

Sports Marketing and Social Media: What Impact in Kinshasa

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Abstract: Long regarded as a simple leisure activity, sport has evolved into a high-potential economic industry (Loret, 1995). In Kinshasa, this evolution is reflected in the progressive transformation of football clubs into genuine entrepreneurial entities, increasingly aware of the stakes of marketing and communication. In a shifting sports market, social media and event marketing have emerged as key tools to increase club visibility, strengthen fan engagement, and attract financial partners. As Hillairet (1999) explains, sport and media maintain a close and strategic relationship. Companies leverage this synergy to communicate effectively, capitalizing on the strong values conveyed by sport: teamwork, dynamism, and performance. This study draws on theories of sports event management and sponsorship to analyze the real impact of digital sports marketing in the Kinshasa context. It highlights current practices, existing opportunities, and the limitations faced by clubs in their pursuit of professionalization.

Keywords: Sports Marketing, Social Media, Promotion of Sports Events.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Sports Marketing

Sports marketing encompasses all techniques, tools, and mechanisms that enable a brand or company to enhance its engagement in the sports sector, with the goal of generating positive outcomes—economically, in the media, or commercially.

Among the most widespread and visible strategies is sponsorship (Kotler & Dubois, 1990). This practice involves associating a company's image with an event, club, or athlete in exchange for visibility on various media : jerseys, advertising boards, traditional media, social networks, and more. Sponsorship enables a company to build brand awareness among different audiences : the general public, industry professionals, and internal stakeholders such as employees and collaborators.

Sponsorship primarily operates on the level of brand image. By associating itself with a sport, a company seeks to transfer to itself the positive values embodied by that sport dynamism, youthfulness, performance, team spirit, excellence, health, or innovation.

The choice of sports partnerships is often strategic. A company may tailor its communication depending on the type of sport (Sporsora, 2008) :

- Popular sports like football or basketball to reach a broad audience ;
- Prestigious sports like golf or equestrianism to appeal to an upscale clientele;
- Youth-oriented sports like surfing or skateboarding to rejuvenate its image ;
- High-tech sports like Formula 1 to showcase innovation ;
- Eco-friendly sports like sailing or hiking to reinforce a sustainable brand image.

Sports marketing helps create a strong emotional connection between the brand and its target audience by leveraging the passion and loyalty that sport inspires.

➤ Social Media

A social network refers to a set of individuals or organizations connected through social interactions. This dynamic social structure enables information sharing, community building, and the maintenance of long-distance relationships.

Online, a social network refers to a digital platform that allows users to connect, share content, communicate, and develop personal or professional relationships (Tshimanga, K.E., 2007). The first online social networks emerged in the late 1990s, offering personalized interactions where users could view and respond to each other's profiles and posts.

As Bardini (1996) points out, social networks now play a fundamental role in modern exchanges. They facilitate the creation and maintenance of long-term relationships, the dissemination of information, and the expression of one's personal or professional identity. Users can customize their profiles, publish content, interact with others, and build targeted connections.

Structurally, a social network can be modeled as a set of nodes (individuals or organizations) connected by edges (relationships or interactions). This graph-based representation is also used in innovation diffusion theory, which examines how social networks influence the spread of ideas and the adoption of new practices.

From a marketing perspective, social media is a strategic tool. It clusters users based on their interests (sports, politics, culture, technology, etc.) and allows businesses to target communications effectively. Various specialized platforms exist: professional networks (LinkedIn), general platforms (Facebook), visual media (Instagram), ephemeral content (Snapchat), and video platforms (TikTok, YouTube), among others.

Faced with this diversity, companies increasingly set up dedicated teams to manage their digital presence. These specialists regularly update content, create interactive features, and design targeted campaigns to maintain community engagement.

Thus, social media is no longer just a means of entertainment; it has become a powerful vector of communication, marketing, and influence, especially in dynamic sectors like sports, where interaction with the public is essential.

➤ Promoting Sports Events

The promotion of sports events is a strategy aimed at enhancing the visibility of football, football clubs, and the products and services offered to fans and partners. It acts as a positioning tool, making clubs and football more attractive by generating growing enthusiasm. This excitement appeals not only to the general public but also to advertisers and businesses eager to associate their brand image with sports in a successful marketing approach.

In general, Alain Loret (1995) defines sports management as *"a rational organization process of mobilizing resources to achieve objectives."* Thus, any sporting event, regardless of its nature, can be optimized and structured to increase its effectiveness. The event becomes a strategic vehicle, requiring careful planning and the adoption of a clear and structured methodology.

Once the objectives and specific challenges of the sector have been identified (Waser, A.M., 1999), it becomes essential to take into account all the components of the sports event, as well as the precise details of its organization. This approach not only allows for effective planning of the various phases of the project but also helps to anticipate potential obstacles wherever possible. The structuring and

formalization of these stages serve as a real management tool, ensuring the coherence, efficiency, and reliability of the entire process.

In this perspective, organizing a sporting event can be considered a true project. According to Maders, H.-P. and Clet, E. (2002), a project is defined as *"an objective to be achieved, by specific actors, in a defined context, within a given timeframe, with defined resources, requiring the use of appropriate methods and tools."*

II. METHOD AND MATERIALS

To present the findings of this research, we adopted the ethnosociological approach developed by Georges Lapassade (1971). This approach proved particularly relevant for collecting and analyzing data, especially in the context of sports and its social and cultural dimensions. It enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of sports marketing particularly through the use of digital platforms as a driver of attractiveness for clubs, events, and associated brands.

Accordingly, data were collected from 85 individuals in the city of Kinshasa, with the aim of identifying the contribution of sports marketing to the vitality and sustainability of football.

III. RESULTS

The survey results reflect the opinions collected regarding the contribution of event marketing to the development and promotion of football.

➤ Contribution of Sports and Event Marketing

On this topic, 69% of respondents believe that sports and event marketing plays a crucial role in promoting football. They consider this type of marketing an effective lever to increase clubs' visibility, attract new supporters, and retain existing fans. Football, as a core activity for these clubs, benefits from enhanced exposure through various promotional campaigns and associated events.

This marketing also helps to highlight the competitions in which clubs participate by creating positive momentum around matches and generating increased excitement among the public. Furthermore, sporting events provide a unique opportunity for sponsors and partners to associate their image with that of the club, which can contribute to improving the team's financial resources and reputation.

Finally, respondents emphasize that event marketing goes beyond simple advertising; it plays a broader role in building a strong club identity by fostering supporter engagement through shared experiences, entertainment, and targeted communication on digital platforms.

➤ Appreciation of Marketing Leadership Within Clubs

On this theme, 83% of respondents believe that sports marketing enables clubs to assert their leadership among their various partners. This leadership is expressed notably through

clubs' ability to build a strong, credible, and attractive image not only in sporting terms but also in communication and stakeholder relationship management.

Respondents identify several groups sensitive to this positioning: supporters, advertisers, and industrial companies from various sectors. Indeed, a club that effectively manages its marketing is perceived as structured, ambitious, and professional, which strengthens the trust of existing partners and attracts new ones. Marketing thus appears as a strategic governance tool, allowing clubs to establish their reputation, negotiate more advantageous contracts, and assert themselves as key players in the sports, media, and economic ecosystem.

➤ *Impact of Digital Platforms on Clubs' Visibility*

In our survey, 73% of respondents affirm that the use of digital platforms (social media, official websites, mobile applications, etc.) has a significant impact on the visibility and reputation of football clubs. Finally, 73% of respondents highlight the impact of digital platforms on the visibility of clubs. This result confirms recent developments in the field of sports communication, where digital tools have become indispensable. Social media, in particular, enable clubs to maintain constant contact with their audience, broadcast content in real time, and generate new revenue streams through e-marketing.

These findings show that sports marketing should no longer be considered a secondary activity, but rather a central dimension of clubs' development strategies. However, some limitations should be noted. On one hand, not all clubs possess the skills or resources necessary to develop and implement an effective marketing strategy.

On the other hand, the professionalization of the sector remains uneven, with many actors still operating intuitively or informally.

It would therefore be relevant, in the future, to strengthen the training of sports leaders in this area and to encourage clubs to adopt a more systematic and structured marketing approach, integrating digital tools as core components of their operational models.

IV. PERSPECTIVES

In light of the results obtained, several perspectives emerge regarding the improvement and professionalization of sports marketing within football clubs, particularly in Kinshasa. First, it appears necessary to enhance the marketing capacities of clubs by offering specific training for leaders, communication managers, and management teams. Developing a structured marketing culture would enable clubs to better exploit commercial opportunities and optimize their relationships with various partners (supporters, sponsors, media, etc.).

Next, the study showed that digital platforms play an increasing role in football promotion. It would therefore be appropriate to encourage clubs to invest more in digital marketing by establishing dedicated teams to manage social

media, produce engaging content, and analyze supporters' behavioral data.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to develop strategic partnerships between clubs, local businesses, and sports institutions to pool resources and build more ambitious event projects capable of generating significant media, economic, and social impact.

Finally, this research paves the way for further complementary studies, notably on the impact of sports marketing on the economic performance of clubs, supporter loyalty, and the digital transformation of sports in African countries. A comparative analysis between different clubs or cities would also enrich the understanding of the dynamics at play.

V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the impact of sports and event marketing, particularly through digital platforms, on the development and visibility of football clubs in Kinshasa.

The results, gathered from the opinions of 85 respondents, clearly show that sports marketing is perceived as a crucial strategic lever. It contributes not only to promoting football but also to strengthening the leadership of clubs with their partners and improving their visibility in an increasingly competitive environment.

With 69% of respondents emphasizing the effectiveness of marketing in promoting football, 83% highlighting its role in the strategic positioning of clubs, and 73% underlining the importance of digital tools, it is evident that the communicational, relational, and digital dimensions of marketing have become indispensable in modern club management.

However, challenges remain, particularly regarding professionalization, training of stakeholders, and access to appropriate tools. Therefore, continued efforts are necessary to further integrate marketing as a core pillar of club strategy.

Sports marketing is no longer limited to simple promotion; it has become a driver of growth, performance, and identity for football clubs, especially in contexts like Kinshasa, where potential is significant but still largely underutilized.

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