

## FAN EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA

**SANDU VLAD ANTONIUS**

*Ph.D. Student UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA, ROMANIA*  
*e-mail: sanduvladantoniuss@gmail.com*

**COSTIN DAN EUGEN**

*Associate Professor Ph.D. DUNĂREA DE JOS UNIVERSITY OF GALAȚI, ROMÂNIA*  
*e-mail: dan.costin@ugal.ro*

**POPA MARIAN GABRIEL**

*Lecturer Ph.D. UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA, ROMÂNIA*  
*e-mail: gabriel.popa@edu.ucv.ro*

**POPESCU MARIUS CĂTĂLIN**

*Lecturer Ph.D. UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA, ROMÂNIA*  
*e-mail: catalin.popescu@edu.ucv.ro*

**PĂȘĂRIN LEONARDO DANIEL**

*Lecturer Ph.D. UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA, ROMÂNIA*  
*e-mail: daniel.pasarin@edu.ucv.ro*

**DUMITRU ROXANA**

*Lecturer Ph.D. UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA, ROMÂNIA*  
*e-mail: roxana.dumitru@edu.ucv.ro*

### **Abstract**

*Activity on social platforms is vital for athletes/athletes/sports clubs to spread their message. It's a great approach to get in touch with fans personally, inform them about new products or services, and humanize the connection between the two camps. sports clubs and athletes can reach an audience far beyond their immediate vicinity by engaging in meaningful online conversations and publishing compelling content.*

*An active and interactive social media presence can also lead to numerous opportunities. First of all, it is about interconnection with other people/sports fans who share the same interests/beliefs, and the possibility to participate in relevant debates. This leads to gaining trust from the network, ultimately building brand authenticity and strengthening the relationship with sports fans.*

*However, it's not all fun and games. Maintaining an authentic and consistent presence on social media is essential. Establishing a positive online presence requires the creation of diverse content, mutual communication between fans and athletes or clubs, meaningful discussions, and compliance with site policies.*

*Not only is the popularity of athletes affected by social media, but also their performance. A strong online presence can give athletes a motivational boost, knowing they have the support of millions of fans. Social platforms also provide a space for athletes to receive real-time feedback and encouragement, which can help improve their performance on the field.*

*In the paper "Fan experience management in social media" Social networks have evolved in ways we could not imagine 10 years ago, and the interaction with the sports world, with athletes and athletes has evolved into a mutually beneficial relationship, as sports entities promote and support solid relationships with fans with the help of these platforms, thus we try in this theme, to emphasize the importance of social networks in the sports sector, how fans can benefit from these developments and how. it helps a better connection between fans and athletes.*

**Keywords:** fans, sport, digital age, social media, loyalty, online presence.

**JEL classification:** M30, M31, M37.

## 1. Introduction

Sport has always played an important role in society, bringing joy, excitement and a sense of community as well as national pride [3]. Over the centuries, sport has evolved from simple local competitions to global events watched by millions of people, gaining ever greater socio-political and economic importance.

Social media has brought sports closer to fans, allowing them to interact with athletes and express their opinions directly. However, this can also lead to a high level of criticism and social pressure. Athletes can be exposed to negative comments and even threats, which can affect self-confidence and emotional health. Such social pressures can negatively influence athletes' performance and ultimately affect their results [8]. Including the expression of unrealistic expectations or ignorance of the status of sports training in a certain period or of dynamic processes causes imbalances in the area of mental and emotional health of athletes.

Social media platforms are powerful tools for marketing sporting events due to their vast potential for reach and engagement [1].

Creating engaging content that resonates with your audience is key. This includes posting regular updates, sharing behind-the-scenes footage, and creating countdowns to build excitement [4].

Using influencers and athletes to promote the event can exponentially increase its visibility. These people often have dedicated followers who trust their recommendations. Partnering with them for shoutouts, live Q&A sessions, or exclusive content can drive significant interest and engagement.

Interactive content such as polls, contests, and user-generated content campaigns can further amplify the impact of the event. Encouraging attendees to share their excitement using a specific hashtag can create a sense of community and anticipation online [2]. In addition, social media advertising allows for highly targeted promotions, ensuring that the event reaches the most relevant audience segments.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 *The rise of social media: A sea change for sports fans*

Social media has revolutionized the way fans engage with sports. We are no longer limited to passive observation while sitting on the sofa or in the stands. We now have access to behind-the-scenes content, real-time updates and direct interaction with players and teams. Social media has given us a sense of ownership over our favourite sports and allowed us to actively participate in creating the narrative [13].

In the digital age we live in today, fan engagement is more important than ever. With so many distractions competing for people's attention online, teams and athletes must find ways to capture the attention of their fans. Without engaged fans, professional sports would not exist as we know them today. Fans are what drive ticket sales, merchandise purchases, sponsorship opportunities, and ultimately revenue generation for teams. Moreover, engagement is necessary because it creates a community among fans, which enhances their emotional connection with their favourite sport or team. This connection causes them to stay involved for the long term, instead of just being supporters who only show up when things are going well on the court or basketball court. Fan involvement is an essential aspect of modern-day sports fanaticism, which has been facilitated by technological advancements in recent decades.

One of the biggest ways social media has impacted fan engagement is its ability to break down barriers between athletes and their supporters. Now, fans can communicate directly with their idols through platforms like Twitter or Instagram. While this can lead to awkward interactions (think oversharing or too much familiarity), it also allows for a unique insight into athletes' personalities and lives outside of their sport. Fans feel more connected than ever, leading to greater loyalty and engagement with their favourite teams.

Social media plays an essential role in the world of sports and has been the basis of its transformation into a truly global social phenomenon. Media has helped create memorable sports moments and through it we are always connected to our favourite teams, sports, and athletes. The

relationship between social media and sports is a very close one. In the modern age, for a sporting event to be truly major, it needs adequate media coverage.

Nowadays, fans are no longer passive observers, and this is because social understanding platforms have allowed them to be actively involved during the games by tweeting live, sharing memes, or through various discussions on the competitions. No matter what's happening on the field, fans can instantly express their excitement or frustration.

Fans can now receive news, insights, and direct commentary from athletes, teams, and sports personalities. The responsiveness of social media fosters a sense of intimacy, and athletes share behind-the-scenes looks, workout routines, and personal stories, creating a stronger connection with their fans everywhere. These social media platforms have become powerful tools for athletes, teams, and organizations to connect directly with fans. Athletes can share personal information, behind-the-scenes views, and participate in real-time conversations.

At major events, fans are encouraged to follow their favourite team on social media. There, the big clubs have specialized social media teams that post live from matches and thus keep the level of fan engagement high.

The most followed teams in the world are Real Madrid with around a quarter of a billion followers on social media and FC Barcelona with over 200 million fans. Some sports clubs, such as Barcelona, have their television channel through which they broadcast matches, interviews, and other news, staying in constant contact with their audience.

Social media has become an important element that has led to the elimination of barriers between athletes and their fans, thus allowing for direct interaction and engagement, regardless of where this is located [10]. The platforms provide a direct line of communication, so athletes can pitch to fans at any time, share personal insights, and provide a glimpse into their daily lives. This interactivity humanizes athletes, fostering a deeper connection with their audience beyond the realm of competition.

The impact of social media on fan engagement and the business of sports is advancing more rapidly than the adoption of TV broadcasts [12]. It's creating new business models that will make it harder for sports organizations to compete for fan attention. And the teams and leagues that can deliver more content through digital channels will be the new media rights winners.

Fans of all ages now turn to social platforms for sports content, including:

- 51% of fans getting sports content on Facebook;
- 46% on YouTube;
- 31% on Instagram;
- 25% on Twitter.

## ***2.2 The most important social media channels***

There is no person who has not heard of the term "social media", but there are few who are truly aware of the force that hides behind this term. Millions of people use social media very often, and this phenomenon has become widespread in the world of sports.

Social media is a process that has the role of raising the degree of awareness of a brand, regardless of whether we are talking about a product, a sportsman, or a club through social media platforms [9]. Social networks are an effective tool used by the majority both for communication and for marketing and sales. A social media marketing campaign aims to generate traffic for the website, increase brand visibility, and increase the number of fans or customers [11].

### **Twitter**

This is one of the best-known and most used social media platforms. Twitter is mainly used for the distribution of information, advertising messages, and other ideas in the form of a tweet, which is a message containing a maximum of 140 characters. Twitter is used with maximum efficiency by businesses for marketing or SEO.

Moreover, if the company does not have a social media specialist, the platform will provide you with a complete guide for using the site to learn how to do social marketing. Through Twitter, you can promote absolutely anything and increase its visibility.

### **Facebook**

With over a billion users, Facebook is the number 1 social media platform in the world. Even though it was initially designed to serve communication, over time, numerous functions were added to influence businesses to move towards promotion. The services and tools available to these members include Facebook marketing, Facebook business, Facebook advertising, as well as Facebook Studio or Facebook Studio Edge.

Facebook is a website that allows users, who sign up for free profiles, to connect with friends, coworkers, or strangers online. It also allows users to sell products/services or share experiences.

### **Instagram**

Instagram is a social media platform that focuses on sharing photos and videos through its mobile app. You can retrieve, edit, and publish visual content to both followers and non-followers as long as your account is public. Users can interact with content by liking, commenting, sharing, and saving.

What can we sell on Instagram?

- Craft products
- Creative services
- Mostly individual experience.

### **Pinterest**

It is one of the most famous social media networks that allows the distribution of images and infographics on a virtual whiteboard.

Although the platform is relatively new in this playground called social media, the site has experienced impressive growth in recent years. The advantage used by businesses is related to the ability to promote valuable content and to create a board as attractive as possible to attract the attention of as many people as possible.

### **TikTok**

TikTok is a social media platform for creating, sharing, and discovering short videos. The app is used by young people as a means of expression through singing, dancing, comedy and lip syncing and allows users to create videos and share them in a community.

### **Snapchat**

Again, a network associated with youth and good mood, Snapchat allows the sharing of images and videos that are deleted shortly after viewing. In addition to the messaging part, very popular are the filters that allow extremely creative photos and videos. More recently, there is even an artificial intelligence chat implemented.

### **YouTube**

It represents an excellent option to market a business. YouTube is the most popular channel in the world, used to share and watch videos. With an enormous audience, YouTube is an extremely effective tool for advertising that does not involve any cost.

### **LinkedIn**

It is more than a social media platform; it is a professional network that allows a global exposure and a professional framework that big brands take advantage of. On LinkedIn, people connect exclusively on professional criteria; they meet people who work in related fields, so the platform can be successfully used for business marketing.

Below are the most popular social networks in the world by number of users:

- Facebook – 2.85 billion users;
- YouTube – 2.29 billion users;
- WhatsApp – 2.00 billion users;
- Instagram – 1.38 billion users;
- Facebook Messenger – 1.30 billion users;
- WeChat (Weixin) – 1.24 billion users;
- TikTok – 732 million users;
- Telegram – 550 million users;
- Sina Weibo – 530 million users;

- Snapchat – 514 million users;
- Pinterest – 478 million users;
- Reddit – 430 million users;
- Twitter – 397 million users;
- Quora – 300 million users.

### 3. Research methodology

This study was carried out between December 15, 2024 - January 25, 2025, based on 123 respondents and aimed to find out their opinion regarding the development of the social media phenomenon and its influence in sports, as well as the way contributed to the creation of a mutual bond between fans and athletes/sports clubs.

The first question followed the creation of a profile of the respondents.

Analysing the data on the respondents, we notice that a percentage of 84% are male, and 16% are female, which means that men are more interested in sports than women.

Regarding the marital status of the respondents, the majority of 45.53% is represented by married people, with the lowest share of 0.81% being the respondents with the status of widower/widow.

The number of respondents aged between 20-30 years were 34 people, the equivalent of 27.64%, 31 respondents were aged 30-40 years, respectively 25.20%, 26 respondents, the equivalent of 21.14%, were aged between 40 - 50 years old, and 32 respondents, the equivalent of 26.02%, are over 50 years old.

The ranking of the respondents according to the last completed studies highlighted the fact that 5 respondents (4.06%) have secondary education, 87 respondents (70.73%) have higher education, and 31 respondents (25.21%) have postgraduate education.

The analysis of the jobs of the people interviewed highlighted the fact that 43 have the status of businessmen, respectively 34.96%, a percentage of 8.95% (11 people) work as government officials, 6 (4.88%) have other occupations than those presented, 7 prospects (5.69%) are students, 3 respondents are retired, the equivalent of 2.44%, 34 (27.64%) they have activities as a teacher, doctor, engineer, economist, 17 prospects (13.82%) are civil servants with secondary education, and 2 of them (1.62%) are employers.

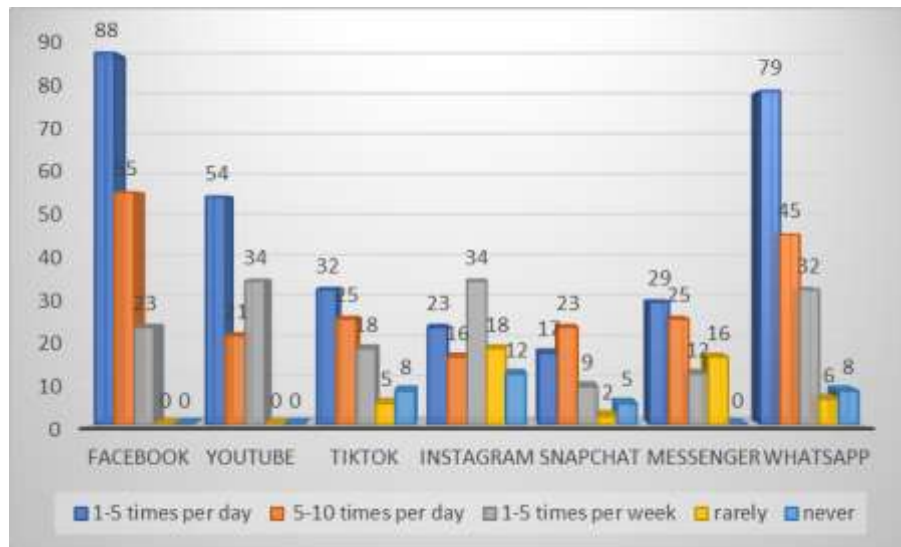
Among the people surveyed, 85% have their permanent residence in the urban environment, and 15% in the rural environment.

### 4. Findings and discussions

First of all, we wanted to know how often our respondents use social networks, especially since we have different age categories and whether this can be a factor of influence or not. Especially during the pandemic, social media has been completely integrated into today's sports culture, so people during the pandemic had to find solutions and ended up being active online for a long time, fans also turn to social media to engage in the topic and sports related content. This has also been noticed by sports organizations who have used these tools to their advantage primarily to promote sports teams and encourage sports conversation with fans around the world. As will be seen in the graph below, all our respondents use social networks daily, some even several times a day, becoming one of their daily habits, so we can conclude that age is no longer a factor impediment to access and access to technology.

Like the most used social networks, Facebook is at the forefront, followed by WhatsApp and YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, and Snapchat ranks last, among others.

**Figure 1 – Distribution according to the number of uses of the social network over time**



Source: own interpretation with the help of the Excel program

Next, we wanted to know the respondents' opinion on how social networks have improved the world of sports and the relationship with fans.

Among the benefits, they brought a social network list and promoted a sportswoman very easily. Many athletes and sports clubs use social channels to promote sports-related activities and activities. It has become imperative that all sports teams have several social channels with the help of which they keep their fans up to date with the latest news. Fans now use social media for sports news and updates more than ever.

Social networks have enabled the distribution of sports news and content, being a bridge for the two tables and allowing two-way communication, which also leads to reductions in marketing costs for sports organizations. Sports fans can use social media to stay up-to-date with sports content, follow their favourite athletes or teams, and interact with other sports audiences.

**Figure 2 – Distribution according to the benefits brought by social networks**



Source: own interpretation with the help of the Excel program

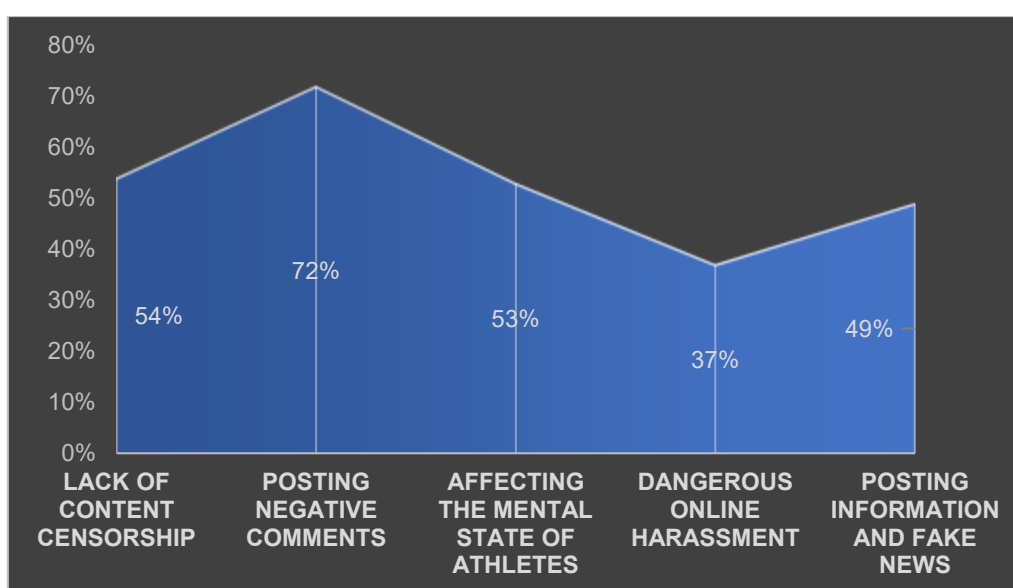
Given that we have discussed the benefits that social networks have brought to the lives of sports and fans, we also wanted to know what the negative effects of the media would be.

A negative effect is that many of these platforms have not found solutions to censor what is possible, a fact that leads to toxic and negative reactions from fans.

So, from a psychological point of view, the effect that networks have on an individual's mental health is very high, because all that information content can lead to anxiety and depression [14]. Also, information and fake news are posted that cannot be controlled because social networks allow active sports discussions by almost anyone with an opinion, but this has led to emotional and mental health problems for many athletes.

It is true that now there is a level of accessibility and interactivity between athletes and their fans, but ignoring the fact that in this way the athletes have built their own brands and managed to keep in touch with their supporters, it also exposed them to a lot of criticism and negativity. Social media users can post negative comments, often anonymously, without thinking about the consequences, leading to a culture of online bullying that can be particularly damaging to athletes.

**Figure 3 – Distribution according to the negative effects brought by social networks**



Source: own interpretation with the help of the Excel program

Next, we discussed how the world of sports, fans, and athletes will look in the future depending on how social networks will evolve.

One of the directions can be to increase the number of young people (Gen Z and younger), increasingly interested in sports, trying to involve them more, to arouse their interest, and to offer them positive experiences at matches.

Regarding the physical base and the stadiums, they will have an evolution as we see in the movies, with video screens integrated into the elastic walls.

There will be events in virtual reality.

From the point of view of transport, you will travel underground and with driverless cars (which will also mean more alcohol consumption in the stadium area), and the lack of parking spaces will allow more construction options.

From a safety point of view, access to the stadiums will be done with facial recognition systems, and the cameras will immediately identify and locate any incidents.

With the help of artificial intelligence, the seats in the stadium will be able to be chosen according to the contacts on social media.

The content offered by the stadium can be customized so that each supporter will have personal holograms and video feeds to follow their favourite players.

Major networks will be blocked as leagues, players, franchises, and fans become kings of content. The influence of commentators and journalists in the network will decrease, as fans will have access to players through social networks.

The major online platform (probably Google) will buy broadcasting rights for several years for major sports leagues. The word "broadcast" will disappear from the lexicon as fans access content from multiple sources simultaneously.

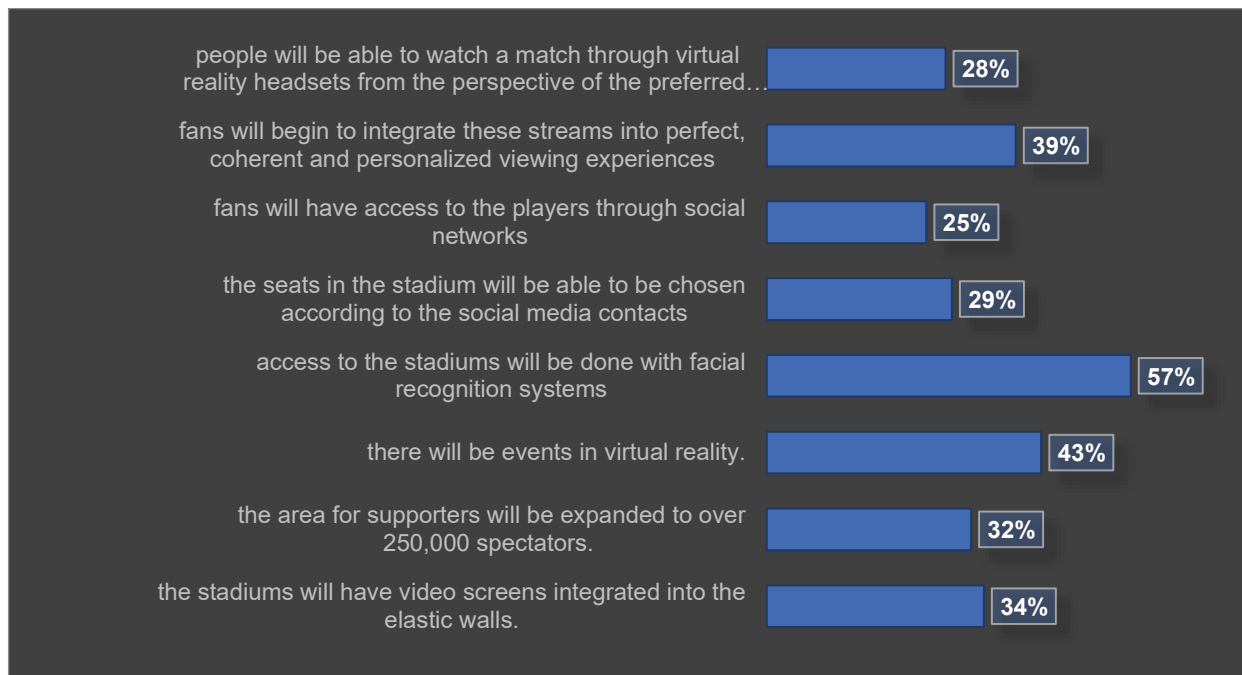
Fans will begin to integrate these streams into seamless, coherent, and personalized viewing experiences [5]. People will be able to watch a match through virtual reality headsets from the perspective of their favourite player.

Some futurologists anticipate robots and kiosks that will replace some of the employees, as well as driverless cars that will replace others. Sports marketing will evolve to focus more on upper- and middle-class women as middle-class wealth declines.

Several franchises will create female teams, not so much for income as for the good of the brand. As an increasing number of fans stay away from live games, the so-called “third venues” will appear as preferred spaces.

These will be 21st-century, family-friendly versions of tech-oriented sports bars. Augmented reality will include 3D replays and life-size close-ups, displayed in venues the size of a theatre.

**Figure 4 – Distribution according to the future evolution of social networks in sports**



Source: own interpretation with the help of the Excel program

## 5. Conclusions

Sport is an effective way to socialize and develop social skills. Through sport, we can build relationships, communicate more effectively, learn values and respect, overcome cultural and language barriers, and develop self-confidence [6]. Participating in sports allows us to interact with people from different backgrounds and improve our communication and cooperation skills [7]. Sports also teach us to follow the rules and accept defeat, thus developing character and emotional maturity. Therefore, sport not only helps us to keep physically healthy, but also to develop social skills essential for success in life.

Social media has a key role in today's sports management, involving fans as well as athletes and clubs, its global reach and its ability to interact and connect with fans in an industry of great popularity, emotional charge, and impact. economic, political, and social.

Whether highlighting authentic stories or investing in skills and education, sports brands, organizations, teams, and athletes have a huge opportunity to be discovered on TikTok and grow their brand outside of sports, generating new forms of awareness and engagement, which ultimately lead to the creation of a loyal fan base. 72% of global social media users say they enjoy watching fan-made clips, reaction videos, or other fan-made sports content, and over 60% say they feel a strong sense of community with other sports fans on the platform.

Social networks have become and will remain in the near future an essential element that helps to build a two-way communication with fans everywhere, especially since we are talking about generation Z which is a digital generation, and which aims to involve the sports public with athletes and sportsmen to be up to date with information related to sports. Social media is undoubtedly changing the way fans watch sporting events. It also controls how organizations and athletes interact with sports audiences and how they expand revenue opportunities with both fans and partners.

### Acknowledgment

All authors contributed equally to this research.

### 6. Bibliography

- [1] Allan, J. (2009). *Event planning: The ultimate guide to successful meetings, corporate events, fundraising galas, conferences, conventions, incentives and other special events* (2nd ed.). Walley.
- [2] Aszalos, C. (2011). *Crampoanele României șchioape. Tabloidizarea presei sportive românești*. Eikon.
- [3] Barbu, M. (2004). *Istoria educației fizice și sportului*. Craiova, Editura Universitaria.
- [4] Barbu, M.C.R., Barbu, C.M. (2011). The management of a public funded sport club in times of crisis - a case study at CSM Craiova. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, 11(4), 455 - 460.
- [5] Barbu, M.C.R., Barbu, C.M., & Diaconescu, D.L. (2020). Marketing developments in the sharing economy. In: R. Pamfilie, V. Dinu, L. Tăchiciu, D. Pleșea, C. Vasiliu eds. *6<sup>th</sup> BASIQ International Conference on New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption*, Messina, Italy, 4-6 June 2020. Bucharest: ASE, pp. 97-104.
- [6] Barbu, M.C.R., Diaconescu, D.L. (2018). Talent management in sport organizations. *Journal of Sport and Kinetic Movement*, 31(1), 62-65.
- [7] Barbu, M.C.R., Bratu, R.S. (2018). Governance structure of nonprofit sports organizations. *Annals of the University of Craiova, Economic Sciences Series*, 46(1), 156-162.
- [8] Bocean, C.G., Logofătu, M., Tudor, S., & Barbu, M.C.R. (2018). Social responsibility in education - challenges and perspectives. *iCOnc 2018 – 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference Competitiveness and Stability in the Knowledge-Based Economy*, Craiova.
- [9] Edwards, C. (2012). *Tips for successful online marketing*. Savannah Morning News.
- [10] Goldblatt, J. (2011). *Special events: A new generation and the next frontier* (6th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- [11] One Cool Gadget. (2023, June 28). *Evoluția implicării fanilor în sporturile din România*. <https://onecoolgadget.com/blogs/descopera-articole-informative/evolutia-implicarii-fanilor-in-sporturile-din-romania>
- [12] Scheck, R. (2024, March 13). *How social media has changed the way we consume sports*. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-social-media-has-changed-way-we-consume-sports-ryan-scheck-5phnc>
- [13] Stan, F. (2021, March 18). *Importanța evenimentelor sportive pentru mass-media*. Romania TV. [https://www.romaniatv.net/importanta-evenimentelor-sportive-pentru-mass-media\\_5354263.html](https://www.romaniatv.net/importanta-evenimentelor-sportive-pentru-mass-media_5354263.html)
- [14] Turcu, I., Borcea, G.B., Diaconescu, D.L., Barbu, M.C.R., Popescu, M.C., & Apostu, P. (2020). The impact of the betting industry on sports. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brașov - SERIES IX - Science of Human Kinetics*, 13(2), 251-258. doi: 10.31926/but.shk.2020.13.62.2.32