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Dr. Ali Gürel Göksel
School of Physical Education
and Sports, Marmara University,
İstanbul, Turkey.

Dr. M Zahit Serarslan
Associate Professor, School of
Physical Education and Sports,
İstanbul Gelisim University,
İstanbul, Turkey.

Public relations in sports clubs: New media as a strategic corporate communication instrument

Dr. Ali Gürel Göksel, Dr. M Zahit Serarslan

Abstract

The aim of the current study is to review usage-styles of new media as a corporate communication instrument under public relation activities organized by sports clubs which are supported by numerous customers/fans, possess various sources of income and create commercial value and can be a topic of news of both visual and print media at any moment. The study is composed of two parts. The reason why the study is composed of two parts is to discuss how something is communicated via social networks in the first part and to demonstrate what sports clubs aim at and do in these social networks through interviews done with corporate communication experts. To assess and review these social networks; scoring methods used by Gibson *et al.* (2003) in their article "Election Campaigning on the WWW in the USA and the UK: A Comparative Analysis" was employed. In the further reviews, interviews made with public relations and corporate communication experts of three sports clubs whose new media accounts were examined were analyzed through descriptive analysis method. It was found out that these three sports clubs have increasingly paid attention to social media. Particularly, they have regarded Facebook and Twitter accounts more important. Besides, it was explored that LinkedIn accounts were managed under human resources department of the clubs. As a result of the interviews made with corporate communication practitioners of the clubs; it was identified that new media accounts were managed in collaboration with marketing department and most of the strategies were decided together. In general sense; it was noted that sports directors of the clubs and professional corporate communication practitioners gave due importance to new media and official pages the clubs possess in the new media. Corporate communication practitioners modify the structure and operational patterns in the official accounts by taking the reactions of the users into consideration and make necessary additions and corrections when necessary. Also, practitioners believe that the pages they possess in new media have a big impact upon their corporate reputation.

Keywords: Sports clubs, public relations, strategic management, corporate communication, new media.

1. Introduction

Sports clubs that have not completed corporate-formation or been in process of corporate-formation consider public relation activities as a function of management and build a department that run public relation activities within organizational structure of the club. These public relation activities are considered important more and more -especially- in football branches of the clubs that have a capacity to attract mass interest. Club directors who run public relation activities have now noticed the necessity to reach fans accepted as both football lovers and customers and different target-groups using various instruments. The fact that sports and -specifically- football has been commercialized has made its adaptation to technological developments essential. In addition to traditional public relations instruments; sports clubs prefer using internet effectively. In this sense, social media instruments and networks are privileged.

Clubs have now been using new media not only for publicity, advertisement and marketing activities but also for receiving feedbacks from target-groups about brand image, corporate reputation, organizational culture or products and services. Although use of new media by sports clubs produces new opportunities in communication, it also produces different problems too. On the one hand, social media renders intra-club communication effective and provides clubs with a direct chance to communicate with target-groups; on the other hand, it sometimes may also lead to possible crisis occurring due to quick and easy spreading speculations, erroneous news and biased information.

Correspondence
Dr. Ali Gürel Göksel
School of Physical Education
and Sports, Marmara University,
İstanbul, Turkey.

These multifaceted relations that emerge in clubs may sometimes need regulating but conducting these activities in a strategic arrangement and objective is considered necessary for an effective communication.

Sports clubs that compete in sportive industry where effects of globalization are strongly felt and especially in football branch with millions of fans integrate virtual platforms and web-based applications into traditional public relations and corporate communication methods and thus may obtain competitive advantages in business models as well as products and services.

The aim of the current study is to assess usage-styles of new media as a corporate communication instrument under public relations activities by sports clubs which are supported by numerous customers/fans, possess various sources of income and create commercial value and can be a topic of news of both visual and print media at any moment. Thus, it is also aimed at diagnosing drawbacks of sports clubs in this regard and offering suggestions for their public relation activities.

Public relations is defined by the International Public Relations Association as the sustained efforts made by a public organization or private corporation to obtain understanding, sympathy and support of its community [26].

According to Canpolat (2012) [4], public relations gains different meanings in different contexts depending on the nature of the relations and ideological formats. For example; in political terms, a community connotes the human masses or electors which are described as country and constitute a political unit. In economic terms, community is composed of workers who work in an organization and customers, audiences and spectators with whom the organization is in contact. From this perspective, communities for sports clubs are composed of athletes who make efforts for the clubs, coaches and trainers, workers who work in the sports facilities the clubs possess, club members, shareholders, investors, customers –that is, fans/supporters- and other public and private organizations that clubs are in contact.

For sports clubs, public relations may be defined as making, developing, protecting mutually sound, correct and reliable relations with individuals or organizations with whom they are in contact, creating positive images in the eye of public opinion and being integrated with the community.

Founding studies in which practitioners' roles in public relations and public relations concepts were examined were started by Broom and Smith (1979) [3] and were continued by such authors as Dozier (1984, 2005) [7, 8], Grunig and Hunt (1984) [10], Toth, Serini, Whright and Emig (1998) [34], Steyn (1999, 2002, 2007, 2009) [28-31], Moss and Green (2001) [21], Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) [11], Moss, Newman and DeSanto (2005) [22] and Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič and Verhoeven (2009) [36] and these studies identified practitioners' tasks that put an emphasis on public relations strategies, public relations consultancy, public relations trainings and professionalisation of public relations in addition to practitioners' role definitions.

Public relations, also termed as strategic public relations or strategic communication management, has become a part of the strategic management through consultancy provided to decision makers and by identifying the existing situation of the organization, determining partners [9] and strategic issues, managing the agenda and problems [35]. The change of public relations from the one with which public relations practitioners played functional role in which routine reactions used to be given [2] into the one which is directly responsible to the top management and fulfils decision-making roles has earned

public relations a strategic direction as well as rendered it a profession [6] managed strategically [12] within whole organization. Roles of public relations practitioners have evolved as a result of changing viewpoints of organizations about public relations during this process.

Corporate communication operates as an mediator between sub-departments that constitute the organization or between groups within the organization or outside the organization for its survival and creates an interchange through relations between ideas and actions, common symbols, a system of signs and behaviors that offer opportunities for a continuous information and idea synergy between the organization and its environments [5]. Corporate communication can be defined as communication and relationship management process that covers all areas so that the corporate performance can be increased and corporations can possess an organizational framework appreciated and approved by the community [13, 15, 17, 23].

Corporate communication is a type of communication that is used for a product, service or corporate publicity and connects all levels of the corporation each other so that the organization can attain its objectives. In other words, corporate communication is the direct communication made with customers, suppliers and all partners both inside and outside the organization. Corporate communication plays a vital role in creating corporate image [14, 24].

New media in general means communication technologies and applications that have recently emerged [32]. New media covers web sites and other digital communication and information channels which are payable/consumable by others whatever the positions active users have are occupied [33]. In the current study; new media term is hereafter referred to as internet and applications of digital technology (social media sites, social networks, micro blog sites, etc.) because these technologies are among the latest communication forms that have today appeared and advanced.

Media management in sports clubs has been progressing towards a special communication discipline to be managed under corporate communication activities. In line with the corporate communication objectives; using tools that are equipped with characteristic properties of the new media and co-coordinating these tools with other communication tools are done under media management activities. Sports clubs that had official websites designed in the first place with the expansion of internet have now headed to new media in accordance with the continuing innovations and advancements. Clubs have been designing pages with various techniques and contents in the new media. Social networks are meticulously designed because sharing is essential, many different applications are contained and feedbacks are quickly given in social networks.

New media has many effects upon corporation's strategic works. In sports clubs managed as a company, social media and similar internet services are classified in its contents through easily conducted studies, creating partnership with shareholders, dialogues, provision of fast and widespread information-sharing, other feedback and connection systems and thus it becomes easy to find out strategies.

Unlike television or newspapers; new media cannot be controlled by the corporations in advance and these contents cannot be managed in this manner; which is due to the fact that new media operates online. Therefore, following new media in sports clubs by responsible practitioners for public relations and communication continuously and instantly has become more and more important.

In sports clubs, management of new media is performed under

public relations management or corporate communication management. However the fact that management of new media is performed by a classical media personnel points out that club directors are not aware that new media is a vast area and requires specialized knowledge as well. It is suggested that the task of an ideal new media expert is to develop and to implement strategies that will improve communication with fans/customers and public, increase club incomes and protect club prestige by using social media instruments. In sports clubs, it is known that practitioner of new media is supposed to have communication and knowledge of the relevant areas. Besides it is argued that in sports clubs new media practitioners direct the following processes. These processes can be listed as below:

- Planning corporate communication of the club,
- Determining communication language of the new media accounts of the club,
- Developing direct communication with senior directors and opinion leaders in the club,
- Increasing social media literacy and the number of the followers of the club,
- Following, analyzing and measuring official new media accounts of the club.

On the one hand, changes in communication technologies continue to develop rapidly, on the other hand, communication on internet has paved the way to reach more people and more quickly thanks to the advancements in mobile phones and production of smart phones and use of ultra-fast mobile internet connection thanks to 3G technology used with these phones. Communication level on internet has increased in time, mobile phones have become number one communication tool of numerous people day by day and people have created personal accounts; which has drawn the attention of the institutions. With these properties in hand, internet has found its place in new media. As new media, social media is most mentioned. With the advancements in information technologies, it is possible for an internet user with no technical background to design contents of new media and to share them with web 2.0 network. As for the social media, it is the implementation of this network.

New communication technologies have added new definitions into areas of activity of the corporate communication discipline. Although these areas of activity vary, they basically serve for public relations and corporate communication. When such definitions as E-PR, online PR, online reputation management and PR 2.0 are examined; they essentially emphasize the same point: "To manage technological advancements professionally and in line with the corporate objectives and to make an effective communication with the target community continuously" [17].

With each passing day social media has been used more; which led to the question how communication and content-sharing of social media made by people with accounts in social networks would be clarified in terms of theories. Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a theoretical basis for explaining whether or not social media users are satisfied with social media. Dating back to 1940s, Uses and Gratifications Theory argues that users are not passive but free in perceiving messages sent by media as they wish. Since it was developed, the theory has been employed mostly in studies focusing on newspapers and televisions and today those researchers who used Uses and Gratifications Theory have been stressing internet since it enables interaction, too.

Now not only corporations, trademarks, clubs but also political

parties and political leaders are aware that it is new media venues that make them reach their target-communities in shortest and truest manner. Moreover; today's US president, Barack Obama conducted most of the election campaigns on the dominant social networking sites –Facebook, Twitter and Youtube- during the 2008 presidential elections [27]. Figures reported one day before the general elections were as follows: the Obama's campaign was more active with social media than the McCain's. Obama had 2.379.102 followers on Facebook vs. McCain's 620.359 followers; Obama had 112.474 followers on Twitter vs. McCain' 4.603 followers and on Youtube there were 18 million canals for Obama while for McCain there were just 2 million canals [20].

In our age, called digitalization, there is one computer almost everywhere. Mobile phones, computers and automobiles have been affected by digitalization everywhere –from schools to hospitals-. In sports, it is seen that webpages of these clubs are used in order to send fans written and visual and voice information and to act as the fans wish. At this point, it is suggested that new technologies have brought so many opportunities in providing sports information and building effective sports marketing [19]. Some of the benefits of the new technologies are integration of sports with new media to some extent and opportunities to communicate with many different and large populations via internet. However, the fact that income of each big club decreases and therefore these clubs fear that they may fall behind has caused them to develop their own media capacities [1].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Type of the study: Qualitative study model was applied as the study method. Of qualitative study designs, case studies were used. The basic characteristic of qualitative studies is to explore one or several cases in depth. Therefore; the usages of new media as corporate communication tool by public relations practitioners in sports clubs and relevant factors (corporations, settings, events, processes, etc.) were examined as a whole and it was tried to focus on how these usages of new media and factors affected the existing conditions and how they were affected by these conditions.

2.2. Study Population and Sample: The population of the study was composed of all the sports clubs in Turkiye. It was our starting point to conduct the study that of the top ten corporations, there were three sports clubs mentioned in the Turkish Facebook-followers report which was issued by socialbakers.com conducting statistical analyses on new media, the number of fans and their interest and attention in branded people or institutions or trademarks and whose datasets are often used in scientific studies. In this sense; the sample of the study included Galatasaray Sports Club, Fenerbahçe Sports Club and Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club which have the highest number of fans and the highest number of followers in new media and their public relations and corporate communication experts.

2.3. Study Problem: Study problem was to determine strategic corporate communication activities used in social media -being one of the corporate communication tools- by sports clubs and –particularly- by public relations and communication practitioners and to identify management types of these activities.

2.4. Data Collection Tools: Interviews made with public relations and communication experts of these three sports

clubs were analyzed using descriptive analyses methods. Because corporate communication practitioners interviewed requested anonymity, the participants were assured of confidentiality and in the analyses their names were coded as Club-1, Club-2 and Club-3. Interview questions analyzed using descriptive analyses methods were based on Uses and Gratifications Theory by Blumler and Katz and were prepared in regard to corporate communication and social media.

2.5. Data Collection: Data collection was carried out face to face meetings and interviews with public relations and corporate communication experts which did not last for more than 75 minutes with these three clubs and necessary data for descriptive analyses were gathered. It was told to the clubs and the participants that the questions and responses would be used for a scientific research. Still, because new media practitioners and the three sports clubs interviewed requested anonymity, in the continuation of the research these clubs and persons would be mentioned as Club-1, Club-2 and Club-3 from now on. The longest interviews made lasted 75 minutes.

Within the knowledge of the participants, all interviews were audio recorded during interviews in order to prevent data loss. Thus, the data obtained were transcribed verbatim. In order to analyze the data obtained in systematic manner, detailed interview forms were designed. The most important feature of detailed forms is that no details in the data are skipped and is an important tool used for descriptive analysis method. Coding in detailed interview forms were independently conducted by the researcher and two experts with communication formation. Subsequently; codings were compared, consistency was assured and detailed interview forms were finalized. In detailed interview forms, there were interpretations relating to five themes uncovered with survey questions. Questions other than these five themes were excluded. These five themes are as follows:

Theme 1: Approach of sports clubs to new media

Theme 2: Communication of corporate strategies in new media by sports clubs

Theme 3: The role of customers/fans' expectations in page designs of clubs and page function in new media

Theme 4: Functional use of new media accounts by sports clubs managers and personnel

Theme 5: The role of pages of new media used by sports clubs in marketing and corporate reputation

2.6. Limitations of the Study: Limitations of the study were that face to face interviews were done with new media practitioners between May and June 2014 and these interviews included public relations and corporate communication practitioners of only Galatasaray Sports Club, Fenerbahçe Sports Club and Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club.

2.7. Assumptions of the Study: It was assumed that sports clubs composing the sample group of the study represented the population. It was also assumed that data collection tool used was the most accurate tool in terms of study aims and attaining the desired results. It was admitted that questions prepared to conduct descriptive analyses were correctly perceived and answered by new media practitioners and these answers corresponded to the strategies and objectives of the clubs.

3. Findings

Today; sports industry market is considered to be one of the indicators of progression and modernization of the nations and makes significant contributions to their global recognition. It

was our starting point to conduct the study that there were three sports clubs mentioned in the Turkish Facebook-followers report which was issued by socialbakers.com conducting statistical analyses on new media, the number of fans and their interest and attention in branded people or institutions or trademarks and whose datasets are often used in scientific studies. The sports clubs that pay the biggest attention to social media were listed as Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş.

Table 1: Turkish Facebook followers report

Rank	Facebook page	Local Followers	Total Followers
1.	Galatasaray	10.654.574	13.104.471
2.	Fenerbahçe	8.994.797	10.216.442
3.	Cem Yılmaz	6.886.458	7.565.290
4.	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	5.063.917	6.958.952
5.	Beren Saat	1.493.817	6.798.874
6.	Arkadaşım Hosgeldin	5.535.355	5.945.930
7.	Beşiktaş	4.939.862	5.682.380
8.	Murat Boz	4.734.185	5.680.939
9.	Turkish Airlines	1.007.274	5.511.973
10.	Emre Aydın	4.907.767	5.481.948

Source: Turkish Facebook followers report, <http://www.socialbakers.com>, December 2014, Access date: 15.12.2014

Considering the report on the number of Turkish Facebook-followers in which the people and institutions of all sectors were included; it was seen that these three football clubs were among the most popular ten institutions. When only reports on the number of Facebook-followers, branded persons and corporations in the sports industry were examined; it was seen that the list included Trabzonspor, Bursaspor, Samsunspor, Eskişehirspor, Göztepe, Anadolu Efes and Karşıyaka Sports Clubs.

We were of the opinion that -apart from the number of the Facebook-followers- it was also necessary to analyze the report on Turkish Twitter-followers in order to increase validity of the study. Therefore; according to the report on Turkish Twitter-followers; it was seen that there were just two football clubs among the most popular ten organizations: Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe Sports Clubs. Unlike the report on the number of Turkish Facebook-followers; Beşiktaş Sports Club was not ranked in the most popular ten institutions. Furthermore, official Twitter page of Beşiktaş Sports Club was ranked as 103rd according to the number of the followers.

Table 2: Turkish Twitter followers report

Rank	Twitter Page	Followers
1.	Cem Yılmaz (@CMYLMZ)	7.781.650
2.	Abdullah Gül (@cbabdullahgul)	5.529.564
3.	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (@RT_Erdogan)	5.316.497
4.	Ata Demirer (@atademirer)	4.752.639
5.	Galatasaray SK (@GalatasaraySK)	4.601.863
6.	Demet Akalın Kurt (@DemetAkalin)	4.310.091
7.	Okan Bayulgen (@okanbayulgen)	4.103.348
8.	NTV Spor (@ntvspor)	4.088.266
9.	Hülya Avşar (@hulyavsar)	3.962.424
10.	Fenerbahçe SK (@Fenerbahce)	3.754.753

Source: Turkish Twitter followers report, <http://www.socialbakers.com>, December 2014, Access date: 16.12.2014

When Twitter pages were carefully examined; it was observed that personal pages attracted more followers than official

pages of the organizations. For example; among the top ten pages, there were seven personal Twitter pages vs. three corporate Twitter pages; which was remarkable. Among 100 Twitter accounts that were followed most; 85% of them were personal Twitter accounts; which was –we thought- thanks to the opportunity that Twitter users may have thought to get the chance to make direct and mutual communication with celebrities via Twitter accounts.

Using the results obtained with the interviews made with the public relations and corporate communication experts of the participant clubs; data were analyzed through descriptive analyses methods. Findings about the five themes determined in the study were as follows:

Analyses of the Theme 1; Approach of sports clubs to new media: About their approach to new media; corporate communication practitioners of Club-1 told that the club does not favor “the mentality that much work should be done with fewer personnel and less money” as a strategy; instead, the club seeks for answers to the question how representation responsibility of the club operates with near zero error and accordingly determines the number of the labor force. The practitioner said that there are three employees in the club that are directly responsible for social media and the club has official Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Youtube and LinkedIn pages in social media but management of LinkedIn pages is under the responsibility of Human Resources Department. Corporate communication expert of Club-1 stated that transfer of visual identity of the club is made, corporate history is presented as far as capacity of social venue allows for extra information and data, philosophy/mission/vision of the club is demonstrated, corporate slogan is used, messages sent by spokesman/leader of the club is communicated, corporate advertisements and product/service information are provided, events and announcements are announced, information on ticket prices is given and communication information is demonstrated in all of their official social media pages but investment profiles and information on ticket prices are not uploaded into Youtube page.

Social media practitioners of Club-2 told that they work under Corporate Communication Department and their general tasks are to take care of internet venue of the club and to represent the club at the highest level. These practitioners told that they are in continuous contact with corporate communication experts and follow all the social networks all day long and communicate all kinds of news and developments regarding the club to the public and fans. They said that transfer of visual identity of the club is made; philosophy, slogan, corporate advertisements, product/service information, information on events and announcements and communication information are communicated; information on corporate organization, messages sent by spokesman of the club, press relations and information on ticket prices are demonstrated in all of their official social media pages whenever necessary but corporate history is presented only in Facebook page because other social networks do not allow for uploading such permanent information.

Corporate communication experts of Club-3 told that there are communication personnel under media department but there are also personnel specifically responsible for social media accounts. Any personnel who work under communication manager can upload any news, announcements or information into social media accounts. Besides; it was stated that marketing department and corporate communication departments work together. In social media; the club has

official Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and Youtube pages but does not have any LinkedIn pages. Corporate communication expert of Club-3 pointed out that transfer of visual identity of the club is made; philosophy/mission/vision of the club is demonstrated; corporate slogan is used; corporate history/ corporate advertisements and product/service information are shared; events and announcements are announced and communication information is demonstrated in all of their official social media pages. However, information on board of directors and distribution of tasks and tickets for all sportive competitions are not presented in social media networks.

Analyses of the Theme 2; Communication of corporate strategies into new media by sports clubs: In regard to communication of corporate strategies into new media venues by sports clubs, corporate communication practitioner of Club-1 told that corporate strategies in social networks were under the responsibility of Marketing Department and Communication Department until recently yet it now is under the initiative of Communication Department only. However; corporate communication practitioner of Club-1 explained that whenever an outward-oriented strategy is to be decided; actions are taken not only with Marketing Department but also in collaboration with the relevant departments in order to determine the strategies.

Corporate communication practitioner of Club-2 said that they as Corporate Communication Department move together with Marketing Department in social networks. However; in order to determine medium-term and long-term strategies, first corporate communication practitioners prepare reports and these reports are analyzed by Corporate Communication Department. As a result of the analyses, plans and programs developed are first approved by general director and then by board of directors before they are realized.

Corporate communication practitioner of Club-3 explained that medium-term and long-term strategies in social networks are prepared by the communication department and approved after the director responsible for communication and the member of the board of directors responsible for communication consult with each other.

Analyses of the Theme 3; The role of customers/fans' expectations in page design by sports clubs and page function in new media: In regard to the theme of the role of customers/fans' expectations in page design by sports clubs and page function in new media; the practitioners who are responsible for social media accounts of the Club-1 stated that fans are never considered as customers and start each day with a greeting message “Good morning Club-1 Family”, which - they think- is a fine nuance between classic marketing and sports marketing: “Sports marketing covers feelings while normal marketing does not.” The practitioners told that if the feelings are in question, nobody can name fans as customers: For example; it is decided long before whether or not jerseys are striped or halved depending on the fans' reactions and as Communication Department, they send fans' wishes, feelings and expectations to Marketing Department because they are part of the family. In relation with the social media accounts, they always pay attention to fans' and supporters' expectations and opinions and make due changes and updating accordingly. Corporate communication practitioners of Club-2 said that they have worked for various companies that serve in many sectors but working in sports club is quite different because unlike classic customers clubs have different populations and

there is an emotional bond and commitment between clubs and fans. They take fans' and supporters' expectations into consideration a lot and always follow their feedbacks. The practitioners of Club-2 highlighted the fan-club collaboration by giving an example: "Once we decided to share the predicted lineup in social media before the match and after reactions and recommendations, we re-arranged match-lineup with videos of the footballers. Again, we uploaded cheers and finally designed an interactive event on the day of the match. What made us more proud was that we witnessed that this interactive event was copied by Barcelona supporters, too."

Corporate communication practitioners of Club-3 stated that official accounts in social media have been signed up before they come to office, they always and carefully pay attention to fans' and supporters' expectations, wishes, criticisms and complaints and communicate them to the relevant departments if required.

Analyses of the Theme 4; Functional use of new media accounts by sports clubs managers and personnel:

Corporate communication practitioners of Club-1 told that social media accounts are followed by many club directors and personnel but mutual communication is not made via these official accounts. Communication networks used by Human Resources Department for internal communication are preferred due to confidentiality and privacy. It was stated that the corporate communication practitioners are at times advised and given recommendations by the club leader but they do not intervene activities done by the practitioners all the time; besides, club directors pay much attention to sharing of personnel, athletes and trainers in social media and emphasize that everybody primarily and principally represent the fanbase. Corporate communication practitioners of Club-2 from whom information was asked in the study explained that some of the club directors actively use social media and take their opinions and advices despite not much; particularly athletes actively share contents in their personal new media accounts and therefore, they have been given social media manual book designed by the department in case they may experience problems in new media. Similarly; club personnel use their personal accounts comfortably despite not as much as athletes but have been instructed not to upload contents related to the club or rival fan base.

Corporate communication experts of Club-3 said that professional directors of marketing department and communication department follow their social media accounts closely rather than club executives, have the necessary warnings and corrections provided and if there are unfavorable and unwanted situations related to club's values and purposes they fix it right away: For example; they instantly gave the necessary warnings to a sponsor because a visual campaign material designed by the sponsor did not fit for club values and purposes. Besides; both senior staff and junior staff do not prefer mutual communication in new media venue; instead, use corporate electronic mail addresses assigned by the club for communicating. As long as it is not highly confidential and private information or it does not contain videos; they are allowed to share contents about the club in social networks. With permission, they are also allowed to share photos taken together with athletes.

Analyses of the Theme 5; Role of pages of new media of sports clubs in marketing and corporate reputation: The responsible personnel of corporate communication of Club-1 told that they share product and service information and details

of sponsored campaigns in these social media accounts through consulting to and discussing with Marketing Department but these are demonstrated in social media pages just for promotion purposes and are not used for after-sales-support. In new media accounts thought to contribute to corporate reputation, they also share social responsibility projects, declare corporate philosophy to both supporters and public; thus, the general stance of the club is known by everybody more.

The responsible social media practitioners of Club-2 from whom information was asked in the study said that they certainly give support to marketing department, official products recently produced of the club are presented in all of the social networks, photos and –campaign texts if available– are shared in the pages and the necessary link is inserted below so that the fans can finish their shopping. Also, necessary guidance for after-sales-support is provided for the fans in order to solve the problems quickly and properly before a direct communication with them is made. For corporate reputation; all the accounts use the same language and design, necessary sharings are done and comments on actual events without referring to political issues with a common sense are allowed. Providing not only Turkish language but also different language options in new media accounts; the number of the supporters has increased and corporate reputation is enhanced.

Corporate communication experts of Club-3 explained that they provide assistance to marketing department in announcing the campaigns to the fans and advertising new products and services. Particularly; by sharing social responsibility projects via these accounts, they aim at increasing social awareness and consciousness; which will eventually enhance corporate reputation.

Corporate communication experts of Club-3 also told that they often resort to official new media tools in order to disclaim false or incorrect news about the club published in printed and visual media and to communicate the corrected version of the news to the fans and supporters and public quickly. Achievements and awards won by other sportive branches not as popular as football are also shared on these pages and thus corporate reputation is enhanced more and more.

4. Conclusions

In a conference held by Sports Marketing Association in 2010, it was reported that use of social networks as advertisement tools disturb fans and supporters and therefore, sports clubs should pay attention to the amount of the messages sent via social media when they resort to social media venues ^[16]. As a result; it is significant not to subject the target group to excessive and disturbing amount of information or advertisement messages. In the current study; the three sports clubs among the top ten trademarks mentioned in the Turkish Facebook-followers report which was issued by socialbakers.com conducting statistical analyses on new media, the number of fans and their interest and attention in branded people or institutions or trademarks and whose datasets are often used in scientific studies were discussed: Galatasaray Sports Club, Fenerbahçe Sports Club and Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club. The study done by Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) ^[16] reported that majority of the NBA clubs have various accounts in social media, these accounts are managed by one department and the clubs mainly prefer Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Google+, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr and LinkedIn as new media venues. From this point of view; considering the popularity of the social

media accounts in Turkiye assessed in our study, we may argue that the current study concur with the study of Kietzmann *et al.* [16] in general and has provided us necessary information and data. These issues are important in preventing the possible problems in the future. The points to be considered by sports clubs in creating new media accounts are shortly summarized as follows

- Official social media pages should be created with the original name of the club.
- As profile photo, a quality and big picture should be used because it is the logo and symbol of sports clubs.
- A descriptive history, active sports branches, official products and product ranges, organization scheme as a corporation and contact information of the clubs should fully be uploaded on pages.
- The language and content of the permanent information presented on new media venues should match with the one used for describing the club as a corporation.
- Separate links for the official web page and other social media accounts should be available on social media networks of the clubs.
- Username should be taken for the page created by the sports clubs (For example; a username is taken from facebook.com/Galatasaray address on behalf of the club and is presented as a link on other social media pages.).
- In order to share contents designed by the sports clubs on other social media accounts; an automatization system should be developed.
- Organizations and events held by sports clubs should simultaneously be shared on official social media networks.
- Official new media accounts should be updated.

The participant sports clubs are interested in Facebook,

Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and Youtube more thanks to their simple contents, simple acquisition of accounts, requiring less labor and time and being free of charge. Although topics shared on Facebook, Twitter and Google+ continuously change; communication process can be manageable because agenda is controlled by one department alone. LinkedIn as a social media tool is different from others for its functional purposes. LinkedIn creates contents that are directly related to corporations and their personnel or presumptive personnel and these contents are shared with LinkedIn users. LinkedIn pages are not utilized by all the participant sports clubs. For those clubs that have LinkedIn accounts; page responsibility, control and supervision belong not to Corporate Communication Department but to Human Resources of the clubs. Again, by activating Youtube channels; club videos are shared with members. The most important difference of Youtube pages is that they are not considered as a general mutual communication tool by the participant clubs. Except one club, the other two clubs have not designed the contents in a way that enables users to comment on.

It is necessary for the sports clubs to build up new media strategies through researches to be conducted and to make decisions before they enter new media venues. Clubs without any new media strategies may experience difficulties in keeping pace with the dynamics of new media. In general sense; new media strategies to be used by the clubs in social media networks comprise clubs' objectives, aims, identity, language and language style, characteristics of the target group, quality of domestic and foreign sources and extent of reporting. It is so important for clubs to design new media strategies that there are always institutions, persons or groups to be affected positively or negatively.

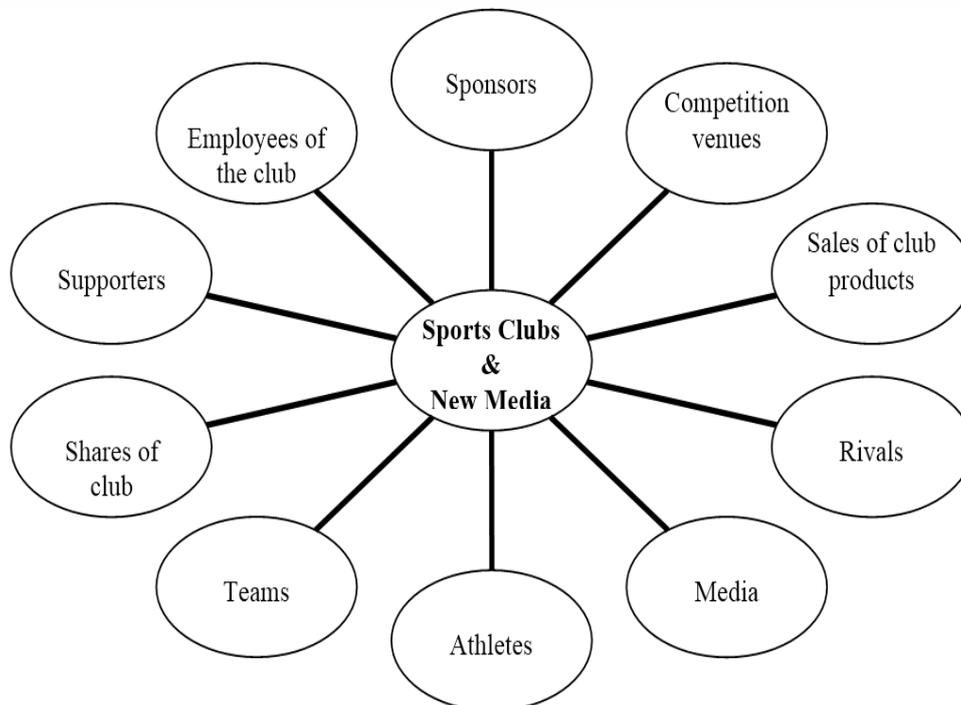


Fig 1: Institutes and persons of sports clubs who are directly related to new media

Using new media effectively and properly by sports clubs may offer them valuable advantages as well as disadvantages such as huge financial and emotional damages. On the one hand; athletes may be motivated for success and attainments by creating public perception with a correct strategy on the other

hand supporters and fans may make contributions to clubs by increasing product sales and turning competitions into festival. In this way; big opportunities can be created by dominating rival clubs in order to reach sportive success as well as economic success, stock market share-prices of clubs can

increase and positive conditions can be prepared so that new sponsors line up at the door of the club. Wrong or poor use of new media by sports clubs may lead to false and wrong news about the clubs in time; which cause huge dangers. Inability to conduct a correct crisis management in case of false news and adverse events and inability to share necessary public announcements with supporters, sponsors, athletes, media and relevant institutions, organizations and persons via new media accounts will pave the way for important short-term and mid-term losses that clubs may undergo.

According to the study done by Rothschild (2011)^[25] on NBA teams, it is still a new approach to use official social media accounts among the NBA teams. Through social media; NBA teams meet an opportunity to create a better supporter experience and satisfaction by improving and empowering official new media venues^[25].

Thanks to the recent and ongoing advancements and public interest in information and communication technologies; new media venues have become an important platform not only for sports clubs but also for all organizations; which has produced the result that social media should not be vested to the responsibility of an ordinary subordinate or personnel. Moreover; universities that have noticed the importance of the issue include new media or new media management courses in curriculums and aim at educating specialized persons in information communication technologies. Because the participant Club-1 and Club-2 are aware of these developments, they have assigned an expert in social media for managing new media accounts under Corporate Communication Department.

In line with the results obtained from the study; recommendations to be made for sports clubs, corporate communication practitioners and researchers who plan and project new scientific researches in this field are listed as follows:

- Significant objectives and concepts that public and supporters should know very well such as sports club's philosophy, mission and vision should be mentioned more in new media accounts.
- Most of the social networks of the sports clubs do not mention main slogan that emphasizes periodic objectives, reflect corporate culture and give information on corporate values as well.
- In terms of assessments on function of communication networks; it was found out that sports clubs share necessary communication channels in social network. However; the fact that communication information on managerial subdepartments (such as marketing, accounting, etc.) is not mentioned at all prevents contacting the correct the responsible person and department quickly.
- When new media accounts are assessed in accessibility, it is seen that one of the significant drawbacks is foreign language contents of these accounts. We are of the opinion that especially those sports clubs that have athletes who compete internationally in different sportive branches should find the countries with the highest number of supporters that follow them in English language and design new media accounts with different language supports in a way to reach far-east markets.
- In our opinion; sports clubs should increase the number of the experts who are in charge of new media accounts. As compared to the European examples; it is known that even in a club who compete in one sportive branch only, almost 100 social media practitioners are employed.

- In our opinion it is important that researchers who plan to conduct studies on new media venues as public relations and corporate communication tools in sports should include small-scale sports clubs in their studies in order to discover the difference between large-scale sports clubs and small-scale sports clubs.

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