

Module 3. Sport Event Brand Communications

Unit 3.3

Introduction

This module analyses the core aspects of effective brand communication strategies for sports events. By module's end, you will master crafting compelling plans to connect with your audience and elevate sports event brand communication. The concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC) takes central stage, enhancing brand impact across diverse channels. The second part focuses on essential steps for successful campaign planning and communication channels. The chapter concludes by delving into execution strategies like social media and alternative communication activations.

Brand communication: theories, models, strategies

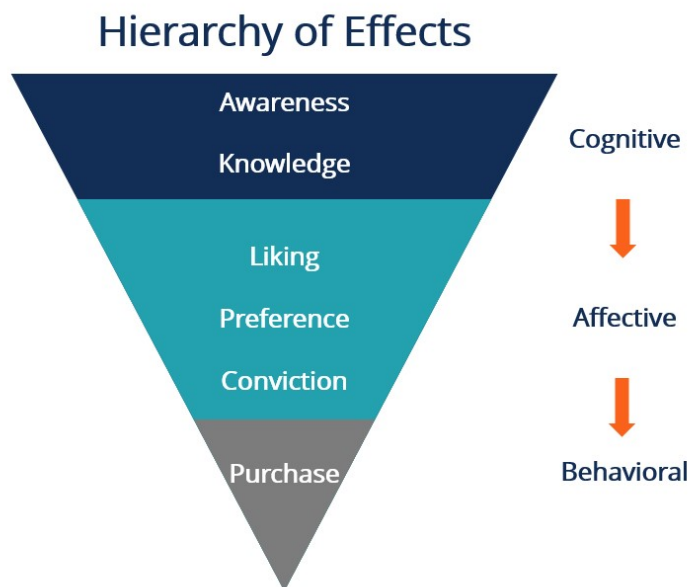
Hierarchy of effects theory

The hierarchy of effects theory explains the process through which communication impacts on consumer behaviour, leading from product unawareness to liking the product and making a purchase decision. Developed by Lavidge and Steiner in 1961, this theory is grounded in behavioural psychology and comprises three main stages: cognitive (awareness and knowledge of our product), affective (liking, preference, and conviction to consume), and behavioural (purchase behaviour). The stages outline how consumers progress from becoming aware of a brand to forming preferences and making purchase decisions.

The hierarchy of effects theory comprises three main stages. Identify them:

- **Cognitive**
- **Affective**
- **Behavioural.**
- Reasoning.

Figure 1. Hierarchy of effects



Source: Corporate Finance Institute [CFI], 2021, <https://bit.ly/45m39in>.

Pull and push strategies

Consumer behaviour is shaped by two primary strategies: pull and push. These strategies are often integrated into marketing communication plans. Pull strategies use brand communication to attract consumers to products through available channels, encouraging purchases and positive actions. Advertising, public relations, sales promotions, direct marketing, and social media fall under this strategy. On the other hand, push strategies target distribution channels like wholesalers and retailers to facilitate product movement, relying on the organisation's sales force. Both strategies are used together in integrated marketing communication programmes to enhance brands and achieve business objectives, each contributing uniquely to communication efforts (Fetchko *et al.*, 2018).

Creative strategy

Creative strategy encompasses key decisions regarding what and how to communicate with the target audience. It comprises three integral components: the message strategy, presentation strategy, and execution strategy, all of which work together to capture audience attention and effectively convey messages. This stage of communications planning assigns a distinctive 'voice' to the brand by shaping messages tailored to the target market (Wei and Jiang, 2005).

Integrated marketing communication (IMC)

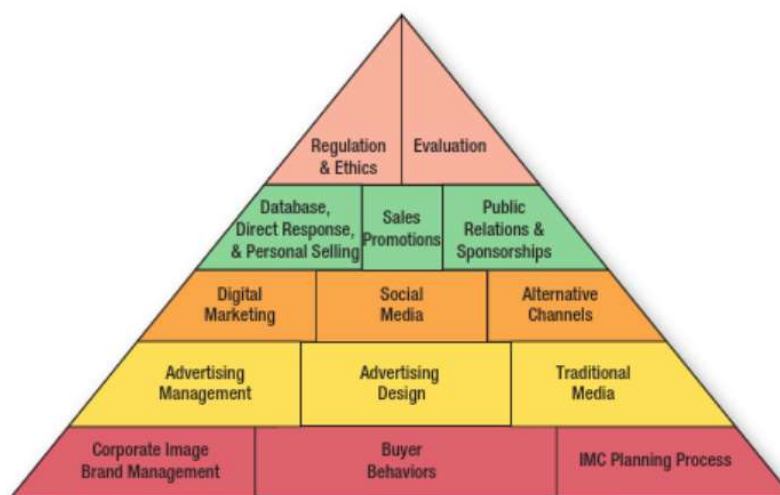


Integrated marketing communications (IMC) is a comprehensive strategy for brand communication that coordinates all marketing communication tools, avenues, and sources within a company, to create a seamless programme that maximises impact on customers and stakeholders while keeping costs feasible. The increase in communication channels beyond the traditional media (TV, newspapers, radio, magazines, posters, etc.) in sport events, including digital platforms like the Internet and social media, has led to the challenge of maintaining message consistency across these channels (Fetchko *et al.*, 2018).

IMC addresses the need for coordination due to increased competition, audience fragmentation, and the importance of consistent identity and brand promises. Ensuring brand consistency across diverse media channels is vital, aiming to reinforce the events' brand position regardless of the medium used. The benefits of IMC include synergy among different platforms, reducing contradictory messages that can arise from lack of coordination. In contrast to disjointed approaches, IMC strives for complementary messaging across all communication tools, enhancing the overall impact of brand communications.

The process of implementing brand communication campaigns in sport events involves the following key steps: defining the target market, setting clear objectives, establishing the budget, deciding on the integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategy and tactics, executing the campaign, and, finally, assessing and evaluating its effectiveness (Clow and Baack, 2022).

Figure 2. IMC process



Source: Clow and Baack, 2022, p. 33.

Case Study: Beach Soccer Stars



A typical case of IMC implementation in small sports events can be observed in 'Beach Soccer Stars,' a beach soccer tournament for young players that has been successfully organised at the Athens Beach Marathon in Greece in the previous years. The organisers set communication goals primarily focused on informing all youth football teams in the Prefecture of Athens, Attica. Their objective was to establish a tournament with a distinct communication identity, encompassing elements such as sand, seaside fun, fair play, coastal and environmental protection, and a delightful experience for both children and attendees including parents, friends, and visitors. They proceeded with a low-cost communication campaign, utilising communication sponsorships, partnerships, email marketing, networking, guest celebrities, social media (Facebook, Instagram), and free press publicity. The campaign was executed with remarkable success, featuring the tournament's coverage on the country's prominent sports channel (Novasports) with unique logo and identity, specific features, broadcasts, videos, and interviews. It also received coverage from popular sports websites, a dedicated presence on Facebook and Instagram, along with regular press releases and announcements. Message frequency was heightened before and during the deadline days for children and teams to decide on participation, as well as during the sponsorships promotion and playing period. The participation exceeded the expectations of the organisers with fifty teams and others on the waiting list who could not fit into the programme. Upon the event's conclusion, a communication report was generated, detailing metrics such as likes, impressions, broadcasts, and videos aired on the sports channel, which was shared with the event's sponsors (Neolaia, 2016).

Figure 3. Stelios Giannakopoulos, former Greece football international, and UEFA EURO 2004 winner as a guest celebrity



Source: Football Academies, (n. d. a), <https://bit.ly/3rFompN>.

Figure 4. Cheerleaders programme at Beach Soccer Stars



Source: Football Academies, (n. d. b), <https://bit.ly/3ZL1TnC>.

2. Brand communication channels and campaigns

Brand communication elements

Brand elements, often referred to as brand identities, encompass trademarkable elements that establish and set an event or league brand apart. Key components include brand names, URLs, logos, symbols, characters, spokespeople, slogans, jingles, packages, and signage (Weszka, 2011).

The brand mantra

A brand mantra is a concise, three-to-five-word phrase that encapsulates the essential essence of a brand's positioning, akin to its core promise. It serves to provide a clear understanding of the brand's representation to both internal employees and external marketing partners, guiding their actions accordingly (Bhasin, 2023). For example, UEFA, the European football authority and competition organiser, uses a 'we care about football' message in all their communication and activities.

Figure 5. UEFA's brand mantra



Source: [untitled image of UEFA's brand mantra], (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/3S8vQfV>.

A brand mantra is

- **A concise, three-to-five-word phrase that encapsulates the essential essence of a brand's positioning, akin to its core promise.**
- A extensive definition, three-to-five-paragraphs phrase that encapsulates the essential essence of a brand's positioning, akin to its core promise.

Sport event brand names

Brand names communicate efficiently, allowing customers to quickly grasp their meaning or recall them from memory. Unlike lengthy ads or sales interactions, brand names work swiftly. Choosing a brand name involves considering six crucial factors: memorability, meaningfulness, likability, transferability, adaptability, and protectability (Manoli *et al.*, 2022).

Robin Hood Marathon, for example, is the marathon race organised in Nottingham since 1981. The brand name Robin Hood evokes the hero Robin Hood and the connection with the city of Nottingham, making recall and memorisation easy.

Figure 6. Nottingham Marathon's brand and name



Source: [untitled image of Nottingham Marathon's brand and name], (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/3RW7eqB>.

URLs, logos, and symbols

URLs, logos, and symbols contribute significantly to brand equity and awareness alongside the brand name. Event logos vary from stylised corporate names to entirely unrelated abstract designs. Noteworthy examples encompass event and league brand logos like the Olympic rings, the Premier League’s lion, and the UEFA Champions League’s star ball (Anagnostou and Tzetzis, 2021).

Figure 7. Paris 2024 logo



Source: [untitled image of the Paris 2024 logo], (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/3RW7eqB>.

Figure 8. The Premier League’s lion



Source: [untitled image of the Premier League’s lion], (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/3Fa9Klu>.

Figure 9. The UEFA Champions League logo



Source: [untitled image of the UEFA Champions League logo], (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/46FB4n5>.

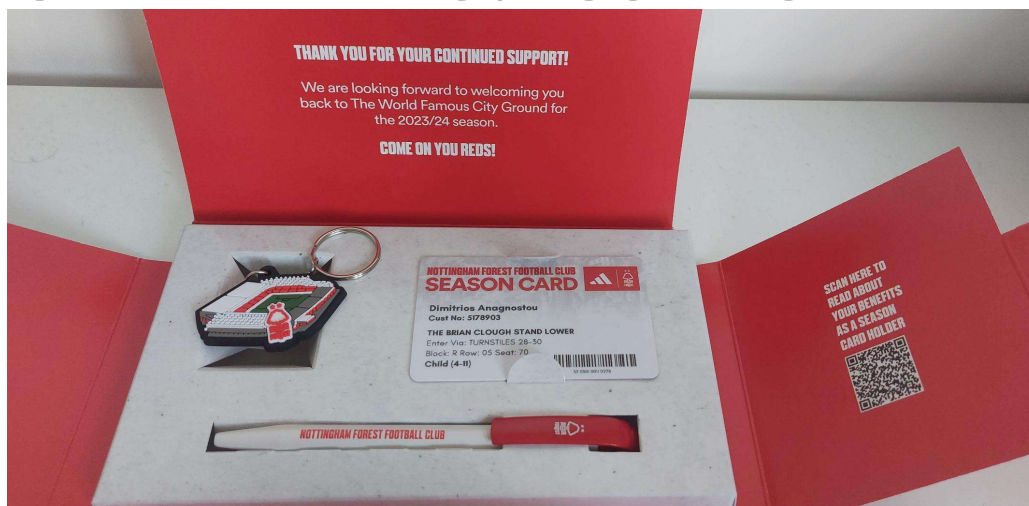
Slogans, jingles, and anthems

Slogans are concise statements used in advertising and packaging to convey a brand's essence. Like brand names, they play a crucial role in brand recognition and consumer understanding. An example is the NBA's slogan 'I love this game,' which captured the passion of basketball for many years. Jingles and competition anthems, on the other hand, are musical compositions that function as extended slogans, leaving lasting impressions. They convey brand messages through music and emotions. The UEFA Champions League anthem is played before UEFA Champions League matches and is associated with the excitement and prestige of the tournament. It has a distinctive melody and is a recognisable element of the competition (Anagnostou and Tzetzis, 2021).

Packaging

Packaging serves critical purposes for sport leagues, clubs, and events, such as brand recognition and information transport. Selecting visual and practical packaging components is vital. For example, Nottingham Forest FC uses the packaging of their season tickets as a communication tool for their events (Underwood *et al.*, 2001).

Figure 10. Communication through packaging for Nottingham Forest FC matches



Source: Anagnostou M., 2023, Nottingham Forest F.C. Season Ticket Package (personal observation research picture).

Traditional brand communication channels

TV

Despite the internet's emergence and alternative viewing options, television advertising still holds relevance and reach. Certain events leverage the power of self-advertising within other prominent events, capitalising on their immense impact and reach. For instance, the Paris 2024 Olympic Games were highlighted during Eurosport's coverage of the World Athletics Championship, effectively piggybacking on an already engaged audience. At a local level, leagues, events, and competitions benefit from promotion by domestic and national TV networks, expanding their visibility and resonance (Clow and Baack, 2022).

Figure 11. Paris 2024 advertised on Eurosport channel and World Champion Athletics



Source: Anagnostou, 2023. An event advertising example, (personal observation research screenshot/picture)

Radio

Radio continues to be a potent platform due to its steady presence in cars and public spaces. Effective radio ads for sport events could employ repetition, sound effects, and catchy tunes for memorable messages. Radio's format-based approach and DJ-listener relationships enhance its efficacy, making it valuable for local events with cost-efficient, tailored ad options.

Out-of-home advertising

Out-of-home (OOH) advertising encompasses various formats beyond billboards, such as ads on taxis, buses, park benches, sports arena fences, and major events. Technological advancements have enhanced OOH advertising, with global positioning systems, wireless communication, and digital displays transforming the field. LED technology enables the creation of animated videos and dynamic visuals that can change electronically (Clow and Baack, 2022).

Figure 12. English FA advertise England U21 matches at Premier League Games



Source: Anagnostou, 2023. An event advertising example, (personal observation research picture).

Newspapers and magazines

Despite the new digital media, smaller local event organisers could find newspaper ads effective. Magazines drive purchase intentions and enhance the effectiveness of other media. Online versions are also gaining traction. Social media interactions with magazines, such as on Facebook, further extend their reach. Specialised magazines provide distinctive opportunities for event organisers seeking to connect with their target audience. For instance, printed and digital specialised magazines focused on specific interests like running can prove highly effective in attracting participants to related events such as running races.

Figure 13. Special Runners' magazine



Source: [untitled image of special Runner's magazine], (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/3RMNPIx>.

Public relations

Public relations for sports events, leagues, and competitions involves strategically managing communication and relationships to enhance their image, reputation, and public perception. It encompasses activities like creating positive narratives, fostering engagement, and building connections with stakeholders such as fans, sponsors, media, athletes, and the public. This includes media relations, crafting press releases and media kits, social media management, crisis handling, athlete and participant relations, community engagement, sponsorship activation, fan engagement, promotional events, blogs, podcasts, content creation, and forming strategic partnerships. Public relations plays a pivotal role in upholding a positive brand image, increasing visibility, attracting audiences, and forging lasting connections with fans and stakeholders of the events and competitions (Manoli, 2017).

Public relations for sports events, leagues, and competitions involves _____ to enhance their image, reputation and public perception.

Answer: strategically managing communication and relationships.

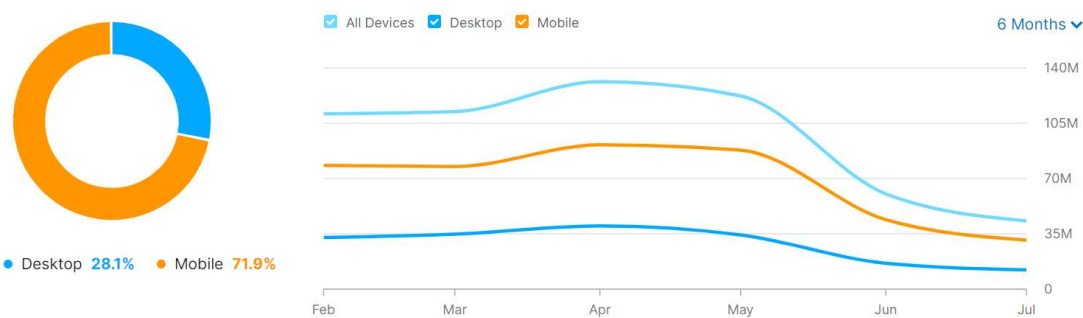
Digital brand communication channels

Within the landscape of digital strategies in brand communication, a diverse array of forms exists, each offering potential benefits to sport event managers. Our intention is to carefully curate the most pertinent strategies, tailoring them to the distinct requirements of brand communications within the realm of sport events, leagues, and competitions.

Events' websites

Websites serve as a distinct communication channel, appealing to a broad spectrum of an organisation's audience. Websites form the central hub of an organisation's online presence, attracting a general audience. The flexible design of websites allows for addressing diverse audience needs simultaneously. Websites allow users to explore offerings at their own pace. Unlike linear mediums such as TV or radio ads, websites provide timeless content that remains relevant over time. Moreover, website interaction demands less commitment compared to linear platforms, enabling users to navigate content without constraints. The official website of the NBA (nba.com), for example, is one of the most popular sport leagues websites and most of their visitors (71.9%) connect through their mobile.

Figure 14. The traffic for the NBA website



Source: Screenshot from <https://www.semrush.com/website/nba.com/overview/> on July 2023

Widgets

A widget refers to a self-contained interactive element embedded within a website or digital platform. Widgets offer specific functionalities, information, or features without requiring users to leave the current page. They enhance engagement, provide real-time updates, and deliver dynamic content in advertising. Examples include interactive quizzes, live social media feeds, embedded videos, weather updates, countdown timers, product recommendations, live chats, buttons, dialog boxes, pop-ups, drop-down menus, icons, scroll bars, resizable window borders, progress indicators, selection boxes, windows, cut-off menus, menu bars, switches, forms, and event calendars (Clow and Baack, 2022).

Figure 15. FIFA World Cup widget

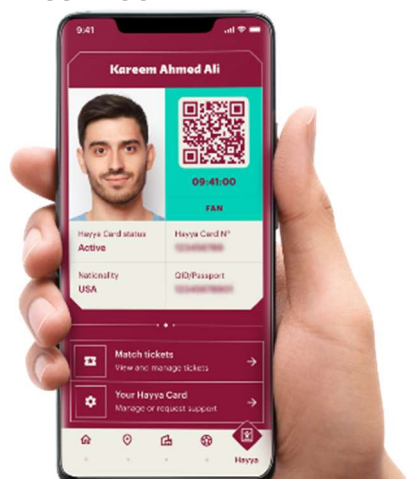


Source: ScoreBat, (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/3F8m99j>.

Mobile apps

Mobile applications, commonly known as apps, hold enormous potential for engaging audiences consistently. They simplify interactions and enhance user experiences. Creating an app can be a strategic move for event brands to attract and retain fans and participants, though success is not guaranteed by app development alone. Apps function as functional bridges between fans or participants and sports events, offering easy accessibility. Using QR codes, it is possible to provide engaging content like behind-the-scenes videos and entertainment, collect data for permission marketing, and boost customer engagement. For example, AKQA developed the official app for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, providing information for the event and streamlining visa applications through the innovative Hayya to Qatar 2022 digital fan ID. This app's scalability and integration of services create a lasting digital infrastructure for future events, extending its significance beyond the tournament (The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, n. d.).

Figure 16. The Hayya App of FIFA Qatar 2022 World Cup



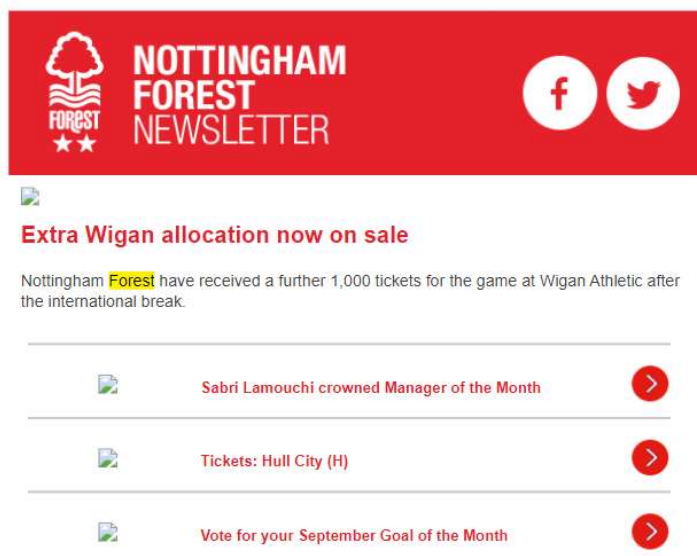
Source: FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3RQhAba>.

Email marketing and newsletters

Email marketing is a precise communication method, effectively reaching potential customers through tailored messages. Automated drip campaigns deliver tailored emails at intervals, while demographics segment the mailing list. Event-targeting emails for specific occasions are often personalised according to browsing history. Additionally, weather-targeting uses GPS and geo-targeting, triggered by mobile phone location indicators, to send contextually relevant emails, such as rain gear offers on rainy days.

Email newsletters are digital communications sent via email to a group of recipients, offering curated content, updates, promotions, and relevant information about specific topics, brands, organisations, or industries. These newsletters often encompass a blend of text, images, links, and interactive elements, with content tailored to recipients' interests. Event organisers use email newsletters as a means of communication. For instance, sports leagues or clubs may send newsletters to stakeholders and registered members monthly for their match days and events (Keller, 2019).

Figure 17. Nottingham Forest FC digital newsletter



Source: Anagnostou, 2023, screenshot from personal email observation research.

Podcasts

The accessibility of podcasts without charge facilitates extensive dissemination, while the economical production of episodes supports frequent content creation. Audiences possess the ability to engage with podcast creators by forwarding queries and feedback through email or by interacting on various communication platforms, including the creator's website or social media. Creation of podcasts could prove valuable to event organisers like in the case of Wimbledon official Podcast (English *et al.*, 2023).

Figure 18. The Wimbledon official podcast



Get the lowdown on all the latest goings-on at Wimbledon with *Between the Lines*, an Official Wimbledon Podcast.

Source: screenshot of Wimbledon (<https://www.wimbledon.com/>).

Web advertising of events

Web advertising provides a highly effective means of reaching consumers, particularly the younger and internet-savvy demographic. Online advertising stands as the fastest-growing medium. Currently, banner ads make up only 22% of online advertising, as marketers infuse banners with videos, widget applications, or targeted display ads to enhance click-through rates. These automated exchange systems could enable precise targeting for sport event consumers.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

SEO or Search Engine Optimization is a digital marketing strategy aiming to enhance a website's visibility and ranking on search engine result pages (SERPs). It involves optimising content, structure, and online presence to attract organic traffic from search engines like Google. On-page optimisation improves individual web pages through content, keywords, headings, and internal links, while off-page optimisation focuses on building credibility through reputable backlinks and social media engagement. Effective SEO can elevate organic traffic, visibility, and customer engagement, but it necessitates continuous adaptation to evolving search engine algorithms and user behaviour (Sharma *et al.*, 2019).

Brand communication in social media

Social media networks have transformed the way people interact, spanning personal connections, businesses, and even strangers. Instant communication enables buzz generation and sophisticated interactions. Social media includes digital tools for online socialising, while social networks are structures linking individuals and organisations. As social media becomes the norm for interaction and content creation, understanding online consumer behaviour is crucial for sports organisations, given the changing dynamics of sports delivery and consumption. Recognising fans' pivotal role in branding, sports events and leagues invest in online relationships, engagement, and branding

strategies. This drive towards uniqueness and engagement has prompted sport events organisations to expand their online presence across platforms (Filo *et al.*, 2015).

Online communities

Social networking websites are not the only option for using social media. Online communities are another channel for harnessing the passion of fans. Online communities within social media appeal to high-involvement fans by enabling them to consume and create content about their favourite teams. Fan forums or communities are often a component of sports news or blog sites, giving event fans or participants a voice to share opinions and interact with other fans and participants (Clow and Baack, 2022).

Video marketing

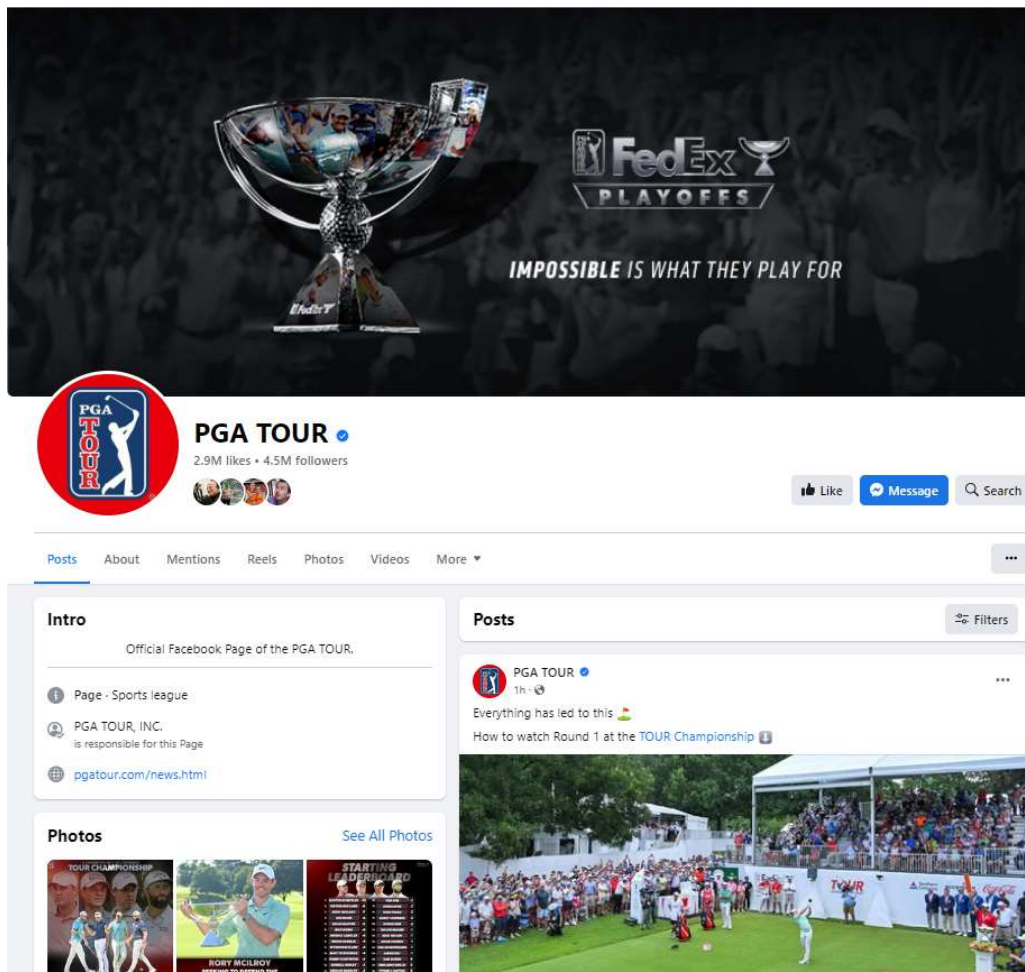
Video marketing has become a significant avenue for reaching consumers, with around 60% of the US population and 75% of internet users engaging in digital videos. YouTube and other videosharing platforms present both opportunities and challenges for social media marketing, witnessing increased spending on video advertising. Research indicates that consumers are receptive to online video ads, with longer average viewing times compared to television. Events and leagues share various videos through their social media channels, including ads and behind-the-scenes content. These channels also feature instructional videos providing useful information to consumers or videos with public relations and cause-related marketing messages to generate goodwill (Clow and Baack, 2022).

Facebook

Facebook boasts a staggering 2.95 billion monthly active users as of Q3 2022, positioning itself as the world's largest app and marking an increase from 2.91 billion users a year prior. Metrics pivotal for gauging the impact of Facebook advertising campaigns encompass reach, which breaks down into organic, paid, and viral; followers, indicating message reach and popularity. Likes and shares reflect customer engagement and message virality. A Facebook page is the main tool for many sport events around the world due to its popularity (Parganas *et al.*, 2017).



Figure 19. The PGA Tour Facebook page

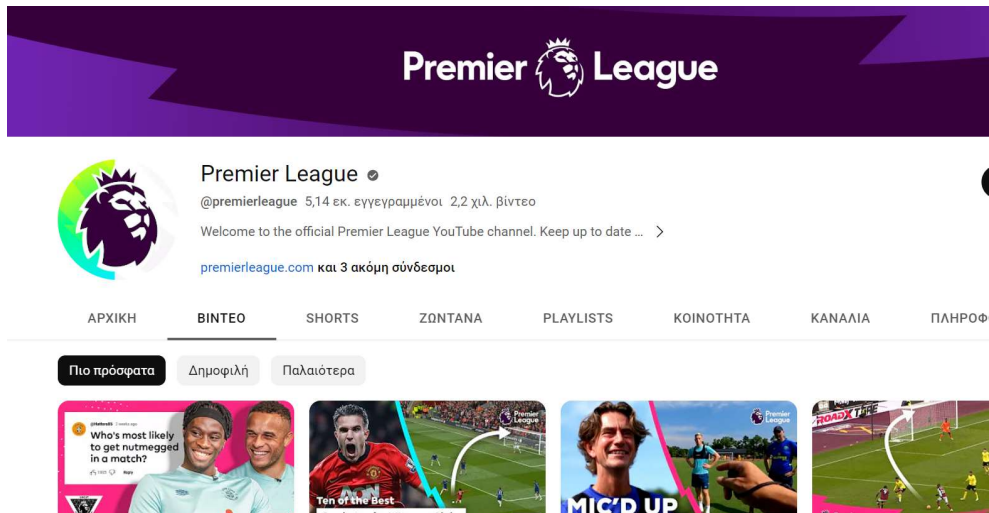


Source: screenshot of Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/PGATour>).

YouTube

YouTube has emerged as a rapidly expanding domain for social media engagement, primarily centred around video content. With a staggering five billion daily video views, YouTube has become a hotspot for user-generated videos. This surge in video content has provided an innovative platform for fans to connect with brands, transforming them from passive consumers to fervent enthusiasts who employ videos to express their opinions (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2011).

Figure 20. The official YouTube channel of Premier League special video section

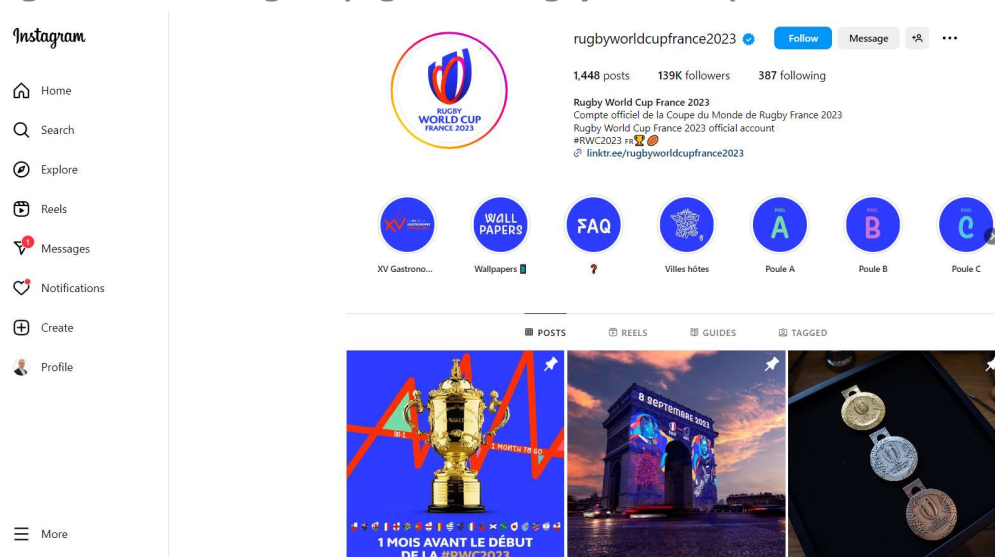


Source: screenshot of YouTube (youtube.com).

Instagram

Instagram, a mobile platform for sharing photos and videos, experienced a significant surge in popularity, bolstered by its ownership by Facebook. The user base comprises young, affluent, and female individuals, with 60% engaging with the platform daily. This rise of Instagram has prompted brand marketers to strategically navigate its potential, with contests and crowdsourcing emerging as favoured strategies, particularly for photo-based engagement (Parganas *et al.*, 2017).

Figure 21. The Instagram page of the Rugby World Cup 2023 in France

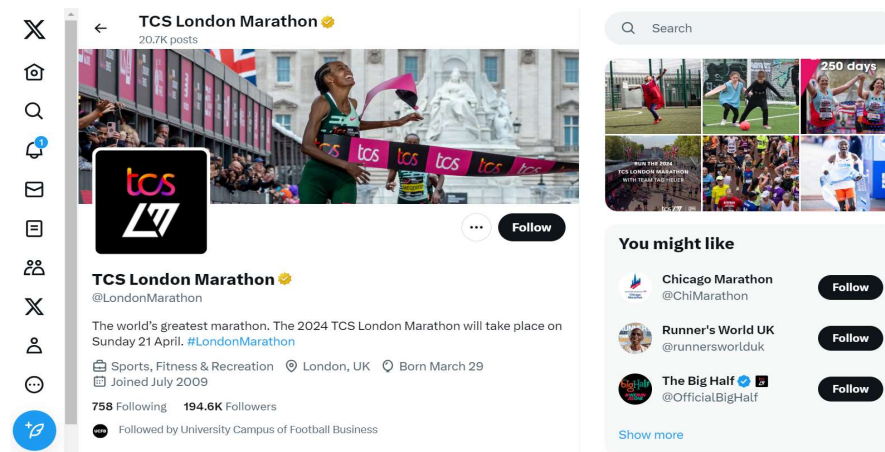


Source: screenshot of Instagram (Instagram.com).

Twitter or X

In July 2023, Elon Musk initiated the rebranding of Twitter, renaming it as 'X.' The transformation included a new 'X' logo on its mobile apps for iPhone and Android, as well as changes to its website and Twitter accounts. Twitter (X) serves as a platform with a diverse audience. Its user base exhibits a higher rate of college degrees compared to national averages. Marketers benefit from Twitter's capability to monitor customer conversations about their brand, engaging with customers or gathering insights for analysis. This practice generates valuable information on customer perceptions. It is crucial to respond to followers' inquiries and comments. While not every tweet necessitates a response, dedicating resources to monitoring and engaging on Twitter proves valuable in maintaining customer interaction and brand image (Parganas *et al.*, 2017).

Figure 22. The London Marathon Twitter (X) page



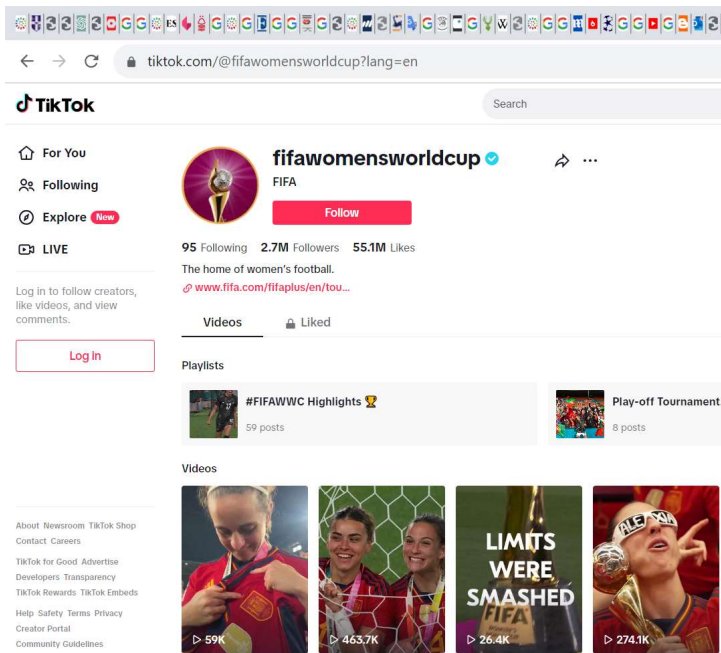
Source: screenshot of Twitter (twitter.com).

TikTok

TikTok is a mobile-based video-sharing app that enables users to create and share short-form videos on various subjects, offering creative tools like filters, stickers, voiceovers, sound effects, and background music. Notably, it holds the highest average time spent among social media platforms, with users spending an average of 55.8 minutes on TikTok in 2023 (Su *et al.*, 2020).



Figure 23. The official TikTok account of FIFA Women's World Cup



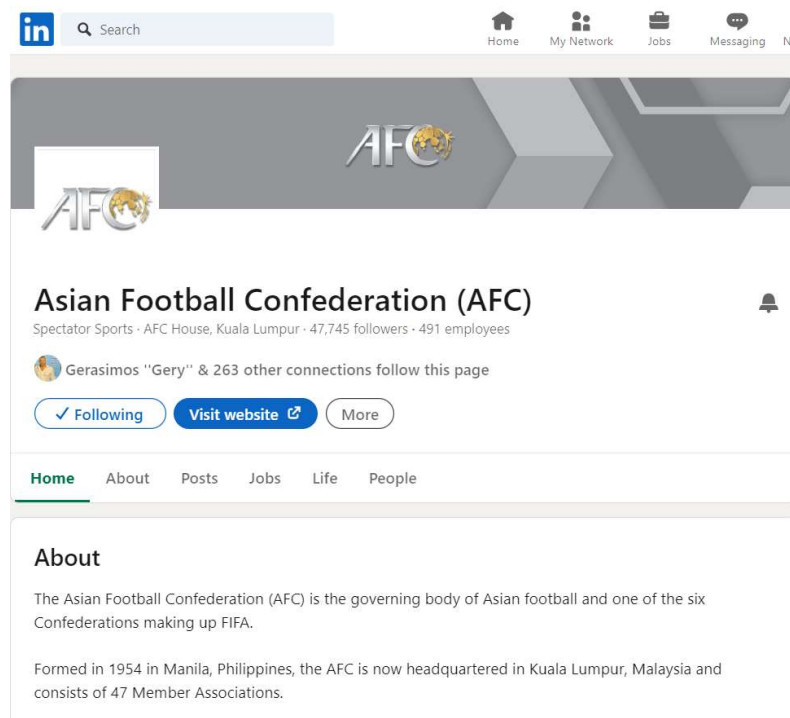
Source: screenshot of TikTok (tiktok.com).

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional social networking platform used for connecting with peers, showcasing work experience, and accessing industry-related information. In the context of sports leagues and events' organisers and rightholders, LinkedIn offers strategic advantages for brand communication. It facilitates networking with sports industry professionals, events, and competitions promotion to a business-oriented audience, sharing industry content, announcing partnerships, recruiting talent, and spotlighting event successes. It also supports virtual events and webinars, fostering interactions through engaging content (Sattler *et al.*, 2023).



Figure 24. The LinkedIn page of Asian Football Confederation



Source: screenshot of LinkedIn (linkedin.com).

Reddit

Reddit operates as a collection of topic-specific forums where users can share and discuss content. Sports events and businesses can use Reddit for targeted advertising, sharing deals, engaging in customer service, hosting AMAs, curating viral content, and running contests.

Alternative brand communication Buzz marketing

Buzz marketing, also known as word-of-mouth marketing, remains a thriving strategy with annual expenditures exceeding \$1 billion. Buzz marketing relies on creating excitement and interest around a product, service, or event through conversations, social sharing, and other forms of viral communication. In the context of sports events, buzz marketing aims to generate a buzz or hype around the event to attract attention, engagement, and attendance.

One famous example of buzz marketing in sports is the annual Super Bowl in the United States. Super Bowl commercials are highly anticipated and generate a lot of buzz even before the event takes place. Companies create unique and creative advertisements specifically for the Super Bowl, and the anticipation and discussion surrounding these commercials become a significant part of the event's overall appeal (Clow and Baack, 2022).



Sport events brand ambassadors

Brand ambassadors genuinely support the event brands they represent and are offered incentives and rewards in return for their advocacy. Event organisers select ambassadors based on their brand loyalty, level of influence, and the size of their social circles. It is essential for brand advocates to be transparent and honest about their affiliations with the event organisers. David Beckham, for example, was the brand ambassador for Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Figure 25. David Beckham, brand ambassador of Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup



Source: [untitled image of David Beckham, brand ambassador of Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup], (n. d.), <https://bit.ly/3LSnDbu>.

Guerrilla Marketing

Guerrilla marketing is an unconventional strategy that aims to captivate consumers through unexpected and memorable methods. It employs creativity, innovation, and a deep understanding of the audience to generate buzz and brand awareness without traditional advertising. This can involve street art, viral videos, stunts, and interactive installations. Particularly beneficial for small businesses with limited budgets, guerrilla marketing focuses on leaving a lasting impact. An example is the 'Red Bull Stratos Space Jump' in 2012, a high-altitude skydiving project involving Austrian skydiver Felix Baumgartner. On 14 October 2012, Baumgartner flew approximately thirty-nine kilometres into the stratosphere over New Mexico, United States, in a helium balloon before free-falling in a pressure suit and then parachuting to Earth. Red Bull used social media and live-streaming to broadcast a record-breaking skydive, effectively employing guerrilla marketing tactics to create excitement and engagement (Clow and Baack, 2022).

Summary

The module extensively explores brand communication within sports events, leagues, and competitions, starting from the hierarchy effects theory to unveiling effective strategies and integrated marketing communications (IMC). It examines the challenges and opportunities of the new media landscape, investigates emerging trends in sport events brand communication with examples, and employs the information processing model to understand message importance. The module emphasises strategic campaign planning, including mobile marketing and digital communication. It highlights the transformative role of social media, examines traditional and digital media synergy, and introduces alternative communication approaches. Overall, the module equips learners with a comprehensive grasp of strategy, creativity, technology, and audience engagement in sport events brand communication.

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