. A paid post is when a sponsor pays to have their logo or product appear on the photo, the caption, or a tag line of the post; an organic post is when the logo or product is integrated into the content, but may not be the focus, but is engaged with comments or likes. Mastromartino and Naraine (2022) adds that paid content is typically more intentionally planned and produced, whereas organic content is more subtle and may not be the primary emphasis of the article or post. Paid sponsorship provides certain advantages because there is a budget to pay for the material to appear on the timelines of targeted consumers, but organic content may also be advantageous because it seems more real, and users are more inclined to engage with the post (Cornwell, 2019).

Professional sport teams have had great success advertising and selling products most notably on Instagram and Facebook. Throughout 2017 and 2018, the Miami Heat based in the U.S. invested heavily in Facebook and Instagram ads and continued to invest after achieving success (Dees et al., 2021). The team utilised Facebook to target basketball fans and customers in order to sell more single-game tickets, generate qualified leads for season tickets, promote online commerce efficiently, and boost sales for all venue events. Dees et al. (2021) stated that by implementing this social media targeted strategy on Facebook, they were able to reach more qualified consumers and enhance their customer experience. In the sport industry, social media ads can be used for a variety of reasons – to expand their audience base, sell match tickets and merchandise, to drive competition entries, drive website traffic or even to download a sport team's app (Horowitz, 2019; Dias & Monterio, 2020; Maguire, 2021). Research on South African sport teams' paid advertising tactics from both the professional and non-professional levels is scarce. This study will provide greater context on how non-professional sport teams view paid advertising on social media.

3.7.2 Content published

It is important for organisations to post content that engages consumers, creates discussion, and creates a dialogue (Kavanagh, 2019; Ernstsson, 2022). Increasing visibility and improving brand image through active engagement can increase social media value for organisations. The predominant intention of the usage of social media from a commercial perspective should be to connect with consumers and trigger dialogues that eventually lead to sales and greater consumer retention. Content is considered one of the most imperative elements to social media design and successes. This study will identify what type of content is published by WPSL rugby clubs across their various social media platforms.

Crucial motivations for engagement in sport are socialisation and nostalgia (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). For instance, fans may often recall moments of action from their favourite team or player, or any other memories related to a specific event that has occurred. Since nostalgia is generally a positive emotion that encourages social connections and improves self-confidence, it has been widely used to initiate online engagement (Machado et al., 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021; Andreski,

2022). As a result, sport fans are observed to be users with a high need for social interaction as well as enthusiastic participants in sport-related activities on online platforms (Phua et al., 2018). Vale and Fernandes (2018) argue that the need for empowerment, integration and social interaction is the driving force behind sport fans contributing on Facebook, i.e., the desire to bond with other sport fans, gain a sense of commitment to the sport community and engage with like-minded fans. Due to this, fans of sport clubs may engage more with social content shared on official Facebook pages than other social media sites (Annamalai et al., 2021). A further study by Thompson et al. (2014) found that sport fans most often engaged with content that showcased behind-the-scenes activities or that posed questions for them to interact with. Kavanagh (2019) agrees that it is important for sport fans to get behind-the-scenes access and enjoy watching their favourite players in a natural, relaxed setting. This may suggest that social content is highly sought after and triggers the highest level of interaction amongst sport consumers.

Sport marketing managers consider entertaining content to be highly engaging (Abeza et al., 2019; Ristevska-Jovanovska, 2021; Pourzarnegar, 2022), but it is also one of the types of marketing activities that sponsors are looking for when they engage with a sport brand. Additionally, a study by Parganas et al. (2015) found that a professional soccer team in England, Liverpool Football Club, predominantly used text messages, links and images as part of their social media content strategy. Video, competitions and polls are also considered in their published content. Interestingly through Twitter, the club emphasises communicating both product and non-product related elements to encourage engagement (Parganas et al., 2015; Yüce et al., 2021; Behrens & Uhrich, 2022; Doyle et al., 2022; Weimar et al., 2022; Burgers et al., 2023). Numerous researchers have identified the type of content sport teams publish as part of their content strategy. This study will ascertain the type of content published by WPSL rugby clubs and will determine any similarities or differences in comparison with current literature. Moreover, it will assist in answering one of the research questions of the study, “How do WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool?”

3.7.3 Content scheduling

By promoting specific posts to broad audiences based on location, interests and demographics, targeted content advertising enables content platforms to generate larger audiences (Mochon et al., 2017). Regardless of how social media platforms decide what and when to post and when to spend money on targeted content advertising, the task of maximising profits through optimal scheduling of social media posts is challenging (Kanuri et al., 2018). In sport marketing literature, limited research is available that directly addresses sport teams’ use of social media scheduling tools or processes. Wolter (2017) argues the need to invest in social media in a way that will apprehend a return on investment by understanding the factors that drive effective scheduling. This may suggest that social media professionals seek a sensible scheduling solution that advises when to publish (at what time of day), and which content subject to post at what time. Developing a successful social media schedule begins with defining the preeminent time to post meaningful

content on social media (Kanuri et al., 2018). Popular platforms currently used for social media scheduling and management include Tweetdeck, Feedly, Falcon, Sprout Social, Buffer and Hootsuite. This thesis will examine the importance of determining how content is planned or scheduled on rugby clubs' respective social media platforms.

3.7.4 Target audience content types: image and video

Using visual features in social media marketing is an effective method to draw in new followers and increase engagement. Facebook and YouTube have become more popular channels for watching long-form content, thus enhancing the experience of watching live sport (Kavanagh, 2019; Simmons et al., 2020; Horky, 2021; Kahiya et al., 2022). Depending on the social site being used to interact with others, images and videos will be perceived differently. For instance, Dessler (2020) and Warren (2022) found that on Instagram, images are typically more popular than videos, while videos are more popular on YouTube. Videos may be more effective on platforms where users are looking for specific content or scrolling through social media, while images may do better on platforms where users scroll through social media speedily. It is also vital to evaluate the demographics of the platform's users. Determining whether image or video engagement should be emphasised requires a thorough understanding of the target demographic and how they generally behave online (Dessler, 2020; Turková, 2021; Ma et al., 2023).

A video can also be incredibly versatile, and can be anything from a quick, trending challenge that boosts engagement to an informative live tutorial that will increase brand awareness and product knowledge. Warren (2022) found that the amount of engagement for Instagram videos is greater than any other type of content, and the amount of engagement for Tweets with video is 10 times higher than non-video content. There is also evidence that videos engage with social media algorithms more effectively. Published Facebook data has indicated that videos receive more interaction than other content categories, with live videos receiving a higher engagement rate than pre-recorded video content (Mosseri, 2018; Naraine et al., 2022). Moreover, video has consistently outperformed all other types of content on social media over the last few years in comparison to giveaways, links and images (Triton Commerce, 2022). Including an image in a post may increase retention and help users connect with an audience on a deeper level. Images stimulate a separate section of the brain, eliciting an emotional reaction that may be linked to a company. Images are less effective in driving engagement than videos (Dessler, 2020). Research indicates that buyers react more positively to video content across many platforms. From a sport context, this inquiry will determine what content types are currently being used by WPSL rugby clubs and will highlight what works best for their social media platforms.

3.7.5 Guidelines and policies

Social media standards and regulations are intended to protect a brand's reputation and encourage internal stakeholders to use their accounts appropriately and responsibly. At this point, probably every sport, league, and club around the world has either embraced or acknowledged

the importance of social media and fan participation. Different sports, on the other hand, have adopted a variety of techniques to police social media use (Ortiz, 2011; Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Blaszkla et al., 2018; Park et al., 2020). Research focused on social media education has indicated that employees believe education and training mitigate the difficulties athletes face on social media (Geurin, 2021).

From an international viewpoint, several sporting bodies have designed social media guidelines and policies to govern social media use by its internal stakeholders. Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018) suggest that sport clubs build rules and synergies with their players' profiles, especially those with a strong online presence. Research by Blaszkla et al. (2018) highlighted that athletic departments' social media guidelines in the US for student-athletes are a well-publicised strategy. They further indicate that implementing certain prohibitions or restrictions are common forms of policies in college sport. Similarly Park et al. (2020) argue that social media regulations and monitoring systems must be reflexive, based on a thorough knowledge of the recognised patterns of student-athletes' social media activity.

Below is a breakdown of some of the most common social media rules employed by each sporting body respectively (Ortiz, 2011; Football NSW, 2017; Swim Ireland, 2017; Carzola-Milla et al., 2020; NASO, 2022).

- **English Professional Soccer League:** Players are subject to the same social media norms as they are for other types of public speech. The Football Association may impose fines or take other disciplinary measures if comments are judged "improper."
- **Major League Baseball:** Major League Baseball does have social media policies in place that oversee the use of social media by its employees, but it excludes players. In the locker room and on the field, players must follow the regulations regulating the use of technological devices.
- **Major League Soccer:** Several clubs have guidelines, but the league does not provide a stated policy for players. However, players are informed that whatever they say is recorded and that they may face disciplinary action if they breach other league laws on Twitter.
- **National Basketball Association:** Mobile phones and other technological devices are not permitted during games. This time span is defined approximately 45 minutes before kick-off until all media commitments are fulfilled.
- **National Football League:** Social media usage by players, coaches, and other operational personnel is prohibited within 90 minutes of kick-off. When media interviews are concluded, social media can be used again.
- **Women's Tennis Association:** Tennis players receive rules by the Women's Tennis Association on how to engage social media in an efficient, professional, and responsible

manner. Players are required to notify the association of their withdrawal from an event prior to making a public statement.

- **International Olympic Committee (IOC):** Every year, a detailed set of social media guidelines pertaining to the event is released by the IOC prior to the event.
- **Football NSW:** The governing body of Australian football in New South Wales has drafted a social media policy that organisations and clubs may adopt for their own membership. This will promote policy compliance and ensure that everyone is informed of their rights and obligations.
- **Swim Ireland:** The goal of the social media policy is to provide direction on how clubs may utilise virtual communities and networks as an effective communication and promotional tool in a safe and transparent manner.
- **National Association of Sports Officials:** Guidelines include not participating in particular play and/or rule evaluation/commentary, whether of a game an official has worked, or observed, or on the influence of officials in any athletic event in general.

Although the value of guidelines and policies is imperative, there is a lack of literature within the South African context addressing sport teams' use of social media guidelines or policies. This inquiry will highlight if social media guidelines or policies are in place for WPSL rugby clubs and if so, to what degree they are employed.

3.7.6 Most effective social media platforms for sport

Today, social media are regarded as the most popular method for attracting the attention of followers, surpassing television and radio. There may not be a single solution that works for everyone, and sport brands should not waste resources creating content for a channel that their intended audience is not using. Instead, athletes and teams would prefer to devote their valuable time to promoting content on channels that are more relevant to their target audience (Massonos, 2019; Esen et al., 2021).

A study conducted by Pedersen et al. (2016) states that Twitter has emerged as one of the most popular current social networking communication platforms in the sport industry. Meanwhile Watkins and Lee (2016) and Yoon et al. (2017) note that Twitter fosters connections with followers, strengthens fan loyalty, and establishes or maintains a brand's presence. Twitter enables sport fans to communicate their thoughts and views on their favourite teams, players, or brands in real time by distributing messages limited to 280 characters. As it can offer a 360-degree sense of a match or event, the team, and the players, Twitter is the social media medium of choice for athletic events and sport regulatory bodies to update its fans (Massonos, 2019). Twitter may also help improve fan-organisation interaction by giving supporters more direct access to athletes (Baldwin, 2020; Eddy et al., 2021; Guzmán et al., 2021; Burgers et al., 2023).

Machado et al. (2020) discovered that the most compelling reasons for consumers to interact with brand-related material on Facebook are social influence, amusement, information seeking, and incentives. With 68 percent of social media users owning a Facebook account, it is possible to suggest that Facebook is a good choice for any sport team looking to establish a community online by sharing their experience via text, images, and videos (Massonos, 2019). Kowalski and Łazorko (2020) suggest it is possible that Facebook is currently the most popular social media network. Thus, due to its popularity among present and prospective fans, Facebook was selected as a means of communication for their research paper. They further argue that Facebook, unlike other social media platforms, aims to find the right balance between official and informal content (Kowalski & Łazorko, 2020). In addition, Turková (2021), Naraine et al. (2022) and Ma et al. (2023) support the argument that Facebook helps sport organisations to develop communities and exchange information.

Sport is extremely visual, and Instagram, as a photo platform, enables sport players to exhibit their daily lives in innovative and exciting ways by uploading images, videos, and text. Engagements of consumers on Instagram are mostly affected by entertainment, rewards, and social influence (Machado et al., 2020; Nayyeri et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021; Sharifzadeh et al., 2021; Kemppainen, 2023). Massonos (2019) further acknowledges that Instagram's user base is rather diversified, and which makes it easier to communicate messages on the move. Research by Geurin and McNary (2021) found that Instagram was selected as the most useful social media platform for their study because visual material gave athletes a larger platform to advertise their personal sponsors than textual information does. Further, findings by Nayyeri et al. (2021) and Doyle et al. (2022) indicated that their selected sport team's Instagram page demonstrated two brand attributes, including product-related factors and non-product-related factors.

Sport has a high social media value in today's world, and prominent social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have assisted numerous professional teams and athletes to engage with fans and other audiences (Samba Digital, 2022). Sport organisations' official fan pages on Instagram and Facebook may be regarded as unique aspects of internet brand engagement (Habibi et al., 2014), which can be valuable tools for sport brands to interact with their followers and establish a strong feeling of social identity among supporters. Facebook and Instagram are currently exceedingly accessible and frequently employed. Therefore, the use of visual information in social media such as Instagram and Facebook provides the club and teams with a platform for enhancing team awareness via the use of visual strategies (Hussain et al., 2021; Doyle et al., 2022). MacDonald (2017) concludes that YouTube, Facebook and Twitter continue to be among the most popular social media platforms, and for sport personalities, these accounts remain essential for establishing their brands. Moreover, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are the most recent marketing engagement channels that sport organisations may utilise to cultivate relationships with their fans and stakeholders (Hussain et al., 2021; Andreski, 2022; Doyle et al.,

2022; Jacobs et al., 2022; Metelski & Leszczyński, 2022; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022; Petersen-Wagner, 2022; Yoon & Pedersen, 2022; Burgers et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2023).

Current research indicates that utilising social media platforms (especially Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) might entice individuals to get more engaged with favourite sport team. Thus, it is envisaged that the present study will determine if there are any commonalities or differences in the most effective social media platform for WPSL rugby clubs.

3.7.7 Campaign measurement and alignment

Measurement is an excellent approach to determine out how social media integrates into an organisation and which medium is best for the organisational goals. Thus it is imperative for this study to ascertain how South African non-professional rugby clubs measure social media usage and how it aligns to the clubs' overall organisational goals. By experimenting with and evaluating the many social media platforms accessible, users can determine how beneficial they are for their purposes. Understanding the organisational objectives and how businesses employ social media will help identify how they intersect and align (Mossey, 2017).

Hudson et al. (2016) analysed social media involvement by interviewing customers about their behaviours rather than calculating aggregate quantities of factors including comments, shares and likes. Other research has concentrated on visible and behavioural indicators of engagement. For example, through the behaviour of the Facebook and Twitter followers, Ashley and Tuten (2015) analysed social media engagement and influence based on Klout scores and engagement database platforms. In addition, academic literature covers a broad spectrum of similar engagement indicators such as number of followers, page views, website traffic, time spent on pages, comments posted, and sharing information (Sterne, 2010; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Lipsman et al., 2012; Thackeray et al., 2012; Abeza et al., 2013; Achen et al., 2017).

Yim et al. (2021) measured the historical and traditional sport consumption behaviours of each generation of sport fans, in order to make a fair comparison of the millennial generation's sport viewing habits versus Baby Boomers and Generation X sport fans. Annamalai et al. (2021) examined the number of likes, comments, shares, and the degree of comments on Facebook fan pages to measure fan involvement. Thus, researchers established that social content received the most contributions, whereas remuneration-related content received the least. Kunkel and Biscaia (2020) suggest using predictive analytics to build standards for which kind of posts promote consumer interaction on social media platforms, as well as A/B testing to analyse the effect of various branding efforts against set benchmarks. The present study will outline to what extent WPSL rugby clubs measure social media activities and campaign success in one way or another.

3.7.8 Giveaways and competitions

Giveaways on social media may help increase brand awareness, participation, and even sales. Abeza et al. (2022) and Krzyżowski and Strzelecki (2022) specified that giveaways or contests have gained a lot of publicity as a technique to inspire users to participate in online activities. Lukowicz and Strzelecki (2020) agree that contests with prizes on social media profiles can be very effective at catching the audience's attention.

In addition, giveaways may also be utilised to draw attention to key messages brands wish to get out to their target audience. Even after the sport season is finished, competitions will assist in remaining relevant (Socialfix, 2021). Giveaways through social media have in past years been underutilised yet may be quite effective in achieving high engagement rates from sport fans. Sport teams, athletes and leagues should invest more in personalised content through contests or giveaways (Machado et al., 2020; Szczepkowski, 2021).

In the world of electronic sport (e-sport), giveaways in the form of sport or gaming accessories is a common method of attracting an audience (Lukowicz & Strzelecki, 2020). In the majority of instances, consumers are requested to like, comment on or share a giveaway post on their profiles while tagging the brand's name or social media handle. In addition, by offering a giveaway on social media, brands may collect qualitative data that Facebook's official monitoring charts cannot offer.

Moreover, by hosting a giveaway via social media, one can determine the qualitative data that Facebook's formal tracking charts cannot provide. Also, if brands incorporate a short form for their audience to complete upon entry, they will also have their contact information to nurture the relationship with them once they have completed the survey (Nao Media, 2012).

This inquiry examined how giveaways and contests are utilised as part of WPSL rugby club's social media usage. It will further highlight if similar successes were obtained in relation to literature found on this matter in question.

3.7.9 Use of hashtags for brand awareness

Hashtags have become an integral part of digital marketing, serving as the backbone of online interactions. The dialogues generated by the usage of hashtags may include both significant communications between users and brands, as well as sporadic thoughts (Naraine et al., 2021). Wang (2021) noted that the hashtag implies that the message is pertinent to a certain topic, and by adding the hashtag, organisations have the potential to engage their followers.

Hashtags may be used in the caption of a post to compile information for readers who may be seeking for certain information or items. For instance, the hashtag #WPRugby may be used on posts containing or related to Western Province Rugby. As a result, hashtags may help in the building of a team's online brand community and can be used to identify and target important user

categories (Naraine et al., 2021). As highlighted by O'Hallarn et al. (2019), hashtags are central in connecting sport and social media; this aspect is crucial to sustain the community in the midst of clutter of information available online (Stavros et al., 2014; Mastromartino & Naraine, 2022). It may be claimed that hashtags are utilised for marketing purposes and are thus associated with the broader social media MC strategy.

Burton et al. (2021) believe that organisations should seek brand anchors with persistence and endurance; periodically limited hashtags cannot provide the lasting engagement that may be generated through social media activation. Research by Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) found that the use of hashtags resulted in a slight drop in the number of comments and likes an athlete's post received, and yet this impact increased with the number of hashtags added. This may indicate that fans see tagged information as attempting to generate a transaction rather than establishing a connection with them. Therefore, from a promotional viewpoint, a more defined and strategic procedure is required for hashtag creation, execution, and possible customer engagement.

Limited academic research has been found on the value of using hashtags for South African rugby teams within the non-professional setting. Thus, this study determined if WPSL rugby teams find value in using hashtags as part of brand awareness. In addition, this research highlighted several initiatives that may be developed using of hashtags.

3.7.10 Advertising and branding activities

Consumers can engage in significant brand-related activities on social media platforms (Hollebeek & Brodie, 2016), promoting dynamic, accessible, and frequently clear interaction among consumers and brands, along with substantial consumer-to-consumer engagements (Dholakia et al., 2004; Gensler et al., 2013). Notwithstanding, social media sites have been predominantly used to communicate event-related information as opposed to direct marketing approaches. This indicates an opportunity to include more content that might lead to increased earning opportunities (Thompson et al., 2018; Abon & Adebayo, 2020). Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018) found that branding remains an important component of a professional sport team's marketing and commercial activities, particularly around a club's history and its players. Cross-promotion and co-branding activities with well-known brands that have a solid social media presence are tactics to consider for sport clubs within the sport sector. Research by Abeza et al. (2020) suggest that sport managers should conduct activities that promote brand humanisation, empower audiences to be educated consumers, and provide customer services to further nurture the value of social media. For example, the Pro Kabaddi league in India has launched a number of social media communication activities, such as broadcasting live game updates, sharing thrilling game images, and advertising the next scheduled game (Trivedi et al., 2020). In the difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, many groups and athletes placed a greater focus on their social media activities, recognising that they were the major method of connecting

with their followers in the absence of competition (Sharpe et al., 2020; Wymer et al., 2020; Areiza-Padilla et al., 2021; Szczepkowski, 2021; Hayes, 2022; Li et al., 2022). Individual athletes, meanwhile, engaged in a variety of social media activities, including fundraising and words of support for National Health Services on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19 (Sharpe et al., 2020; Grix et al., 2021; Schallhorn et al., 2022).

Advertising and branding activities are endless, and it will be interesting to identify what type of activities or tactics were employed by WPSL rugby clubs as part of its overall social media usage.

3.7.11 Activity frequency

The ideal posting frequency may help maintain audience engagement, yet each social media platform has its own guiding principles. Studies conducted by Lupien et al. (2005), Achen et al. (2017), and Kanuri et al. (2018) reported that the urge to interact with content is likely to be greatest in the mornings, modest in the evening, and minimal in the afternoon. For the purpose of supporting the research objective, "To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs utilise social media as an MC tool", the researcher determined how often rugby clubs post on their selected social platforms to establish activity frequency.

Recent industry data by Keutelian (2022) and Myers (2022) indicated the following best practice post frequency and timings for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Each platform differs in best practice posts frequency, as indicated in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Social media platform best practice frequency

Social media platform	Frequency of posts	Best times to post
Facebook	Maximum of two posts daily	Between 13:00 and 15:00 during the week and Saturdays
Twitter	Three posts daily	Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 09:00
Instagram	One post daily and no more than three times a day	Mondays at 11:00 Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 10:00 and 13:00 Thursdays and Fridays between 10:00 and 11:00

Source: Adapted from Keutelian (2022) and Myers (2022)

3.7.12 Appealing social media strategies used in sport

There is an impressive amount of creativity on all social media sites. Examples of international professional sport teams with arguably the best social media strategies are illustrated in Figure 3.5 below.

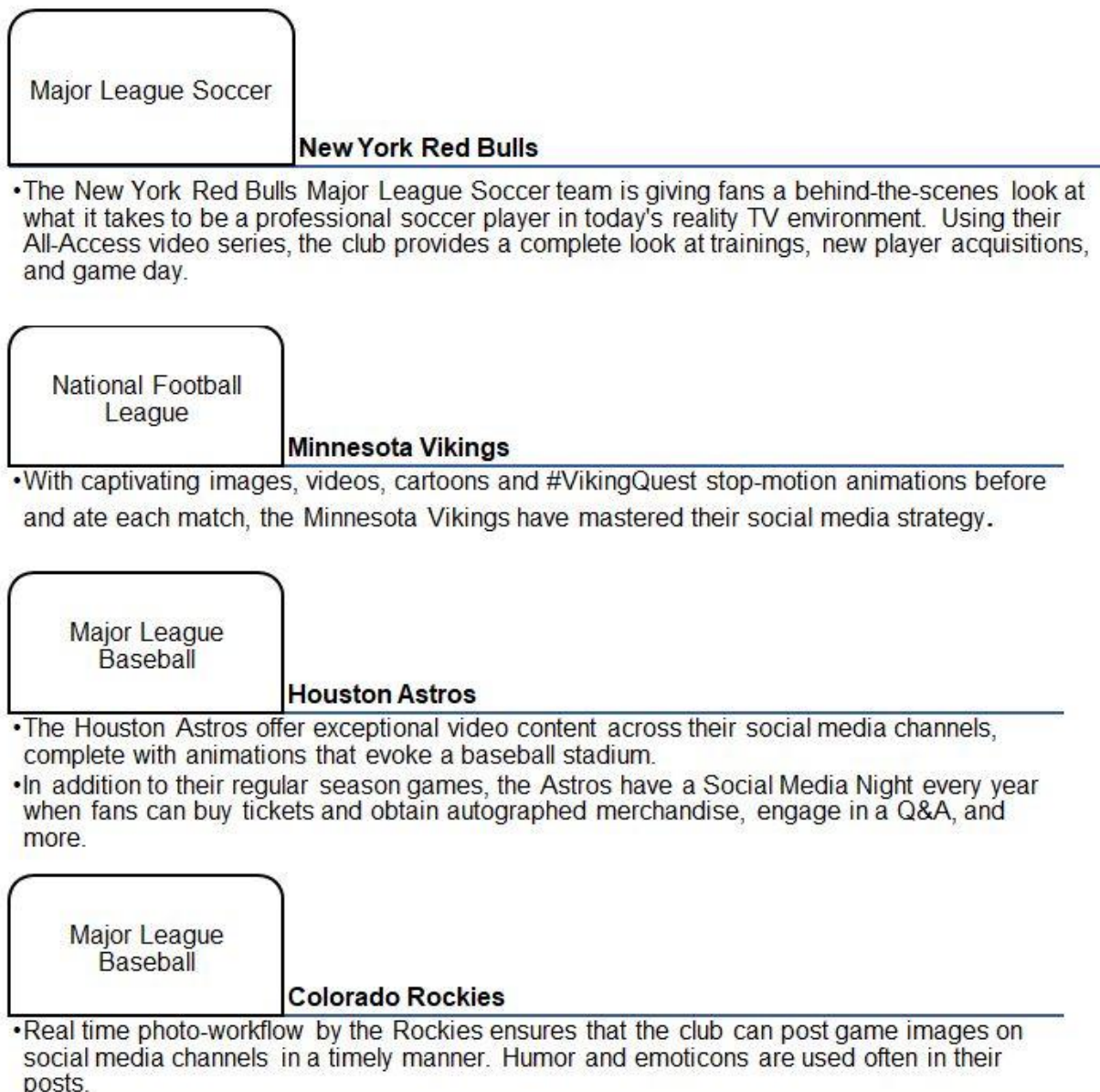


Figure 3.5: Appealing social media strategies

Source: Adapted from Raby (2018)

One of the research objectives of the present inquiry is “to establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy”. Moreover, this research will look to see whether the chosen sport teams match the pattern of other worldwide sport marketing methods or if there are differences in South Africa that need adaptation of these strategies.

3.7.13 Social media challenges

The use of social media certainly offers a number of advantages for sport and athletes, but it also poses some challenges. Abeza et al. (2017) argue that a challenge in social media usage for sport teams is making the platforms truly engaging and valuable to consumers. Staying current with technological advancements is another challenge the sport industry faces. Through social

media, many fans connect with their preferred teams, so it is crucial that teams keep their Facebook and Twitter pages updated (Sport Management Degree Guide, 2022). A major barrier to social media usage is a lack of training and technical management support (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Abeza et al., 2019). In addition, Antheunis et al. (2013) have highlighted that despite all the benefits of social media usage, cost and time are considered a drawback for sport organisations' social media usage. Eagleman (2013) reported that North American sport organisations identified three key challenges of social media usage: frequency and content population, maintaining message control, and observing and managing fan comments. Sport organisations have a difficult time establishing social media policies, but the management of social media platforms must be regulated by their personnel (Sanderson, 2011; Andreski, 2022; Mastromartino & Naraine, 2022; Weimar et al., 2022).

Moreover, a study conducted by Abeza et al. (2017) reported the following challenges related to social media in professional sport.

Table 3.6: Social media challenges in professional sport

Challenge	Description
Operational management	Creating fresh, unique, diverse, appealing content is a constant challenge.
Change management	Adapting to the rapidly evolving social media technology and repurposing emerging platforms are cited as challenges.
Control	Teams' social media platforms have limited control over content posted by users.
Actionable data	It takes a lot of time and effort to mine data, sort it, filter out real complaints and transform that data into actionable information.
Internal conflict of interest	A challenge with the use of social media within departments in organisations is balancing the different objectives and interests.
Anonymity	People impersonate organisations on social media in order to make certain remarks or spread false information.

Source: Abeza et al. (2017)

This study examined the key challenges faced by WPSL rugby clubs from a social media promotion and usage context. The study further determined if there was any alignment in the challenges faced from a non-professional perspective.

Through social media, passionate fans have been able to voice their opinions, both positive and negative, by posting public comments and/or sending unwanted direct messages to athletes (Geurin, 2017). Many athletes have been victims of cyber bullying, particularly those with a large audience online and who fail to meet fan expectations (Sanderson & Truax, 2014). During major sporting events, where there is increased pressure on athletes to live up to performance expectations, negative messages can pose a significant challenge for athletes.

Using the Internet as a tool for spreading hate has become more and more popular among sport fans and the general public. Brown (2009) asserts that in addition to providing instant access to new followers, the internet makes mobilising and spreading hateful opinions easier. Nakayama (2017) claims that people often feel free to foster hate abusive messages online rather than in person or in public spaces. Kilvington (2017) argues that racism from behind-the-scenes is now being put in front of the camera due to social media. While progress has been made within sport stadiums to control hate speech and racism, racism in football has not fully been eliminated yet. While racist incidents at live sport matches are on the decline, racism on social media directed towards players, teams, and other supporters is on the rise (Bennett & Jönsson, 2017). In 2021, in an effort to combat abuse and discrimination on social media, members of international football clubs, players and athletes participated in a four-day boycott of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram (BBC Sport, 2021).

Facebook usage has also been associated with sport anxiety and attention disturbance in athletes of all levels (Encel et al., 2017), which might be troublesome for elite athletes around competition time, especially if several players use Facebook before a competition. Cohn (2019) agrees that social media influence the mental game of players.

3.8 Sport team social media usage during COVID-19

With most live sporting events around the world temporarily suspended, many sport teams, leagues and media organisations suffered from a lack of content and experience to create ways to innovatively interact with their audiences (Hall, 2020; Horky, 2021; Majumdar & Naha, 2021; Li et al., 2022; Radmann & Karlén, 2022). This was at the same time sport that consumers consequently increased their online streaming usage (Alexander 2020; Staley et al., 2021; Kahiya et al., 2022). Sport teams and leagues throughout continued interacting with their audiences in a manner that aligned with existing pre-pandemic MC strategies and objectives. Social media played a large role in this engagement with fans, which was an important influence on the relationship between high-profile athletes and their fans.

Some of the message's athletes conveyed to their fans were influenced by public campaigns, including those promoting health awareness and good hygiene practices (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Sharpe et al., 2020; Szczepkowski, 2021; Schallhorn et al., 2022). The world-renowned soccer player, Cristiano Ronaldo, shared pictures on Instagram of him teaching his children the importance of hand washing. The soccer player has over 200 million Instagram followers and over 80 million Twitter followers. Former Welsh rugby captain, Ryan Jones, ran 26 miles in his back garden for charity, raising money for the National Health Service (NHS) in the process but also encouraging followers to remain active during COVID-19 (BBC Sport, 2020).

From a sport team and organisation perspective, #StayHomeStayStrong was a social media campaign of the International Hockey Federation that aimed to keep the hockey community

unified and focused on how they could stay healthy, fit, and safe (International Hockey Federation, 2020). Furthermore, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), in partnership with the World Health Organisation (WHO), developed and launched an awareness campaign called “Pass the message to kick out coronavirus”, requesting people to follow five key methods that could assist in fighting COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). There was a widespread promotion of indoor high-intensity interval training in the United Kingdom by Team Great Britain gymnastics across their social media channels (Sharpe et al., 2020).

With no rugby being played, players used the COVID-19 lockdown as opportunity to be creative and interact with fans through social media (Thomas, 2020). A few New Zealand rugby players teamed up with sport brand, Adidas, and launched a social media campaign #hometeam. The campaign was aimed at rugby fans to create videos of different home hobbies during lockdown and encouraged them to send these videos, as well as and tag the professional rugby players in the posts (Thomas, 2020). Rugby players used social media during the COVID-19 lockdown to post home workout videos and challenges for other players and fans (Thomas, 2020). Furthermore, professional rugby players engaged daily with fans on social media sharing entertaining videos, as well as spreading awareness to practice social distancing and prioritise personal hygiene during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sky Sports Rugby Union, 2020).

WP Club Rugby saw an increase in online activity from many of its clubs. Although clubs initially focused on staying fit and conditioned with the hope of returning to play, they shifted their focus to building their online content (WP Rugby, 2021). Many of the clubs went into their archives and displayed some historical stories and images and shared this online, making for interesting communication on social media (WP Rugby, 2021). To this end, it is evident that opportunities exist for further research on sport club’s social media usage as an MC tool in the context of COVID-19. Hence, this inquiry will attempt to answer one of the research objectives of the study “To analyse how social media was used as an MC tool during COVID-19”.

3.9 Acceptance of new technology in social media adoption

3.9.1 Technology Acceptance Model

In order to market their brand and engage with fans, sport organisations are constantly experimenting with new methods and technological innovations play a vital role in such promotions. This study examines preferences and motives for social media usage from the perspective of the TAM. It was developed by Davis et al. (1989) explicitly to explain how users accept technology and is most frequently used to explain the way technology is used (Princi & Krämer, 2020). Also, due to its simplicity, TAM has been widely used to study the acceptance of a wide range of technologies by users.

A total of five factors were incorporated into the original TAM to explain technology acceptance, of which PU, PEOU, attitude towards using, behavioural intentions of using, and actual use were

considered (Sun & Zhang, 2021). Davis et al. (1989) argue that users' attitudes towards using new technology were predominantly influenced by both PU and PEOU. Moreover, TAM also concluded that PU and attitude impact the behavioural intention of users directly and significantly (Davis et al., 1989). In addition, it suggests that users' actual adoption of new technologies depends mainly on their behavioural intentions.

The TAM has been used in multiple contexts to study people's attitudes and behaviour towards adopting various technologies. Further studies have used the TAM to identify what drives consumer behaviour in terms of using technology and the decision mechanisms underlying it (De Boer et al., 2019). In studies by Pinho and Soares (2011) and Elliott and Polyakova (2014), the basic TAM with two traditional inputs, PU and PEOU, has been found to be valuable for investigating social media sites. While the traditional TAM has been tried and tested, many extended versions have also been developed in an attempt to explain user adoption of social media in further considerations (Sun & Zhang, 2021). For example, Kocak et al. (2020) looked at the extended TAM which included trust and perceived risk as additional variables. Additionally, Alshurideh et al. (2019) evaluated the acceptance of social media using the expanded model, which included perceptions of playfulness as well as intentions to use social networks. While Sun and Zhang (2021) introduced perceived enjoyment and satisfaction to the TAM, this contributed directly to behavioural intention of users.

3.9.2 Technology Acceptance Model usage in sport

Recently, a lot of research has been done on why people accept or reject new systems and technologies (Abdullah et al., 2016; Lemay et al., 2018; Algarni, 2020; Kalayou et al., 2020; Kashada et al., 2020; Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021; Ishaq et al., 2021; Unal & Uzun, 2021; Kaur, & Gopal, 2022; Khan et al., 2022; Kumar, 2022). Within the sport marketing context, recent studies explored how technology can be optimised to make professional sport more appealing and increase its acceptance by the viewership (Goebert & Greenhalgh, 2020; Majumdar & Naha, 2021). Several sport-based studies have demonstrated the value of TAM in predicting user behaviour in the contexts of smartphones for the health and fitness industry (Qi, 2019), amplified reality technologies (Goebert & Greenhalgh, 2020), factors influencing spectators' use of digital tickets (Marquez et al., 2020), sport streaming apps (Wu, 2020), sport spectator adoption (Uhrich, 2021), viewing the game textually among Nigerian football fans (Ojomo & Olomjobi, 2021) and sport audience measurement (Fujak & Karg, 2022).

The popularity of social media could be perceived among sport teams as an effective means of communicating with their audience due to the level of PU and PEOU as sources of information about the sport team itself and its people. The model further tests the influence towards using social media by WPSL rugby clubs. PU and attitude as drivers for use of social media by the rugby clubs will lead to the behavioural intention to use social media. Thus, in the current model, this construct is expected to have an impact on actual social media use. Two key objectives of

the present study are to determine why WPSL rugby clubs are using social media and to analyse how WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as an MC tool. As previously stated, the purpose of the TAM is to explain why users accept or reject new technologies.

3.10 Summary

The chapter began with an overview of the history and development of social media. Social media zones and relevant social media platforms were discussed in detail to give context to this study. The use of social media as an MC tool and its use within strategic marketing was investigated and interpreted within the local and international sport sector. The impact of social media in sport marketing was discussed as well as how it has been adopted in South Africa. The chapter also examined usage factors such as frequency, content and guidelines and social media campaign measurement and assessment. Literature revealed that social media posts with videos often perform better than those with static photographs. It is also anticipated that social media usage will continue to rise over the next 2-3 years, as brands seek to develop new fan engagement strategies in a world where linear broadcasting is being overhauled by newer communication technologies. TAM was introduced as the theoretical model for this study.

The chapter concluded with a discussion on social media usage by sport teams during COVID-19. The following chapter will outline the most appropriate research design and methods used for this inquiry, which investigates the usage of social media as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to advance the research methods utilised in the study. This chapter describes in depth how the research design and methods were developed. A theoretical underpinning for several research approaches is also offered. The objective was to gain greater knowledge of the underlying methodological theories. The chapter also outlines the research methodologies used and why they have been adopted. The target population, sample size and data analysis procedures will be discussed. Finally, the section describes how the data was obtained and analysed, as well as the rationale for employing the instruments. The chapter concludes with an outline of the study's research methodology limitations, data trustworthiness, and recognition of the ethical concerns.

4.2 Research

Creswell (2008) defines research as a series of steps used to gather and analyse information in order to learn more about a subject or problem. He indicates three crucial steps to follow: pose the research question, obtain the necessary data to answer the research question, and lastly present answers to these questions. Similarly, Wiid and Diggins (2013) describe research as the systematic collection of data using recognised methodologies that permit its analysis and transformation into knowledge that can be used to draw a conclusion regarding the posed topic. The present study followed this process in order to ascertain the appropriate research approach and methodologies required to contribute towards the body of knowledge on sport and social media marketing.

4.3 Research paradigm and philosophy

Hughes (2010) views the research paradigm as "a way of viewing the world that frames a research issue" and determines how researchers approach the topic. Thus, the research paradigm allows a researcher to comprehend and reconcile diverse perspectives on the same social issue (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe paradigms as theoretical constructs that interact with initial principles indicating the researchers believes to create meaning from data. Respectively, Creswell (2007) and Neuman (2014) contend that research paradigms are fundamental sets of common beliefs of certain schools of thought, through which researchers evaluate and interpret the data collected in research projects. As a result, a paradigm has ontological, epistemological and methodological elements (Žukauskas et al., 2018). Ontology is viewed as the character of our views about reality (Richards, 2003), while epistemology is classified as the discipline of philosophy that explores the nature of knowledge and the method by which knowledge is gained and evaluated (Gall et al., 2003). Methodology on the other hand

focuses on the debate of how a specific part of the research should be conducted. The current study asserts that human beings actively build and provide meaning to reality and information through perception and discourse.

Brown and Dueñas (2020) argue that after determining a worthwhile subject and considering research ethics, ontology—the nature of reality—must be explored. After establishing a philosophical grasp of the subject area of reality, one must determine the nature of knowledge, which is the epistemology of a work. From this study's interpretivist approach, there are several subjective realities, each of which is socially formed by people and their interactions with one another.

Researchers have proposed a wide range of paradigms; however, Candy (1989), one of the pioneers in the subject, proposes that they may all be categorised into four broad subcategories: the positivist, post-positivist, interpretivist, and critical theory paradigms. The positivist paradigm aims to discover laws that are generalizable and that there is a single objective reality (Pham, 2018). Post-positivism adopt reductionism and, due to their ontological and epistemological convictions, often use quantitative methodologies (Brown & Dueñas, 2020). (Goldkuhl (2012) believes that interpretivism uses current subjective meanings that exist in social science and redesigns them with the aim to create a theory. Critical realism is the nature of reality, structure, and the implicit or explicit ontologies that humans operate with (Easton, 2010).

This study adopted an interpretivist approach, which incorporates the beliefs, reasons, attitudes and perceptions of the subjects (Edirisingha, 2012). This inquiry accepts that reality may be impacted by one's frame of reference. The researcher acknowledges that science is not the sole means to discover the truth, as knowledge acquired through multiple subjective realities, constructed socially, by and between individuals.

This investigation extended towards the interpretivist epistemology since the researcher believes that the world should be viewed through the perspective of its people. To achieve the research objectives, the inductive interpretivist philosophy was selected for the study as the most appropriate approach to gain rich detail and perspectives from the respondents and their relationship with sport and social media as an MC tool. Moreover, the interpretivist paradigm is suitable for interpreting social media usage as an MC tool, as these dimensions are influential theoretical foundations of the present investigation.

4.4 Research approach

To achieve the aims of research, a qualitative and/or quantitative research approach can be employed (Sileyew, 2019). Quantitative research is often characterised by systematic and empirical analysis of phenomena employing statistics and mathematics, as well as the accurate processing of numerical data (Basias & Pollalis, 2018; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Polit and Beck (2012) describe qualitative research as the focus of lived experiences and human perspectives.

Both Merriam (2009) and Hennink et al. (2010) affirm that qualitative research encompasses research that deal with phenomena by studying experiences, behaviours, and relationships without the use of statistics, mathematics, or numerical data processing.

An overview of the two research approaches proposed by Queirós et al. (2017); Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) and McLeod (2019) is provided in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: A comparative summary of quantitative versus qualitative research

Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
In quantitative research, numerical data is widely selected and examined.	Qualitative research is not concerned with numerical representativeness, but rather with a thorough comprehension of a particular issue.
Typically, samples are large and representative of the population.	The sample populations are generally smaller in size.
Quantitative research adopts structured procedures and formal instruments for data collection.	Data collection methods are unstructured or semi-structured in some cases.
Uses close-ended and multiple choice questions.	Uses open-ended questions.
Data is analysed using numerical comparisons and statistical interpretations.	Themes from respondents are used to analyse the data.
Makes use of surveys, experiments and observations.	Makes use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups and literature reviews.

Sources: Queirós et al. (2017), Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018), and McLeod (2019)

Qualitative research is predominantly classified as an inductive procedure of categorising data into themes/categories and detecting relationships among those themes/categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). It is significant for this study to acquire meaningful data from the experiences and expertise of stakeholders; therefore, the study will use a qualitative research approach. Furthermore, the inquiry selected the qualitative research approach to be in line with the research purpose, and to observe and understand the insights of the participants.

Qualitative methods seek to comprehend the experiences and attitudes of people or communities. Basias and Pollalis (2018) believe that the qualitative research approach allows researchers to interact intimately with participants and obtain a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) indicate that these methods endeavour to provide answers to questions about the 'how', 'why' or 'what' of phenomena. The primary purpose of this inquiry is to understand why and how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool. Recent sport-related studies by Barbu et al. (2019), Kuntcevic (2019), Annamalai et al. (2021), Dunn et al. (2021), Fenton et al. (2021), Mancuso and Addo (2021), Nayyeri et al. (2021), Sharifzadeh et al. (2021) and McCarthy et al. (2022) also employed a qualitative research approach to determine their research findings.

4.5 Research process

The research process consists of a sequence of activities or stages required to carry out research efficiently (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Kothari, 2020). Also, the research process is made up of a

variety of closely linked tasks that overlap continually rather than in a precisely specified order (Kothari, 2020). Khan (2014) reports that while conducting research, the researcher will always have an understanding of the possible advantages and drawbacks by following the research process.

Figure 4.1 below illustrates the research process and its use within the current study.

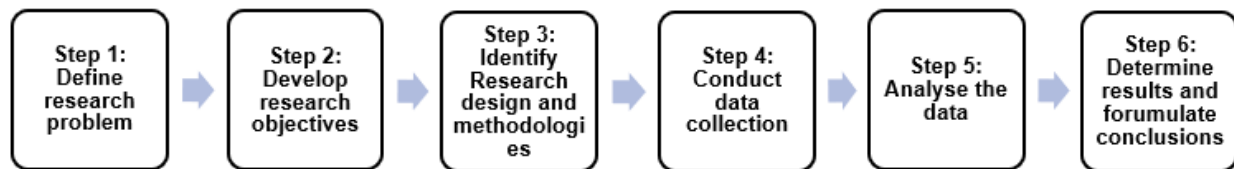


Figure 4.1: This study's research process

Source: Adapted from Kumar (2018)

Defining the research problem is the first and most important stage in formulating a research study (Cheng, 2015). A research problem is defined as the issue(s) that prompt the researcher to undertake the research investigation. The process of formulating a research problem starts with understanding how to transform an interest in the subject into an inquiry research problem (Irlbeck & Thornton, 2012). The defined problem of the present study relates to the examination of WPSL rugby club social media usage as an MC tool.

Developing research objectives provides a more detailed description of the specific research topics or issues the project intends to examine (Thomas & Hodges, 2010). These are essential to every study since they specify the questions and methods to be employed for data collecting and analysis. Consequently, it is important to note that research objectives are a description of the purpose for conducting research in the first place. A key research objective of this inquiry was to establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy.

Identifying the research design and methodologies is significant and relevant since it leads the strategy, structure, and strategic build-up to gain answers to the research questions and influences the overall relevance of the research findings (Moffatt, 2015). Iacobucci and Churchill (2010) add that the research design tests hypotheses and establishes potential responses to research questions, which provides the data essential for decision-making. Exploratory research was the optimal method for achieving the specified research objectives of this study.

The collection of data enables researchers to gain deeper insight and unique perspectives into the research problem. To generate these insights, qualitative data needs data that is comprehensive, rich, and subtle, allowing patterns and conclusions to emerge from meticulous examination (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Jones (2022) identified interviews, observations, content analysis, focus groups and questionnaires as key primary data collection techniques used in

qualitative research. Interviews were deemed the most suitable means for the gathering of data in this study.

Data analysis is the process of evaluating, categorising, coding, analysing, or otherwise recombining data in order to generate empirically-based conclusions (Yin, 2009:126). O'Brien et al. (2014) define data analysis as the process of making interpretations and conclusions, which may involve the creation of a framework or model. Importantly, there must be coherence between the employed method(s) and analysis. ATLAS.ti (version 9) was utilised to assist this process in the current study.

The discussion and conclusions could also assist individuals see how the evidence affects practical decisions and how they can apply the results and findings in their own instances.

4.6 Research strategy

There are three types of research strategies that a researcher might employ: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive research. The main goal of explanatory research is to explain why things happen and to forecast what will happen next. Explanatory studies employ theoretically selected predictor variables that are hypothesised to explain for variance in the criterion variable (Check & Schutt, 2011; Welford et al., 2012). George and Merkus (2021) report that explanatory research is often known as "cause and effect" research since it looks for patterns and trends in current data that have not been looked at before. As a result, it is frequently referred to as a causal study. Fawcett and Garity (2009) point out that the goal of descriptive research is to name things or to put things into groups based on their characteristics. Williams (2007) argues that research that is descriptive looks at the situation as it is presently. Exploratory research is a research technique that focuses on perplexing phenomena and lays the foundation for further descriptive or explanatory investigations (Du Toit, 2010). Exploratory investigations are intended to create early thoughts on areas for which there is limited information. Once a research problem has been identified, a researcher can start exploratory research to see if there are any links between the problem and certain factors. Kothari (2004) holds that exploratory research investigates an in-depth problem to identify perception, ideas and insights.

Implementing an exploratory research strategy provides rich data information that will assist in addressing the objectives of the research questions of a study (Penwarden, 2014). Relevant sport and social media related studies by Achen (2017), Vale and Fernandes (2018), and Theocharis et al. (2019) implemented an exploratory research strategy to conduct their research. This study undertook an exploratory research strategy as its primary goal to gain ideas and insight to the research problem. In addition, because limited studies are available on South African sport teams' use of social media, the chosen research strategy assisted to gather new insights into the research topic (De Beer & Stander, 2016).

4.7 Research design

Research design is seen as an action plan for setting the direction to obtaining answers (Yin, 2003). Burns and Grove (2001) observe that a research design assists researchers to plan and apply methods to the study that will gather the projected results. This study employed a qualitative descriptive strategy and qualitative research to obtain empirical data. Jones (2022) outlines nine research designs listed: ethnography, case study, grounded theory, time series, experimental, longitudinal, action research, autoethnography and cross-sectional study.

In qualitative cross-sectional research, themes are developed throughout a phase of data collection (Balmer et al., 2021). This study employs a combination of cross-sectional and multiple case study design, which requires collecting information about a phenomenon from multiple cases only once (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Research conducted by Bourke et al. (2019) used a cross-sectional research design to determine social media usage as a nutrition resource for athletes in New Zealand. Naraine et al. (2019) used a cross-sectional research design to investigate the user participation amongst a Twitter community of professional sport organisations. Duplaga (2020) utilised a cross-sectional design to examine young adult women's use of fitness influencers' websites in Poland. A cross-sectional design is appropriate for the present study as data was extracted and detailed from various sources in the selected sample of key stakeholders from the WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town.

Multi-case study research is an exploratory design in which the researcher examines multiple cases over time by collecting extensive, in-depth data from multiple data sources. Stake (2000) adds that the lower number sample size in case study research redesign does not always allow for random selection; thus, purposive sampling, recognising the potential for in-depth inquiry, is the most effective method. Yin (2014) has emphasised that a multiplicity of cases improves the strength of the findings. A sport-related investigation by Hipke and Hachtmann (2014) employed a multi-case design when they examined the social media strategy in Big Ten athletic departments. In the current study, a multi-case research design was performed to collect data from twelve cases (rugby clubs) situated in various areas of Cape Town. The participants of the study formed a bounded system since they each used social media for their rugby clubs. The decision to focus on marketing stakeholders was made since they were directly involved in organising, executing and evaluating social media efforts for the rugby clubs.

4.8 Sampling

Sampling is the process of determining a portion of a population that is representative of an entire population (Haque, 2010). Thus, it is possible to suggest that a sample will be any number of people, units, or objects chosen to represent a population in accordance with a research plan. Palinkas et al. (2015) claim that sampling procedures for qualitative methodologies in practical approaches are frequently less transparent.

4.8.1 Population and sample frame

Barnsbee et al. (2018) advise that groups of individuals are the target population which an intervention aims to study and draw conclusions from. The target population for this study was WPSL rugby clubs and their social media platforms. Participants from suitable rugby clubs within this population were selected as the sample frame, which met the social media usage criteria and were easy to access. The selected participants had access to information and a high level of knowledge related to the research topic and research questions of the study.

A data saturation method was employed in the study for selection of the interviews based on the number of rugby clubs that were active on social media platforms. Data saturation allows new participants to be introduced into the study until data shows replication (Bowen, 2008). Bowen (2008) further adds that implementing a data saturation method is important for data validity to ensure the quality of the qualitative research conducted.

4.8.2 Sample size

The sample size is determined by the collection of data until the saturation point is reached when no added data from the interviews and analysis are new. Kemppainen's (2023) study used ten semi-structured interviews relating to how Instagram influencer marketing can be used for sport sponsorship. Thompson (2016) considered the engagement between a brand and its fans on social media by surveying eleven stakeholders. Sinn (2015) interviewed five professional sports teams in the US as part of a qualitative study to assess how they used social media.

Moyo et al. (2020); Moyo et al. (2022a); Moyo et al. (2022b); and Moyo et al. (2022c) used a sample size of six organisations in South African qualitative sport studies to ascertain the connection between professional sport organizations' marketing performance and corporate social responsibility. In light of the previous global and South African sport studies with lower sample sizes, a sample size of twelve was deemed sufficient for this analysis.

The sample size selected for this study is illustrated in table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Sample size of the study

Respondent	Area in Cape Town	Interview duration	Position
1	Belville	34 minutes	Social media representative
2	Constantia	35 minutes	Media liaison
3	Goodwood	25 minutes	Head of marketing
4	Greenpoint	36 minutes	Social media co-ordinator
5	Stellenbosch	28 minutes	Social media manager
6	Parow	25 minutes	Social media representative
7	Paarl	33 minutes	Social media manager

8	Kenilworth	32 minutes	Club administrator
9	Somerset West	28 minutes	Social media representative
10	Milnerton	44 minutes	Club representative
11	Belville	47 minutes	Brand & project coordinator
12	Claremont	27 minutes	Marketing manager

Source: Author (2022)

The selected sample of twelve respondents was based in various areas of Cape Town and the interview processes lasted approximately 25 to 47 minutes. The respondents were allocated a pseudonym to ensure participant confidentiality (Yin, 2015). Participants were categorised as respondent 1, 2, 3 etc.

4.8.3 Sample unit

Bonham (1989) defines sample units as population members on which assessments are conducted during sampling. Moreover, sample units are non-overlapping and distinct entities (Boham, 1989; Kent & Crocker, 1992). From the population identified, key stakeholders involved in the marketing of WPSL rugby clubs were selected as the sample unit for the interviews.

The chosen sample units for the interviews were appropriate as they were directly involved in managing the social media channels of their rugby clubs. These participants were in the best position to provide insights to answer the research questions set out in the study.

4.8.4 Sampling method

The sampling process involved initial research and analysis of which WPSL rugby clubs had a social media presence. Once the analysis was complete, communication with the respondents was started by means of an introductory email and invitation to participate in the research study. This process started in October 2020 and concluded in March 2021 when the final respondent agreed to participate. If the respondents agreed to participate, a formal signed permission letter was requested from the rugby clubs confirming their participation in the interview process.

Once the population and sample unit are clearly defined it is then necessary to select whether to use a probability or non-probability sampling technique. In probability sampling, every sample has an opportunity of being selected in the study (Showkat & Parveen, 2017), whereas the converse is true for non-probability, since not all of the units or participants have an equal chance of selection and inclusion in the research study (Etikan et al., 2016).

This study employed a non-probability sampling technique, and a judgemental (purposive) sampling approach was implemented to select the sample for the study. Judgemental sampling is best used to focus on characteristics of a population that are considered important and that are easily accessible (Kent, 2007). Judgmental sampling involves the researcher selecting the sample unit from the sample population based on the researcher's own knowledge and

professional judgement. Moreover, judgemental sampling is frequently employed in qualitative research methods and in exploratory research designs (Palinkas et al., 2015) which suits the research strategy chosen for this study. Hence applying judgemental sampling for this inquiry was appropriate as the participants were purposively selected because of their direct involvement with the rugby clubs' social media platforms and marketing activities.

4.9 Data collection instruments

4.9.1 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview process allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions in the form of a data collection instrument (Flick, 2002). The rationale for selecting semi-structured interviews was the fact that detailed information was required about the participants' thoughts and opinions, as well as to explore new issues, which was facilitated by a semi-structured approach (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Welman et al. (2005) note that using a semi-structured interview gives the interviewer the opportunity to elaborate and adjust questions while simultaneously maintaining a structured and meaningful conversation.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were implemented in this study by utilising an interview guide as a data collection instrument. Using this interview method for data collection allowed the researcher to engage in discussions that gained insights into the perceptions and views on using social media as an MC tool. This decision was made in light of the ability to deviate slightly from the questions provided by the semi-structured interview. For instance, if further details were required in some cases to support a response. While the order of questions was consistent, participants were questioned further to provide further information about particular answers. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the rugby clubs' marketing stakeholders to get their perspective of social media implementation and usage. This reinforced the interpretative framework that guided this study.

4.9.2 Interview guide

In an interview guide, the questions are selected before the interview and documented with the help of the guide (Mason 2004; Rubin & Rubin 2005). Taylor (2005) indicates that the main aspects of the investigation are covered in the interview guide. It keeps the conversation on track during the interviews but should not be strictly followed. Instead, the aim is to discover more about the research area by collecting similar kinds of data from each participant (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Gill et al. (2008) suggest that this will be done by guiding participants on what to talk about.

Kallio et al. (2016) adds that a qualitative semi-structured interview guide helps make studies more reliable and objective and may ultimately make the findings more credible. Hence, this inquiry utilised an interview guide (refer to Appendix A for the full guide) when collecting the data

from the participants based on the study's research questions and objectives. The interview guide aided in the relevance and coherence of the questions, though in certain instances questions were tailored or rephrased to aid the respondent with an improved understanding of a particular question. Jones (2022) asserts that one of the primary benefits of conducting interviews as a research approach is the ability to probe for additional information when asking questions. While the researcher made use of the interview guide questions, further insights were obtained in some cases by employing clarification and elaboration probe type questions such as "Could you expand on that point?", "Were there particular reasons why?", etc.

Recommended interview guide techniques and structure were adopted from a study performed by Knott (2014). In addition, interview guide questions for this study were adapted from a qualitative interview guide employed by dos Santos and Duffett (2021). The structure of the interview guide design is described below.

4.9.2.1 Interview guide design

The interview open-ended guide questions were divided into eight sections, which are outlined below.

Section 1: Introduction and background to social media use

The introduction and background to social media usage section comprised the initial discussion and questions designed to make the respondent feel more at ease with the interviewer. The researcher began the process by providing a brief introduction, explained the purpose of the study and why the respondent was selected for the inquiry. In addition, the researcher reiterated that the information supplied by the participants would not be shared with any outside parties. During this section participants were reminded to provide verbal consent for the interview to be recorded for data analysis and data validity purposes only. The respondents were then asked to introduce themselves. Thereafter the set of questions focused on why the rugby clubs made use of social media as part of their MC strategy.

Section 2: Strategy

The second section was established to define the social media strategy of the rugby clubs, elements that impact the methods employed and to comprehend if there was an alignment between social media and the rugby club's marketing and organisational goals.

Section 3: Measurement and assessment

This section addressed the measuring and evaluation of social media usage. The questions were designed to determine how social media efforts were measured, barriers faced, and the rugby club's preferable platforms.

Section 4: Budget

This section's questions concerned the application of a social media budget. Additionally, the questions covered paid advertising.

Section 5: Content and guidelines

The questions in this section assessed the content and guidelines in using social media.

Section 6: Best practice

The questions sought to establish the best practice measures that were used by other sport teams; social media campaign examples and appealing strategies that respondents would like to implement.

Section 7: COVID-19 practice

This section of the interview guide concentrated mostly on social media adaptation and the form of content published during COVID-19 when live sport was prohibited.

Section 8: Branding

Lastly, section eight solicited perceptions about the relevance of advertising and branding activities employed on social media by the respondents.

The aforementioned sections were selected purposefully based on the study's objectives, and every question was added to align with the research questions. The link between the interview guide sections and questions, research questions, and objectives is depicted in Table 4.3 below. An overview of the questions is provided below to illustrate the rationale for their inclusion.

Table 4.3: Linkage between interview guide sections, research questions and research objectives

Section	Interview questions	Objective of questions	Relation to research question	Research objective answered
Introduction and background to social media use	Questions 1-4	These questions introduced the research topic in question and verified why WPSL rugby clubs made use of social media as part of their MC strategy. Questions asked included: - Value of social media usage for participants - Primary purpose of usage - Social media platforms used	Why were WPSL rugby clubs using social media as part of their MC strategy?	To determine why WPSL rugby clubs were using social media as part of their MC strategy.
Strategy	Questions 5-18	This series of questions identified the social media methods adopted. Questions asked included: - If a social media strategy was in place or not - Social media goals - Target audience identification - If a social media scheduling tool was employed - Social media usage to generate sales - If an e-commerce tool had been employed	What social media MC strategies could be identified to maximise the clubs marketing efforts?	To establish how WPSL rugby clubs could maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy.

		• Social media alignment with club's marketing and organisational goals		
Measurement and assessment	Questions 19-21	These questions were designed to determine the participant's views on: • Measurement of social media campaigns • Social media challenges faced • Identification of the most effective platforms used	How did WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool?	To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs were using social media as an MC tool.
Budget	Questions 22-23	The purpose of these questions was to ascertain the participant's perspective on social media budgeting: • Social media budget usage • Examined if paid advertising were implemented	How did WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool?	To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs were using social media as an MC tool.
Content and guidelines	Questions 24-28	These questions were aimed at eliciting participants' opinions on: • Activity frequency • The type of content posted • What content types were employed • Use of social media guidelines • What brand emotions did they want to convey on social media	How did WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool?	To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs were using social media as an MC tool.
Best practice	Questions 29-32	These questions explored participants best practice views of other sport team's social media usage. Questions asked included: • Participants view of professional sport team's social media pages • Social media campaign examples • Appealing strategies they would like to implement	What social media MC strategies could be identified to maximise the club's marketing efforts?	To establish how WPSL rugby clubs could maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy
COVID-19 practice	Questions 33-35	These questions probed how social media were used during COVID-19. Questions asked included: • Social media activity during COVID-19 • Adoption of social media practice • Type of content published during COVID-19	How were social media MC practices adapted during COVID-19 when sport was prohibited in South Africa?	To analyse how social media were used as an MC tool during COVID-19.
Branding	Questions 36-38	This set of questions highlighted the branding activities that participants used on social media. Questions asked included: • The use of hashtags for brand awareness • The implementation of competitions or loyalty programmes • Advertising and branding activities employed	How did WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool?	To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs used social media as an MC tool.

4.10 Data collection

CIn (2013) believes that data collection is an important part of the research process and data collection techniques allow researchers to collect information systematically about their population and setting of study. The study followed a multi-method approach for data collection. Primary data was collected by means of online and telephonic interviews while secondary data in the form of a literature review was employed. The structure of the primary data collection interviews is illustrated in Figure 4.2 below.

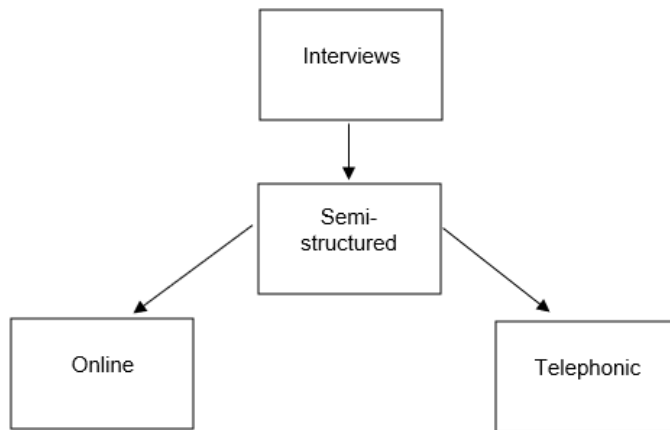


Figure 4.2: Structure of the interviews

Source: Author (2022)

4.10.1 Primary data collection: interviews

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a variety of adjustments to standard research procedures, notably data collection. The advent of new video conferencing tools presents qualitative researchers with new avenues to collect real time data (Gray et al., 2020). Winiarska (2017) claims that currently, video conferencing tools are commonly utilised to save money, acquire access to bigger and more varied audiences, and conduct interviews with more participants in less time by eliminating travel. Online interviews are, among other things, cost-effective, environmentally friendly, and secure, all of which are crucial characteristics in today's society with its environmental challenges and despite the pandemic being over, people have continued to use online meetings and interviews. Available research suggests that telephone interviews produce the same level of data richness as in-person interviews in terms of topic relevant data (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Vogl, 2013) with the only exception of not being able to assess body language. Trier-Bieniek (2012) indicates that the telephone offers flexibility in terms of when and where the interview is conducted, which increases confidentiality and decreases distraction, hence enhancing the information provided. Telephone interviews may be a useful first choice for data gathering, providing for a greater number of persons to have a chance to share their experiences (Azad et al., 2021).

Six of the twelve interviews were conducted using the Google Meets online video application. The remaining six interviews were conducted via telephonic calls. At the time of data collection, the use of online and telephonic interviews was the preferred and most appropriate method for conducting the semi-structured interviews due to the stringent COVID-19 regulations faced in South Africa. The interviews (online and telephonic) were audio recorded on an additional device

which allowed the researcher to listen repeatedly to the interviews to ensure data validity and data reliability, which is imperative when analysing and coding the data (Al-Yateem, 2012).

Prior to the interview, participants provided consent for the interview to be recorded. The choice of interviews as a data collection method for the study assisted the researcher in gaining a holistic overview in the attempt to answer the research questions and objectives of the study. Preparation for the interviews is an important aspect for a successful interview. With the interview taking place online and telephonically, it was significant that both the researcher and participants had access to a stable internet and mobile network connection to avoid signal issues or any time wastage.

4.10.2 Secondary data collection: Literature review

Secondary data research was conducted to conceptualise the research topic by collecting data from published and unpublished journal sources, blogs, dissertations, books, annual reports and analysed information, which was available on relevant websites. The literature review obtained secondary data pertaining to MC tools, social media marketing, sport marketing and brand engagement of sport teams. Literature on social media and sport organisation involvement, social media's influence on sport marketing, and obstacles were included. Additionally, information was acquired on how sport teams used social media locally and globally during the COVID-19.

4.11 Trustworthiness of data

To ensure this study's credibility and the reliability of its findings, it was necessary to address concerns of trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of a research inquiry relates to the degree of trust in the data obtained and the procedures employed to acquire the data including the analysis. Jones (2022) outlines a few techniques that may be used to ensure the reliability and validity of data. First, verify that each of the concepts to be assessed is carefully defined and integrated. Similarly, get the data collection instrument evaluated by people with subject matter expertise to gain input. Although trustworthiness approaches and criteria vary by subject, the following were considered significant in the framework of this investigation: data credibility, reliability, rigour, and transferability. In qualitative research, these are commonly acknowledged as trustworthy criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell 2014; Connelly, 2016).

- **Reliability:** Primarily, reliability relates to the quality of the study, which is established by the inquiry instruments' dependability, consistency, predictability, stability, and honesty (Kumar, 2014). Moreover, reliability refers to the credibility of the study findings as well as the amount to which they may be generalised and repeated (Welman et al., 2005). This study preserved an audit trail of the whole research process, which is extensively recorded in this chapter in order to allow other researchers the opportunity to replicate the technique

if necessary. Primary data in the form of audio recordings and electronic Microsoft Word format interview transcripts were saved on ATLAS.ti and on Google Drive for audit and future reference should it be required at any time.

- **Credibility:** Jones (2022) defines credibility as the degree to which findings of a study and interpretations are credible. The researcher acknowledged credibility by outlining how the findings and conclusions of this investigation study were reached. The participants selected were stakeholders who were actively involved in the social media administration of the rugby clubs' social media platforms. As previously stated in this chapter, the current study acknowledges that people may build knowledge; as a result, participants in the study established knowledge and meaning.
- **Transferability:** Transferability is based on the idea that results may be applied generally or to other contexts or populations (Elo et al., 2014). This chapter explained the study's context, location, and participants. Therefore, the outcomes of this study may be applied to comparable situations.
- **Rigour:** Rigour is required as it maintains the integrity of the study and promotes the validity of the findings (Daniel, 2019). The study's results were founded on the data obtained. In addition, a detailed justification of the research paradigm, research strategy, data collection techniques, sample selection and data analysis for the study was provided in the relevant sections of this chapter.

4.12 Data coding and analysis

Data preparation is a method of validating data received from respondents and converting it into an electronic format to analyse using electronic computer software (Haydam & Mostert, 2013). Flick (2013) states that qualitative data analysis is an interpretation of visual elements that creates implicit and explicit structures. The research followed specific stages to identify the four main themes: theme one: motive for the use of social media; theme two: level of social media usage; theme three: strategic use of social media as an MC strategy; and theme four: social media usage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once the data collection process is complete, the data obtained was transcribed verbatim and grouped together to identify common and coded themes in relation to the research study. Categories, which align with the purpose of study and research questions, were outlined for the coding process (Stuckey, 2015). The next step was to categorise the data under the main themes depicted from the responses, which attempted to answer the research questions of the study.

It is critical for data to be sorted in a way which is easy to interpret and understand in order to analyse the data effectively. This study utilised the ATLAS.ti (version 9) qualitative data analysis software tool, as seen in Figure 4.3 below. The twelve transcribed documents resulted in the formation of eight code groups, which were then subdivided into 40 unique codes and 33 categories. These were colour-coded for the identification to the research questions and objectives. The data analysis codes were meticulously developed through a systematic and thoughtful inductive approach. Consequently, the inductive approach employed for developing data analysis codes constitutes an integral aspect of this study's research methodology.

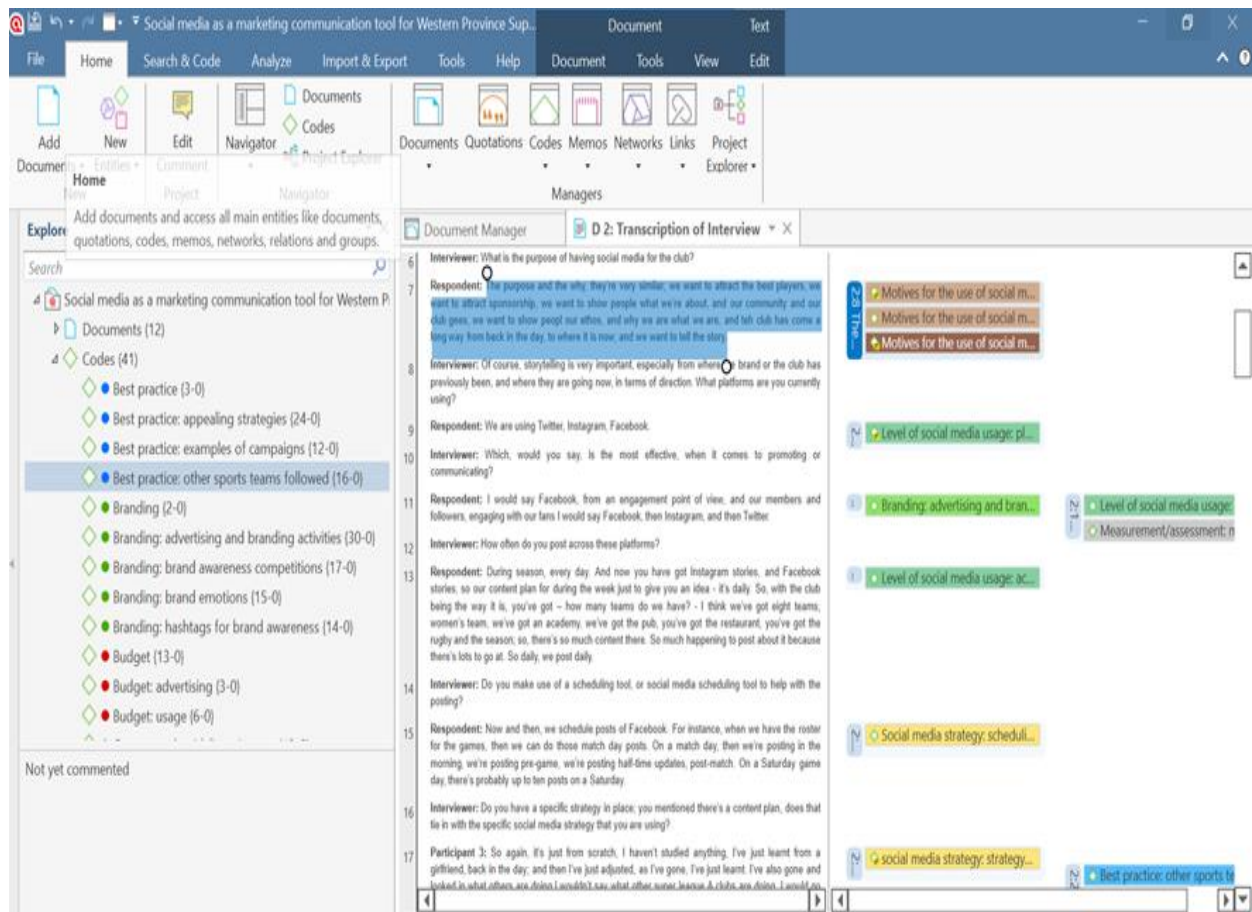


Figure 4.3: ATLAS.ti (version 9) software tool screenshot

Source: Author (2022)

ATLAS.ti allowed the researcher to upload all the transcribed interviews for coding to present the results via direct quotes and graph format to provide interpretations. ATLAS.ti enhances the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis and allows for transparency and validity of data results that provide reliable data in the study (Freise, 2016). Below is an illustration of the coding procedure for one of the interviews, as seen in Figure 4.4.

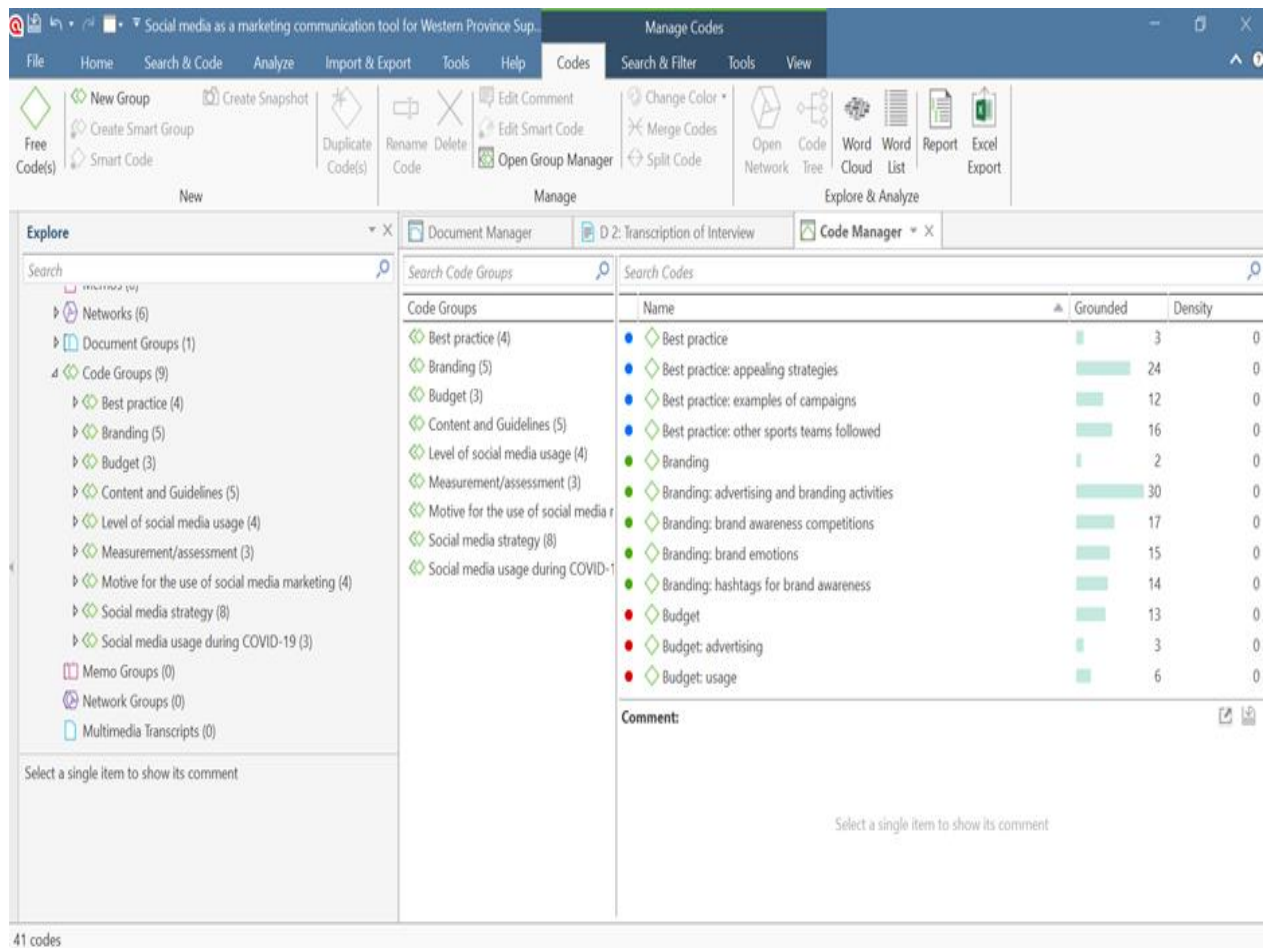


Figure 4.4: ATLAS.ti (version 9) coding process

Source: Author (2022)

In addition, Figure 4.5 below indicates an example of a report generated by ATLAS.ti, which provided direct quotes used in Chapter five.

Project: Social media as a marketing communication tool for Western Province Super

Report created by Justin Marthinus on 2021/09/18

Quotation Report – Grouped by: Codes

(43) quotations

Local filters:

Show quotations coded with any of the codes Social media usage during COVID-19: impact, Social media usage during COVID-19: content or Social media usage during COVID-19: adoption of strategies

● Social media usage during COVID-19: adoption of strategies

Active: 12 Quotations:

1:85 ¶ 82 in Transcription of Interview

Text quotation

It was difficult, because that page it's like a business page, and then nothing; everyone would be like, oh, what's happening to the club, and then we have no answer, it's a question that we cannot answer. Because we only posted after we received the go ahead when we started to finalise our final squad, then we would release the poster with our final squad, and everyone was so engaging with it

2:46 ¶ 82 in Transcription of Interview

Text quotation

the engagement, obviously, there is not much to do like before, so people are on their phones a lot, so engagement has been pretty good, it's all like, can't wait for things to come back, miss you, can't wait for club rugby, that type of thing. It has been okay, but again, we're not posting daily, you're not talking about exciting games, so that's what creates engagement, that's what gets people excited, rugby gets people excited, so it's not

Figure 4.5: Report generated by ATLAS.ti (version 9) for direct quotes

Source: Author (2022)

4.13 Research methodology limitations

Limitations are factors that limit the opportunity and outline the restrictions of the study (Simon, 2011). In the current study the following research limitations are noted and acknowledged:

- The data obtained in this research study was confined to the perspectives, feedback, and subsequent actions of WPSL rugby clubs at the time of the interviews. No quantified follow-up interviews were conducted to evaluate usage over time, as in longitudinal research.
- The study only focused on the WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town, South Africa. Other divisions and leagues within the Western Province club rugby structures were not considered, thus restricting the population and sample unit.

- The findings are limited to the social media platforms in which the respondents participate and use, and it is possible that they will not be relevant to any other social media platforms that were not the focus of this research.
- Because participation in the study was optional, it is likely that key informants who declined to participate for personal reasons may have prevented the study from gathering more useful information. Despite this, the sample's saturation technique, which monitored the addition of new data to the research, may have mitigated this limitation.
- COVID-19 restrictions also limited the opportunity for any in-person interviews to take place, although the use of online and telephonic interviews might also have provided the rich and detailed data required for this study.

4.14 Ethical considerations

Ethics is essential for all research studies, which can be described as the beliefs or honest distinctions about what is deemed to be right or wrong (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Saunders et al., 2012). Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009) indicate that the ethical norms that apply to human participants in research are designed to guarantee that their rights are not compromised or violated during the conducting of research.

Prior to the primary data collection, the consent of the participants was obtained before commencing with the interview process. In addition, a permission letter or an email confirmation was received from the participating rugby clubs by granting access to the sample population to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Ethical clearance for the research study was obtained from the Faculty Higher Degree Committee (FHDC) and Research Ethics Committee at Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Ethical Clearance Certificate Number 2020FOBREC805 can be found in Appendix B.

Ethical issues considered for this research study included:

- Informed consent: before commencing the interviews, it was important that participants fully understood their role, and the objective and purpose of the research study. Furthermore, participating in the research study was voluntary. Participants were made aware in advance of what kind of data would be collected from the interviews.
- Confidentiality: it was made clear that the participants' information provided would not be passed on to a third party or made public.
- Voluntarily participation: all participants were notified in advance that the research was only for academic purposes and was voluntarily; they could decide to withdraw from the

study at any time, decide not to answer a question if they were not comfortable in answering it or ultimately choose not to participate.

- Honesty and professionalism: the primary data collected was recorded honestly, professionally and without any misrepresentation.

4.15 Summary

This chapter described the study's research methodology by first defining the research philosophy and paradigm as inductive and interpretivist. The qualitative method was subsequently presented as the research framework for this study, which was supported by an exploratory research strategy. A cross-sectional research design was adopted, which was underpinned by semi-structured interviews as the primary method of gathering data.

Ethical considerations for this investigation were explained in detail along with examples of how they were used throughout data collection process. The importance of disclosure of the study's methods and participants' informed permission and confidentiality were also outlined.

The data analysis process was also introduced in this chapter. The following chapter will provide an analysis of the data gathered, which will be examined in greater detail.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The primary purpose of this inquiry was to analyse the use of social media as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town. This chapter presents the primary data that was collated, coded and analysed. The chapter distinctly outlines details of each code and category and their relevance for this investigation. A number of codes, category groups and sub-categories were established within each main theme. Major category groups within branding, best practice; social media strategy and budgeting are outlined. In addition, measurement and assessment, content and guidelines and social media usage during COVID-19 categories and sub-categories are also highlighted. The first theme in this chapter is to indicate respondents' motive for social media usage. The second theme highlights the level of social media engagement by WPSL rugby clubs. Strategic use of social media is also outlined as a theme, as well as the level of social media during COVID-19.

5.2 Themes

As mentioned previously, an interview guide was developed for the interviews. It was designed to gain broader insights how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool. Four main themes were predetermined based on the research objectives and interview guide. Theme one focuses on the reasons why WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool. Theme two highlights the degree to which rugby clubs use social media and the implementation thereof. The third theme examines what social media strategies are currently being used and what best practice measures can be considered to maximise future strategies. Lastly, theme four explores how social media practice was adapted and utilised during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 5.1 below demonstrates the linkage between the interview guide questions, research questions, research objectives and category groups derived from each theme after analysing the data.

Table 5.1: Connectivity of interview guide questions, research questions, research objectives, themes, and category groups

Interview guide questions	Research questions	Research objectives	Theme	Category groups
These questions ascertain why WPSL rugby clubs use social media as part of their MC strategy.	Why are WPSL rugby clubs using social media as part of their MC strategy?	To determine why WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as part of their MC strategy.	Theme: motive for the use of social media.	Brand awareness Building relationships Information and communication Player recruitment Attracting sponsors Storytelling

These questions revealed how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool.	How do WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool?	To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as an MC tool.	Theme: level of social media usage.	Activity frequency Sales and merchandising Competitions and loyalty programs Hashtags for brand awareness Advertising and branding activities Brand emotions Brand image Social media budget Paid advertising Content published Content scheduling Content types: image Content types: video Social media guidelines Most effective platforms Campaign measurement Social media challenges
These questions uncovered the social media strategies used and what best practice methods can be maximised.	What social media MC strategies can be identified to maximise the clubs' marketing efforts?	To establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy.	Theme: strategic use of social media as an MC strategy	Social media alignment to club Target audience Appealing strategies Sport teams followed Campaign examples
These questions identified how social media were used during the COVID-19 pandemic.	How were social media MC practices adapted during COVID-19 when sport was prohibited in South Africa?	To analyse how social media were used as an MC tool during COVID-19.	Theme: social media usage during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Impact on social media activity Adoption of social media activity Content published during the COVID-19 pandemic

A summary of the main category groups and themes used in this study is provided in table 5.1 above, which demonstrates how each category links to the research objectives and research questions.

5.3 Theme one: motive for the use of social media

One of the research objectives of this study was to determine why WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as part of their MC strategy. The respondents were asked introductory questions on the reasons for having a social media presence and what value they bring for the rugby club. Respondents identified brand awareness, player recruitment, attracting sponsors, storytelling, building relationships, and information sharing and communication as the key drivers for using social media. Their responses prompted a few emerging sub-categories as seen below.

5.3.1 Brand awareness

Building brand awareness for the rugby club, sponsors and players was a significant motivator for using social media as MC tool for seven of the respondents. Respondent five reported that they used social media as a way to showcase sponsor brands. For respondent one, social media was pivotal in attracting outsiders such as students and parents. Moreover, respondents four, five and six suggested that a motive for creating awareness for the club through social media was to show people what the club was about and to get people to participate more actively in the club. In contrast, respondents four and five indicated that the club used social media for brand awareness of players too. Respondent eleven affirmed that the club used social media for brand awareness because of its perceived penetration and reach into the target market.

Category 1.1

Rugby club brand awareness

Responses

We decided that the best way for us to attract outsiders such as students and parents was to use social media. [R1/43:4]

I think, the more awareness you can create around the club and what the club's all about, the more likely you are... [R4/2:6]

Well, it is first, to use the platform to showcase our brand, to share some history and tradition, and to share what the club is all about. [R5/3:6]

My main goal was to have people see what the club is really about, and that sense of family at our club; if you feel apart, you will participate more actively in the club. [R6:4:7]

It is a nice tool to create awareness. I do think it is an important tool for any rugby club, or any organisation to have, to market themselves. [R8/7:7]

Every single one has a mobile in their hands, most of the time and, social media seems to have the penetration and the reach that you want. [R11/5:8]

Category 1.2

Sponsor brand awareness

Responses

For sponsors it gives them a base to showcase their brand. [R5/3:6]

Category 1.3

Player brand awareness

Responses

The building up, almost, of portfolios, for these players on social media is valuable to them. [R4/1:5]

We also use the platform for the current players to showcase what they are about. I mean, the

photos and videos just gives them exposure.
[R5/3:6]

5.3.2 Relationship building

Building relationships and connecting with key stakeholders such as the local community, fans, members and former players were seen as motives for the use of social media for the majority of the respondents. This was indicated by seven of the respondents as seen below.

Respondents two, eight, nine, ten and twelve all reported that they used social media to engage and stay in touch with their communities and club members. Moreover, respondents six and seven stated that engaging with fans was an objective for using social media. Respondent ten noted that former club players still trying to engage with the club and social media allowed them to communicate with former players.

Category 2.1

Building relationships with community and members

Responses

As a growing club, and playing Super League A rugby, you want to engage with your community, and support your community. [R2/9:5] Social media is basically a tool to communicate with your community and people around you. [R2/8:7]

A lot of people bought into the idea of being associated with the club. [R9/2:6]

We try and do a lot of fundraisers, and just events to have get-togethers and gatherings, at the rugby club itself just to bring the communities together. And that drives our social media page. [R8/9:6]

Members are always trying to stay in touch with the club, and in the olden days, we used to write newsletters and send it to them. But now, with social media, more and more of the older generation are getting onto social media, although they do not always understand how to use it, they are on Facebook or Instagram or whatever, so we share quite a lot on there. [R10/5:5]

I think it is one of our key contact points with our audience, and with our members. [R12/4:8]

Category 2.2

Fan engagement

Responses

My personal objective with social media was, first of all, just connecting with the fans more, getting them more involved. [R6/4:7]

Engaging with the supporters where they can go see, hey, there's articles being written about us. [R7/8:10]

Category 2.3

Building relationships with former players

Responses

A lot of our players have moved overseas and / or some of them have stopped playing rugby, so

they moved away. They are always trying to stay in touch with the club. [R10/5:5]

5.3.3 Player recruitment

Player recruitment was cited by respondent one and four as a benefit and motive of social media usage. Respondent one mentioned that since using social media, the rugby club now had people interested in playing for the club. Respondent four stated that the more awareness was created around the club, the better the club was able to attract players.

Category 3

Player recruitment

Responses

Since we used social media, the club now gets a lot of people who are interested in playing for the club. [R1:43:4]

I think, the more awareness you can create around the club...the more likely you are going to be able to recruit a player whose ambition is to go play at Super League A level. [R4/2:6]

5.3.4 Attracting sponsors

Two respondents identified attracting and linking sponsors as an important benefit of social media usage.

Category 4

Attracting sponsors

Responses

Translates to the next thing, where I approach corporate organisations to sponsor the club. [R3/3:4]

So naturally, for me, it was to link sponsors to it, to sell the brand more. [R9/2:6]

5.3.5 Storytelling

Respondent two presented the following idea on storytelling as part of the benefit of social media usage.

Category 5

Storytelling

Responses

We want to show people what we're about, and our community and our club *gees* [spirit], we want to show people what the club is about, and what is our ethos, and why we are what we are, and the club has come a long way from back in the day, to where it is now; and we want to tell the story. [R2/8:7]

5.3.6 Information sharing and communication

Sharing information and communication were considered important objectives for rugby clubs using social media. For respondent one, having information on social media has invited people

to the club. Whereas respondent four indicated that from an internal communications perspective, social media were useful for semi-professional rugby clubs. Respondents six and eleven argued that social media were the most effective communication tool at present for their clubs. Respondents five, seven, eight, ten and twelve all reported that social media allowed them to provide critical information to club members such as fixtures, results and events happening at the club. The responses below provide further insight in this regard.

Category 6

Information sharing and communication

Responses

Using social media has invited a lot of people to come to the club and it is now much easier, because the information is out there. [R1/42:8-9]

From an internal communications perspective, I think social media is quite useful, especially when you are dealing with clubs that are semi-pro. [R4/1:5]

When there are actual happenings, it is a way of keeping our followers up to date with what's happening at the club. [R5/3:6]

I think it is the most effective and the most useful communication tool to, not only connect with your players, but your fan-base as well [R6/5:5]... and letting the supporters know what's going on. [R6/4:7]

Here in Paarl, the marketing of rugby was not big, so getting onto social media, and just starting off with promoting the games...I saw that people do not know when we play, they do not know where, and what's going on. That was the one way of just being more informative with the people outside of the club, or the supporters. [R7/7:8]

The only other means of communication to know what is happening with the millennials is on social media. I do think that it is particularly important for us to have a social media platform, to stay in touch with those guys. [R8/6:6]

It was always more for the engagement aspect ...[R9/3:19]

The purpose is, basically, for information, the guys want the scores, and they want the results of the weekend. A lot of the other guys are busy at work, and they do not have time for social media, or not allowed to have social media, so when they get home, they want to catch up on what's going on; either via Facebook, or Instagram, we communicate with them. [R10/6:7]

We have now made it a formal part of our communications, throughout the structure of the club, from the coaches to the administrators; if we want a message to reach the rugby player, it is via social media. [R11/5:8]

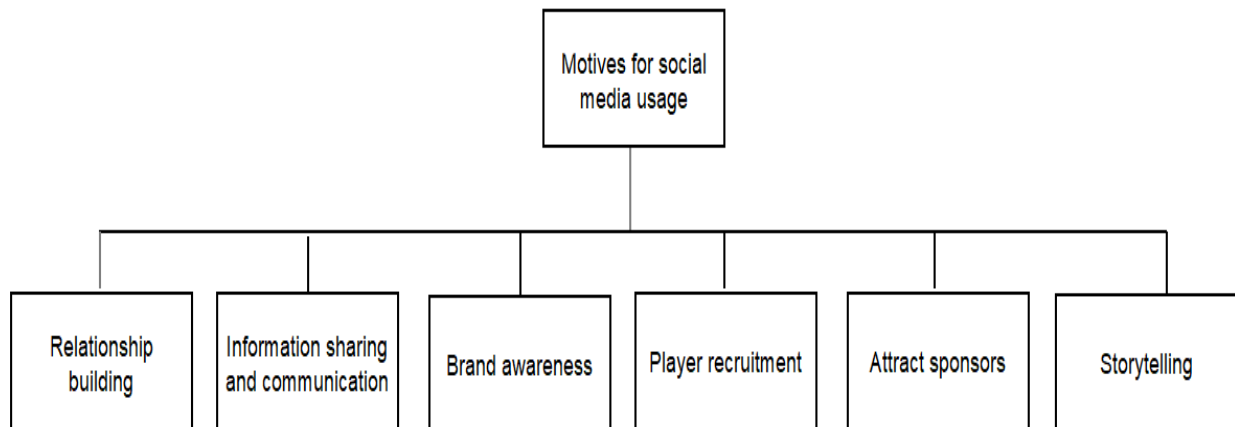


Figure 5.2: Motives for social media usage

Source: Author (2023)

5.4 Theme two: level of social media usage

The respondents were asked questions to attempt to answer one of the research objectives of the study: “to analyse how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool.” Numerous categories were identified as part of the answers received from respondents in this theme. Figure 5.3 below illustrates the level of social media usage that respondents instituted in relation to social media communication channels.

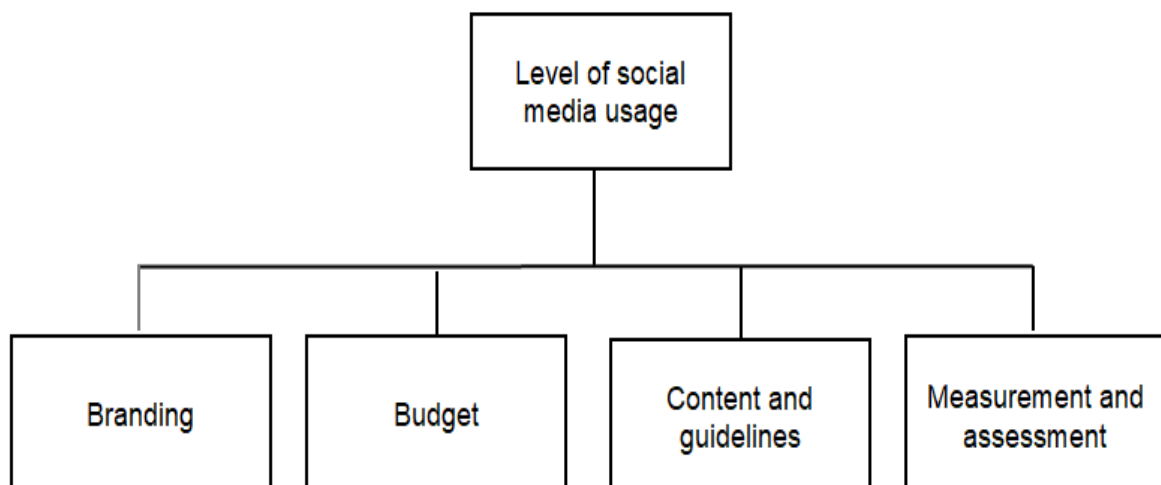


Figure 5.3: Level of social media usage

Source: Author (2023)

5.4.1 Social media usage

The researcher confirmed that each respondent’s rugby club had a social media presence before commencing. It was relevant to examine which of the social media platforms they engaged with. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp were revealed as the most popular social media

platforms among the rugby clubs. All twelve respondents confirmed that they used both Facebook and Instagram. Four respondents engaged with Twitter and only three respondents indicated that they use WhatsApp as an MC tool. It is worth noting that respondents ten and eleven used all four of the above-mentioned social media platforms. Respondent twelve reported that Facebook was a focal point even though Instagram was used by the club. Figure 5.4 below depicts the findings.

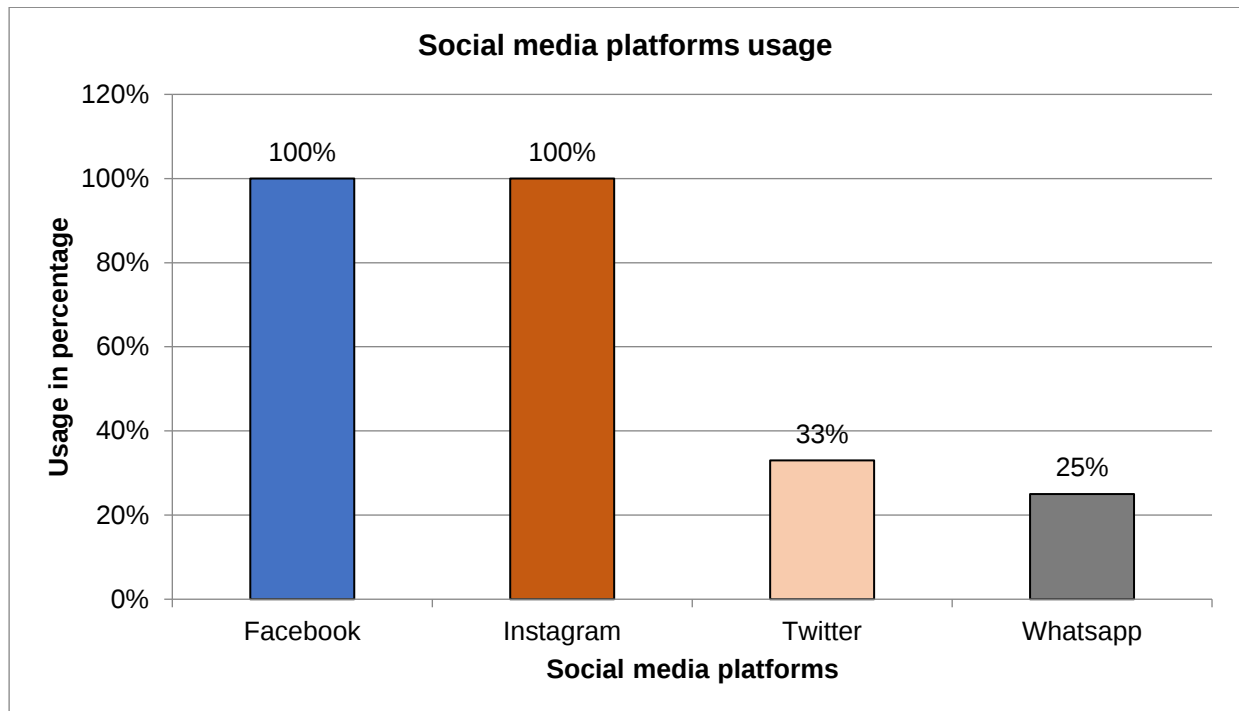


Figure 5.4: Social media platform usage

Source: Author (2023)

5.4.2 Activity frequency

In order to support the research objective, "To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool", it was imperative for the researcher to ascertain how often rugby clubs posted on their preferred social media platform to identify activity frequency. Nine of the twelve respondents indicated that they posted on a weekly basis, whereas two of the twelve respondents indicated daily. Respondent five reported that their club posted both daily and weekly, while respondent ten and eleven did not specify their activity frequency. Figure 5.5 below presents the activity frequency of each respondent categorised as daily and weekly.

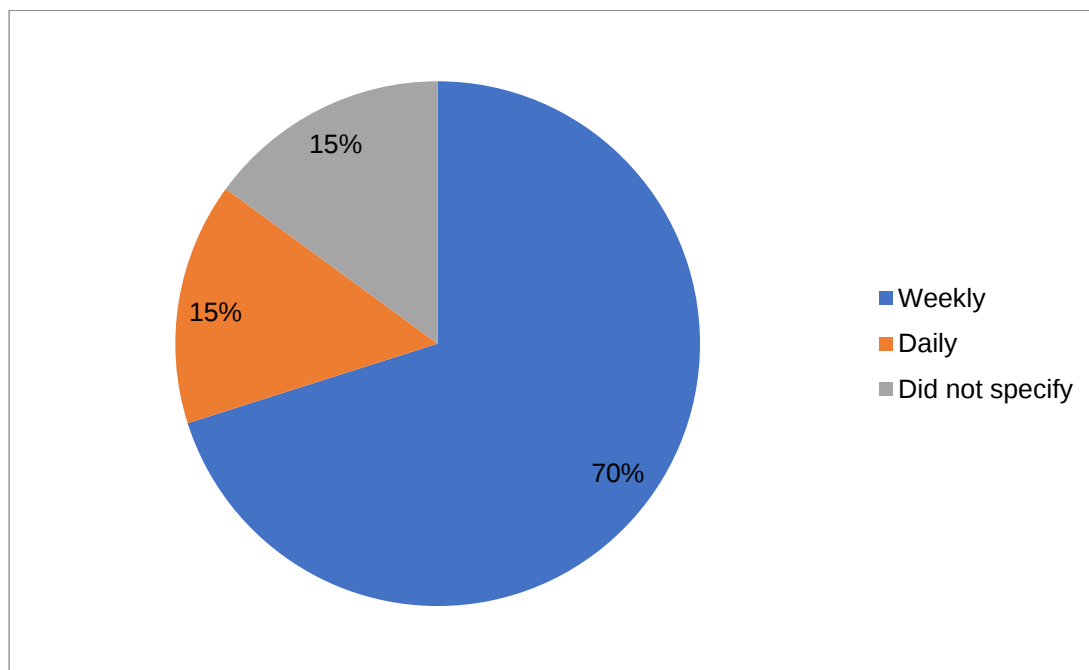


Figure 5.5: Social media activity frequency

Source: Author (2023)

5.4.2.1 Weekly

From the findings above it is evident that most of the rugby clubs posted on social media several times a week with nine respondents reporting this. It is worth noting that respondents seven, nine, and twelve indicated which days of the week they were likely to post content. The responses below provide insight into this finding.

Category 7

Activity frequency: several times a week

Responses

I would be sure to post something on a Monday and Wednesday and I would be sure to post something on a Friday to make sure that the team sheet is out. And on a Saturday, again. [R7/10:19]

On a Monday morning 9am because people are normally at their desk and getting ready for the day. Then on a Wednesday I will update them about club things. Then on a Friday depending on the game and sponsors and then also on Saturday. [R9/45:21]

What we try and do is engage our audiences from Monday through to Thursday [R12/6:14]

5.4.2.2 Daily

From the findings provided in Figure 5.5 above, respondents two and five affirmed that they post on social media on a daily basis.

5.4.3 Sales and merchandising

The researcher inquired with the respondents if social media were used as an MC tool to generate sales or sell merchandise for their rugby clubs. Four of the respondents reported that they used social media as an MC tool to generate sales or sell merchandise for their respective rugby clubs. Respondents two, four, five, and nine promoted their club's merchandise by displaying and posting the products available for purchase on their social media. In addition, respondent four had used social media to promote the sale of club memberships. Respondent four also reported that their club's website had an e-commerce shop where online visitors could purchase merchandise directly on the website. Whereas respondents three, seven, eight and ten all mentioned that they would be interested in exploring the route of online sales via an e-commerce platform or through social media in the future. The responses below from the respondents confirmed the aforementioned findings.

Category 8

Sales and merchandising

Responses

Yes, we use social media for members' kits. We had a ...backpack made, and the profits of that, went back into the club to help pay for the running of the club, and we used social media for that. Our website has the product range, and then you basically just email or direct message (DM) us on social media and place your order for clothing. [R2/31:36]

With regards to the tickets to the 1875 Club, a hundred percent; with regards to the merchandise, we have not done any sales content, this year, because of COVID-19, obviously, but definitely, in the past, there have been, and going forward in the future, for sure. [R4/26:35]

We have a website as well, where we have got an e-commerce section or shop, which we will link to our social media as well. [R4/27:35]

Definitely, we use social media for that. I do not know how many caps are being sold at the club, I just post about it, that it is available, but it definitely works, I would say. [R5/28:40]

I would love to promote those types of things on there, where you can buy directly from us like an online shop you know, like Facebook has an online shop. [R7/32:61]

We designed a new jacket for the club, and we sold about 500 units. And we also made golf t-shirts. The club has its first female chairman and we branded t-shirts saying first "Chair Lady" and we also sold about 500 t-shirts of that design. So yes, social media had a powerful impact as well as promoting it heavily on various WhatsApp

Groups when it came to the sales of the merchandise. [R9/17:47]

An online shop that will be linked to our social media that is part of our strategy for next year. [R10/29:55]

5.5 Branding

The respondents were asked certain questions pertaining to how branding was implemented when using social media as an MC tool for a rugby club.

5.5.1 Brand awareness

In theme one, brand awareness was identified as a motivator for using social media as an MC tool by respondents. Below the researcher discovered how respondents used brand awareness as part of their social media activity.

5.5.1.1 Competitions and loyalty programmes

The respondents were requested to comment if they had implemented competitions or loyalty programmes across social media channels as a brand awareness tactic.

Six respondents specified that they had used or were currently using competitions or loyalty programmes for brand awareness on social media. Respondents two, five, six and eight reported various types of competitions which they had implemented. Respondents two, four and twelve reflected on the loyalty programmes that their clubs had implemented.

Category 9.1 Competitions

Responses

Yes, we will promote competitions with the restaurant and the bar. It is fortunate and nice to have that facility of a pub and a restaurant. And then also, as I said, we'll get certain things from sponsors, and sometimes we'll do give-aways to members, so we'll get extra kit, and we'll do give-aways; and that also creates engagement. [R2/20:67]

We do, especially during the Varsity Cup; we have a ticket competition; so that's the most popular one that we use. [R5/18:74]

What we often do, just to let people know that we're still there, and just get our fans interactive, we'll have a little small competition and people can win, let's say, a club cap, or a club shirt. [R6/21:40]

Yes, we definitely have done that previously, we have done golfing and whatever give-aways is coming up. We are working on something now where someone can win a weekend away as a prize. [R8/21:61]

Category 9.2

Responses

We've also got, it is called The 100 Club, so if

Loyalty programmes

you're not a player, but you still want to be associated with the club as a member, so you pay a membership fee, and then you're part of The 100 Club, and then you've got access to, I think it is three cheese and wines, a year, and a guest speaker that comes and speaks to The 100 Club. [R2/25:24]

There is a Loyalty Club Card for the club, and it is in association with Saggy Stone, so if you're a member at the club you get 10% off at the bar and food and beverages. [R4/19:68]

What we do find, as well, is the local pub that we have, we do a lot of marketing for them as well, such as comedy nights that we have, and that also brings back the members there, as well, because with the membership, they get 10% discount off. [R12/39:76]

Three of the respondent's stated they did not use competitions or loyalty programs for brand awareness on social media. Respondent eleven reported that the club discouraged competitions on social media as there were already so many messages on the platforms.

Category 9.3

No of competitions or loyalty programs

Responses

We do not use them on social media, we use it at the games. [R1/61:91]

I cannot really remember if we had any competitions running on our social media pages. [R9/13:90]

Not really, we do not do that. We probably discourage competition; again, there's such a lot of messaging that our students get bombarded with. [R11/18:88]

5.5.1.2 Hashtags for brand recall and brand awareness

Respondents were asked if they utilised hashtags to build brand recall and exposure across their social media channels. All twelve respondents pointed out that they made use of hashtags on social media. All respondents made use of a club name hashtag. For the purpose of confidentiality, the researcher removed any club name reference within the hashtags provided. The responses below confirm this.

Category 10

Hashtags for brand recall and awareness

Responses

Yes, we do, and our tagline is, mostly, #OneTeamOneFamily, and then if we play in the Varsity Shield, it is hashtag "...#BitesTheBullet, #VarsityShield. And then when we play the club rugby, we use the hashtag #OneTeamOneFamily, but we will tag the Western Province Club Rugby in these posts and use #WPClubRugby and #WeAre"...". [R1/58:84-85]

We have got our club hashtag, so we've got our #UTB or Up the Bay, we've got #BehindTheBay, we've got #CustodiansoftheJersey, we've got #BayFamily; because we've got the ones that we use for our club and our members, and our members use it, up the bay, #YouTV, it is a massive one, everybody uses that. And then we've just got general ones, #Rugby, we will go, #WesternProvinceClubRugby, #loverugby, #StrongerTogether, that type of thing. [R2/19:60]

At this stage, only, I'm doing the #"... " hashtag, which I use in all of them. [R3/15:38]

Yeah, so we try and use two or three common hashtags, so we use #"... " or #"... ", just so that if someone were to go and search at hashtag, they would see most of our content. But then if it is post specific, for example, if it is an 1875 Club post, will say, #1875Club. [R4/15:63-64]

Yeah, like we have various ones. We have hashtags for all our sponsors and for things like #UptheMaroon, #"... " hashtags, and then we use #"... ", #"... "t, so we use those as well, #GooiMielies which is part of "... "Sport. [R5/16:72]

Yes, the #"... ", the #RedDevils, and our, #OneDreamOneTeamOneFamily, that is one thing that is always big, whether it is players, supporter, or sponsorship posts, is the Red Devils and the one dream one team one family; that is something that always sticks. [R6/18:58]

I make use of #Paarl, I always, all my posts I would #"... ", #"... ", #"... "; that will be my three major hashtags. [R7/23:74]

We used hashtags in the beginning and like #Rugby, here and there we used brands we were part of. [R8/20:58]

Yeah, I have my cliché ones; #"... ", #CommunityClub, #ClubOfChoice which was the slogan for the club. [R9/12:86]

Yes, they started using quite a lot of hashtags. [R10/16:85]

Yeah, so we're happy to use #"... ", again our identity, and again, we're being let's not say broad, but we are being inclusive, by saying, #"... ", we make sure that we honour and recognise our diversity, but this is our identity, and then hashtag #"... ", again, pride to be and to wear the jersey. There was a #BestOfBothWorlds, that we ran for one of the campaigns as well. [R11/17:78]

Yes, we do. So how it will be going forward, is that if there are, say social media posts done about the club, and we have maybe got an arrangement with one of our sponsors, then we hashtag the brand. [R12/44:70]

5.5.1.3 Advertising and branding activities

Six respondents provided examples of branding and advertising activities which they implemented at the rugby club. Respondent two provided insight on how the club used the restaurant to amplify advertising and branding activities for the club. Two of the respondents indicated that they made use of a club email signature and email address to emphasise branding across the club. Respondent four revealed that starting a YouTube Channel enabled the club to use the channel as a key fundraising platform. Respondents five and six made use of a branded emailer that linked to its social media pages as a means to create brand awareness for their respective clubs.

Category 11.1

Advertising and branding activities

Responses

Now we've got the restaurant, with that you've got the live bands, so that we'll post competitions and specials to do with that, to associate with that. You want to engage with your community, because that influences the vibe, and it influences your takings, your pub, your restaurant...[R2/9:5] [R2/21:67]

Category 11.2

Branded email signature and domain

Responses

We've got a Club email address too. [R2/22:69]

There is a little email signature with an old club logo, that's definitely not anywhere near where it should be. Most of the guys also have the club's domain email addresses. [R4/18:76]

Category 11.3

YouTube channel

Responses

Maybe a good example of how we use social media is, we've also got a YouTube channel that we've recently started up, but that's primarily used as a fundraising club, so it is called the 1875 Club. [R4/33:24]

Category 11.4

Branded marketing emailer/newsletter

Responses

When I look through the E-newsletter so that I know when communications are out, I note the social media is promoted on these. I'm not sure if it is icons, or how, but I do know they do inform people of the platforms. [R5/20:84]

I do have at the bottom of a Mailchimp emailer; they always give you the option to link your social media pages. I know, especially, because the mailers, it goes out to players, supporters, anyone who registered... [R6/19:63]

We will be using Mailchimp as our email broadcaster. Our big drive, now, is to build our database. [R12/15:72]

5.5.1.4 Brand emotions

It was necessary to ascertain what brand emotions respondents wanted to convey through brand visuals and messaging on social media. This question drives the narrative on how content messaging was presented by the respondents. Eleven respondents identified brand emotions that they used when creating content. For respondents two, four, five, and eleven, showcasing a sense of passion and pride were key brand emotions they wanted to evoke when creating content on their social media channels. For respondents three, five, six, eight and nine, togetherness and unity prevailed as the key brand emotions they wanted to evoke when creating content. Other brand emotions revealed by respondents were respect, positivity and professionalism.

Category 12.1

Brand emotion: passion and pride

Responses

Our message is definitely to show people that we are passionate, and that we are proud, that's our message. [R2/16:45]

I'd say if we're going to be punting any emotions, it is going to be passion; it is going to be a bit of bravado, passion, maybe a bit of humour. [R4/10:48]

We want to showcase that the club can be a stepping stone, it can give you opportunities; but most of all, it gives you a chance to be part of a rugby club that has immense tradition, culture, and history. [R5/12:20]

Our values are the things that come through; fair play, pride, and passion and these are the Olympic values that I specifically push, because not many people know them. [R11/10:57]

Category 12.2

Brand emotion: togetherness and unity

Responses

It is creating a community, family-orientated club again, which kind of got lost through the years. [R3/12:25]

Just in general, if you're part of the club, it is a privilege, and that we definitely want to showcase. [R5/12:20]

I mean, at the club, we all know that we've been going through a dip, the club is not one of the best performers, yet we've got so many great players, because they like that sense of, we're all friends, we're a family, we've got each other's backs, kind of vibe. [R6/15:20]

We try to keep it informal, in the sense of, everybody, inclusive of every single person out there. [R8/16:30]

Togetherness, I drive that emotion hard because that is the reason why I joined the club in the first place because of the brotherhood and dying for each other feeling and that is why the club is such a strong and known rugby club in the Western Cape. [R9/9:35]

Category 12.3

Brand emotion: professionalism

Responses

We have to try to be professional. [R1/52:29]

Category 12.4

Brand emotion: positivity

Responses

I like to put positivity out there. [R7/18:32]

Category 12.5

Brand emotion: respect

Responses

Respect, on and off the field, and that goes for social media, and it goes for everything at the club. [R10/11:38]

5.5.1.5 Brand image

It is worth noting that respondent three viewed the use of social media as the first step towards developing a more professional image for the club.

Category 13

Brand image

Responses

Because of the benefits of social media marketing, the first step in taking your club to more professional. [R3/3:4]

5.6 Budget

Questions were posed to the respondents about social media budget usage and spend.

5.6.1 Social media budget

All twelve respondents revealed that they did not have a dedicated social media budget in place. Factors such as priority, overall budget allocation and usage were among some of the outcomes for not having a dedicated budget in place.

Category 14.1

No budget

Responses

No, it is only for transport, because remember, our team has expanded now, so now they have to be worried about the budget that we have to accommodate for five teams, which is a lot. [R1/54:61]

It is all in-house, we all work together, and so there is no budget. [R2/17:73]

Yeah, there's nothing. [R4/12:51]

Not at the moment, as far as I know. [R5/13:88]

No, unlike most clubs, we do not even have a team, it is just, basically, me that does everything. [R6/16:47]

There is no budget, you're basically running that out of your own. [R7/19:45]

No. [R8/17:44]

No, that's the sad part, no. [R10/13:66]

I do not have a specific budget for the rugby club; what we do have, it is event-specific. [R11/12:47]

No, there is not. [R12/12:56].

Respondents two and four provided insight into what they believed could convince their respective rugby clubs to put a set budget in place. Respondent two highlighted the need for a dedicated role within the club in order for the club to see the value and allocate a budget to it. Whereas respondent four suggested that doing a player recruitment campaign via social media marketing might strengthen the club and might convince the club to invest money.

Category 14.2
Budget

Responses

The club would put a budget in place if there was not someone to do it properly. There are budgets in place for coaches, there are budgets in place for grounds upkeep, there are budgets in place for all aspects of the club, so there would be a budget, if it was more of a devoted role to do it, then there would be a budget for that. I would not be able to tell you how much. [R2/56:61]

I can certainly see, if we even do recruitment campaigns towards the end of the year, in order to get guys excited for the beginning of the season, next year, and we start winning more games, because we're recruiting better quality players, then again, that's not a monetary return on investment, but it is something that we can still say, guys listen, this is how we're attracting new talent, put some cash behind it. When I refer to return on investment, it does not have to be only monetary. [R4/43:54]

5.6.2 Budget: paid advertising

While none of the rugby clubs had a dedicated social media budget in place, it was worth establishing if they made use of any social media paid ads or boosted posts to reach a larger target audience. The responses below affirm that paid advertising was not utilised by the rugby clubs.

Category 15
Paid advertising

Responses

No, not at all. [R1/55:65]

No, we've never done any sponsored posts, or anything like that. [R2/12:73]

I have thought about doing Facebook page boosts but those kinds of things, you will only

bring in when you're boosting sponsors content. [R3].

No, sorry we do not do that, no. [R5/14:90]

No, it was not needed as the content ideas I had, I knew it was going to work and I already had a large following for the club. [R9/10:70]

I think, we are not at that point, yet, where we must do it. I think it is because we've got multi-prong communication tools. [R11/13:49]

When we are working with brands, so like Coca Cola, we'll definitely have to incorporate boosts on the posts, and paying extra for marketing that side, because I'm sure, on their side, that they would want to see more exposure. [R12/13:58]

5.7 Content and guidelines

It was imperative for the researcher to ascertain how content and social media guidelines were used by the rugby clubs across their social media channels. The respondents were asked to comment on the following topics; how content was posted, what content was posted, social media guidelines and brand image and emotions for content creation.

5.7.1 Content published

The respondents all presented distinct views on the type of content they post across their social media platforms. Six of the respondents reported that they focused on content that was rugby-related or directly related to the rugby club. Respondents eight and nine indicated that they had no set plan for the type of content that was posted and merely did it on an ad hoc basis and in the moment. It is worth noting that five of the respondents also focused on content that was not rugby-related, for example promoting events at the club's restaurant or promoting graduation for the university. Whereas respondents two, ten and eleven suggested that they tried to keep the content positive in nature when engaging on their social media platforms. This is validated by the responses received below.

Category 16.1

Content published: rugby related

Responses

Let's say, if you want players, we post the trials and trial dates, that's it. If we have games, we post games. If you have the Varsity Shield, we post the pre-season, so our followers will have the interest of what's happening behind-the-scenes, so we post pre-season practices, and then we post the pre-season games, and then we post during the games. [R1/50:23]

On a Monday, we will post, basically, what is happening in the week. We'll give a little itinerary of how the week is looking, so people can plan their week. Tuesday, it will be practice and we'll post one or two pictures from practice, something like that. Thursday will be Captain's practice, so

we'll be posting something about Captain's practice. Friday night, the 4ths and 5ths are playing so we will post about that. [R2/29:46]

At the moment, our focus is Varsity Cup pre-season but for the club, and during the season, it is training sessions, matches, and gym sessions. R5/9:16]

Generally, the content we focus on plays a role in promoting our games and our players. I like to focus on content that I like, behind-the-scenes content, like posting a picture of training, getting the guys there, getting them motivated, showing people the work that is done behind-the-scenes. [R6/11:17]

The content I was posting is mostly rugby-based stuff. If we played on a Saturday, obviously, on the Friday you want to tell the people, okay, this is the team sheet, you would say where we're playing, we'd even make a poster, or you would get the other team's poster, and post it there, or you would make a poster and send it to the other team that you're playing against and share it on social media. [R7/14:21]

The rugby logs were posted, all those types of things. It was more of the people engaged a lot on all the pictures that were taken. [R8/15:24]

Category 16.2

Content published: ad hoc

Responses

I do not prepare content, it is merely ad hoc and, in the moment, when I feel we need to push a certain piece of content. [R9/8:55]

Everything is completely ad hoc. It was just upcoming events, what the guys looked forward to, we have our regular photographers, they would take pictures from the junior, the youth stuff, right up to the senior rugby, and you post all those pictures in different albums on our Facebook page. [R8/15:24]

Category 16.3

Content published: positive type content

Responses

We want to show that we are a club, and that we're a club for everybody, and whenever we post, we want to post, anybody can talk to us, anybody can come down to the club. [R2/29:46]

We try to push positive feed that goes out on social media. Also, again, respect to everybody else; our main motto is, respect. We try with whatever we share with respect and that is what I would like to see, what a spectator would like to see. For example, the club is doing well, this guy got married, and this guy got a baby etc... [R10/34:52-53]

I am looking for feel good story, I'm looking for success, and I'm looking at always pushing education. [R11/9:51]

Category 16.4

Content published: Non rugby related

Responses

Wednesday will be the False Bay bar and restaurant there'll be something incorporating that, specials, and that. Friday night, the bar is open, there's a band playing so we will post about that. [R2/29:46]

We try to keep it human; we do not want it to seem like there's strict rules around what we're posting, etc., obviously, we want to be respectful, and keep in mind that we're a diverse club, we've got people from all ethnicities, all religions, etc., and we hope to welcome everyone... [R4/9:44]

Then we have, the end of every year, we have graduation. It depends on, once again, we are part of the university, so everything that happens at university, and where we can get involved and contribute. [R5/9:16]

We like to do little happy birthday and appreciation posts to super fans and players. [R6/11:17]

All the content that is getting posted, is memories, it is not actually too much rugby related at the moment [R12/10:46]

5.7.2 Content planning and scheduling

The researcher identified the importance of determining how content was planned or scheduled on the rugby clubs' respective social media platforms. The respondents were asked if they had adopted a social media scheduling tool to assist with content planning. It was interesting to note that four respondents made use of a social media scheduling tool in the past or were currently using one to schedule content. Respondent six and twelve reported that they used Facebook Business Manager as their preferred scheduling tool for content planning, whereas respondents two and three scheduled posts directly on their social media channels.

Category 17

Content scheduling

Responses

Now and then, we schedule posts on Facebook. For instance, when we have the roster for the games, then we can do those match day posts. [R2/34:15]

Yeah, so I have done it a few times, but it has not become a thing for me, because I would like to, once I have enough creative content, to just run those scheduled posts. [R3/26:60]

I prefer Facebook Business Manager, because it is really, really user friendly, and it does have a scheduling feature, where you can schedule posts into the future, for Instagram and

Facebook, if you link up your accounts. Using Facebook Business Suite - you can literally pull reports to see how your post and what days, what times, you get the most eyes on the page; I like to then schedule posts in accordance with that. [R6/30:42]

Yes, the Facebook scheduling tool and, what's nice, is it can give you your week's schedule and line up for what you need to do. Quite often, with the days getting busy, and there is a lot going on at the club, something like that could be easily forgotten, so I think if a schedule is put in place, then we know, at least, that it is going to be done. [R12/19:20]

5.7.3 Content types

It is compelling to establish that images and videos were highlighted as the two content types that all twelve rugby clubs use across their social media channels.

5.7.3.1 Images

The feedback from eight of the respondents indicated that using images as part of content on social media worked best for them. In addition, four respondents affirmed that they used both video and image content on their social media platforms.

Category 18 Images

Responses

We do both videos and pictures, but mostly we do pictures. People are interested in the pictures, so the pictures work nice, especially the match pictures. [R1/48:25]

Images and video, and then also when you are talking about something special, like winning a certain match or when you are talking about a certain performance, or outcome, that generates big engagement. [R2/13:48]

So mostly, my content is picture-based, or image-based, and focusing on the game itself, the players, and the behind-the-scenes. [R6/12:17]

I went into a few different types, some of the content that I used, it was videos, it was photos, and it was more article-based, newspaper style-based type of writing. [R7/12:25]

Absolutely, one hundred percent. The images are a major, major influence acts as engagement. [R8/13:28]

I would say a bit of imagery and video. [R9/7:39]

And what I mean is, I will have an action picture of a rugby player kicking, or it does not matter what picture it is. [R11/8:51]

Yes, I would say visual. [R12/8:54]

5.7.3.2 Video

The feedback from seven of the respondents emphasised that using video as part of content on social media worked best for them.

Category 19

Video

Responses

We do videos, but we do videos once a year, like after the varsity shield, we will do a tribute video of all the games; we try to make it short. [R1/49:25]

Images and video. [R2/13:48]

Video is always incredibly good, but content that works, is something about bio, something about a person; a man of the match interview, get to know the team, new player introduction, that content that works. [R3/8:20]

I think with anything, the more movement the better, so video, as I said earlier, the video content is key. The more animated, the more colourful, the better, in my opinion. [R4/7:46]

Definitely videos. It can be videos, content about alumnus like former players that is always extremely popular content. [R5/8:18]

I did do videos, and especially after games, when there was a good cameraman, and there were highlights of the game. [R7/13:28]

Videos of no longer than 30 seconds long because of the attention span of most people wanting to see something that they really want and like. [R9/7:39]

to go through me, that accountability, obviously, comes in there. [R3/11:34]

I as admin, will not get involved trying to defend the club, or put any information on that; I will just let it go. If it really gets insulting, or any swearing, I will block that. [R5/11:22]

So usually, what would happen if something were to happen, obviously you have Facebook filters, but we also discuss with management, and it is not just me, the person who deals with it, that decides; we have a discussion, it is discussed with the Chairman, with our club President, and the coaches, and from there, we take an approach whether to respond on social media, or to contact the person individually. [R6/14:23]

I do not reply to comments that is one of the things I do not do. Maybe once or twice I would reply to comments; even if somebody posts something great, I have made it a point not to reply to comments. [R7/15:36]

I always check it once a week, I make a point of it, every Monday I check whatever is in there for the week, and then reply to anybody, best way possible. We have got policies in place; if somebody badmouths the club outside, they will be dealt with. [R10/12:38]

5.8 Measurement and assessment

Respondents were required to answer specific questions on their insights on measuring and assessing social media platforms.

5.8.1 Most effective social media platform

5.8.1.1 Facebook

Respondents were required to comment on which social media platform/s they considered to be the most effective for promoting the rugby clubs. Most respondents specified that Facebook was considered as the most preferred and effective social media MC platform by the respondent WPSL rugby clubs. Respondent five and eight reported that both Facebook and Instagram were considered effective platforms for the respective clubs. The following responses all demonstrated the abovementioned finding.

Category 21.1

Most effective platform: Facebook

Responses

I would say Facebook because we have a lot of followers on the platform. [R1/47:17]

I would say Facebook, from an engagement point of view, and our members and followers, engaging with our fans I would say Facebook, then Instagram, and then Twitter. [R2/12:11]

I think that you have to use Facebook, as the most powerful tool, at this moment, and I'm quite surprised, the more that I'm using the Facebook page tools, the more I'm very amazed, because it is quite powerful. [R3/7:11]

Well from the rugby point of view, it is Facebook and Instagram. [R5/7:10]

If you look at the reactions, the people that were reached, the comments, the shares, the likes, the overall performance, and interaction with a post; Facebook just tends to have higher or better results. [R6/9:13]

Facebook. Facebook has been effective; I think I grew my page with 2,000 followers in about a year. [R7/11:16]

I can say both. Like I mentioned now, so with Facebook we have a certain audience, and with Instagram we will have a certain audience. [R8/12:15]

I would say Facebook because basically a lot of people that follows the club are your mid-25 upwards. Majority of these people are the aunties and uncles, and I would say it is the most successful platform. [R9/6:27]

Facebook will probably be our biggest social media, compared to the three, I will say Facebook first and then Instagram and then Twitter. [R10/32:22]

I would definitely say Facebook, because of its tools for allowing that engagement, for allowing that correspondence with our audience, with our members, and keeping them up to date. So yes, Facebook, that would be our key social media platform. [R12/7:12]

5.8.1.2 Instagram

Instagram was highlighted as the second most effective social media platform by four of the respondents.

Category 21.2

Most effective platform: Instagram

Responses

I think there is probably more engagement on Instagram. [R4/6:11]

Well from the rugby point of view, it is definitely Facebook and Instagram. [R5/7:10]

Like I mentioned now, so with Facebook we have a certain audience, and with Instagram we will have a certain audience. [R8/12:15]

If I should prioritise it, it is Instagram, Facebook then Twitter. [R11/7:16]

like, so we'll post more videos next month. [R2/37:29]

Yes, "... likes to do the Facebook analytics, because it says how many views, share and likes, or whatever, then you can see how many people it is reached. Now that's what he likes to do, to gauge the success of a post. [R10/36:62]

Category 22.2

Campaign measurement: past campaign and content

Responses

Initially, I compared the reactions I got, to the amount of likes and followers, the page has, but then I started measuring it to similar posts or similar competitions, in previous years [R6/36:29]

That's probably the biggest campaign we do is web ticket sales...This year it will be different, there's no way we'll have to do that again, I think, for us, it is mostly that ticket sales... [R5/38:46]

Category 22.3

Campaign measurement: outsource

Responses

I outsource that measurement to the communications office, I ask for a report, and then they provide me with the analysis...[R11/34:45]

5.8.3 Social media challenges

Figure 5.8 below illustrates the vast array of challenges respondents currently face when it comes to promoting their respective rugby clubs on social media. A common challenge which was highlighted by respondents three, four, seven and eleven are budgets and access to funds. Time was also identified as a common challenge by respondents seven and eleven. Respondents three, five and six noted that the biggest challenge is to find a balance between frequency of posting content and the quality of content created. The following responses revealed the aforementioned findings.

Category 23.1

Social media challenge: funding

Responses

Money is, right now, obviously the issue, because we first need to start getting money in, before we can do the post boosts, and that kind of things. [R3/13:29]

If it is not an income stream for the person doing it, then obviously, it takes a bit of a back leap, unfortunately. But also when you have a committee that are all relatively of the older generation, they do not really appreciate social media and new age marketing. [R4/37:20]

You would not get the funds, so that was one of the other challenges which need to be overcome. [R7/20:43]

One of the challenges, especially when it comes to the unit within which I find myself, is that we must fight for our budgets. [R11/14:24]

Category 23.2

Social media challenge: time constraint

Responses

It takes some of your time, it takes a bit of your time loading the things up, even your data. [R7/20:43]

It is my time that I have to spend to design a marketing strategy; I really have to put a plan together. [R11/16:24]

Category 23.3

Social media challenge: frequency of posting and quality of content

Responses

The other challenge that you face, is that people now follow the rugby page, and they want rugby related info. You need to also educate your audience about the content that they will be getting and letting them know. [R3/13:29]

The biggest challenge first of all to not make your page look cheap; and second of all, not to spam people's news feeds with unnecessary content, or too much content. That is a noticeably big challenge. [R6/17:27]

Category 23.4

Social media challenge: reach

Responses

Our biggest thing is to get our actual players the information that they need. [R10/15:44]

Category 23.5

Social media challenge: video creation platform

Responses

I think the only hurdle, I would say, is that we do not have access to a video creation platform. [R4/13:42]

Category 23.6

Social media challenge: seeking sponsorships

Responses

I think for the brands to come on board; but it is hard, constantly for players and people to go out and look for sponsorships to promote the club and social media in turn. [R8/41:50]

Category 23.7

Social media challenge: Negative social media reactions

Responses

There is always some kind of challenge, but it is more like what other people do, just the reaction that's challenging, I'd say. [R5/15:50]

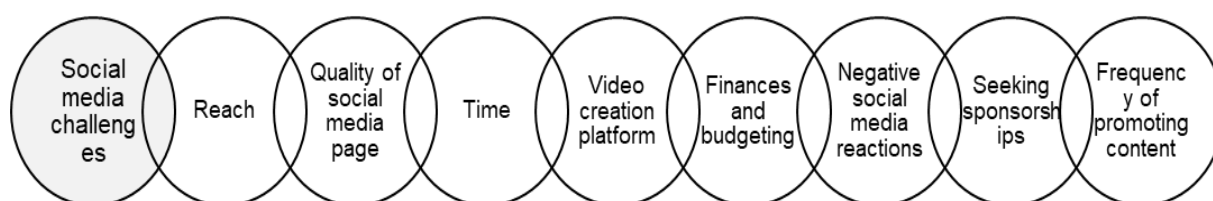


Figure 5.8: Social media challenges

Source: Author (2023)

5.9 Theme three: strategic use of social media as an MC strategy

Another significant research objective of the study is to establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy. Social media strategies and best practice are among the categories which have been identified to direct the questions posed to respondents in the attempt to answer the research objective.

5.9.1 Social media strategy

Respondents were asked to provide insight into their social media strategy and how it aligns to the club's overall marketing and organisational goals.

Only three respondents reported that they have a devoted social media strategy in place. Respondent five noted that the strategy revolves around showcasing what the club is doing and at present the focus was on the Varsity Cup pre-season. While respondent ten suggested that the strategy is all about being informative and focusing on rugby related content. Respondent eleven reported that the club's strategy forms part of the university's overall sport communication strategy and rugby happens to be one of the key sport.

Category 24.1

Social media strategy

Responses

Yes, we do, at the moment, the strategy is to still showcase what we do, and make sure we do not post anything, or do anything that's not in line with COVID-19 regulations. Usually in the normal season, we do have a solid strategy based on our calendar, and the university calendar, but at the moment, it is just varsity cup pre-season, that is my strategy which is a big focus. [R5/31:24-25]

Yes, the big thing is being informative, that's a big thing, to the point, and no-nonsense jokes or anything, and it is all rugby related. [R10/31:21]

At the university, we do not treat the rugby club as its own entity. Because we are a department, we manage all sport on behalf of the university; we have an overall strategy when it comes to communication, and rugby just so happened to be part of it, as well. [R11/29:18]

Respondents that revealed their rugby club do not have a dedicated social media strategy in place were prompted to provide insights as to why this is the case. Various responses were given by the respondents but promoting content on an ad hoc basis, not being prompted to develop a strategy from the rugby club and being in the process of developing a strategy were some of the common findings identified. The responses below points to the common findings discovered.

Category 24.2

No social media strategy

Responses

We are trying to get there, I think the more we do post, the more we attract sponsors, so that we, hopefully, one day, are going to get huge sponsorships. [R1/71:44]

It is just from scratch, I have not studied anything, I've just learnt from a girlfriend, back in the day; and then I've just adjusted, as I've gone, I've just learnt. [R2/36:19]

It is completely spontaneous. We rely heavily on sponsorships and things like that, and as you can imagine, social media is going to be way down on the pecking order, in terms of paying anyone to do it... [R4/29:16]

We are working on it. We are looking at putting a little team together and putting something like that in place. [R6/33:32]

There was not really a strategy, we just took it as it came. [R7/35:66]

Unfortunately, we did not get to the part of putting a strategy in place, and brainstorm on what is the best strategy for rugby... [R8/33:26]

There was no set plan. It was on my feet communication you know, learning from people and applying it as we go along. [R9/20:62]

At the moment, we're looking at a whole rebrand for the club. It is going to definitely have to incorporate with the on goings with COVID-19. We are busy putting that strategy together, getting our sponsors on board. [R12/32:26]

5.9.2 Social media alignment with marketing and organisational goals

The researcher recognised that it was necessary to comprehend if there was an alignment between social media marketing and the respondents marketing and organisational goals. Respondents expanded on the synergy between the rugby club's social media marketing and overall marketing organisational goals. Respondent two indicated that the club has a media team consisting of ten members whereby they utilise WhatsApp to talk about the image of the club and the messaging they publish. Moreover, respondents four and ten shared similar views that all communication in the club follows a general theme of family oriented and respect, respectively. Respondent five reported that throughout the club's communication the main objective is to promote the club, its team and individual players. Respondent seven revealed that they are not familiar with the club's overall organisation goals. Whereas respondent eight suggested that the club tries to maintain the alignment with marketing and organisational goals, but it depends on the type of content which brings the most engagement. In addition, respondent eleven affirmed that social media has become the official voice and messaging channel for the rugby club.

Category 25

Social Media alignment

Responses

Yes, so we have also got a media team on WhatsApp, and that's where we brainstorm, and we put things together and we talk about the image of the club, what we want to put out there, new ideas, and there's ten of us on that media team. [R2/40:32]

All the social media communication has that kind of general theme, with regards to friends and family. There is a bit of a golden thread through all the messaging, but it can be better, it can be a little bit more pronounced. [R4/35:31]

The main outcome is to promote the rugby club. There is also an alignment of wanting to promote our individual players. Secondary to the team but that's also part of the strategy. [R5/32:27]

To be honest, I do not even know what the goals are, of the club. [R7/38:70]

I think we really strive and try very hard to do that, but I think 90% of the time, it really lines up with what it is that we're physically trying to do based on the engagement, comments, and the responses we get. [R8/34:32]

The same rules apply, respect, on and off the field, and that goes for social media, and it goes for everything at the club. We have got policies in place. [R10/35:38]

I had to get it to the point where, whoever I'm communicating with, understand that this is the official voice and the messaging of the rugby club. [R11/32:26]

5.9.3 Target audience

Respondents were requested to comment on their perception of who their target audience is from an online perspective. The responses received were diverse which outline the markets in which each rugby club operates. Some of the responses were broad in saying they target any individual, whereas, in some instances, respondents opted for a more targeted approach to include specific demographic and psychographic audience. Respondents one, two and eight revealed that there is no restrictions of target audience they target anyone and everyone. Whereas respondent five viewed social media as a way to reach and engage with their target market. The below responses reflect the above-mentioned finding.

Category 26.1

Target audience: no defined audience

Responses

We do not target a specific group; we just target anyone. [R1/69:27]

Everybody. If you love rugby, you're a target; even if you not from the local community, we've got players that live in Bellville, and Strand, and everywhere around Cape Town. [R2/30:40]

There is no limit on our target audience. That is basically anybody, and everybody. We try to keep it very inclusive. [R8/29:35]

Category 26.2

Target audience: defined target audience

Responses

Right now, the local community is the target audience. [R3/19:27]

I think it is, basically, players and their immediate friends and families, people who are there to support them, so we do tend to focus more on our membership base. [R4/25:33]

I would say two to three different kinds of audiences, you have your student audiences, your students, and then you have your alumni. [R5/26:34]. Seeing as our primary base are students, that's where we differ, from most of the other Western Province rugby clubs that we are a student-based club, and social media is important to the students. [R5/4:4]

The players and supporters would be our target audience. [R6/27:34]

It is mostly the Paarl community; I would say is my target audience. [R7/31:53]

It ranges hey. From the young age of 12+, what I realised when I started, was that a lot of young people come to the field. a younger audience based on socio economic impact is a key target audience online for us. [R9/16:43]

As I mentioned we want to get businesses more tuned into their community, meaning the people of the Milnerton

area, businesses to be interested in their local club. Then also the supporters and players. [R10/29:49]

It is the 1st year students, the alumni and in terms of gender, I know the rugby guy, I do not have to spend too much time to convince him, it is the females that I want to get excited about rugby too. [R11/25:32]

Our target audience, you are looking at an LSM of about 6 to 8, and you are looking at an age group of 25 to 65. We have got a broad target audience, at the moment. I think we want to now

start targeting the varsities, the schools, getting a much younger audience involved, and freshening up the club. [R12/24:44]

5.9.4 Social media goals

Increasing followers and reach across social media platforms was mentioned as a prominent goal by a few of the respondent WPSL rugby clubs to having a social media presence. Respondent one, five and eight all alluded to this finding. Moreover, respondent one suggested that attaining more sponsorship through social media is also a goal. Below are the responses that support the aforementioned discovery.

Category 27.1

Social media goal: increase followers and interaction

Responses

We are trying to get a lot of followers, but we are on 3,000 followers now, on Facebook, so maybe by the end of the year; we can get double the number. [R1/75:55]

We obviously have a certain number of posts we need to do every month, or every week. We want to grow our numbers. Our focus is to see constant growth. The biggest thing is interaction, and then it is just growing the numbers. [R5/33:29]

To increase our following, we did not get to that point...[R8/37:26]

Category 27.2

Social media goal: attract sponsorships

Responses

We are trying to get a lot of sponsorships, so hopefully, we're going to get that. [R1/75:55]

5.9.5 Best practice

This category intended to establish best practice social median MC strategies from other sport teams that can be recognised to maximise the WPSL rugby club's marketing efforts.

5.9.5.1 Sport teams followed on social media

This study also desired to reveal which sport teams the respondents follow on social media which serves as a guide on the inspiration they can learn from. Eleven respondents provided examples of local and international sport teams which they follow on social media. Respondent one, two, eight, eleven and twelve all indicated that they follow other rugby clubs within the WPSL A division. While respondents two, three, four, five, six, seven and eight reported that they follow professional rugby teams in South Africa. In contrast, respondent five revealed that they follow The National Football League (NFL) American football league teams. Whereas respondent

eleven and twelve indicated that they follow international sport teams and organisations such as English Premier League soccer clubs, US swimming team and New Zealand Olympic Centre.

Category 28.1

Sport teams followed: WPSL rugby clubs

Responses

We always follow the team we play against, like the teams that are in the same league. I do follow some clubs in the Western Province Super League A like, Maties, UCT and False Bay Rugby Club. [R1/63:67]

I've also gone and looked in what others Super League A clubs are doing. [R2/27:19]

Yeah, obviously, I keep my eye on all the local rugby clubs, rugby teams in South Africa, I'm a huge follower of NFL so that's obviously much different what they do over there, but you get some ideas of the interactions. I follow a lot of NFL clubs that use social media platforms. [R5/22:62]

Obviously, Western Province, your local teams, international players, there's not enough time to mention. [R6/22:51-52]

I follow all rugby type of things like rugby schools, kicking clinics. Guthro Steenkamp is one of the personalities I also follow. I follow the Blue Bulls, Western Province Rugby and SA Rugby and Springboks pages. [R7/24:84]

I think we follow False Bay Rugby Club's Instagram and their Facebook page, and then we follow the DHL Stormers social media pages. [R8/23:53]

I think that there are quite a couple, for example, the US Swim Team, there are the football teams, there are the New Zealanders Olympic Centre; there are a couple of these professional Olympic Centres, around the globe. [R11/19:64]

I follow, probably, all the Super League teams, because it is important to see what's happening professionally, within rugby. [R11/25:65]

I have, yes. One that I'm quite impressed with, is False Bay's social media page. The English Football Premier League clubs are also very impressive to me. [R12/18:60]

Category 28.2

Sport teams followed: Professional rugby teams in South Africa

Responses

I would go watch what type of content the Stormers are posting, or the Springboks, and I try and incorporate that into our posts. [R2/27:19]

Yes, I'll go as far as Stormers, because I'm trying to keep it relevant to where we are. [R3/17:56]

I follow the Sharks Rugby Team account; I follow the Springbok account. [R4/21:58]

I keep my eye on all the rugby teams in South Africa. [R5/22:62]

Obviously, Western Province... [R6/22:51-52]

I follow the Blue Bulls, Western Province Rugby and SA Rugby and Springboks pages. [R7/24:84]

We follow the DHL Stormers social media pages. [R8/23:53]

Category 28.3

Sport teams followed: International sport teams and organisations

Responses

The Arsenal Football Club Instagram account...I follow the Argentinian Rugby Team account. [R4/21:58]

I'm a huge follower of NFL so that's obviously much different what they do over there, but you get some ideas of the interactions. I follow a lot of NFL clubs that use social media platforms. [R5/22:62]

I think that there are quite a couple, for example, the US Swim Team, there are the football teams, there are the New Zealanders Olympic Centre; there are a couple of these professional Olympic Centres, around the globe. [R11/19:64]

The English Football Premier League clubs are also very impressive to me. [R12/18:60]

5.9.5.2 Appealing strategies

Respondents were asked whether they had identified any appealing strategies from professional sport team social media pages that they would like to implement on their respective rugby club's social media. Incorporating quality video and generating more engaging content on social media was one of the common strategies identified by respondents one, five, six and twelve as appealing. Respondent three stated that getting involved with community projects and uplifting the community through social media was an appealing strategy. Respondent eight highlighted that paid adverts which some professional sport teams implement was something the club could take note of when attracting sponsorships.

Nine of the respondents gave insight into appealing strategies.

Category 29.1

Appealing strategies: incorporating quality video and engaging content

Responses

Yes, there are a lot of things. An example would be to film the players when they come out of the dressing rooms, which is done by professionals. [R1/68:74]

I will look at the overseas clubs, and I'll just see the ideas, and I'll incorporate that... Ensuring it is up-to-date, and that it is good content. [R2/28:19]

I think the level of content they put out there, is above par, and way above what we currently do, without a budget. But their engagement is tenfold, and it is just because they have got professional teams around them, in terms of the social media space. [R4/23:61]

I do get inspired, and I do want to do more and be more creative. I think the platforms that I do follow, I look for quality videos so that's the most important: good quality videos, images, graphics, then is what they're sharing, interesting; that's the most important. [R5/24:67]

Just the overall aesthetic of their posts. I mean these people, if you look at the design of their posters, and the content they post, everything is always so beautiful, so polished, so well-written, and it just goes to show that there is effort put in, and that if you do a bit of editing, you could work wonders. [R6/25:56]

I saw that if you have the technology, and the right people around you, then those type of things are so easy. I also like the way they get players involved on their social media pages. [R7/29:88] Some of the teams give their members and their audience a lot more of what they want. [R12/19:62]

Category 29.2

Appealing strategies: community projects and upliftment

Responses

I think the professional teams like to get involved in community projects and uplifting the community. I think that is always a beautiful story to tie in, when you are involved with a club. [R3/18:58]

Category 29.3

Appealing strategies: paid ads

Responses

Most of those things is paid ads and stuff on their page, there are things that we can take note of to get more sponsorships. [R8/25:55]

5.9.5.3 Campaign examples

Five of the respondents revealed examples of campaign activities that they found interesting. It is noteworthy that respondent four, six and eight all reported that implementing a campaign featuring player profiles was engaging on social media. Respondents one and five indicated that the way professional sport teams incorporated video content in the form of highlight packages of pre-match content were examples of campaigns they would like to implement. Respondent twelve noted the use of a mobile app that professional teams used, and believed there was a market for it.

Category 30.1

Campaign examples: player profiles

Responses

They do everything that I'd love to do, in terms of the highlight packages, and the video content before a game, when they do the line-up for the squad, the squad announcements; that's all stuff that builds fierce amongst the players and spectators and gets people amped up to come watch the game. [R4/24:60]

I mean, I want to do videos of players running onto the pitch that kind of thing. [R5/25:66]

Yes, for me, one of my favourite things is, player profiles; is introducing your team, and your coaching staff, having some key facts about them, and having a fun fact; that is something that I find relatable and personal, and gives the page a certain touch. [R6/23:54]

What I did like was the player profiles I think it was cool to drive more social media engagement. [R8/24:55]

Virtual players are an example of this and breakdown on player stats, the simplicity, as well, of how they are set out; because for me, something like rugby, and sport, in general, it is visually orientated. [R12/22:64]

Category 30.2

Campaign examples: video

Responses

They do everything that I'd love to do, in terms of the highlight packages, and the video content before a game. [R4/24:60]

I mean, I want to do videos of players running onto the pitch that kind of thing. [R5/25:66]

Category 30.3

Campaign examples: app

Responses

I also like the idea of an app; I think there is a market for it. [R12/22:64]

during the global pandemic. This theme is intended to address the following research question: “How were social media MC practices adapted during COVID-19 when sport was prohibited in South Africa?”

5.10.1 COVID-19 impact on social media

It is imperative for this study to examine how COVID-19 had impacted respondents’ social media activity. The rapid spread of COVID-19 and hard lockdown measures had a great impact in that live sport could not take place in South Africa. Respondents were asked to comment on the impact COVID-19 had on social media activity. Most of the respondents shared similar sentiments on the negative impact the pandemic had on social media activity for their respective rugby clubs. Respondents one, two, four, five, six and ten all reported that creating content and publishing content was limited and a challenge, and that the pandemic situation had negatively impacted social media activity as a whole. In addition, respondents seven, eight and nine indicated that club-related social media activity was virtually non-existent. It is worth noting that respondent eleven verified that sport content had to be halted and focus was shifted on to the academic programme. The following responses support the aforementioned finding.

Category 31

Impact on social media activity

Responses

COVID-19 killed us a lot, we did not post much this year, to be honest, because there were these COVID rules, so we had minimum content to publish. [R1/83:78]

Massive. So obviously you’re not allowed to play rugby and in terms of the social media engagement there is not much to do like before. [R2/43:78]

It has impacted it for the worse; I suppose it just took away opportunities to create content, so we were not doing the weekly mash reviews, and pictures from the game, etc., we were not doing team line-ups before the game. Obviously, there were not any events allowed. It was limited in what we could do. [R4/39:78]

I would say, August, September, October, was really challenging to find fresh content, and just to put things into perspective. [R5/41:55]

It had impacted us a lot all the activities which we had normally posted like behind-the-scenes, player activity, game day photos and pre-match activity all stopped. [R6/37:65]

Yeah, social media activity became virtually non-existent. [R7/39:78]

Everything just fell by the wayside, when COVID-19 happened. [R8/44:22]

It impacted us a lot, I could not be as involved because of other commitments, and I was not

that active across the platforms as before.
[R9/24:78]

Because there are no results and no fixtures and no fun photos, and no action photos and stuff, so that has affected our activity. [R10/38:76]

From a sporting point of view, and from a university point of view, we had to halt sport content and focus on the academic programme. [R11/36:69]

Taking over the role, quite recently, during COVID-19, it has been incredibly challenging. [R12/40:78]

5.10.2 Adaption of social media to COVID-19 regulations

The study inquired how respondents had to adapt social media practice during COVID-19. Respondents eleven and twelve indicated that the pandemic had given them time to reconsider and adapt their social media activities and practice whereas other respondents had to adapt activity frequency and content intermittently. Respondent three indicated that the club had undergone a change in management during COVID-19 and therefore adapted content and activities around that. Respondent four reported that the club had launched a new campaign online during COVID-19 and had focused efforts on promoting that campaign.

Category 32

Adaption of social media activity

Responses

It was difficult, because the Facebook page was like a Facebook business page, and then there was nothing. We only posted after we received the go-ahead when we started to finalise our final squad for the Varsity Shield tournament. [R1/85:82]

It has been okay, but again, we're not posting daily, you're not talking about exciting games, so that is what creates engagement, that's what gets people excited...[R2/46:82]

The advantage that we have currently is that we have a completely new management that took over, and new coaches. I have been mainly focusing on introducing who the new management is. [R3/28:62]

We launched the online 1875 Club during this period, and that became the predominant feature of content. [R4/40:78]

During that time, I focused a lot on alumni, because Western Province and other teams could start training again. [R5/45:58]

Every two weeks, we put something out there, even if it was a gyming exercise where this guy was pulling cables, and the other one was pulling

a tyre, and lifting tyres at work; just to build gees [spirit]. [R10/41:83]

It also gave us an opportunity to reflect, I suppose, and at the same time, more time to plan, as best we can, for 2021. [R11/39:71]

We are going to have to look at doing things completely differently with our marketing if we're going to be able to have audiences in our stands in the future. As COVID-19 develops we are going to have to evolve with it. [R12/43:82]

5.10.3 Content published during COVID-19

It was essential to confirm with the respondents what type of content was published on social media during COVID-19 when live sport was forbidden. Some respondents focused on content that promoted their club's restaurant or bar with the hope of attracting people to the restaurant and bar. This was suggested by respondents two, three and twelve. Respondent nine reported that the club joined forces with three other rugby clubs to create COVID-19 generic posts that would be shared across the different club platforms to show togetherness. Respondents six, eight, ten, and eleven were creative in publishing fun content that got players involved in contests and performing virtual workout videos, cooking shows, etc.

Category 33

Content posted during COVID-19

Responses

When the bar and the restaurant opened again, then it was mainly, trying to get people in there, because obviously, people come eat at the restaurant, people come drink at the bar, money comes into the club; we can look after the fields, pay the restaurant staff, and the bar staff, so that's what the last few months have been. [R2/45:79]

I did a bio of every management position on social media, that's been pretty much occupying content posts. And we've always got live performances and at our club's bar; so, we'll post that on a Wednesday, for the build-up to the live performances on the Saturday. [R3/28:62]

It was basically just rugby memes, the COVID-19 1875 Club posts, and then I know they started looking through the archives for old images, etc. to post. [R4/41:80]

A big thing was our current students, keeping fit was the one part; and then the other part was alumni and each time a player made his debut for the Stormers, we would post about it. That kind of rugby content was the easier part and was the key focus. [R5/43:58] Occasionally, just give the motivational post, happy birthday to these people, sharing some fun videos, funny training videos, just general content, nothing too focused, because we did not really have focus content to post. [R6/38:65]

The only thing that we have been posting is if our players were doing their own training, usually, at home, and they were doing whatever, they would share their videos with us, and that kind of thing, to be posted on the pages involved. [R8/43:20]

Yeah, so myself, and three other rugby clubs joined together to create COVID-19 posts and we would have generic posts that would be shared across the different clubs' platforms to show togetherness. [R9/25:82]

We got the guys to do a cooking programme, or like Master Chef, they have to prepare a meal, record it; we're going to publish that in a cooking book. To keep the guys' heads up and motivate each other in the social media groups the guys had to challenge each other with a workout, and we would share that content. [R10/39:76-77]

It was probably level 5 and 4, it was a case of how to use what you have to stay fit; everybody was an online fitness guru. We also had to turn this content into something fun because we also spent a lot of time focusing on mental wellness, because that was a major impact of COVID-19. [R11/38:73-74]

We are just posting updates on player stats, what they're doing, what's happening, and the sport world. If there are any events at the club restaurant, we promote those, purely because that brings people to the club. [R12/41:80]

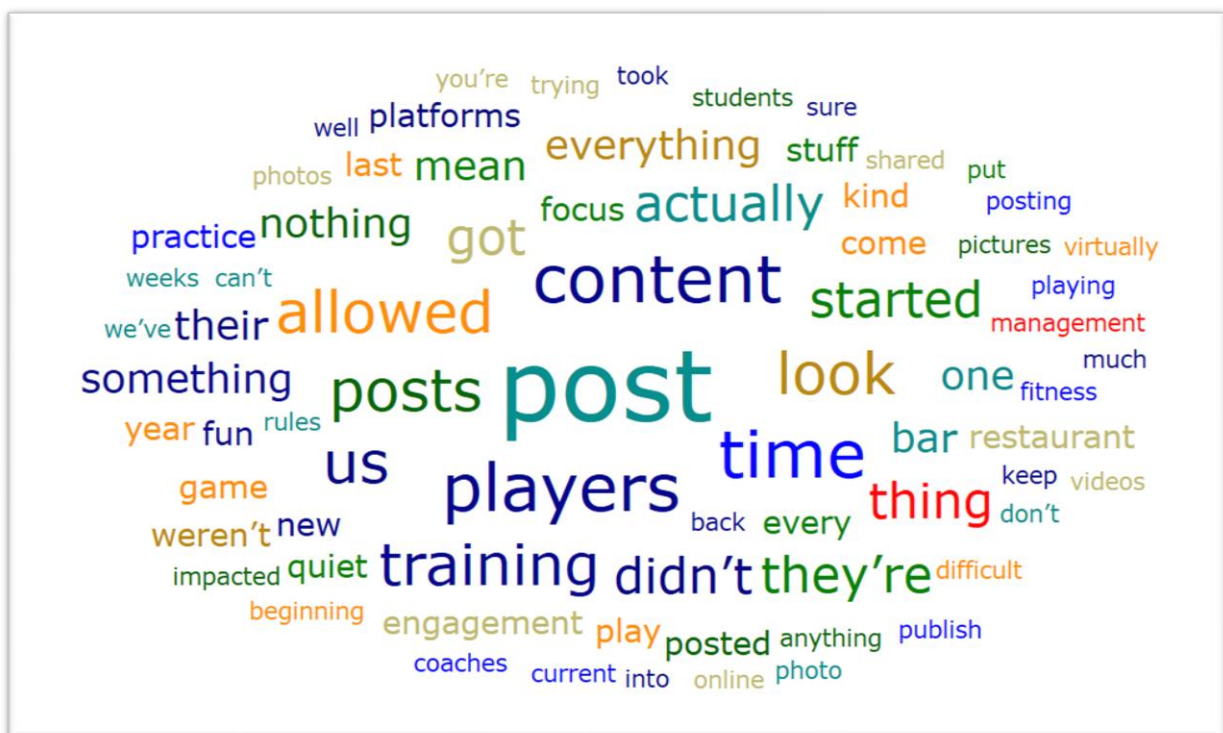


Figure 5.11: Word cloud on social media usage during COVID-19

Source: Author (2023)

The word cloud features the most frequently used words by the respondents when commenting on social media usage during COVID-19. The most used words were post, content and time (refer to Figure 5.11). Respondents regularly referred to the type of content and time as factors when noting social media usage during COVID-19.

5.10.4 Summary of social media usage during COVID-19

This theme focused on social media usage during COVID-19. The researcher reported empirical findings from the respondents such as the impact COVID-19 had had on social media activity and how respondents had to adapt social media practice. It was also necessary to gain insight into what type of content was being published when live sport was prohibited in South Africa.

5.11 Summary

This chapter analysed and summarised the findings from the primary research conducted. In addition, this chapter presented the results of the analysis of the responses obtained from the interviews with the WPSL rugby club respondents. Moreover, it depicted the coded data and extracts common themes from respondents, which provide further rich insights.

Twelve interview transcripts were coded in ATLAS.ti which assisted to generate 40 unique codes and 33 categories. The four themes were identified at the onset of the study and constitute the four objectives of this study, and categories and sub-categories were then established within each main theme.

The themes and categories are represented in the findings of this chapter which address the research objectives and the research questions of the study. Furthermore, the findings in this chapter are illustrated in the form of diagrams, direct quotes from respondents and tables which organised the data in a more systematic manner.

The first theme stated in this chapter revealed respondents' motive for social media usage. Thereafter the focus was on the level of social media engagement by WPSL rugby clubs. This was followed by the strategic use of social media as an MC strategy and lastly how social media was used during COVID-19. Broadly, the participants examined the utilisation of social media from multiple perspectives. Some of the most interesting data revealed that Facebook and Instagram are the most engaged platforms and are seen as the most effective by respondents. Other interesting discoveries include how content is generated and displayed on social media.

The pursuing chapter interrogates the findings in more detail and discusses the outcomes in conjunction with the available literature to discover new insights that may emerge.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of this research study. This chapter aims to discuss the findings presented in Chapter Five in relation to the research objectives and previous research from the literature review that was outlined in Chapters Two and Three. Moreover, the comparative analysis that follows will identify the similarities and contrasts between the respondents' actual experiences using social media as an MC tool for rugby clubs and findings of other research available.

As previously stated, the main research objective identified for this investigation is to analyse the use of social media as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town, South Africa. The discussion focuses on the objectives of the study: to determine why WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as part of their MC strategy; to analyse how WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as an MC tool; to establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy, and to determine how social media were used as an MC tool during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The findings of each of the main themes are discussed in the context of the national and international literature obtained for this research study.

6.2 Theme one: motives for the use of social media

Research revealed that social media has had a dramatic impact on the delivery and consumption of sport globally. The sport industry has already become a major source of entertainment, professional activity, and lifestyle, but also a significant revenue generator (Belfiore et al., 2019; Lukinović et al., 2022; Zakizadeh et al., 2022). Further literature indicates that sport firms are constantly relying on social media channels to promote their brands and interact with fans (Maderer et al., 2018).

This study revealed brand awareness, sponsor attraction, relationship building, and information sharing and communication as the common theme and primary drivers for social media use. These findings addressed the research question “Why are WPSL rugby clubs using social media as part of their MC strategy.” The key factors will be discussed next.

6.2.1 Brand awareness

In the current study, many of the respondents stated their use of social media as an MC tool, which was motivated by the desire to increase brand recognition for the rugby club, sponsors, and players. These findings are consistent with other research (Pegoraro et al., 2017; Na et al., 2019; Joanna & Zuzanna, 2020; Andreski, 2022; Ong & Leng, 2022), which revealed that social

media help athletes and sport organisations alike to enhance brand awareness. Very few respondents verified that their club made use of social media as a way of increasing brand awareness due to the perceived visibility and reach into the club's target market. This is comparable to the findings of Pronschinske et al. (2012) and Thompson et al. (2014), which discovered that social media enabled sport brands to interact with their audiences for longer periods of time than other types of MC tools.

A number of respondents stated that a motivation for increasing club awareness using social media is to encourage people to engage more actively with the rugby club. A finding by Singh and Nimkar (2020) agrees with this notion, as their study acknowledged that social media improves sport by increasing brand awareness in a comprehensive way that efficiently engages enthusiastic sport fans.

Therefore, the above-mentioned studies show that social media enhanced brand awareness among sport organisations and athletes in Australia, Canada, India, Poland, Singapore and the US across soccer, baseball, hockey, softball, and volleyball sport codes (Pegoraro et al., 2017; Na et al., 2019; Joanna & Zuzanna, 2020; Andreski, 2022; Ong & Leng, 2022). Consumer engagement was another motivating factor among soccer clubs and cricket clubs in Europe and India (Nisar et al., 2018; Vale & Fernandes, 2018, Annamalai et al., 2021). This current study confirms that South African rugby clubs utilise social media to create brand awareness.

6.2.2 Relationship building

Building relationships and interacting with key stakeholders, such as the local community, fans, members, and past players, is apparent from the responses of the majority of the study's respondents. Several respondents indicated that they used social media to keep in contact with people in their community and in their clubs.

Available literature suggests that sport organisations are actively developing relationships with present and prospective consumers via digital channels in order to create appropriate brand communities (de Vries et al., 2012; Thompson, 2016; Schubert & Seyffert, 2017; Naraine, 2019; Joanna & Zuzanna, 2020; Su et al., 2020; Abeza et al., 2022; Andreski, 2022; Ernstsson, 2022; Ramon & Rojas-Torrijos, 2022). A small number of respondents of this study mentioned that interacting with fans was a goal of their social media usage. This finding is in alignment with studies by Pegoraro et al. (2017) and Barbu et al. (2019) who also found that social media communication is critical for their sample selection of sport clubs to retain and build their fan base relationships. Furthermore, Andreski (2022) is of the opinion that teams must first establish ties by employing the use of social media, which is an excellent tool for promoting and retaining two-way interactions, sharing information, and telling stories. Ernstsson (2022) adds that connecting with fans on social media serves as a means to build rapport with them, and in turn, enhances the team's brand. Taking into account how pleased the rugby clubs were with how they used

social media to promote their brand and establish relationships, this proves that Thompson et al. (2018) were indeed correct when suggesting that social media platforms help sport organisations build and improve their brand as part of a longer-term relationship marketing approach.

Given that sport organisations operate in a service context, the relationship marketing approach ought to highlight cultivating relationships with fans. This would be consistent with Achen's (2017) statement that it is more beneficial to concentrate on building relationships with fans on social media than to rely on traditional marketing.

As indicated by the studies above, using social media to build relationships with internal and external stakeholders is apparent in several quantitative and mixed-methods research papers (Naraine, 2019; Su et al., 2020; Joanna & Zuzanna, 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021) and in recent international qualitative studies that focused on Iranian and US college and professional sport teams and athletes respectively (Sharifzadeh et al., 2021; Andreski, 2022). This inquiry also confirms that relationship building is imperative as a motive for employing social media within a non-professional sport context in South Africa.

6.2.3 Attracting sponsors

Research by Phua et al. (2018), Singh and Nimkar (2020), Sharpe et al. (2020), and Scott et al. (2021) found that social media offers significant sponsorship opportunities for sponsor engagement and activations. In addition, Wymer et al. (2020) found sport organisations were effective in boosting engagement through the deployment of player-driven content and tailoring material for sponsors. Boricheva (2022) and Koronios et al. (2022) report that knowing the fan base and prospective followers is essential in order to focus on gaining fans and sponsors. This links to the present study, whereby a few respondents highlighted that acquiring and establishing sponsors is a significant benefit of using social media.

Phua et al. (2018) indicated that during the game season, sport sponsors may gain from their advertising and marketing efforts by linking their brands with winning teams and players who are supported on social networking sites. Uzma (2019) supports this finding by indicating that effective deployment of strategies has the potential to increase the existing level of sponsor interaction on the various social media platforms utilised by Pakistani sporting organisations. Barbu et al. (2021) indicated that social media are vital in any communication strategies. In addition, they may be used to bring about the activation of sponsorship campaigns, the formation of relationships, and the engagement of an audience for the duration of an event. Contrarily, a study on professional sport teams found that a lack of innovation in social media content can have a negative effect on attracting and maintaining sponsorships over short and long term timeframes (Mastromartino & Naraine, 2022).

The research noted above suggests that social media promoted and attracted sponsors for European sport teams in Romania and Finland (Barbu et al., 2021; Boricheva, 2022) and Asian

sport organisations in Pakistan and India (Uzma, 2019; Singh & Nimkar, 2020). Though attracting sponsors via social media was not the most prominent motive for social media usage in this study, WPSL rugby clubs in South Africa have also embraced social media platforms to increase the value of their brands by gauging the interest of sponsors and other stakeholders, which is consistent with the aforementioned studies.

6.2.4 Information sharing and communication

It is evident from the findings that sharing information and communication was considered an important objective for rugby clubs using social media. However, fewer than half of the respondents stated that social media enabled them to communicate vital information to club members such as fixtures, results, and club activities. Further, very few respondents reported that social media was an excellent means for their clubs to communicate in real time. This finding aligns with an investigation of Wang and Zhou (2015), which discovered that NBA clubs in the US concentrated on creating professional relationships with their Twitter followers, which included information sharing and promotion. The content posted by NBA clubs on Twitter consisted of news, announcements, events, and other information pertaining to clubs, teams, games, and athletes.

Machado et al. (2020) pointed out that social media should be regarded as a more modern form of communication inside the standard marketing mix for sport organisations. A similar finding was recorded by Sahin et al. (2020) who found that a professional soccer team in Turkey continuously shared information from social media in order to develop a closer connection with fans and to increase their supporter base. Although the aforementioned study focused on a single case within the professional sport context, findings comparable to the present inquiry suggest that the evolution of social media affords a tremendous opportunity for sport organisations to establish ties with the general public and their key stakeholders. As a result, it is in accordance with current literature that informational content has enhanced fan engagement (Annamalai et al., 2021; Koronios et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2022).

In line with prior studies (e.g., Popp & Woratschek, 2016; Barbu et al., 2019; Machado et al., 2020; Trivedi et al., 2020; Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Verma & Yadav, 2021; Jacobs et al., 2022; Kemppainen, 2023), the findings of this research indicate that active engagement is primarily associated with the desire to be connected to the brand community from interactions with the brand and other fans.

The current inquiry examined the motivational factors that drive rugby clubs to employ social media, and although it considers non-professional rugby clubs in South Africa, the results are similar to the activities of professional sport teams in Turkey, India and the US (Wang & Zhou, 2015; Annamalai et al., 2021; Jacobs et al., 2022).

Figure 6.1 below demonstrates the primary motives for the use of social media as an MC tool by WPSL rugby clubs.



Figure 6.1: Motives for social media use of the WPSL rugby clubs

Source: Author (2023)

6.3 Theme two: level of social media usage

6.3.1 Factors inducing the level of social media usage

6.3.1.1 Social media usage

As per Kemp (2023), there are 4.76 billion social media users worldwide, accounting for more than half of the world's population. Over the past year, the number of users has surged by more than 3 percent, including 137 million new members joining in 2022. The aforementioned data illustrates the global need for digital adoption and its rapid expansion. As of January 2023, South Africa had 25.8 million social media users, with an estimated 68 percent of the population having access to the internet (Kemp, 2023). The magnitude of social media application by WPSL rugby clubs was evaluated in this research by soliciting responses to questions on this subject, assessing the social media platforms that respondents employed, and evaluating overall activity frequency. Examining this extent of primary data supported one of the study's research objectives, "To analyse how WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool."

6.3.1.2 Social media platforms used

The most popular social media platforms among WPSL rugby clubs were discovered to be Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. These findings are supported by a research report from World Wide Worx (2021), which indicated that Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook are the top four social media channels where companies are extremely engaged in South Africa.

Further research by Esen et al. (2021) corroborates that fans today exhibit their commitment to their teams by following them on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, message boards and blogs, rather than just showing support by wearing team merchandise.

Kemp (2023) reported that at the beginning of 2023, Facebook in South Africa had 22.15 million users, making it the most popular social networking site in the country. Twitter had 3.65 million active users. Meanwhile, Instagram and Snapchat are the next most popular social media platforms in the country, with 5.65 million and 5.85 million active users respectively (Kemp, 2023).

All respondents utilised Facebook and Instagram. Similarly, a quantitative inquiry by Machado et al. (2020) used Facebook and Instagram to determine the most relevant motivations that influenced consumer and brand engagement of a Portuguese soccer club. Moreover, a quarter of the respondents in this inquiry utilised Twitter as a social media platform. Similarly, international literature also examined Twitter as a social media platform in sport-related studies (Pedersen et al., 2016; Watkins & Lee, 2016; Yoon et al., 2017; Massonos, 2019; Baldwin, 2020; Eddy et al., 2021; Guzmán et al., 2021). Moreover, Maderer et al. (2018) found that professional soccer teams were more active on Twitter than Facebook. This result, shared by all its 10 sampled teams, may be attributed to Twitter's unique emphasis on the live game update experience. Only a few of this study's respondents also used WhatsApp as an MC tool, which is supported by Weimann-Saks et al. (2020) who found that Israeli soccer fans utilised WhatsApp to create an eloquent viewing experience while watching the 2018 FIFA World Cup. It is also worth pointing out that several respondents of this study used all four social media platforms.

Although using Instagram, a particular respondent claimed that Facebook was more significant for the club. This finding concurs with those Sahin et al. (2020) who found that Facebook was the most effective and most used social media platform by a Turkish soccer team. In addition, an investigation by Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015) found that Facebook has the ability to give supporters a more active role which strengthens the relationship between fans and the team. Likewise, an inquiry by Ma et al. (2023) determined how post features and brand factors influence fan interaction with the Facebook pages of two Taiwanese professional baseball clubs. Byon et al. (2022) indicated that a study conducted in 2016 found that Facebook was the most prominent used platform by provincial rugby teams in New Zealand. Each of the provincial teams' Facebook pages had considerably more followers compared to the other platforms, including Instagram and Twitter, at the time of the research.

A study by Byun (2020) indicated that using YouTube as a social media platform in sport had a positive impact on brand attitude, brand image and brand loyalty for sport content viewership. This may suggest that YouTube, as an MC tool, is more prevalent in an international sport setting than in South Africa, as YouTube usage is significantly lower compared to the other social media platforms in this country.

Other studies reported that Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube are the most frequently used platforms by sport clubs and athletes across various settings around the world (MacDonald, 2017; Kowalski & Łazorko, 2020; Hussain et al., 2021; Andreski, 2022; Doyle et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2022; Metelski & Leszczyński, 2022; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022; Petersen-Wagner, 2022; Yoon & Pedersen, 2022; Burgers et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2023). This discovery corroborates the current study's results, owing to the similarities in social media platforms with the exception of YouTube, used by WPSL rugby clubs in South Africa.

6.3.1.3 Most effective social media platforms for sport

Platforms for social media communication can make athletes, as well as sport teams, more approachable and relatable. Massonos (2019) therefore advises that athletes and teams should rather spend their time promoting content on platforms that are pertinent to their intended audience.

In the present study, the respondents reported that Facebook was the most preferred and effective social media MC platform for WPSL rugby clubs, followed by Instagram. The majority of respondents highlighted Facebook, while a few mentioned Instagram. A very small number of respondents cited both Facebook and Instagram as equally effective for their rugby clubs. A common thread in the responses pointed towards Facebook's capabilities for facilitating engagement, enabling communication with their online audience and for keeping them up to date consistently. Kowalski and Łazorko (2020) concur with this finding as they argued that because of Facebook's popularity among current and potential fans, and in contrast with other social media platforms, Facebook is able to establish a dynamic equilibrium between formal and informal content. Similarly, Pegoraro et al. (2017), Schubert and Seyffert (2017), Phua et al. (2018), Vale and Fernandes (2018), Massonos (2019), Turková (2021), Naraine et al. (2022), and Ma et al. (2023) corroborate the claim that Facebook assists sport organisations in developing communities and exchanging information by allowing them to share their experiences via text, images, and videos.

Consequently, the consumption of visual content in social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook affords the club and its team's forums for elevating the level of team awareness through the application of visual approaches (Hussain et al., 2021). A participating rugby club stated that with Facebook they had a particular audience, and with Instagram they had a different target audience, which suggests that both platforms work equally well for them to reach their target market efficiently. Sport is highly visual, and Instagram, as an image platform, allows athletes and sport teams to showcase their brands in new and fascinating ways by sharing photographs, videos, and text. A respondent also mentioned that they found more engagement on Instagram.

The present study's findings on Instagram usage as an effective platform are in accordance with the results of past investigations by Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018), Geurin and McNary (2021), Li et al. (2021), Nayyeri et al. (2021), Scott et al. (2021), Sharifzadeh et al. (2021), and Doyle et al. (2022), who found that Instagram was the most useful social media platform for their investigations, though this may be related to the social media objectives of those organisations.

The results of the present investigation and those referenced above indicate that sport teams, sport organisations and athletes share similar ideals when it comes to identifying Facebook and Instagram as their most effective social media platforms.

6.3.1.4 Frequency of social media use

The researcher determined how often rugby clubs posted on their preferred social media platforms in order to determine activity frequency. Findings revealed that most respondents posted several times on a weekly basis. In a qualitative study by Achen et al. (2017), respondents valued balance regarding the frequency of postings on social media platforms that examined social media engagement. This relates to a response during the interview process which highlighted that the respondent in question preferred to do one or two posts a week, to avoid spamming people with excessive content.

A small percentage of respondents indicated that they posted content every day. Literature by Lupien et al. (2005) and Kanuri et al. (2018) found that the desire to engage with material is likely to be highest in the morning, moderate in the evening, and low in the afternoon. Further, some respondents identified Monday, Wednesday and Friday as the common days which they are likely to post content. These aforementioned specified days are in alignment with Keutelian (2022) and Myers' (2022) best practice post frequency and timings for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Facebook's best time for content publishing is between 13:00 and 15:00 during the week and Saturdays. In contrast, Twitter's best time for content publishing is Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 09:00. Conversely, Instagram's best time for publishing is Mondays at 11:00, Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 10:00 and 13:00, Thursdays and Fridays between 10:00 and 11:00 (Keutelian, 2022; Myers, 2022).

A quantitative inquiry by Esen et al. (2021) examined the effects of social media use on Turkish sport clubs' corporate reputation. The findings indicated that respondents posted multiple times daily. These results are comparable to this study's social media usage frequency results; however the aforementioned investigation focused on the end-user whereas the current study looked at the particular rugby club's usage frequency.

The level of participation from the clubs is varied as per the findings. Literature reviewed above by Achen et al. (2017) and Esen et al. (2021) illustrates that activity frequency differs in each case, particularly from an international viewpoint. This may suggest that activity frequency could rely on the type of content available and best practice methods followed. Thus, the activity frequency findings in this study are similar to other generic organisational best practice research conducted (Keutelian, 2022; Myers, 2022).

6.3.2 Budget and paid advertising

Although none of the rugby teams had a specific budget for social media, a respondent emphasised the need to have a designated position in the club in order for the club executives to recognise the worth and commit funding to it. Another respondent indicated that conducting a player recruiting campaign using social media marketing may persuade them to spend money on social media and thus enhance it. This negates the results of Pegoraro et al. (2017) who indicated

that despite having less funding and lower levels of fan interaction, niche sport organisations can still develop relationships with potential supporters by using social media.

A telling finding from this inquiry identified factors such as priority and total budget allocation, and consumption as inhibiting aspects for not having a social media budget.

Inquiries by Dias and Monterio (2020) and Maguire (2021) found that football teams in Brazil and Ireland, with few resources and operating on a limited budget, often assign sport marketing responsibilities to an employee with no expertise. Dias and Monterio (2020) add that this may have a detrimental influence on marketing objectives and goals, as well as hinder marketing strategy formulation and execution. This is in alignment with one of the respondent's feedback in this study as they mentioned that they did not have a budget and they were effectively operating social media on their own. Obtaining sufficient funding for social media initiatives continues to be a significant challenge for many sport marketers of non-professional sport clubs.

Conversely, literature by Dees et al. (2021) acknowledged that over the last decade sport brands and sponsors have started shifting their budgets towards social media and digital marketing. Particularly, professional sport teams have had significant success promoting and selling merchandise on Instagram and Facebook.

In contrast to the findings of the current study, available research suggests that social media advertising in the sport sector may be used for a number of purposes, including expanding its fan base, selling match tickets and merchandise, driving competitions, increasing website traffic, and even enticing people to download the sport team's app (Horowitz, 2019). Moreover, a study by Dees et al. (2021) reported that by implementing a social media targeted paid strategy on Facebook, Miami Heats in the US were able to reach more target consumers and enhance their customer experience.

A further study by Yarmoliuk (2021) noted that for some time now, there has been a focus on directing advertising budgets to develop more customised content and promotions to build a more focused ad spend. While many partners are holding out after Covid-19 financial constraints, marketers are trying to explore new alliances and collaborations with sponsored content.

The aforementioned literature indicates that assigning a social media budget and paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram enhanced sport organisations' customer experience, increased engagement and augmented ticket sales in Australia, Canada and the US (Pegoraro et al., 2017; Horowitz, 2019; Dees et al., 2021).

Thus, there is a significant disparity between access to paid advertising and social media budget in South African non-professional rugby clubs in comparison to international cases.

6.3.3 Sales and merchandising

Data from the study revealed that a third of the respondents used social media as an MC tool to generate sales or sell merchandise. The findings confirmed that a quarter of the respondents marketed their club's merchandise by promoting and advertising products for sale on social media. These findings are in agreement with Maderer et al. (2018), Horowitz (2019), Machado et al. (2020), Maguire (2021), Annamalai et al. (2021), Ristevska-Jovanovska (2021), Pereira et al. (2022), and Piché and Naraine (2022) who noted that sport organisations employ social media to promote online merchandise catalogues, match ticket sales, and special online promotions. Furthermore, utilising social media to enhance club membership sales was considered by a respondent.

Hence, it is worth suggesting that the general public believe that digital marketing enables the sport industry to access a wider audience to sell their products or merchandise. This was evident in the study as very few respondents mentioned that their club had designed an e-commerce shop via their website as a tool to promote and generate sales through the sale of merchandise. In support of this finding, Singh and Nimkar (2020) found that professional athletes took advantage of social media and digital channels not only to engage with their fans, but also as a sales tool to promote the merchandise of their club or brand. Sport teams and brands are always looking for alternative approaches to generate income in response to the expansion of the sport industry. This correlates with this study's findings that numerous respondents would be open in venturing down the path of online sales in the future, either via the use of a social media platform or an e-commerce site. This further suggests that sport brands are aware of the target market population they could reach online by setting strategies to create sales, since social media is viewed as an essential component of digital marketing.

As specified by the studies above, using social media for sales and merchandising amplified the brand of sport organisations across numerous sport codes such as cricket (Annamalai et al., 2021) and soccer (Maderer et al., 2018; Machado et al., 2020; Maguire, 2021; Pereira et al., 2022). The present research also shows that South African rugby clubs in the Western Cape Province also use social media for the purposes of sales and merchandising.

6.3.4 Advertising and branding activities

It is evident from the present study's results that respondents considered advertising and branding activities when utilising social media. To further cultivate the value of social media, Abeza et al. (2020) argued that sport marketing professionals should engage in activities that enable fans to be enlightened users and offer support. Some of the respondent's highlighted approaches such as branded email signatures, e-newsletters and starting a YouTube channel as branding activities to promote their social media platforms. Only a small portion of the respondents claimed to utilise the club's restaurant as a platform for promotion, posting relevant information to attract new

members and build brand recognition. Cross-promotion and co-branding initiatives with well-known organisations with a strong social media presence are strategies for sport clubs in the sport industry to explore. Findings from this study align with Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018) who report that branding is still an essential component of a professional sport team's marketing and commercial operations, especially when it comes to the team's history and players. A South African soccer study by Abon and Adebayo (2020) demonstrated that all soccer clubs in their quantitative inquiry used comparable marketing efforts to communicate with supporters, fans, and spectators. Activities included giveaways, visits to people in their communities, use of social media, word-of-mouth, and the relational market as marketing techniques.

Literature indicate it is critical for club marketing professionals to analyse corporate marketing and advertising activities in order to generate suitable marketing actions that may serve as competitive advantages (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Abeza et al., 2020; Abon & Adebayo, 2020). Therefore, this study also examined advertising and branding activities of rugby clubs. The clubs used for this study exhibited lower levels of branding and marketing activities, which may limit their attraction of sponsorships and promotions.

6.3.5 Giveaways/competitions and loyalty programmes

From data collected, it appeared that giveaways and loyalty programmes were employed as a brand awareness method by half of the respondents. Abon and Adebayo (2020) found that raffle and competitions were utilised by soccer clubs in KwaZulu-Natal, although it was not clear how and if these activities were promoted across their social media platforms. Similarly Smith (2014), Lukowicz and Strzelecki (2020), Abeza et al. (2022), and Krzyżowski and Strzelecki (2022) also discovered that ticket discounts, giveaways or contests on social media encouraged online participation and were compelling in attracting online audience attention. Achen et al. (2017) also reported an interest in adopting giveaways and competitions on social media.

The respondents interviewed for this study did identify some conventional use of competitions and loyalty programmes via social media which differed from the current literature. One of the respondents focused on giveaways that were not directly related to the club, for example, a golfing trip or a weekend away which also provided good engagement across their social media channels. In terms of loyalty programmes, several of the respondents highlighted loyalty club memberships that they offered to members whereby they received exclusive rights or discounted rates on items.

Socialfix (2021) affirms that even when the sport season comes to an end, contests will help sport teams remain relevant. Giveaways through social media have been underused by rugby clubs in South Africa in recent years, despite the fact that they may be extremely effective in generating high engagement rates from fans. Based on findings by Machado et al. (2020) and Szczepkowski (2021), active engagement is mostly motivated by a desire to belong to a community through connecting with the brand and other fans, as well as involvement in competitions and other

activities that enable supporters to gain something in return (tickets or points to loyalty programmes and discounts).

Studies by Machado et al. (2020), Lukowicz and Strzelecki (2020), Szczepkowski (2021), and Abeza et al. (2022) found that prudent use of giveaways, competitions, and loyalty programmes on social media has the ability to enhance the connection between a sport club across all levels and its target audience. This investigation found that non-professional rugby clubs are similarly seeking various ways to constantly engage their audiences to increase brand awareness and participation. It is also evident that the rugby clubs studied in this enquiry did not engage in giveaways or loyalty programmes to the same degree as professional sport clubs in developed countries.

6.3.6 Hashtags for brand awareness

The use of hashtags was found to be prevalent among all respondents in the study. A common theme amongst each respondent was the utilisation of a hashtag that was aligned to the rugby club's name or nickname. Another significant finding was that a small proportion of the rugby clubs included their sponsor's name hashtags within related content.

This finding is in agreement with a study by Mastromartino and Naraine (2022) who established two opportunistic strategies that brands employ to activate their sponsorship with sport organisations in particular: sponsor-related postings and brand-related hashtags. Wang (2021) analysed 5 561 tweets to see how NBA teams utilised Twitter to build relationships with their fans. The research specified that sport organisations extensively used Twitter hashtags.

Very few respondents indicated in addition to their club's own hashtags that they also frequently used the league's hashtag in which they competed, for example #WPClubRugby. Naraine (2021) affirms that the above-mentioned sorts of hashtags may aid in the development of a league's online brand community and could be used to target particular customer segments. As noted by O'Hallarn et al. (2019), hashtags play a major role in integrating sport and social media and are important in sustaining the community amongst the online information overload (Stavros et al., 2014). Though this inquiry's findings indicated that hashtags contribute towards brand awareness for the respondents, in contrast Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) and Doyle et al. (2022) in their quantitative studies discovered that the inclusion of hashtags led to a minor but significant decrease in the number of comments and likes athletes received in their engagement with posts. This may imply that users see tagged content as an effort to create a sale rather than a relationship. Consequently, from a marketing perspective, a more focused and systematic process is necessary for hashtag generation. The findings of this inquiry do suggest that the use of promotional hashtags for rugby clubs in particular is conceivably in need of further research. Most of the literature reviewed in this study focused on how the consumer or sport fans used hashtags as a communication tool as opposed to the sport club or team using hashtags within a rugby setting.

6.3.7 Social media challenges

The use of social media has many benefits for sport and athletes, but it does have certain drawbacks. It is also worth noting that the majority of the organisations analysed in this study encountered various challenges when it came to marketing their particular rugby clubs on social media. Prevalent difficulties identified by a quarter of the respondents were access to funds or a social media budget for advertising. Respondents also emphasised the need for teams to avoid overwhelming newsfeeds with excessive posting. The finding also showed that time was a barrier for respondents when it came to the employment of social media. This is similar to Antheunis et al. (2013), who also found that cost and time were considered a drawback for sport organisations' social media usage. Other respondents cited content and activity frequency as significant obstacles to social media use. The literature reviewed supported this finding by highlighting that sport teams employing social media experienced barriers to enhancing their platforms' user value and appeal (Abeza et al., 2017).

As highlighted by Geurin (2017), passionate fans have been able to communicate their thoughts, both positive and critical, on social media by making public comments and/or sending inappropriate direct messages to athletes. From the findings, reach and negative social media reactions were recognised as challenges for two of the respondents. Similarly, Eagleman (2013), Andreski (2022), Mastromartino and Naraine (2022), and Weimar et al. (2022) echoed that three primary constraints of social media adoption were noted by North American and German sport teams: frequency and content population, sustaining message control, and monitoring and regulating fan comments. With regards to dealing with negative social media reactions, individuals often feel more contented posting offensive comments online than in person or in public areas (Nakayama (2017). Thus, Sanderson (2011) added that it is difficult for sport organisations to adopt social media policy, but the administration of social media platforms must be governed by its employees. This may suggest that sport fans and the public are increasingly using the social media platforms to spread hate.

A respondent interestingly suggested that seeking sponsorships was also a challenge for the rugby club, particularly around social media promotion. This could suggest that a significant impediment to social media use is a lack of technical management expertise which, Michaelidou et al. (2011) and Abeza et al. (2019) have previously identified. It has been noted in the literature on sport marketing that many fans engage with their favourite teams via social media; hence, it is essential that teams keep their Facebook and Twitter sites updated (Sport Management Degree Guide, 2022).

In comparison to international studies highlighted above, limited research has been conducted on the usage and challenges of social media from a South African sport organisation perspective; hence this study reveals a high degree of understanding among social media usage challenges highlighted by WPSL rugby clubs.

The findings in this study concur with the social challenges presented in the literature review as illustrated in Figure 6.2 below.

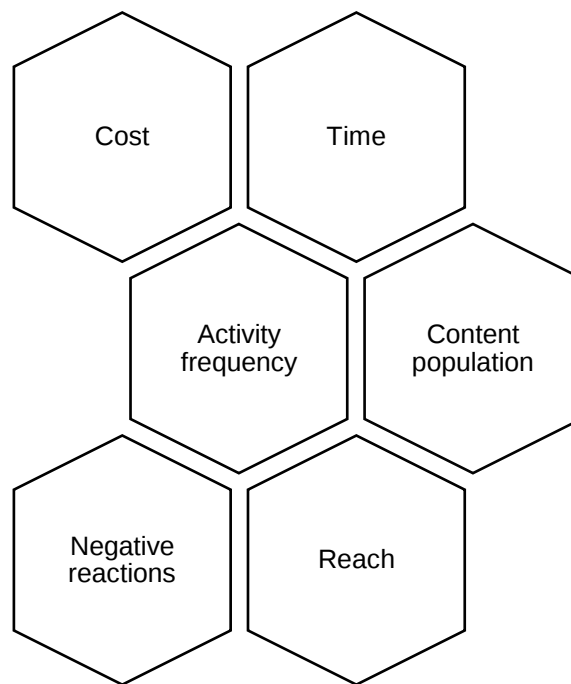


Figure 6.2: Social media use challenges

Source: Author (2023)

6.3.8 Content preferences

Content generation is one of the key drivers of social media growth and success. Hence, this research looked at the kind of content that WPSL rugby clubs posted on their different social media channels. The aforementioned is supported by Thackeray et al. (2012), Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015), Phua et al. (2018), Machado et al. (2020), Annamalai et al. (2021), Andreski (2022), Jacobs et al. (2022), and Li et al. (2022) who have underlined that it is critical for organisations to provide content that engages consumers, stimulates debate, and initiates interaction.

This investigation's respondents were primarily interested in content pertaining to the social media sites they used. Focus was centred on the sorts of content published, the tone in which that content was expressed, as well as the content's quality and visual appeal. The majority of respondents concentrated on rugby-related or directly club-related information, as per the findings. In accordance with past research, the findings demonstrate that content type is critical in posting strategies as it has a major impact on online engagement (Vale & Fernandez, 2018; Aboul-Dahab, 2022). This also completely corroborates Filo et al. (2015) who claimed that developing authenticity in a method of communicating via the official team page may positively affect the number of followers, highlighting the significance of brand trust in social media.

Respondents also mentioned that behind-the-scenes footage and upbeat topics were valuable in terms of content selection.

These forms of content serve to present fans with material that they might not otherwise have access to. This finding is substantial as it confirms the finding of Thompson et al. (2014) who conducted research on Tennis New Zealand and concluded that sport fans were particularly interested in behind-the-scenes content. Similarly, Kavanagh (2019), Ristevska-Jovanovska (2021), Naraine et al. (2022), and Yoon and Pedersen (2022) claimed that it is critical for sport fans to obtain behind-the-scenes insight and experience viewing their favourite athletes, sport events and teams in a natural, comfortable environment. This might imply that social content is in great demand and generates the most interactions among sport fans.

Respondents indicated that they preferred content that identified with passion, pride, positivity, unity and professionalism, which supports the view of Vale and Fernandes (2018) that positive emotions such nostalgia and socialisation have been extensively adopted to institute online engagement amongst sport fans. However, a small percentage of respondents mentioned that their club aimed to showcase content that provided opportunities and a sense of brotherhood, family and immense tradition within its local community. This is an aspect that was not evident in the literature reviewed, which suggests that this is a unique finding within a non-professional South African setting.

Including visuals as part of the content that is shared on social media was acknowledged by Parganas et al. (2015), Yüce et al. (2021), Behrens and Uhrich (2022), Doyle et al. (2022), and Weimar et al. (2022) to be an effective approach for promoting user engagement in sport. Considering either to prioritise image or video interaction requires a detailed insight of the target audience and how it typically engages online (Dessler, 2020). Moreover, the occurrence of visual content was frequently revealed as critical to respondents, with the majority of the respondents explicitly citing the significance of using images and videos across their social media channels. The respondents confirmed that images, in particular, have a significant impact on engagement. Maderer et al. (2018), Machado et al. (2020), Maguire (2021), and Pereira et al. (2022) concur with this finding as they found that professional soccer teams effectively use images as part of their social media content strategy.

Additionally, video was also regarded by respondents as an excellent type of content that worked well for them. Sport teams should also consider the duration of the videos they publish as a respondent noted that videos of no longer than 30 seconds were impactful for them. A study by Triton Commerce (2022) agrees that videos receive more engagement than any other type of content, and Tweets containing video has regularly outperformed text, images, and other forms of content on social media. Similarly, Warren (2022) found that Instagram video posts received ten times higher engagement than other platforms. In light of this viewpoint, video may provide a preferable visual content resource for sport social media marketers.

Images and videos will be viewed differently based on the social media platform used to communicate with others. Conversely, sport teams should also consider using a variety of platforms for different purposes (such as Twitter for live match updates and Facebook and Instagram for sharing user-generated content) in order to encourage relationships with their fans.

As specified by the studies above, utilising particular content on social media that focus on the use of visuals, behind-the-scenes footage and brand related content was prominent in numerous qualitative studies on professional sport teams (Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Andreski, 2022; Ernstsson, 2022). Thus, although this investigation studied non-professional rugby clubs in a developing country, the results are similar in terms of content preferences.

Figure 6.3 below exhibits the content preferences of WPSL rugby clubs across social media.

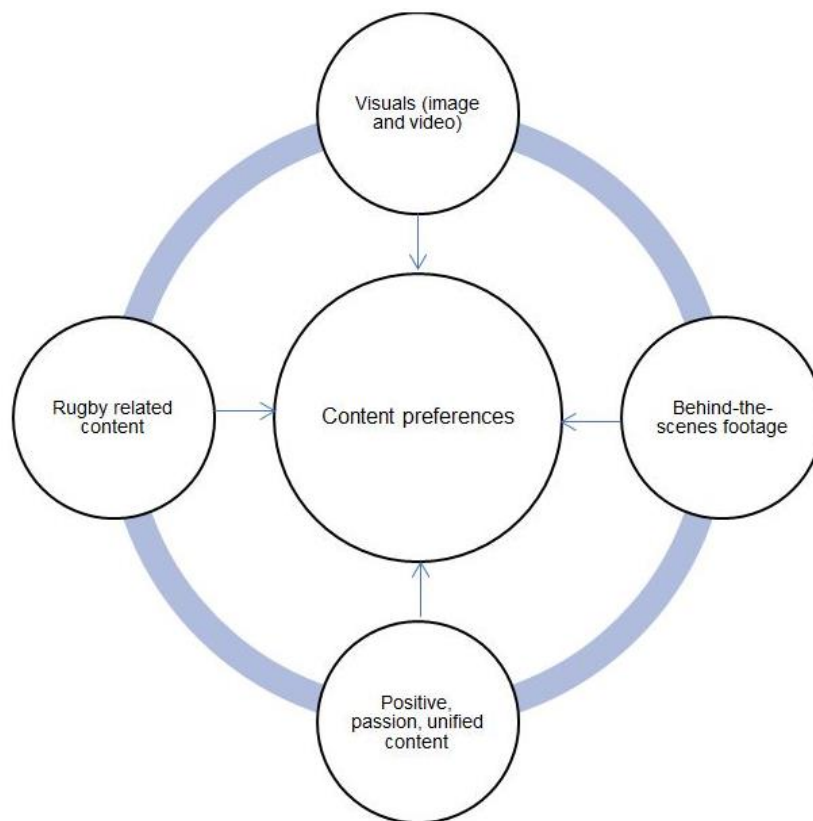


Figure 6.3: Content preferences on social media

Source: Author (2023)

6.3.8.1 Content scheduling

Although content scheduling was not found pertinent by respondents of this study, a quarter of the respondents indicated that they had previously made use of social media scheduling tools such as Facebook Manager or had scheduled posts directly on the respective platforms.

Available literature argues that creating an effective social media schedule starts with determining the best time to publish relevant content on social media (Kanuri et al., 2018). This is supported by Wolter (2017) who believes that organisations should invest in social media to offer a return on investment by comprehending the aspects that influence effective content scheduling. The

aforementioned literature points out those social media practitioners require a scheduling tool that offers guidance on when to publish (what time of day) and also what content to publish at what time. As stated above, respondents of the current study did not use content scheduling tools often and therefore differ from findings in the present literature.

6.3.8.2 Content guidelines and policies

Guidelines and policies of social media as an MC tool through which the rugby clubs could interact with their target audience were an essential deliberation. Available literature suggests that various sport codes have taken different approaches to monitoring and enforcing appropriate social media etiquette (Ortiz, 2011; Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Blaszkas et al., 2018; Park et al., 2020).

The findings of the current study testify to a perspective that is parallel to the viewpoint presented above. Half of the respondents mentioned that they did have explicit processes in place to monitor and respond to negative comments made on their social media sites. Several respondents indicated that negative comments were channelled through to the rugby club management and as a committee they would determine how to respond to negative comments. In some cases respondents ignored, deleted or blocked the comments; and in other cases they reported them and responded directly to the individuals. From the perspective of the international sporting community, a number of governing sporting organisations have formulated social media policies and guidelines in order to regulate the use of social media by their internal stakeholders (Ortiz, 2011; Football NSW, 2017; Swim Ireland, 2017; Carzola-Milla et al., 2020; NASO, 2022). In the context of South Africa, there is a scarcity of literature that addresses the adoption of policies or guidelines regarding the use of social media by sport teams.

6.3.9 Campaign measurement and alignment

While social media measurement and alignment were a component of overall social media use, it was focused largely on engagement within the respondents' specific teams. Less than half of the respondents stated that they tracked social media activity and campaign performance in some manner. Very few respondents mentioned that they used social media analytics (Facebook and Instagram analytics) to compare and discover what content performed the best for their audiences. In addition, a small number of respondents measured and assessed campaigns based on the club's previous social media postings and efforts.

Moreover, measuring the success or failure of content on social media cannot be based solely on basic activity numbers, since they might be deceptive and do not account for the countless offline engagements fuelled by such content. Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015) and Achen et al. (2017) proposed that sport teams adopt a customer review research instrument to better assess content strategy. Hudson et al. (2016) investigated social media participation by questioning consumers about their behaviours rather than estimating overall amounts of variables such as comments, shares, and likes. Further, researchers may reevaluate how engagement is measured

in their studies in order to better correlate social media interaction and participation with organisational outputs.

Measurement is an effective method for assessing how social media fit into an organisation and which platform is optimal for accomplishing organisational goals. This is substantiated by perspectives in literature that assess social media success based on the number of likes and followers, comments, page views, shares, and the degree to which comments are employed to measure fan engagement (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Lipsman et al., 2012; Thackeray et al., 2012; Abeza et al., 2013; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021). The current inquiry's assessment of measuring social media campaigns is limited in contrast to several sport team and athlete studies mentioned above.

6.4 Theme three: strategic use of social media as an MC strategy

6.4.1 Strategic use of social media

The extent of strategic use of social media by WPSL rugby clubs in this study was evaluated by observing the responses to questions examining this theme, investigating social media alignment with the clubs' overall marketing, social media goals and best practice examples from other sport teams.

Current literature is in agreement that social media marketing may be implemented strategically in the context of sport as a component of an MC strategy (Parganas and Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Faria et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2022).

Several studies have shown that social media produce effective marketing and brand outputs for organisations and have aided sport marketing. Research concluded by Parganas et al. (2017), Ma (2018), Maderer et al. (2018), Belfiore et al. (2019), Jones (2021), and Obaid and Kishore (2022) found that social media may provide sport teams and organisations with a low-cost method for reaching a large number of fans and increase brand awareness and brand equity. Among other considerations, Habibi et al. (2014), Wang and Zhou (2015), Billings et al. (2017), Osokin (2019), Andreski (2022), and Beissel et al. (2022) provide persuasive claims that social media may be beneficial as an MC strategy for sport organisations and businesses.

The findings of this study essentially agree with these arguments, but interestingly, only a small percentage of respondents indicated that they had a social media strategy in place. Respondents provided a variety of responses as to why they had not employed a social media strategy. Some of the prevalent observations made were promoting content on an ad hoc basis, not always being urged to develop a strategy by the rugby club and being in the process of creating a strategy. Tafesse and Wien (2018) concur that organisations have difficulty using social media to support strategic marketing strategies. This may also align to the challenges for social media strategy creation, such as resource and time factors. In comparison to the international market, Maderer

et al. (2018), Sahin et al. (2020), Jones (2021), Ong & Leng (2022) and Pereira et al. (2022) found that European soccer clubs have integrated social media marketing into their marketing efforts and have become amongst the most followed online brands in the world, leveraging on the sport's universal appeal. Thus, it is notable to demonstrate how continued development of social media strategies may result in short and long-term organisational advantages for a sport club.

Thus, the above-mentioned studies confirm that employing a social media strategy aids in connecting actively with fans and improves the overall online experience for sport teams. However, this present investigation confirms that South African rugby clubs lack the implementation of a social media strategy in comparison with international cases, for various reasons.

6.4.2 Social media alignment

The researcher acknowledged it was important to find out if there was a fit between social media marketing and the marketing and business goals of the respondents. It is evident from the findings that more than half of the respondents identified social media alignment with its overall organisational marketing goals. Very few respondents mentioned that social media had become the official voice and messaging channel for the rugby club. Whereas two other respondents regarded social media as part of the club's overall communication strategy reflecting the main objective which is to promote the club, its team and individual players. Studies by Ma (2018), Wang and Chan-Olmsted (2020), Li et al. (2021), and Verma and Yadav (2021) reported that social media have changed sport in a variety of ways, most notably as a communication strategy and platform for sport promotion. This concurs with the findings of the current study and shows that social media might give sport teams a low-cost method for interacting and connecting with fans and raising brand awareness.

Moreover, research conducted by Parganas et al. (2017) found that social media platforms provide sport organisations with an efficient means to express preferred brand connections and brand identification to their followers. However, a respondent felt a disconnection between the club's social media communications and its overall marketing and further pointed out that they were not aware of what the clubs marketing goals were.

This finding demonstrates a divergence between academics, practitioners, and the present study; thus sport social media representatives of rugby clubs should explore bridging the gap by altering their social media communication techniques and strategies.

6.4.3 Best practice

This segment aimed to identify best practice campaigns for social media from other sport teams that may be identified in order to optimise the WPSL rugby club's marketing efforts. A key element in achieving the research goal, "To determine how WPSL rugby clubs may maximise the strategic

use of social media as part of their MC strategy," other sport teams were tracked, and compelling approaches and campaigns were discovered.

6.4.3.1 Appealing strategies

One of the popular tactics highlighted as attractive by a third of the respondents was incorporating quality video and creating more engaging content on social media. Very few respondents highlighted that the engagement of professional sport teams is largely better because they have professional social media teams around them to produce compelling content; while another respondent mentioned that they admired the general appearance of professional sport team posts from the layout of their banners to the content they provide. Numerous studies by Kavanagh (2019), Machado et al. (2020), Ristevska-Jovanovska (2021), Naraine et al. (2022), and Yoon and Pederson (2022) agree that to increase brand engagement, sport brands can provide some behind-the-scenes video and images of the team and players, videos showcasing exceptional moments in the team's performance; and exclusive images of game highlights.

Raby (2018) identified the best social media strategies by top performing US-based sport teams which all involved the use of innovative visual elements via imagery, TV and video content. Meanwhile, Mastromartino and Naraine (2022) argued that it is imperative that professional sport organisations should not assume that any content, even if entertaining, would instantly establish a stronger connection with their target audience. This substantiates how critical it is for sport clubs to carefully research and understand their intended target audience effectively.

Participating in community initiatives and encouraging the community via social media is an attractive tactic, according to a particular respondent. Another respondent mentioned that sponsored advertisements, which some professional sport teams' use, are something the club should consider when getting sponsorships. The aforementioned responses in this study differ from the literature reviewed, which may suggest that these aspects are unique to South African sport teams of a non-professional nature.

Figure 6.4 below demonstrates the key strategies by international professional sport teams that WPSL rugby clubs found appealing.

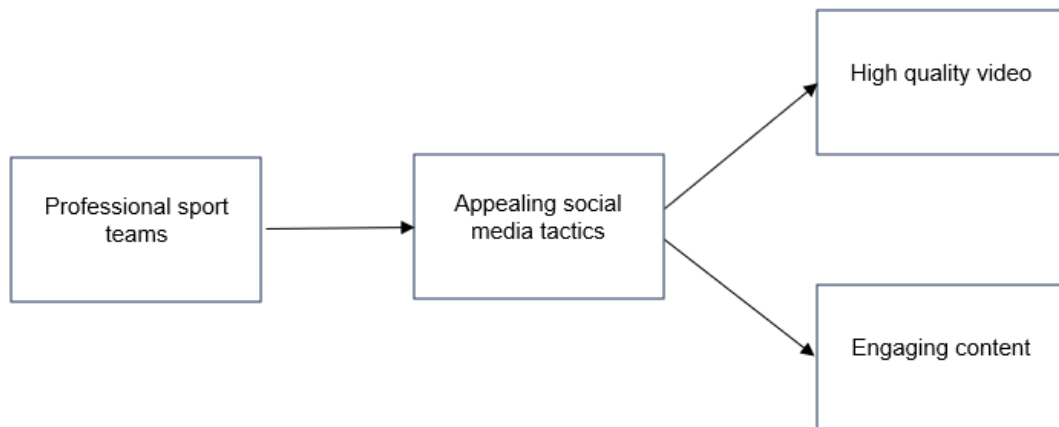


Figure 6.4: Professional sport teams appealing strategies

Source: Author (2023)

6.4.3.2 Campaign examples

The findings from most of the respondents demonstrate that rugby club social media platforms may considerably benefit from including player profiles, highlight packages, and the use of a dedicated app in their social media campaigns. Although the respondents adhered to conventional methods for employing social media campaigns, they showed their approval for initiatives and campaigns that they found particularly attractive from a global or professional perspective. The findings suggest that the key impact of social media campaigns on the respondent rugby clubs are the elevated brand exposure and promotion (Boyle, 2000; Pegoraro et al., 2017; Belfiore et al., 2019; Smith, 2019; Machado et al., 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021; Jacobs et al., 2022).

From the perspective of sport in South Africa, literature provides examples of how the South African national rugby team employed the #StrongerTogether campaign to unify the nation during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Several South Africans have used the #StrongerTogether hashtag to show their support for the Springboks across social media posts and platforms (Meltwater, 2019). As was previously noted, hashtags could help build an online brand community for a team and can be used to find and target important groups of users (Naraine et al., 2021; Wang, 2021).

McCann and Barlow (2015) and Effing and Spil (2016) reported that social media are considered to be a significant form of marketing. For example, respondents in Effing and Spil's (2016) study stated that the majority of social media goals follow from an organisation's strategic marketing goals. Li et al. (2021), Körkkö (2022), and Ong and Leng (2022) support the latter and add that marketers can use social media resources strategically depending on what they already have and what they can do.

Thus, it is possible to suggest that innovative ways to market a sport brand include using social media to provide constant updates on the team and players, generating blogs and video channels, and coordinating community projects. The findings of the present inquiry conclusively show that sport organisations benefit from the employment of social media campaigns and adhering to best practice examples from soccer (Machado et al., 2020; Weimann-Saks et al., 2020; Maguire, 2021; Pereira et al., 2022), and rugby clubs could improve brand exposure and enhance relationship building with their target audience (Byon et al., 2022).

6.5 Theme four: social media usage during COVID-19

6.5.1 Social media during COVID-19

This research also looked at the effects of social media usage by WPSL rugby clubs during COVID-19. The theme was also created to examine the social media influence, adoption, and content generated during the global pandemic. The theme is proposed to address the research question: “How were social media MC practices adapted during COVID-19 when sport was prohibited in South Africa?” COVID-19 has emphasised the relevance of social media in sport, making it a crucial means for supporters to keep connected with their teams. Consequently, it was crucial to understand how rugby clubs used social media to grow and expand their brand with their audience throughout the global pandemic. The rapid spread of COVID-19 and severe lockdown restrictions had a significant influence on the prospect of live sport taking place in South Africa. For the purposes of this inquiry, it is important to note that WPSL rugby league fixtures and tournaments were also postponed in 2020 and 2021.

6.5.2 COVID-19 impact on social media

The COVID-19 pandemic immobilised the sport sector, not only in terms of elite-level competition, but also in terms of existing sponsorship agreements and media rights, as well as employee compensation. Professional, semi-professional, and amateur sport were significantly affected by the COVID-19 epidemic and worldwide lockdown restrictions (Ramagole et al., 2020; MacInnes, 2021; Staley et al., 2021; Andreski, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Schallhorn et al., 2022; Smith & Skinner, 2022; Knott & Hemmonsby, 2023). Furthermore, professional sport teams and organisations rapidly incurred financial losses due to a lack of live spectators. Simmons et al. (2020), Horky (2021), and Kahiya et al. (2022) noted that the postponing of live sport owing to the virus had repercussions for a number of sport sector stakeholders.

A majority of the respondents articulated similar opinions about the pandemic's destructive influence on social media engagement for their individual rugby teams. Half of the respondents claimed producing and posting content was constrained and onerous, and that it had a negative impact on their overall social media engagement. Additionally, a small number of respondents indicated minimal social media participation during this period. This finding is indicative of a shared perception in research by that of Majumdar and Naha (2021) who noted that

understandably, sport had taken a back seat as a consequence of widespread concern and apprehension. Sport organisations recognised that the global pandemic had a detrimental influence on their connection with fans because people were barred from attending games at stadiums, resulting in a loss of excitement in live games. Nonetheless, it was apparent from the findings that marketing, and promotion was still viable, although to a limited extent, for rugby clubs through the use of social media, indicating that meaningful engagements with followers did occur.

Research concluded by Abosag et al. (2012), Su et al. (2020), Frederick et al. (2021), Abeza et al. (2022), Aboul-Dahab (2022), and Ernstsson (2022), reported that due to the level of confidence of sport fans, sport brands were in a distinct position to establish enduring relationships with their fans. This study found that relationship building, and brand awareness is at the core of the rugby clubs' activity, since most of what they did on social media was to build and keep relationships with fans. The sporting world has undoubtedly been revolutionised during the COVID-19 restrictions, but by all accounts, it was able to adapt and reinvent itself in order to remain competitive and connected with its members.

Based on findings of COVID-19's impact on social media from sport clubs in Germany (Grix et al., 2021; Schallhorn et al., 2022), Poland (Szczepkowski, 2021), Spain (López-Carril & Anagnostopoulos, 2020), and England (MacInnes, 2021), it is probable that similar developments were seen in other nations (with some country-specific nuances).

As highlighted by the studies above, the COVID-19 epidemic presented great obstacles for sport club's social media usage across the world, and thus equally impacted South African rugby clubs as found in this study, particularly in terms of communication and coordination with their members.

6.5.3 Adoption of social media during COVID-19

The research found that connection and engagement between the rugby clubs and their supporters was attainable through social media, and teams were able to adapt their social media practice when no live sport was played owing to the global pandemic. Several respondents reported that the pandemic gave them time to rethink and change their social media activities and practices, while other respondents had to adjust activity frequency and content on a regular basis to keep their audience engaged. This concurs with research by Mastromartino et al. (2020) and Schallhorn et al. (2022) who also found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the toughest tasks for sport teams was to keep team and fan identification through social media. At a time when many sport teams around the world had to play in stadiums with no fans, some of them came up with inventive ways to get fans involved so they could still feel like they were part of the action. Some sport teams let fans pay to have images of their faces put on mannequins inside the stadium, and the money raised went to the fight against COVID-19 (Krnjaic, 2020).

Furthermore, it was evident in the study that interaction and engagement between the rugby clubs and their fans continued during COVID-19 as few respondents' content focused on promoting the

new management team of the club. Another respondent launched a new campaign in order to maintain fan engagement and promotions. In the context of COVID-19, sport organisations had to identify virtual and socially distanced locations to engage their brand communities and design marketing strategies for empty stadiums that could nevertheless connect with supporters beyond the gates (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Areiza-Padilla et al., 2021; Hayes, 2022; Smith & Skinner, 2022; Knott & Hemmonsbeay, 2023).

In the past, sport organisations were unable to engage with supporters outside of closed doors; however, they were now required to invest in digital platforms to reach followers. Stefanović and Alakovi (2020) and Radmann and Karlén (2022) characterise digital stadiums as a new phenomenon that provides sport fans with a completely new experience from the comfort of their own homes. This is directly relevant to the present enquiry since South African sport teams were examining methods to use digital media to interact with supporters online.

This examination showed that the adoption of engagement on social media by WPSL rugby clubs was consistent with the results of Mastromartino et al. (2020) and Schallhorn et al. (2022) described above during COVID-19.

6.5.4 Sport team social media content published during COVID-19

As a consequence of content shortages, clubs and leagues throughout the globe used a variety of tactics to maintain audience engagement and enhance their pre-pandemic social media aims and plans. Past match highlight packages and replays, as well as the broadcasting of e-sport tournaments, were two of the most widely used marketing strategies by sport organisations (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Thomas, 2020; Keshkar et al., 2021; WP Rugby, 2021; Li et al., 2022).

Consequently, it was important to verify with respondents what kind of information was released on social media during COVID-19, when live sporting events were cancelled. Very few respondents preferred content that advertised their club's restaurant or bar in an effort to lure customers to these facilities and generate income. Some of the respondents were resourceful in generating entertaining content that engaged users in competitions and virtual fitness videos, food programmes, etc. Thomas (2020) supported this finding by asserting that during the COVID-19 pandemic with no rugby being played, players took advantage of the situation by posting home-workout videos and challenges for other players and fans. Moreover, professional rugby players engaged everyday with followers on social media, providing fun videos and promoting social distancing and good hygiene during the COVID-19 epidemic (Sky Sport Rugby Union, 2020). Furthermore, Sajjadi et al. (2021) and Manoli et al. (2022) argue that online fitness training are rapidly expanding, and that e-sport will likely have a long-term influence on physical and recreational activities in the coming future. Live streaming has grown increasingly popular on

social media, with several sites, like Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, now offering the opportunity to live stream.

A respondent indicated that the club collaborated with three other rugby clubs to generate generic COVID-19 postings that would be published throughout the three clubs' platforms to demonstrate unity. This result provides insight into how social media were utilised as an MC tool during COVID-19, one of the study's objectives.

Data from the study revealed that sport clubs and leagues tried to continue to communicate with their fans in ways that matched pre-pandemic marketing and communication plans and goals. Additional international research revealed that some of the message's athletes communicated to their supporters had been affected by public efforts, such as those encouraging health awareness and good hygiene habits (Sharpe et al., 2020). It is also evident that social media played a significant part in this connection with fans, having a significant impact on the relationship between prominent athletes and their supporters.

As indicated in the literature, COVID-19 emphasised the relevance of social media in sport, making it a crucial means for supporters to remain connected with their teams. The findings of this study shared this sentiment as WPSL rugby clubs employed a variety of approaches to keep their audiences engaged and to improve their social media content during COVID-19.

6.6 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework depicts respondents' perceptions on social media use from WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town, South Africa (refer to Figure 6.5). The conceptual framework clarifies the most prominent factors/motives influencing social media as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town.

There are various parts to the current framework: social media external variables (positive and negative influences), PU of social media (positive and negative influences), social media PEOU (positive and negative influences), and social media behavioural intentions (positive and negative influences). This all subsequently connects into the variables that promote the usage of social media. It is imperative to highlight that the notions described here are based on the TAM (Davis et al., 1989) which was adapted as appropriate for the current investigation. The influence of social media may be recognised as a consequence of certain respondents' behaviour, but it can also be evaluated from the viewpoint of non-adopters. The degree of social media use was influenced by the other main themes as well as the perceptions and attitudes towards social media as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs. The motivating aspects affected the respondents' activity and frequency thereof on the various preferred social media platforms. Consequently, this had an effect on the initiatives executed on the various social media platforms.

6.6.1 Key social media external variables

The first component of the conceptual framework focuses on the major external variables that impact WPSL rugby club's usage of social media. Positive external factors for communicating through social media in the scope of the study were instant connection, which increased interaction and engagement, low-cost marketing medium, growth in club membership, and a popular sales and merchandising tool. Negative external factors included a lack of organisational support, lack of best practice benchmarking and the fast development of evolving platforms.

6.6.2 Perceived usefulness of social media

The second component of the conceptual framework emphasised the primary PU of social media. Positive aspects that surfaced were the ability to engage with the key internal and external stakeholders digitally during the COVID-19 lockdown, increased competitiveness online amongst rugby clubs, and access to sharable content. Sharing visuals via image and video were considered effective content types for WPSL rugby clubs. Some of the drawbacks were that WPSL rugby clubs had difficulty in measuring social media impact, and club memberships and operations were key managerial areas with limited focus being placed on social media.

6.6.3 Social media perceived ease of use

The third component of the conceptual framework concentrated on the critical perceived ease of using social media. One of the most common positive elements that arose was that the majority of platforms were easy to use and accessible and allowed for greater audience reach at any given time. Limited financial resources, inconsistent posting frequency and the inability to measure social media campaigns were all factors impacting the ease of use of social media.

6.6.4 Social media behavioural intentions

The fourth component of the conceptual framework concentrated on the most important perceived social media behavioural intents to utilise the platforms. Showcasing a sense of positivity, unity, passion and pride were key brand emotions and behavioural intentions WPSL evoked when creating content on their social media channels. Attracting sponsorships for the rugby clubs was also evident as behavioural intention behind using social media. Another positive factor was the inclusion of giveaways, better quality video, and engaging content as key methods for best practice implementation.

Negative factors included rugby clubs' limited human and financial resources towards social media, due to lack of understanding of benefits and value. In addition, COVID-19 resulted in constrained and onerous content published which further hindered the behavioural intention to set clear social media goals and strategies.

6.6.5 Factors promoting actual use of social media

In summary, the elements that encouraged the actual use of social media were the culmination of all of the previously described components of the conceptual framework. Factors included increases brand awareness of rugby clubs, and an opportunity to attract sponsors for teams while supporting information sharing and communication. Additional factors promoting the actual use were the ability to build engagement and relationships with key stakeholders through storytelling and being able to promote player recruitment.

The proposed conceptual framework for the study is outlined in Figure 6.5 below.

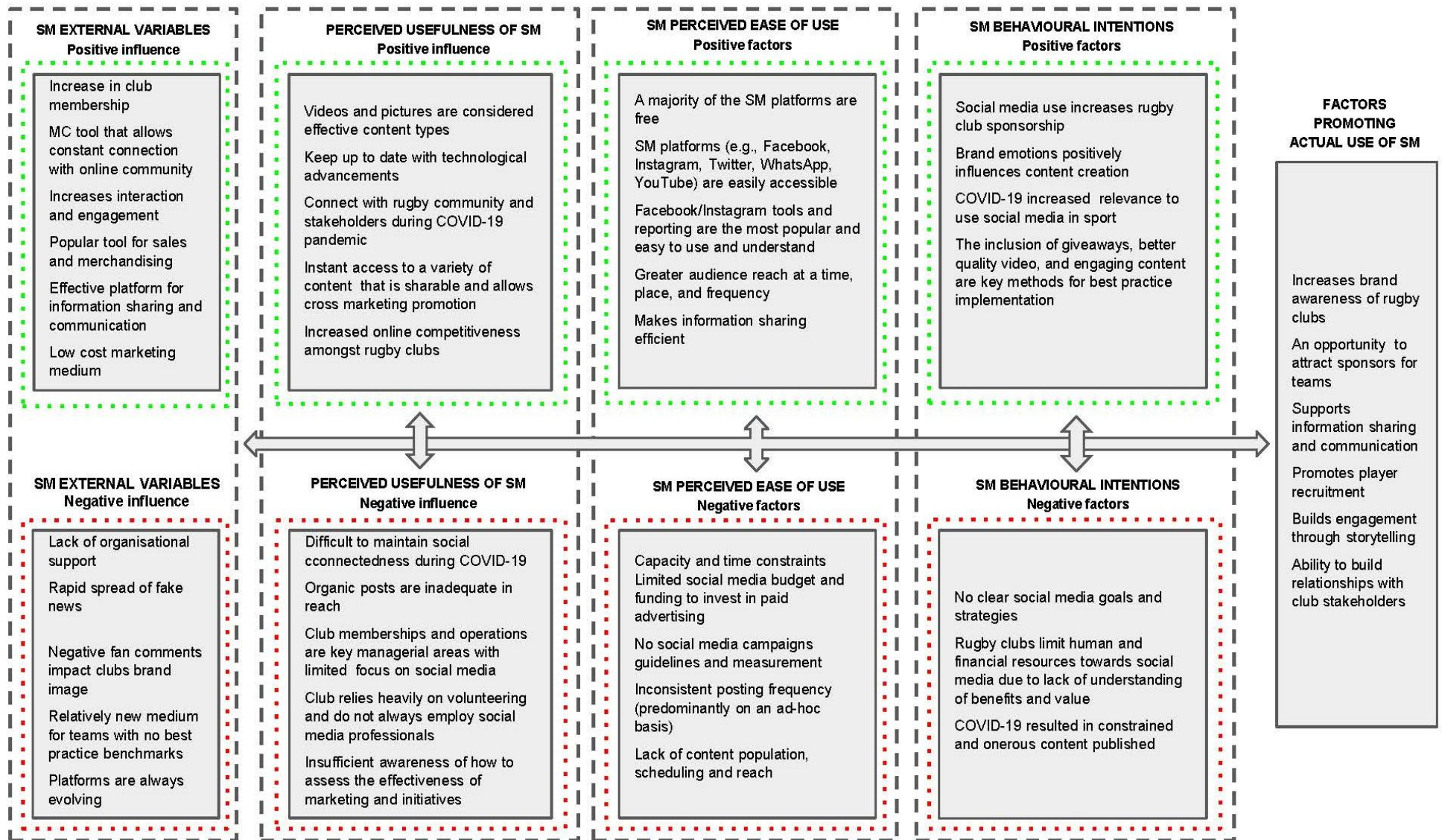


Figure 6.5: Key motives and influences shaping WPSL rugby clubs' adoption and usage of social media (SM)

Source: Author (2023)

6.7 Summary

This chapter discussed the results of the study by referring to several elements of previous studies and findings. The results revealed that WPSL rugby clubs were relatively active on social media and used them as an MC tool.

Facebook was discovered to be the most popular platform among respondents, which is similar to earlier research examining the use of social media among sport clubs, although the majority of these studies were conducted internationally. This investigation found that brand awareness, sponsor attraction, relationship building, information sharing, and communication were the major motivators for social media usage. The identification of best practice social media strategies and campaigns used by professional sport teams locally and globally was important in achieving the study objective that related to how WPSL rugby clubs utilised social media strategically as part of their MC strategies. Respondents indicated the incorporation of higher quality video and more engaging content as important methods used by professional sport teams that might be explored for local adoption. There were several advantages to using social media for sport teams, but several challenges were also evident. Funding, time, and content quality and frequency were amongst the most common and greatest challenges found. The conceptual framework for the study was also highlighted and outlined in detail.

These results were compared to those of other research to determine whether they supported or opposed the findings. The following chapter will present the conclusions and recommendations of this discussion.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed the results of this investigation. The objective of this chapter is to provide the conclusions and recommendations generated from the discussions and related to the findings from the data analysis methods undertaken in previous chapters. The research was executed based on the TAM framework, which was founded on the theoretical underpinning provided by Davis et al. (1989). Four major variables were adapted from TAM and selected to investigate WPSL rugby clubs' use of social media as an MC tool. These include PU and PEOU, behavioural intention to use social media, and the actual use of social media.

The primary purpose of this inquiry was to determine the use of social media as an MC tool for WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town, South Africa. The conclusions and recommendations are considered in relation to the study's objectives. The first objective was to determine why WPSL rugby clubs used social media as part of their MC strategy. The second was to analyse how WPSL rugby clubs used social media as an MC tool. The third objective was to establish how WPSL rugby clubs could maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy. The final objective was to determine how social media was used as an MC tool during COVID-19. This chapter concludes the study by summarising the key research findings in relation to the research aims and questions, and a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications and contributions. The chapter will also review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research.

7.2 Key findings and recommendations

The key findings reported below answer the research questions originally raised in the inquiry and meet the study's stated objectives.

7.2.1 Objective one: motives for WPSL rugby teams adopting social media use

7.2.1.1 Brand awareness

This inquiry aimed to investigate the motives for the use of social media. The current study's results indicate that South African non-professional rugby teams use social media to enhance brand awareness. Consequently, the findings of the existing study validate the conclusions of Pegoraro et al. (2017), Na et al. (2019), Joanna and Zuzanna (2020), Andreski (2022), and Ong and Leng (2022) who found that social media aid athletes and sport organisations similarly to enrich brand awareness amongst their target audience. These investigations, however, were not undertaken in South Africa and were largely based in North America and Asian cases.

Recommendations

There are numerous ways to raise brand awareness, and social media is by far one of the most effective particularly for sport brands. Brands and sport organisations are encouraged to use social media to engage their target audience, as this increases customer engagement and brand awareness. For WPSL rugby teams, greater social media engagement can indicate that more people are aware of their brand and that their marketing efforts are more valuable. This is an opportunity for the rugby clubs to effectively communicate with their audience and be exposed to new users.

7.2.1.2 Relationship building

This study demonstrated that developing relationships with both internal and external stakeholders was a major driving force for respondents to use social media as an MC tool. This aligns with international research which indicates that building relationships is a motive for social media usage for sport teams across multiple sport codes (Su et al., 2020; Frederick et al., 2021; Abeza et al., 2022; Andreski, 2022). Moreover, Andreski (2022) believes that teams should first develop relationships by using social media, which is an ideal resource for fostering and sustaining two-way interactions, exchanging knowledge, and sharing stories. As a result, this research found that relationship building was a strong motive for WPSL rugby teams' use of social media as an MC strategy.

Recommendations

Based on this conclusion, sport organisations should consider social media as an effective tool for establishing and maintaining relationships with their target audience. WPSL rugby clubs should use existing social media platforms to establish connections, which can help them extend their reach, strengthen the brand, and build a consumer base, thus, continually providing effective methods to connect with the audience and enhance engagement.

7.2.1.3 Attracting sponsors

As per previous studies, social media encouraged and garnered sponsors for European sport teams (Barbu et al., 2021; Boricheva, 2022) and Asian sport organisations (Uzma, 2019; Singh & Nimkar, 2020). Though attracting sponsors through social media was not the most important reason for using social media in this study, WPSL rugby clubs in South Africa have also adopted social media platforms to improve the value of their brands by assessing the involvement of sponsors and other partners, which is coherent with existing literature (Phua et al., 2018; Singh & Nimkar, 2020; Sharpe et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2021).

Recommendations

As previously stated, social media allows brands to build relationships with new and existing audiences; therefore, sport organisations should use social media to identify suitable sponsors as it is a way to increase a team's resources and promote community outreach. Maanda et al. (2020) agree that sport sponsorships via social media have a critical role in developing brand awareness for sport brands. WPSL rugby clubs could offer sponsors a particular amount of social media posts on their platforms while mentioning or tagging the sponsor, in addition to adding their logo as a sponsor on the teams' social media profile images.

7.2.1.4 Information and communication

Rugby clubs were unanimous in their belief that social media had a positive influence on their brands. This increased the perceived significance of the platforms as a whole. The current investigation found that respondents considered sharing information and communication as a critical motive for rugby clubs use of social media as an MC tool. The outcomes of the present inquiry are supported by studies by Annamalai et al. (2021) and Jacobs et al. (2022) who also determined that information seeking is shown to be a driver of social media usage and thus enhanced fan engagement. The above-mentioned studies found a relationship between the PU and the behavioural intention of WPSL rugby clubs using social media. Hence, it can be concluded that information sharing, and communication are favourable motives for sport teams' social media usage across various sport codes in both developed and emerging countries such as South Africa.

Recommendations

Brands and marketers should focus on ensuring that active engagement is prevalent which is mostly driven by a desire to feel connected to the brand community via connections with the brand and other fans. Sport organisations should consider continuously distributing information via social media, which may bring a deeper relationship with followers, therefore leading to a larger fan base. WPSL rugby clubs must concentrate on the types of information that are individualised and are especially valuable or unique to social media. As a result, in addition to concentrating on personalisation, they should concentrate on personalisation elements that can only be identified through social media.

7.3 Objective two: factors inducing the level of social media usage

7.3.1 Social media platforms used

The findings show that WPSL rugby teams use social media as an MC tool. The extent of social media usage ranges from a variety of platforms to consciously chosen media. WPSL rugby clubs preferred Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp, which aligns with a report by World Wide Worx (2021) that found that South African corporations are most active on Twitter, Instagram,

YouTube, and Facebook. It is worth noting that Facebook and Instagram were both used by each of the study's respondents. Parallel to a series of international studies, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are the platforms most frequently used by sport teams and athletes throughout the world (MacDonald, 2017; Kowalski & Łazorko, 2020; Hussain et al., 2021; Andreski, 2022; Doyle et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2022; Metelski & Leszczyński, 2022; Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022; Petersen-Wagner, 2022; Yoon & Pedersen, 2022; Burgers et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2023). Considering that WPSL rugby teams in South Africa employ comparable social media platforms, it can be concluded that these international findings support the findings of the present research.

Recommendations

Based on this conclusion, sport organisations and WPSL rugby clubs should consider a variety of social media platforms when engaging with their audience base. This will allow organisations to reap the benefits of the unique aspects of each of the platforms, for instance, Twitter's distinctive focus on real-time game updates and announcements. The consumption of visual data on social platforms such as Instagram and Facebook serves as an opportunity for a rugby club and its players to increase team recognition through the use of visual techniques.

7.3.2 Most effective social media platforms for sport

Given the prominence of social media use by the rugby clubs in this study, it was imperative to establish which platforms were considered the most effective. In the current study, respondents reported that Facebook was the most favoured and efficient social media MC platform for WPSL rugby teams, which was followed by Instagram. Similar findings were made in research by Pegoraro et al. (2017), Schubert and Seyffert, 2017, Phua et al. (2018), Vale and Fernandes (2018), Massonos (2019), Geurin and McNary (2021), Li et al. (2021), Nayyeri et al. (2021), Scott et al. (2021), Sharifzadeh et al. (2021), Turková (2021), Naraine et al. (2022), and Ma et al. (2023). The findings of the current study and those mentioned above suggest that sport organisations, teams, and players have similar beliefs about Facebook and Instagram as their most efficient social media platforms.

Recommendations

Instagram and Facebook are excellent platforms for engaging with followers and sharing videos that could go viral. WPSL rugby clubs and other sport organisations should consider Instagram and Facebook Live platforms for presenting real-time information on sport events, which may result in a higher level of community-wide experience. In addition, live streaming and providing real-time updates and highlight segments of a sporting event could be an efficient approach to promote this type of social media interaction for sport clubs.

7.3.3 Frequency of social media use

The key finding pertaining to social media activity frequency show most respondents posted more than once a week. Achen et al. (2017) and Esen et al. (2021) demonstrate that activity frequency varies in each instance, particular in an international context. This might imply that activity frequency is determined by the type of information accessible, and the best practices used. As a result, the findings of this study on activity frequency are equivalent to previous general organisational best practice research (Keutelian, 2022; Myers, 2022). Also, several respondents indicated Monday, Wednesday, and Friday as the most common days for them to publish material. These days are consistent with Keutelian (2022) and Myers (2022) best practice post frequency and timings for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Recommendations

When using social media, WPSL rugby clubs and other sports teams should find a balance between being informed without being obnoxious with regards to activity and posting frequency. Based on the conclusions, sport marketers should continuously test and monitor each social media platform and consider how each platform performs in alignment with best practice guidelines. For example, on Twitter a high post frequency is preferable whereas on Facebook quality content is preferable to high posting frequency, as excessive posting may hinder performance.

7.3.4 Sales and merchandising

This enquiry found that a number of respondents made use of social media as an MC tool with the objective to bring in revenue or sell merchandise. Similar outcomes were reflected in studies by Maderer et al. (2018), Horowitz (2019), Machado et al. (2020), Maguire (2021), Annamalai et al. (2021), Ristevska-Jovanovska (2021), Pereira et al. (2022), and Piché and Naraine (2022) which reported that sporting organisations and clubs across the world use social media as an MC strategy to promote online product catalogues, game tickets, and special online promotions as a sales tool to promote the merchandise of their club or brand. This study also verified that using social media for the purpose of sales and merchandising is deemed useful and can contribute towards an increase in brand recognition for WPSL rugby clubs.

Recommendations

It is recommended that sport clubs wanting to engage with their fan base on other levels through social media platforms should determine a sales strategy to increase merchandise sales online or offline. The marketplaces on Facebook and Instagram should be considered by non-professional and amateur sport organisations as an additional channel for increasing product availability and sales. Sporting organisations with mobile applications may also use the platform to advertise and increase sales by expanding product exposure and availability across different channels.

7.3.5 Advertising and branding activities

The study showed that the use of advertising and branding activities as social media MC strategies was evident amongst WPSL rugby clubs. Respondents indicated the use of branded e-newsletters, email signatures, cross-promotion with the club's restaurants and a YouTube channel as key advertising and branding activities they engaged with.

This aligns with Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018), Abeza et al. (2020), and Abon and Adebayo (2020) who discovered similar marketing and advertising strategies that might give sport organisations a competitive advantage. It is worth noting that WPSL rugby clubs had less activity in branding and marketing in comparison with other sport-related studies from an international perspective. This study found that advertising and branding activities through social media led to a higher consumer engagement level for sport teams.

Recommendations

WPSL rugby clubs and other sport organisations must consider creating a strategy for each platform they use, as every platform has its own advantages and limitations, and it is imperative to ascertain which advertising and branding approaches provide the most engaging content for a certain audience. In addition, marketers should investigate broad cross-promotion and co-branding opportunities with internal and external stakeholders with a strong social media presence to boost its club's brand and market presence.

7.3.6 Giveaways / competitions and loyalty programmes

In accordance with the findings, respondents employed giveaways and loyalty programmes to increase brand recognition. Lukowicz and Strzelecki (2020), Szczepkowski (2021), and Abeza et al. (2022) also demonstrated that the use of social media giveaways and loyalty programmes has the power to improve the relationship between a sport clubs at all levels and its target audience. The outcomes of this investigation also suggested that non-professional rugby teams look for new tactics to connect their audiences to enhance brand equity and engagement. It is also apparent that rugby clubs in developing nations participate in giveaways and loyalty programmes to a lesser extent than other sport clubs in developed nations.

Recommendations

Rugby clubs in South Africa have previously underused social media giveaways, notwithstanding the fact that they might be very effective in increasing fan engagement levels. Thus, it is recommended that WPSL rugby clubs and other rugby clubs offer a variety of incentives, which could be a good approach to incorporating other companies and expanding the competition's reach. It is also an efficient approach to reach out to new audiences and connect their brand with others.

7.3.7 Hashtags for brand awareness

The use of hashtags was shown to be extensive among all research participants. The use of a hashtag that is matched with the rugby club's name or nickname was a prevalent trend among all respondents. Another interesting discovery was that some rugby clubs incorporated their sponsor's name hashtags or the league's name hashtag in relevant content. In contrast, Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) and Doyle et al. (2022) found that the use of hashtags resulted in a statistically relevant reduction in the number of comments and likes athletes received in response to their engagement postings. This may imply that users interpret labelled content as an attempt to drive a sale as opposed to an effort to establish a connection with the brand. A study by O'Hallarn et al. (2019) highlighted that hashtags play an essential part in merging sport and social media, as well as in maintaining connection amidst online information saturation. This study concluded that hashtags for brand awareness used in this study contributed towards WPSL rugby clubs' development of an online brand community amongst its audience.

Recommendations

Sport clubs should use hashtags that are relevant and specific and should consider using as few as possible. If they are too complex, they will be challenging to find and will not be utilised by its fan base or users.

7.3.8 Social media challenges

It is important to point out that the rugby clubs in this inquiry faced a number of challenges when attempting to promote their specific clubs on social media. Key challenges identified included reach, activity frequency, cost and budget constraints, content population, seeking sponsorships, time, and negative reactions. The findings in this study are in congruence with studies by Antheunis et al. (2013), Eagleman (2013), Andreski (2022), and Mastromartino & Naraine (2022). This study therefore determined that there is an alignment in the challenges faced by local non-professional sport clubs and professional sport clubs in an international setting. Moreover, this investigation reveals an understanding among social media usage challenges underlined by WPSL rugby clubs.

Recommendations

The usage of social media has many benefits for sport teams, but it also has several challenges. Sport clubs are encouraged to constantly examine content distributed and its effectiveness across all social media platforms. This may result in acquiring critical audience insight and a better understanding of the present social media challenges faced. In addition, sport clubs should consider adopting an online tool to aid in managing, collaborating, and combining their multiple social media platforms.

7.3.9 Content preferences

Content creation constitutes one of the most essential aspects of social media success and development. The study provides insight into the content types and preferences of WPSL rugby clubs' use of social media as an MC tool. There was general unanimity among the rugby clubs that the use of visuals (image and video), behind-the-scenes footage and rugby-related content was of value to them in terms of content types and preferences. Furthermore, respondents expressed a preference for content that embodied positivity, unity, passion, and pride.

These findings are consistent with those of Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015), Andreski (2022), Ernstsson (2022), and Li et al. (2022) who identified visuals, behind-the-scenes footage, and brand-related content as content preferences for sport teams. Consequently, it can be concluded that notwithstanding the fact that this study focused on non-professional rugby teams in a developing country, the findings are comparable to professional sport teams in regard to content preferences.

Recommendations

WPSL rugby clubs and other sport organisations ought to create and include content such as live tweeting matches and giving followers a team- or game-specific hashtag to use when posting on social media to capture and encourage real-time engagements. Using memes and humorous content may also assist to humanise a sport team as this creates a platform for users to develop an interest and relate to the team on a more personal level. Sport clubs should also consider personalising themselves by demonstrating how they are making a contribution in their local communities. This includes coverage of charitable projects and initiatives that have a direct effect on fans on the ground.

7.4 Objective three: strategic use of social media as an MC strategy

7.4.1 Strategic use of social media

Findings from the study show that even though some of the rugby clubs had a social media marketing strategy, this was not enough to build upon their relationship with their fans since these strategies were not consistent for an extensive period of time. One of the key responses from the respondents was that the development of a strategy was not driven by the club itself. Therefore, this factor represents an opportunity for rugby clubs to strengthen the way social media is perceived and invest resources to strategically use social media as an MC tool.

It was evident from the findings that social media and digital technology strategies can enable rugby clubs to increase levels of consumer engagement significantly. Parganas et al. (2017), Ma (2018), Maderer et al. (2018), Belfiore et al. (2019), Jones (2021), and Obaid and Kishore (2022) established that social media will possibly provide sport teams and organisations with an affordable technique for attaining a great number of fans and intensify brand awareness and

brand equity. Consequently, it is important to illustrate how the continuing growth of social media tactics may result in short- and long-term organisational benefits for a sport club.

In the global sport market however, Maderer et al. (2018), Sahin et al. (2020), Jones (2021), Ong and Leng (2022), and Pereira et al. (2022) found that soccer clubs have included social media marketing in their marketing activities and have developed some of the best followed online sport brands in the world, drawing on the sport's extremely wide appeal. Thus, it is notable to demonstrate how continued development of social media strategies may result in short and long-term organisational advantages for a rugby club. Compared to other international studies, this inquiry has found that South African non-professional rugby teams do not execute social media strategies for extended periods, or not at all in some cases.

Recommendations

This study strongly expresses the need to expedite training for development of an appropriate social media marketing strategy for non-professional rugby clubs. The researcher suggests that rugby teams use loyalty programmes, and an innovative strategy that depends on the application of digital technology, as a way to reward fans for their commitment.

7.4.2 Social media alignment

A significant finding was the adoption of social media and their alignment with WPSL rugby clubs' overall marketing, which indicates that social media forms part of the club's overall MC strategy. Hence, social media has influenced sport in several ways, primarily as an MC and platform for sport marketing which is supported by other studies (Ma, 2018; Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Verma & Yadav, 2021).

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusion, the investigation suggests that sport clubs develop and execute relevant measures to track social media alignment with overall marketing goals to reap the advantages of digital marketing and promotion. The emergence of digital and social media marketing platforms not only permits sport clubs to diversify their existing market, but also to find new fans.

7.4.3 Appealing strategies

A research objective of this inquiry is "To establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their MC strategy." This research investigated if the selected rugby clubs followed the pattern of other global sport marketing tactics, or whether there were peculiarities in South Africa that needed adaption based on these strategies. Thus, respondents were asked if they had seen any interesting ideas on the social media pages of professional sport teams that they would like to adopt for their own rugby clubs' social media. It

was found that high-quality videos and more interesting content for social media were key elements identified by the rugby clubs. Accordingly, it is possible to infer that behind-the-scenes video and photos of the team and players; videos displaying good experiences in the team's performance; and unique images of game highlights are appealing for sport organisations and teams.

Hence, the current investigation's results indisputably suggest that sport organisations profit from the use of social media campaigns and following best practice models from professional soccer and rugby cases to enhance relationship building with its audience (Machado et al., 2020; Weimann-Saks et al., 2020; Maguire, 2021; Byon et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2022).

Recommendations

It is plausible to argue that utilising social media to offer frequent updates on the team and players, creating blogs and video channels, and organising community initiatives are all examples of new approaches to promoting a sports team and a rugby club.

7.5 Objective four: social media usage during COVID-19

7.5.1 COVID-19 impact on social media

The unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak, as well as the lockdowns connected with seeking to curb its spread, had a significant effect on both professional and amateur sport. Professional sport teams and organisations experienced direct financial losses as a result of the absence of live spectators. The study found that respondents had similar views on the pandemic's negative impact on social media participation for their respective rugby teams. Findings also highlighted that creating and sharing content was difficult and time-consuming for the rugby clubs, and that it had a negative influence on their total social media participation. This is in line with previous studies by Grix et al. (2021), MacInnes (2021), Staley et al. (2021), Li et al. (2022) and Schallhorn et al. (2022), which also identified difficulties in content creation and engagement with fans during the early phases of the pandemic. It emerged from the interviews that maintaining members' feeling of belonging despite social alienation was seen as a critical task under these testing conditions. In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges for South African sport teams, notably in terms of interaction and coordination among members.

Recommendations

Considering spectators may seek momentary social connections in the absence of live action, it is recommended that **rugby clubs and sport** leagues may need to ramp up their off-season social media content strategies.

7.5.2 Adoption of social media during COVID-19

The COVID-19 epidemic certainly pushed sport organisations to adapt and develop unique strategies to market their sport and keep up customer engagement. Despite the challenges, connectivity and interaction between rugby clubs and their fans in the study were discovered to be possible through social media, and respondent teams were able to modify their social media practices when no live sport was performed due to the worldwide pandemic. Further results indicated that the pandemic allowed the rugby clubs time to analyse and modify their social media operations and practices, whilst also regularly adapting activity frequency and contents to maintain audience engagement. This observation is reflected by Mastromartino et al. (2020) and Schallhorn et al. (2022) who also observed that one of the toughest issues for sport teams was maintaining team and fan recognition via social media. This is particularly pertinent to the current inquiry since WPSL rugby clubs investigated ways to utilise social media to communicate with fans online.

Consistent with the conclusions of the above research, this examination indicated that the adoption of social media activity by WPSL rugby clubs during COVID-19 limited the reduction in viewer engagement caused by the pandemic lockdown.

Recommendations

Sporting organisations are now compelled to invest in digital channels to keep in contact with their fans on a frequent basis. It is recommended that sport clubs utilise more video in their social media marketing strategy as video has grown in prominence among social media users, but due to COVID-19 it has only grown in popularity.

7.5.3 Sport teams' social media content published during COVID-19

In many ways, the results from the study seemed to be encouraging user engagement by implementing competitions, virtual fitness videos, and food cook-off programmes to provide a sense of entertainment for their social media audience. Similar initiatives were evident in a study by Thomas (2020), who indicated that during the COVID-19 epidemic, when rugby was not being played, players posted home training videos and challenges for other players and fans. In conclusion, WPSL rugby teams used a number of ways to keep their fans engaged and enhanced their social media content throughout COVID-19.

Recommendations

Sport teams and brands are also encouraged to modify their content strategy on social media during COVID-19 and any future global health crisis. It is also suggested that during pandemics, fitness routines and healthy behaviours be implemented as conventional content pieces to practice health and welfare.

7.6 Theoretical implications

This study connects the findings of the motivation and behavioural intention for using social media as an MC tool to the TAM (Davis et al., 1989). The outcomes from this study add to the current basis of TAM in the social media and sport contexts. Therefore, the inquiry considered the external variables in the form of positive and negative influences, PU and POEU positive and negative factors, behavioural intention positive and negative factors to use social media, and the factors promoting the actual use of social media within a sport setting. In addition, the research found additional factors associated with the TAM theory positive external variables, including increased rugby club brand awareness and memberships, low-cost marketing media, information sharing and communication, and sales and merchandising. Whereas the negative external influences included the ever-evolving technological tools, negative fan comments, spreading of fake news, no best practice benchmarking, and the lack of organisational support.

Considering the PU of social media construct of the TAM, rugby clubs identified positive influences such as video and images as the most effective content types; instant access to content that was readably sharable; ability to build relationships with the rugby club community and members; and the increase in online competitiveness amongst competing rugby clubs. The negative factors within the PU construct were identified as the lack of human resources; the deficiency of social media marketing alignment to the club; the inadequacy of organic content reach; and the adoption and impact of COVID-19 on the rugby clubs' social media promotion.

This research contributes to the existing body of literature by extending the current understanding of sport teams' social media use by presenting robust data about amateur sport teams' levels of PU. By focusing on rugby in South Africa, this inquiry addresses the research gap for studies beyond international cases for soccer, baseball, American football, cricket, baseball, and hockey social media usage. Thus, the PEOU construct positive factors within this study were the preferred status and ease of using Facebook and Instagram amongst the rugby clubs; the ability to efficiently share information; and content which allowed the teams to reach their target audience at any particular time and place. The negative PEOU factors included social media challenges such as capacity and time; limited social media budgets and paid advertising; inconsistent content posting frequency and scheduling; and lastly, minimal social media guidelines and campaign measurement.

The behavioural intentions to use social media provided several positive factors from WPSL rugby clubs including increasing and promoting sponsor brand awareness; brand emotions positively impacting content creation while implementing giveaways; and engaging video content were key best practice methods. Lastly, there was a keenness to use social media in sport during the COVID-19 lockdown, as rugby clubs had to adapt the type of content that was published to

connect with their fan base. Conversely, the negative behavioural intention factors highlighted by the rugby clubs were an absence of social media goals and strategy implementation, as well as the scarcity of human and financial resources dedicated social media due to the lack of understanding of the benefits and their overall value to brands. In addition, COVID-19 resulted in constrained and onerous content being published by the rugby clubs. In essence, these new behavioural intention variables that were integrated into the TAM theory present a more precise and practical perspective on how sport organisations may form meaningful relationships with their followers on social media while promoting their brand.

Lastly, the factors that promoted actual use of the social media construct: WPSL rugby clubs identified increased brand awareness; relationship building; information sharing and communication; and the opportunity to attract sponsors. Moreover, building engagement through social media storytelling and promoting player recruitment were also considered as factors that promoted social media usage. Recent research in the sport marketing environment investigated how technology may be used to make professional sport more attractive and enhance spectator acceptance (Goebert & Greenhalgh, 2020; Majumdar & Naha, 2021; Aboul-Dahab, 2022; Mamo et al., 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2022). However, there is a lack of studies that focus on the TAM theoretical framework within the sport industry in which rugby clubs participate. Hence, this investigation addresses a gap in the literature relating to the relationship that WPSL rugby clubs have with social media as an MC tool. This investigation has yielded substantial new insights into a relatively new issue, particularly in the African setting, which will assist sport organisations which use or intend to employ social media as an MC tool, as well as academics who are scholars of the evolution of TAM theories.

This study is unique as it is the first to empirically investigate non-professional rugby clubs' social media usage in the area of Cape Town, South Africa. Despite the fact that a significant number of sport-related researchers has emphasised the necessity of professional sport organisations using social media as an extension of conventional marketing (Barbu et al., 2019; Sahin et al., 2020; Machado et al., 2020; Guzmán et al., 2021; Faria et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2022), the effects of social media on non-professional sport have produced relatively limited research attention on marketing. Moreover, in the current investigation, the motives for social media usage, level of usage and strategic use were extensively examined, and the impacts of COVID-19 were also empirically recognised.

The current study presented a number of positive connotations between PU, PEOU and behavioural intention towards promoting actual use of social media. These discoveries verify and add to the theory that using social media positively benefits rugby clubs as an MC tool. The study also shows some negative factors that contribute to theory on the use of social media as an MC tool among South African rugby clubs.

7.7 Managerial or practical implications

This research not only benefits sport academics, but it also has practical implications for practitioners. The study's results might be valuable for managers or marketers in various sport teams and organisations as they explore the role of social media and how to use it in marketing strategy. The findings, in particular, provide important strategic insights for team marketers looking to use an online brand community on social media to attract sponsors, identify the most effective social media platforms, enhance brand awareness, develop relationships with current fans, or connect with future fans.

The study provides social media marketers with valuable insights into social media marketing initiatives of non-professional sport clubs (particularly rugby). For example, sport club marketers should attempt to create targeted and timely content around various aspects of the clubs and not only focus on match day content, to continually engage their target audience on social media. Another component of this research is that it gives direction for South African sport clubs in developing strategic use of social media strategies based on best practice measurements and approaches outlined in the study. Furthermore, sport teams should regularly evaluate the contents provided as well as the involvement of their followers to assess the efficiency of different content features. Moreover, the instant diffusion of information and communication through social media (Wang & Zhou, 2015; Machado et al., 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021; Jacobs et al., 2022) encourages social media marketers of sport clubs to benefit from including constant visual (image and video) updates of the team and players, generating blogs, giveaways, video channels, and coordinating community projects to enhance fan engagement and fan relationship management.

Practitioners should also consider the importance of quality content over quantity of content, as well as the times of day and week when content may attract the most interactions (Keutelian, 2022; Myers, 2022), all of which are important components of pioneering digital and social media strategy. Sport marketers cannot always ensure that the sport product will be available to produce content, whether it is influenced by a significant public health crisis like COVID-19, hence it is essential to avoid complacency and adopt a more active, customised social media strategy. Furthermore, the research is topical, particularly in the light of the recent pandemic, which has severely impacted many industries, and which could conceivably recur with the onset of a different virus, which has severely impacted many industries. The research examines how sport organisations, particularly rugby clubs, have dealt with the pandemic in light of their connection with their supporters. This study can contribute to organisations in South Africa, since they can use social media in their overall marketing and communications to engage users, especially during COVID-19, since the pandemic has emphasised the relevance of social media in sport, making it a crucial medium for supporters to remain connected with their teams. This makes the study's contents more relevant and trustworthy.

One of the key findings was that social media usage challenges included reach, activity frequency, cost, content population, time, and negative reactions. This also implies that sport marketing practitioners should prioritise and invest in resources to better understand their online community and audience in addition to improving their team's social media strategy to foresight potential usage challenges.

Finally, the study offers recommendations to sport organisations, in particular non-professional sport clubs, on how they can use social media as an MC tool. For example, the analysis discovered that to build or grow user interactions, a consistent degree of engagement and participation is essential. This helps sport clubs to manage their activity on social media.

7.8 Research limitations and future research

Since the research study only focused on a single sport and the teams' stakeholder perceptions, the context will have a greater influence on the results and findings; it was also limited to a solitary industry. Whereas future studies may endeavour to focus on other team or individual sports in greater depth. The study further acknowledges the limitation of geographical landscape, which only considers the South African sport market. The research only investigated club rugby teams within Cape Town area, Western Cape and does not include sport teams from the rest of South Africa. Future research may thus concentrate on other regions of the country to acquire a wider geographical perspective on social media usage among other non-professional clubs in South Africa. The global popularity of the chosen sport opens new opportunities for investigation. For example, it may be useful to compare fan engagement rates between regions or countries.

Moreover, the research only considered club rugby in South Africa and did not investigate professional rugby teams, school rugby, women's rugby, or sevens rugby. Future studies could focus on woman's club rugby in South Africa to assess the use of social media marketing.

The study is limited by only assessing social media as an MC tool and does not factor in any other marketing tools used in sport marketing such as traditional advertising, sponsorships, brand activations, sales promotion, and direct marketing. Future research directions could include digital marketing channels such as Google advertising or influencer marketing, to determine whether sport teams engage or employ those MC tools. Semi-structured interviews would have taken place face-to-face but were conducted virtually (using Google Meets and telephonic interviews) due to the COVID-19 lock-down regulations in South Africa at the time of data collection. Despite the limitations, the objective was to provide meaningful and empirical responses to concerns about the use of social media as an MC tool amongst WPSL rugby clubs and provided a solid platform for future research.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter began by summarising the research goals of the study, and then presented key findings from the discussion chapter together with recommendations. From the theoretical

framework, TAM, external variables and both positive and negative influences leading to the PU, PEOU, behavioural intention to social media usage and actual use contributed to meeting the primary objective of this study. The primary objective was to determine WPSL rugby clubs' use of social media as an MC tool.

The results imply that social media MC does have a great deal of potential for rugby clubs. Many of the study's key findings show that brand awareness, sponsor attraction, relationship building, and information sharing, and communication were primary drivers for social media use. Facebook and Instagram were identified as the most effective social media platforms, which concurs with international studies (Li et al., 2021; Naraine et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2023). Incorporating better quality video and more engaging content was highlighted as a key method for best practice implementation. COVID-19's impact on rugby clubs' social media usage resulted in constrained and onerous content which negatively affected social media engagement.

It was established that utilising particular content on social media that focuses on the use of visuals, behind-the-scenes footage and rugby related content was prominent and corroborates qualitative studies on professional sport teams (Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Andreski, 2022; Ernstsson, 2022). Another key finding was that social media reach, activity frequency, cost and budget constraints, content population, seeking sponsorships, time, and negative reactions were amongst the prominent social media usage challenges WPSL rugby clubs faced.

Overall, the research leads to a better understanding and awareness of the relationship between social media and sport marketing in South Africa. This study has substantial theoretical and practical implications by contributing to the TAM and developing the growing body of knowledge in South Africa on consumer behaviour, sport, and digital marketing.

The results further indicate that specialised content methods are needed to increase the validity of sport fan engagement brand emotions such as unity, positivity, passion and pride. The investigation also suggests that online content communication techniques should alter between various aspects of the club and not only focus on match day content. This study is beneficial because it will help sport brands, non-professional sport clubs, organisations and social media marketers improve their market presence by ensuring that their target audiences are better defined, and that they are adapted to technology advancements for enhancing the efficacy of MC strategies. These findings are valuable for both academics and practitioners. Hence, it can be concluded that WPSL rugby clubs use social media as an MC tool. The level to which they do so is impacted by external variables that have both positive and negative effects on the factors that promote actual usage. The study was able to establish a link between the rugby clubs' usage of social media and the positive results produced from using these platforms as strategic MC tools.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

Research title: Social media as a marketing communication tool for Western Province Super League rugby clubs

Name of organisation:

Participant designation:

Date:

Brief Introduction and explanation of the interview

Although the value of studying sport marketing and its connection with social media are clear based on past international research studies, there is a lack of literature within the South African context addressing sport teams' use of social media as an MC tool. Therefore, this makes the present study important in the South African sport setting.

The study will address research gaps as there is a need to analyse how social media as a marketing communications tool are used by selected club rugby teams.

WPSL rugby clubs were selected for this study because each of the clubs are well known community-based rugby clubs which play in the top divisions of the Western Province Rugby Super League. Furthermore, the clubs each engage with social media platforms and have a suitable online fan base to analyse within the present study.

The main purpose of this study is to analyse the use of social media as a marketing communication tool for WPSL rugby clubs in Cape Town. Further objectives are to determine why WPSL clubs are using social media as part of their marketing strategy; to analyse how WPSL rugby clubs are using social media as a marketing communications tool; to establish how WPSL rugby clubs can maximise the strategic use of social media as part of their marketing communication strategy; and to analyse how social media were used as a marketing tool during COVID-19.

Prior to the research study, participants will be required to complete an informed consent data collection form that needs to be signed before commencing with the interviews/data collection. In addition, a permission letter will be received from each of the rugby clubs that have agreed to participate in the study, granting access to the sample population to conduct the semi-structured interviews. It is important to note that participating in the research study is completely voluntary and participants will be guaranteed that they will not be harmed by any situation during the interview process. Participants' information provided will not be passed on to a third party and the participants' identities will not be revealed to the public. Participants can decide to withdraw from

the study at any time or decide to not answer a question if they do not feel comfortable with it, or choose not to participate. Lastly, data will be collected and recorded honestly, professionally and without any misrepresentation.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Introduction and background to social media use: We will start the interview with some questions to find out more detail about the club's social media use.

- 1.1 What value is there in using social media marketing communication channels in marketing the rugby club?
- 1.2 What is the primary purpose of having a social media presence for your club?
- 1.3 Which social media platforms are you currently using and why?
- 1.4 How often do you post on social media, and what type of content do you post on your social media platforms?

2. STRATEGY

- 2.1 Could you elaborate if the rugby club has a social media strategy in place?
- 2.2 If not, are there particular reasons as to why the club does not have a strategy in place?
- 2.3 What would convince you to design a targeted social media strategy as a means of marketing promotions?
- 2.4 Who is responsible for planning, executing and measuring marketing performance of your social media strategy?
- 2.5 What social media marketing communication strategies can be identified to maximise the team's marketing efforts?
- 2.6 What social media goals are in place, and what do you hope to achieve using social media for the rugby club?
- 2.7 How does social media marketing fit with your current marketing strategy?
- 2.8 Who is your target audience? Do you make use of a social media scheduling tool when posting content across your social media channels?
- 2.9 If yes, which tool do you make use of and how has this improved your social media management process and improved your marketing outputs and efficiency?
- 2.10 How does your social media strategy align with the rugby club's organisational goals?
- 2.11 What impact does social media have on the way fans have purchased team merchandise and apparel?
- 2.12 How is social media used as a marketing communication tool to generate sales for the rugby club?
- 2.13 Can you share any insights regarding the integration of an e-commerce component with your social media platforms?

3. MEASUREMENT/ ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 How are you currently measuring the success of your online campaigns?
- 3.2 Which of the social media platforms do you consider the most effective in promoting the rugby club?
- 3.3 How do you measure ROI and define success with your social media strategy?
- 3.4 What challenges do you face in your social media promotions?

4. BUDGET

- 4.1 Do you have a social media budget?
- 4.2 If yes, how often do you use paid ads on social media or boost posts to reach a larger target audience?

5. CONTENT & GUIDELINES

- 5.1 How do you decide on what type of content gets posted on your social media channels?
- 5.2 What social media guidelines are in place that assist in monitoring social media content that appears on the club's platforms should you be faced with a sensitive matter?
- 5.3 What emotions do you hope to bring across through your brand's visuals and messaging on social media?
- 5.4 What type of content types works best for you and how does it appeal to your target audience?

BEST PRACTICE

- 6.1 What is your opinion on professional sport teams' social media marketing strategies?
- 6.2 What are your experiences with exploring the social media pages of professional sports teams?
- 6.3 What are most appealing professional sport team social media pages that could see yourself implementing as strategies on your rugby club's social media platforms?
- 6.4 Are there any specific examples of these campaigns that you would like to share?

7. COVID-19 PRACTICE

- 7.1 How did COVID-19 impact your social media activity?
- 7.2 How have you adapted your social media practice during COVID-19?
- 7.3 What type of content were you publishing on your social media platforms during COVID-19 when live sports were cancelled?

8. BRANDING

- 8.1 How do you incorporate hashtags on your social media platforms to enhance brand recall and awareness?
- 8.2 How do you go about promoting your social media channels to enhance brand awareness, especially in e-newsletters or email signatures?
- 8.3 Could you share any insights you've used, such as competitions or loyalty programs, to engage users on your social media channels?

APPENDIX B: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



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Office of the Chairperson Research Ethics Committee	FACULTY: BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
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The Faculty's Research Ethics Committee (FREC) on **20 October 2020**, ethics **Approval** was granted to **Justin Marthinus (211212733)** for a research activity **Master of Marketing** at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Title of dissertation/thesis/project:	Social media as a marketing communication tool for Western Province Super League rugby clubs Lead Supervisor (s): Prof B Knott and Prof R Duffett
---------------------------------------	---

Comments:

Decision: **APPROVED**

 Signed: Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee	21 October 2020 Date
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APPENDIX C: COPY EDITOR CERTIFICATE

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24 March 2023

To whom it may concern

This is to certify that I have copy-edited the following thesis by Mr Justin Marthinus

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR WESTERN PROVINCE
SUPER LEAGUE RUGBY CLUBS

Please note that this does not cover content, conceptual organisation or textual
changes made subsequent to the editing process.

Best regards



KEN BARRIS

APPENDIX D: TURNITIN ORIGINALITY REPORT

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR WESTERN PROVINCE SUPER LEAGUE RUGBY CLUBS

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