

Module 4. From athlete to clubs, leagues and federations. The organizational impact of social media

The structural changes/requirements

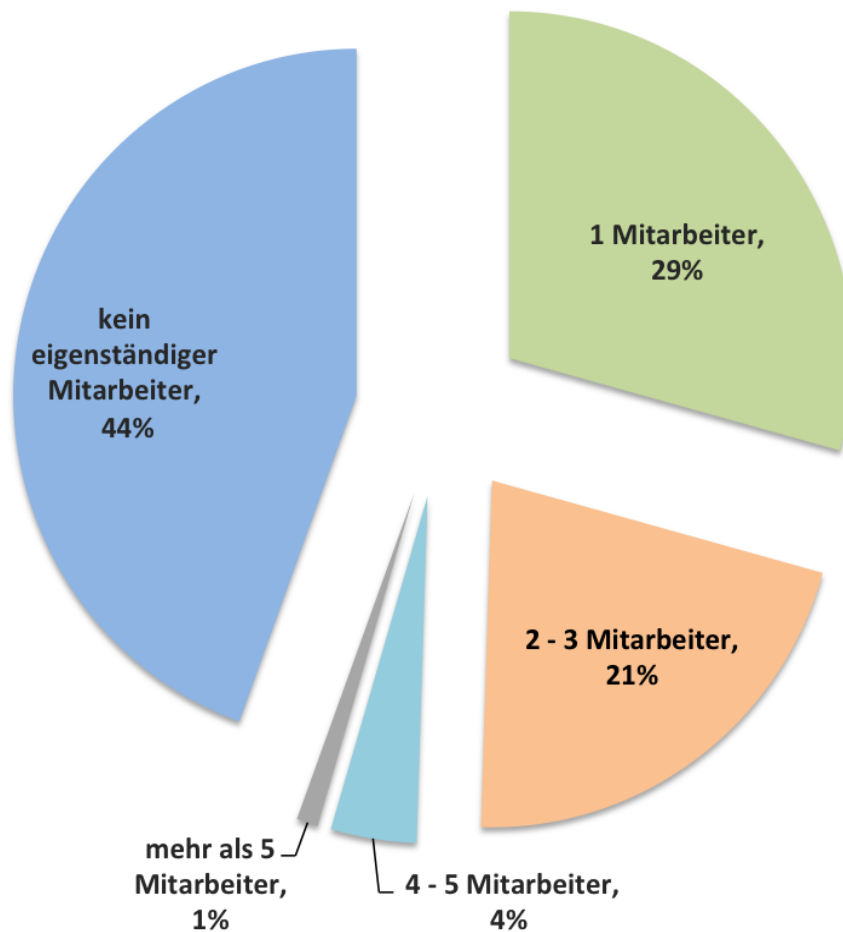
Initially, the activities in the social media were done “on the side”. Often the responsibility lay with the Press and Public Relations Department. With the entry of Facebook into the German market, the potential of a direct relationship with the fan was basically recognized.

What has evolved from this over the past few years is the attempt to personalize communication. Even more, sports organizations are transforming into media companies. A survey by RESULT Sports, a Munich-based company that is exclusively dedicated to the digital media in sport, shows this development very clearly.

At the start of a profile, the target group’s wishes content was “tested”, often in “trial-and-error” mode. However, the administrators and those responsible developed a good feel for the target group. It was problematic, however, with the sports organizations who filled this position with an intern, because after the time the knowledge and know-how was lost and you started again at 0 or did not even recognize what knowledge you had lost.

This can also be proven relatively well by interaction figures within the corresponding profiles. But what did the personnel and structural organization look like? In July 2012 there was a survey for the first time that was specifically dedicated to this topic.

Figura 1



Source: Result Sports.

The result clearly shows that almost 75% either did not employ any or only one specialist for the new media. Organizationally, as already described, 67% of the responsibility lay with the Press Department. In addition to the expenditure on human resources, the provided commercial budget was rather manageable, perhaps not even definable at this point in development. More than half of the survey participants had no budget at all for the social media.

In the following years, however, this changed considerably. The staff structure was improved, the organizational adjustments were made, and the club media departments established at least in the first two football leagues. It is to be expected that the structures will continue to change in the course of the further change to a media company.

Digital transformation

The website iScoop defines what digital transformation is:



Digital transformation is the cultural, organizational and operational change of an organization, industry or ecosystem through a smart integration of digital technologies, processes and competencies across all levels and functions in a staged and strategic way. (...) Digital transformation is the profound transformation of business and organizational activities, processes, competencies and models to fully leverage the changes and opportunities of a mix of digital technologies and their accelerating impact across society in a strategic and prioritized way, with present and future shifts in mind. (...)

The development of new competencies revolves around the capacities to be more agile, people-oriented, innovative, customer-centric, streamlined, efficient and able to induce/leverage opportunities to change the status quo and tap into big data and new, increasingly unstructured data sources – and service-driven revenues, with the Internet of Things as a vital enabler. Digital transformation efforts and strategies are often more urgent and present in markets with a high degree of commoditization. (...)

Digital transformation is a journey with multiple connected intermediary goals, in the end, striving towards ubiquitous optimization across processes, divisions and the business ecosystem of a hyper-connected age, where building the right bridges (between front end and back office, data from 'things' and decisions, people, teams, technologies, various players in ecosystems etc.) in function of that journey is key to succeed. (Digital transformation: online guide to digital business transformation, n.d., para. 1-9)

The human element is key in all levels: in the stages of transformation as such (collaboration, ecosystems, skills, culture, empowerment, etc.) and, obviously, in the goals of digital transformation. Since people do not want "digital" for everything and do value human and face-to-face interactions, there will always be an "offline" element, depending on the context. Yet, also in non-digital interactions and transactions, digital transformation plays a role in the sense of empowering any customer-facing agent and worker.

A digital transformation strategy aims to create the capabilities of fully leveraging the possibilities and opportunities of new technologies and their impact faster, better and in a more innovative way in the future. A digital transformation journey needs a staged approach with a clear roadmap, involving a variety of stakeholders, beyond silos and internal/external limitations. This roadmap takes into account that end goals will continue to move as digital transformation *de facto* is an ongoing journey, as is change and digital innovation.

So, as you can see, this is an internal change management process, where all departments and management will be involved and drive for change. External agencies or experts can assist, but ultimately it is critical to control the process and determine objectives and KPIs (Key Performance Indicator), which are dynamically adjusted and continuously developed. A short history follows now on the overall evolution.

Unit 4.1 Media and Communications

Department becomes content producer

The former media director of FC Bayern Munich, Markus Hörwick, correctly assessed and interpreted the newly created situation a few years ago:

The internet and social networks give every company, every sports club, every other organization, even every single person, the opportunity to present themselves. Whereas in the past you had to rely on publication by journalists, every Bundesliga club can now publish itself and of course it will do so in the best possible way.

And Hörwick turned out to be right. More and more clubs, associations and event organizers are producing their content (text, images, video, animations, live streams, etc.) themselves, using it to serve their fans and also making the content available to the media. On the one hand, you relieve the journalists of work; on the other hand, you can influence the reporting to a certain extent. In other words, you only provide content that has a positive effect on the club, association or athlete or sponsor. The media often take over texts, photos or videos, integrate live streams via an embedded code or supplement their reports with integrated iFrames from social media postings by the clubs. In addition, the reach of your own contributions increases immensely.

The framework conditions have become more and more complex in the last few years. The resources have been continuously expanded in the media area, and content planning has become more and more detailed, structured and extensive (Communication departments have been increased and “outsourced content” has been brought back). This gained flexibility and made it possible to act independently. It is no longer enough to “only” specify a topic for communication, rather it has to be prepared specifically for each individual channel for the target group.

Celtic Glasgow, a traditional Scottish club, took a new approach to expanding its Communications Department. Some of the employees were “directly” financed by the players. This ensured that the players got up-to-date and good content, in accordance with the club's specifications, produced for their own channels. This benefited both the athletes themselves and the club.

So, if you claim that professional clubs and associations have developed or have to develop into their own media companies in recent years, this is certainly not a joke, but definitely has its justification, regardless of how many platforms the respective communication mix belong. The end of this journey has not yet been reached and will continue to require a lot of creative and innovative input from those responsible in the future in order to continue to meet this development and demand with the necessary quality.

Unit 4.2 LIVE content on your own platforms (streaming)

The inhibition threshold to produce live streams yourself has been reduced and greatly simplified over the years. Reporting live via smartphone harbours new opportunities, but also risks. How can you stream live in a responsible way? Which apps are useful and what should you watch out for when streaming live? Above all, the legal situation (such as personal law) should always be taken into account.

The fact is that in recent years more and more clubs have jumped on the bandwagon of live streaming, which enabled an additional dialogue with the fan, and thus designed the content themselves. However, not only are press conferences streamed, but “behind-the-scenes” content is also shown and players can answer questions by fans in live mode. In addition to the normal “stories” on Instagram and Facebook, fans are also given a comprehensive and exclusive look behind the scenes and convey the feeling of being there. It is important that the viewers are given four to five minutes before the “program” begins in the stream (from experience, it always takes a little while until everyone has found the stream and is fully involved).

Besides, there should always be movement when streaming, apart from press conferences. The viewer must be taken along by an experience or event, or different perspectives should be made possible. Otherwise, the experience can turn out too monotonous for the viewer. That does not mean you have to overdo it with the movement of the image; a healthy mix is just beneficial.

3G already delivered acceptable results, 4G (LTE) already ensured in some cases very good quality for the sender and receiver. Apps quickly appeared that made streaming much easier for the user with good encoding software. While Bambuser had been on the market for a long time, the introduction of Meerkat, Periscopes and plussh meant a real boost. It did not take long for Facebook to catch up and thus cause the next big wave –by embedding it in the Facebook environment, you got greater reach and more relevance. Facebook promoted streaming as part of their services and pushed live streams way up in many timelines. It is hardly surprising that Instagram also quickly had a live streaming function and implemented Instagram TV (IGTV).

In the recent past, the topic of eSports in football has developed enormously. Many Bundesliga clubs have hired their own FIFA eSports professionals in order to develop a new online target group and to convey the values of the club. In this area, social media, streaming in particular, is of enormous importance. Tournaments, the Weekend League, etcetera are streamed for hours on Twitch, which is attracting a growing target group.

Twitch on the rise as a marketing channel

Daniel Dodt, author at DMexco, wrote an article on Twitch:

Often dismissed as a platform limited purely to eSports and gaming, Twitch has long flown under the radar of marketers with its potential as a livestreaming portal and social network. Wrongly, as it turns out, as a look at usage statistics shows:

1 billion hours of video footage were viewed worldwide every month in 2019 alone. (...)

Especially exciting for advertising on Twitch: In addition to the original transmission of video games, numerous other channels have established themselves that thematically tend in a very wide variety of directions. So-called “IRL” [“in real life”] channels are particularly popular. Here, viewers can accompany their favourite streamers through their everyday lives. Streaming communities on topics such as food, cooking, do-it-yourself, fitness or music, in turn, fall into the creative categories and are also enjoying ever- larger audiences.

As a result of the deliberate thematic opening and fresh variety in content, Twitch is increasingly growing among user groups not primarily interested in gaming and eSports. The trend among groups on the streaming platform is correspondingly heterogeneous. This is how Twitch creates additional channels for marketing through which messages can be placed with broad reach, targeted and authentic.

The focus for Twitch marketing is on young, fast-growing target group

The main reason for increased marketing on Twitch is that the platform enjoys a high level of popularity among young target groups, a popularity traditional media and channels can barely reach. These are typically 18-34-year-olds with high online affinity, people who enjoy interactivity and have purchasing power and spend more than 90 minutes on the livestreaming portal each day.

Currently, around four out of five users worldwide are male. However, given the increasing distribution of content alternative to gaming, the number of female viewers is expected to increase significantly in the future. Their share in the German market already stands at 30 percent.

Targeted presentation in the streaming environment

Given the broader range of topics, the growing community and greater differentiation among target groups, Twitch is also becoming exciting for those brands and companies that thus far have focused their marketing on other channels.

Advertisers are particularly likely to use the standard forms of advertising familiar from YouTube and other portals, such as classic video spots. Twitch integrates these as part of its own ad server solution and plays them out in the appropriate streams as a pre- or mid-roll. (Dodt, 2020, para. 2-8)

Trent Murray, author at The Esports observer, gives us some information about Twitch:

Twitch has steadily increased its engagement with the traditional sports world over the last year or so, broadcasting Thursday Night Football games with popular streamers providing commentary, and recently announcing that coverage of four matches from the Premier League would be broadcast on the platform for viewers in the U.K. Many professional athletes also stream their own content on the platforms including Los Angeles Chargers player Austin Ekeler, F1 driver Lando Norris, and WWE superstars Claudio Castagnoli (ring name Cesaro) and Xavier Woods, among others. (Murray, 2020, para. 3)

The New York Times also published an article on Twitch:

Twitch offers the opportunity for individual sports stars to stream direct to their fans. British Formula 1 driver Lando Norris became the youngest ever Brit to stand on a Formula 1 podium earlier this month, and he's a regular Twitch streamer. Norris uses his phone to stream behind the scenes looks at the planning and preparation phases for races, sometimes just minutes before he's about to start practice laps. He's also streamed his escapades in PUBG and Call of Duty: Warzone. Los Angeles Charger Austin Ekeler and a trio of WWE Superstars also use Twitch to reach fans.

Twitch's peak viewership now rivals the average prime-time viewers of some cable networks, as seen in the chart above. But compared with online video giants, Twitch is small. In hours of video viewed each month, Netflix is roughly eight times larger than Twitch, and YouTube is roughly 24 times larger, according to statistics from each company.

Still, top Twitch streamers build large audiences, and hold the attention of tens of thousands of people for hours. Those viewers can translate into revenue: Top streamers can earn money from ads, donations and subscriptions from their followers, who watch videos on the site for almost two hours a day, according to Twitch.

Game developers and other companies are also on Twitch, streaming footage from tournaments that pit top teams against one another. Riot Games, the company that makes the game League of Legends, holds frequent competitions that attract hundreds of thousands of viewers. (Aisch and Giratikanon , 2014).

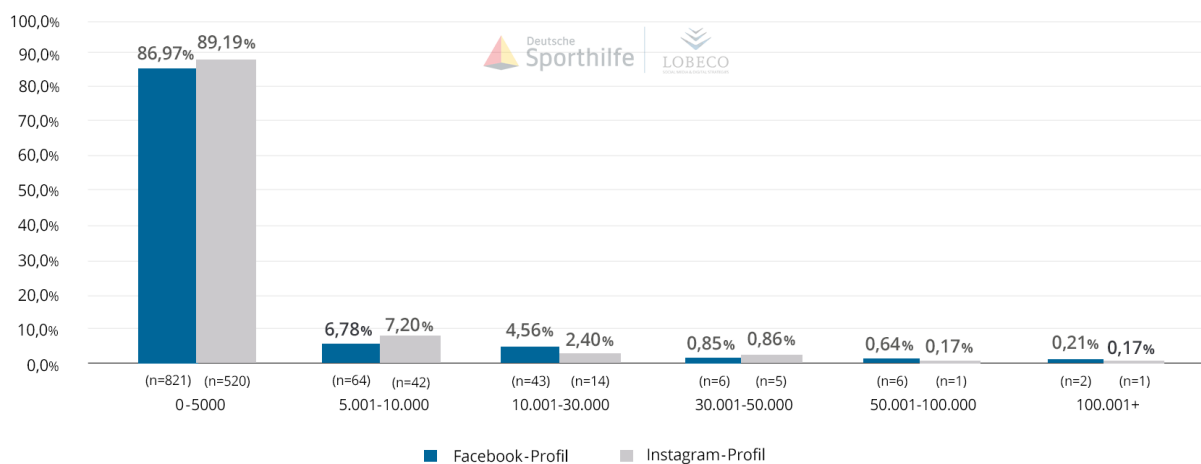
Wherever there is streaming, there is often a bit of cheating in practice. With the technical development in the various platforms, clubs now have the opportunity to go "fake live". In other words: content (for example, a club TV show) is recorded in advance, cut together and only then planned and published as "live" at time X. This gives more preparation time, and you avoid hopscotch or can simply remove the so-called "disturbance images". The user usually does not notice this if you clean it up and pay attention to details.

Unit 4.3 Will athletes become the new influencers?

Influencer marketing as an element of your marketing strategy needs to be integrated into the overall marketing mix. This is especially true if it is not intended to enrich marketing as a one-off measure but as a long-term instrument. The influencer marketing must be merged in the context of the other online and offline marketing activities in an integrated overall plan. It is also about the decision of the importance of influencer marketing. Is it more a matter of supplementary, flanking measures as part of the company's social media marketing strategy, or is influencer marketing a new, independent instrument? (Deges, 2018)

Germany's athletes usually belong to the so-called micro- or nano-influencers. In the most heavily used network, Instagram, the vast majority of those surveyed have less than 5,000 followers (87 percent), only 6 percent have already exceeded the 10,000 followers mark. The following is comparable on Facebook (89 percent have less than 5,000 followers; 4 percent have more than 10,000 followers). On the other platforms, the respondents only have a few followers with rare exceptions.

Figure 2: Age structure in years



Source: Deutsche Sporthilfe, n. d., <https://bit.ly/3s87Udz>

Enriched with a blend of Polynesian tamanu nut oil and white lily extract, the refreshing formula removes impurities without over-drying and without the uncomfortable feeling of dry skin, leaving hands soft, supple and rejuvenated (Social media use by German top athletes, n.d.)

The fact is, however, that more and more companies are making use of top athletes in their communication mix, even if they still have a lot of catching-up to do compared to

industries such as lifestyle, fashion and beauty. Not only the big stars are often interesting personalities who have attractive and loyal communities to offer. On their social channels, however, the athletes too rarely position themselves strategically and too rarely position themselves as a permanent brand.

On the one hand, companies reach a new target group; on the other hand, their own products or services are perceived very differently by the “ambassador athlete”. Here the user makes a connection to the success of the athlete and quickly picks up the “message” on another level, which is often conveyed in the emotional area. Above all, credibility plays an extremely important role in the interaction between athletes and the community. It is important to remain authentic so that influencer activities by athletes do not become a pure product placement because recommendations are too clumsy and arbitrary. As a result, it is important that the athlete knows his followers exactly and can capitalize on himself by working with a selected company. In addition, they should not weaken their authenticity with unsuitable products so that they do not lose their credibility towards the fan community.

But you can assume that you have done your homework in the field of sports and can narrow the large gap with the other industries mentioned above. This will result in even more opportunities for the athlete in the future, which, on the one hand, pays off in their own personal brand, but, on the other hand, does so on the partner's brand in the long term.

Unit 4.4 Data is relevant (analysis & evaluations)

The topic of analysis and evaluation of all activities in the social networks is becoming more and more relevant. First and foremost, it concerns statistics, market research and success monitoring for the filled platforms. The results are important indicators for assessing your own activity and content, and for further developing your future strategy. Most social networks provide their own statistical tools for their own appearance, which examine their own published content in detail.

Nevertheless, it can often be useful to use third-party analysis tools for evaluations. These provide data that cannot be easily determined or filtered out using in-house or network tools. In addition, they often automatically compile useful reports for their own editorial staff or management, which saves a lot of work and resources. In addition, external providers offer a detailed look at the competition, and the person responsible can learn from this and take a lot of input with them for their own work.

The types of metrics that an analysis tool can provide are many. All numbers and also the growth rates should ideally be limited to freely selectable periods. The crux of the matter with some tools is a look into the past. For example, the German company RESULT Sport has developed its own “crawler” and supports many sports clubs and associations not only in Europe but also in Africa. The company responds to the individual needs of its customers and uses the evaluated parameters to develop digital strategies that are aimed at the goals or needs. Here are important metrics an analytics tool can provide:

Your own activity

Number of postings

- Typical posting time
- Type of postings (number of those with picture, video, link, etc.)

The individual postings

- Number of divisions
- Number of comments
- Number of likes/favourites
- Reach of the postings per period
- Sum of the postings or the divisions
- the best posts
- Posts by type (images, videos, links, status)
- the best postings by type of posting (best pictures, best videos)
- the worst running posts
- Information about fans that a posting has reached
- Multipliers for a posting

The social network appearance

- Number of fans

- Fan growth curve
- Growth rate per period
- Calls to the profile page in the network

The fans/followers

- Age, gender, origin of the fans
- Age, gender, origin of the people reached (reach)
- Fans with the most friends and followers (multipliers)
- most active fans in my network (multipliers)
- Times when fans are most active
- Pages on which the active fans are also active (Primps, 2016; p. 103)

It is important to regularly scan the success of your own activity and to compare it with the measurable goals from the concept that you had set yourself. Even relatively vague targets “We want to post fewer links to the website and more independent Facebook content”) can be checked, made countable and measurable. The occasional changes to the algorithm in the social networks, which are usually not made known, can also be immediately felt. Accordingly, one can react quickly to changed framework conditions. Other important indicators can be the answer to the questions: What times are my fans on my platforms or how do they interact with my content?

Numbers are good and helpful for a successful appearance on social media, but to be able to work with them, a correct interpretation is necessary. The personal assessment of the person responsible with a feeling for the fans and knowledge of the content, framework conditions and debates, etc., are of essential importance. It is only with this experience that the determined key figures become a valuable tool with which your own appearance can be designed more successfully.

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