28 - USING DIGITAL MARKETING TOOLS IN SPORTS CLUBS WEBSITES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The spread of the Internet and the increase of connection's speed have provided a large environment for incorporation of sports marketing strategies focused on the relationship with the fan. The digital marketing has become the base to clubs to build up fans communities, develop a digital identity and to diffuse values and promises of their brands. The website, main platform connecting fans and sports, saw a big change with the emergence of social networks and new ways of using the web. On one hand, these platforms have provided a personal space to users to publish amateur multimedia content besides the formation of communities around a common subject, where each participant can contribute by sharing information considered interesting and be valued for their participation. On the other hand, caused the change on the ways of content distribution so far called 'Top Down' by its linearity company-user, to a dynamic 'Bottom Up', circular, where the user, the web and organizations interact, co-produce and disseminate the contents (Pybourdin, 2010).

In this context, the website is no longer the only sports clubs official platform, but part of a integrated system where it needs to reinvent itself to meet the fan's needs. The incorporation of digital marketing tools in sports websites is an attempt to this reinvention.

This paper investigates how sports clubs uses digital marketing tools on their websites to offer multimedia content and promote interaction with the fan. The method comprises a checklist of 32 implementable tools categorized in dimensions a priori in accordance to given literature.

The sample comprises the official websites of the 20 soccer clubs competing in the first division of the Brazilian national soccer championship in 2013. The results shows that few clubs are using more than 50% of all digital marketing tools searched in their websites and that the 'ease of use' dimension is the most present. The wide range of tools combination can represent differences in clubs marketing objectives. Moreover, the diversification of clubs digital presence can mean that others platforms, such as social networks, are being used to perform the missing functions tools of their websites. From this work, a variety of sports professionals can benefit from the information regarding the functionality of the website platform and implementable tools, as seen in the study.

INTRODUCTION

The Web 2.0, also called web of contribution (Pybourdin, 2010), is derived from the technology development, which allowed the establishment of search engines, multimedia platforms such as Youtube and Flickr, and social networks. With them, new social habits came as digital profiles creation, participation in virtual communities and free download of photos, videos and music. This greater freedom in the exchange of information and contents has given users empowerment in what to do, share and consume online. Coupled to this phenomenon, the proliferation of personal pages and discussion forums elicited the amateur expertise, where all users can publish their personal opinions, make recommendations and be credited by other users of the network.

As a result, the 'user empowerment': term given to that power the user gets by becoming spokesman to his own and third-party content, which he engages to share on the web. These digital choices, made individually or in community, can influence other groups and promote a snowball effect, or have no repercussion and fall into oblivion. This incertitude demonstrates two characteristics of this 'empowerment': the potential to influence a large number of people in the web (in a personal, economic, organizational, political and/or legislative way) and the dynamic flow of information (Dutton, 2005). O'Reilly (2007), in turn, characterizes the Web 2.0 as a decentralized environment, based on the users' experiences and their actions, often related to multimedia contents.

Fan, sports and the digital community

The relationship between fans, sports clubs and the Internet already caught the attention of scientific community. Pitta & Fowler (2005) observed a considerable growth of the digital audience for sports in which fans engage in communities and are predisposed to interact with others and sports actors. Leighton (2007 apud Ioakimidis, 2010) corroborates with the idea citing the proliferation of amateur contents as evidence of this engagement on the web.

Increased numbers of weblogs, amateur podcasts and vlogs, as well as the attendance to live webcasts on different digital platforms are the results of the engagement of fans with sports on the web (Kahle, 2007). Through social networks, blogs and forums, the fan interacts with others and exposes their opinions about their favourite sport or team. Kahle (2007) suggests that the extent to which fans interact with others around the globe increases the possibilities of influence in amateur digital consumption. As an example, Gibbons & Dixon (2010) mentions the contribution of football fans in forums and blogs as activities that allowed the construction of communities in which they also discuss their concerns about sports and where they calls for changes in certain aspects of games/teams. They also claim that these initiatives, stimulated by own fans, has the effect of preserving the interactions between them by different digital platforms such as email, social networks and message platforms (Brown et al., 2008 apud Gibbons & Dixon, 2010).

Wilson study's (2007 apud Gibbons & Dixon, 2010) deals with the use of the internet by sports fans in three major areas: sports update, live monitoring and purchasing services and products online. The results revealed that "11% of users and just over one fifth of all American football fans (18%) regularly use the internet to access direct results, summary of new games and sports information. Second, 7% of football fans use the network to follow live sports events through videos, audios and texts. Finally, the acquisition of products and online betting is a third, non-developed set of web services used".

The diversity of platforms and modes of use of Internet explains the web's complexity and the multiplicity of possibilities to engage the fan and his favourite team or sport. For Simmons (2007), there are four pillars for the development of brands on the web: understanding the consumer, communicate, promote interaction and provide content. In this scenario Richelieu (2005) and Kitchin (2006) put in evidence the need to build a loyal relationship between the club and its fans from the provision, by clubs, of spaces for interaction and online extension of fan's experience. Satisfy their needs towards the club, players and sports results becomes essential.

Therefore, the creation of a seductive digital presence, which enhances the interaction with the fans and meets their

expectations, could facilitate the construction of a community engaged and active in the process of consolidation of clubs brand and values on the web.

WEBSITE AS MARKETING TOOL

During its infancy, the web didn't allowed complex or bulky websites, which included only low resolution images and static text (Turow 2009 apud Ioakimidis, 2010). The lack of search engines made access to sports websites difficult and email was still a novelty to explore. The limitations of that time led many organizations to ignore the web as a marketing tool using it just to present the news of the club to fans (Beech et al, 2000).

With the development of digital audience and fans communities, eagers for information and interaction with sports (Evans & Smith, 2004), the possibilities of using the web as a sports marketing tool became evident. Therefore, to understand the opportunities and limitations of the web as well as the needs of online fans is an important step (Rein et al, 2007) in the development of a community where fans, media and sponsors promote sporting institutions in response to the benefits of social exchange and individual identification (Smith, 2007 cited Ioakimidis 2010).

To feed this system, sports clubs diversified their digital presence, infiltrating social networks and implementing new tools on websites. The aesthetic appearance and disposal of high quality multimedia content, plus the enhancement of user's generated content are part of the modifications found on sports websites (Beech et al., 2000). Furthermore, the establishment of digital security measures (Karim, 2011) that would increase the confidence of navigation and online shopping, as well as the restructuring of the sites to a simple navigation model turned the website into a showcase for the brand and the values of the sports clubs.

Kitchin (2006) emphasizes that creating interactive websites, where the fan identifies himself and has an answer to their digital expectations could contribute to the development of an attractive space in which he returns regularly and spends more time connected to the platform. According to Hur, Ko and Claussen (2012), the perception of the fan on the ease of use of the website as well as the entertainment offered are also variables that determine the use of sports website.

MARKETING TOOLS IN SPORTS WEBSITES

According to Williams & Chinn (2010), the development of social media (blogs, social networks, forums, content managers, content aggregators) represents an opportunity for sports marketing where managers needs to adopt new attitudes towards those different tools. These can be characterized by allowing users to connect, communicate and collaborate with others. This collaboration is distributed in user's capabilities to watch, share and improve contents.

In Ioakimidis (2010), two dimensions of the web 2.0 were treated: services related to multimedia, and promoted interaction with the fan. Kitchin (2006) reinforces the extent of interaction as one that has the ability to increase the time fans stay connected to the page. Hur, Ko & Claussen (2012) mentions the ease of use the website as another dimension while Zhang & Won (2010) speak of the possibility of generating resources on the website via e-commerce.

Thus, we can consider that the function of sports website is divided into four dimensions: Multimedia, Interactivity, Accessibility and a Commercial character, each of which can be enhanced by a set of digital marketing tools.

Multimedia dimension includes tools related to the provision of online content: news, photo albums, audio and video clips, e-books and digital magazines, statistics stock, web streaming, live audio, live scores, smartphone apps, tablets apps, wallpapers and similar, RSS feeds, newsletter, mobile services and online/download games. In Interactivity dimension, tools that promote interaction fan-fan-club: social networking, polls/quizzes, forums/messages boards, member log-in, blogs, internal fans network, share button and email address. In Accessibility dimension tools whose purpose is to facilitate platform navigation: search function, frequently asked questions, mobile compatibility, site map, multi-language. On Commercial character tools aimed to monetize: online shop, online tickets, travel agency and advertising.

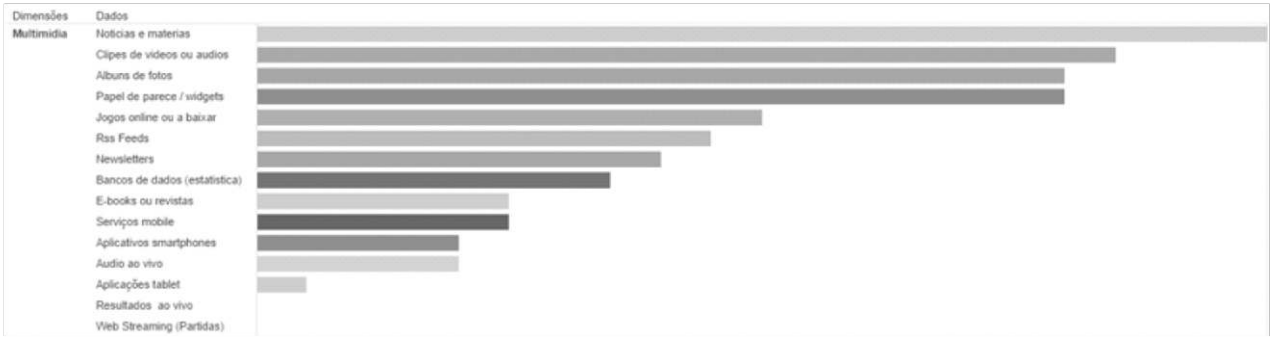
METHODOLOGY

The sample consists of the website of 20 Brazilian football clubs that compete in the first division of the Brazilian national championship in 2013. This competition is considered the highest level of professional soccer in Brazil and all clubs have websites originally in Portuguese, facilitating the collection.

Four dimensions were defined following the presented literature: Multimedia, Interactivity, Accessibility and Commercial character. Each site was fully investigated in order to determine the presence of each of the four dimensions tool set. Data collection was conducted in May 2013 through a check list.

RESULTS

A wide variety of digital tools were found on the websites (Figure 1). Of the 32 tools searched, only 2 ('web streaming' and 'Live Scores') were not found in any site surveyed. Among the most used tool 'News' and 'Social Networks' were the unique found in all sites (Figure 2). In Multimedia dimension, tools linked to 'photos', 'audio', 'videos', 'wallpapers' and 'online/download games' concentrated 52% of incidences found in the dimension. As tools for Interaction, most clubs have 'share button' (70% of clubs) and 'member log-in' (50% of clubs). Only 15% offers 'forums' or 'polls/quizzes'. In terms of Accessibility, the 'search function (85% of clubs) and the 'site map' (65% of clubs) were the tools found in most clubs sites. 35% of clubs have the site in languages other than Portuguese and only 25% of the total have 'mobile compatibility'. The provision of a 'virtual store' and 'online tickets' correspond to 77% of monetization strategies, and 'advertising' were the less used in Commercial dimension.



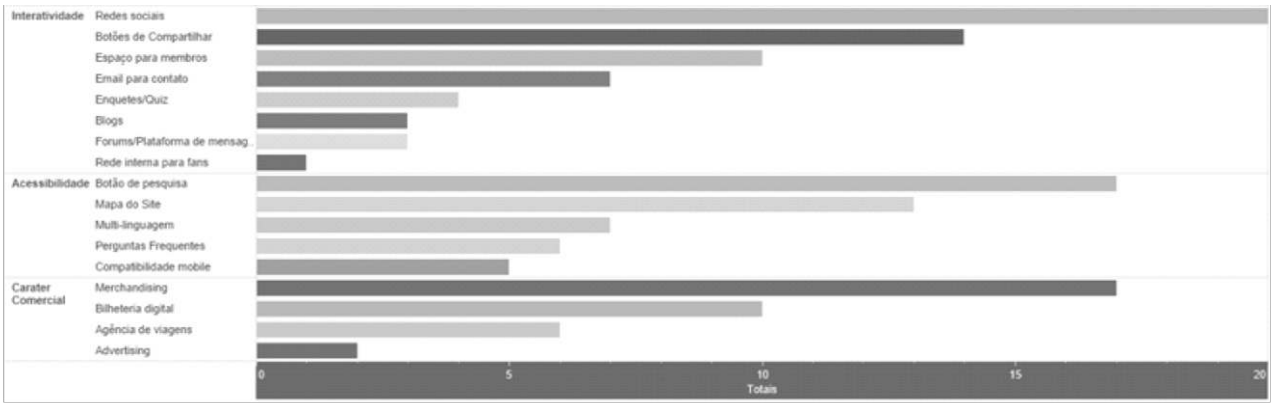


Figure 1: Result of tools incidences founded in the sample (by author)

The average of tools found on the sample was 13.4. Only 1 club offers over 20 tools on their website. 14 clubs use less than 50% of total tools and 5 clubs provide exactly 50%.

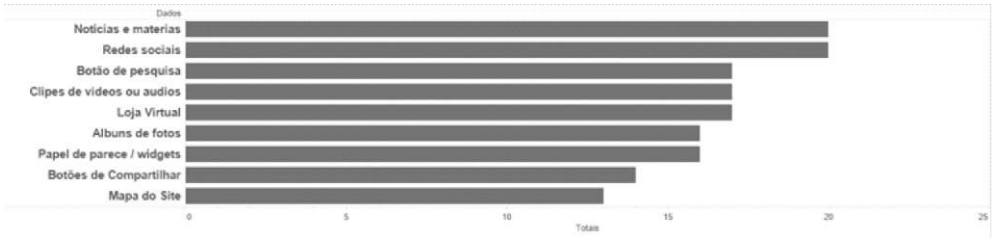


Figure 2: Tools used by most clubs on their websites (by author)

DISCUSSION

Most clubs provides less than half of the possible incorporated tools in websites. This may mean fewer opportunities to promote interaction with the fan or offer online content by the platform. A broad mix of tools and the participation of clubs in social networks can justify decisions to implement more or less tools on the website. This choice may be determined, for example, by the characteristics of fans communities and clubs communications purposes.

The presence of social networks in all clubs can mean a displacement of certain features of Interactivity and Multimedia to other platforms, which could also explain the absence of tools like 'polls' and 'forums' on website. Among the four dimensions studied, Accessibility was the one that had the greatest number of incidents found in the total (48%) and Interactivity (39%) the lowest. This difference can be justified by the need to often feed the site in most tools of Interactivity dimension (eg 'digital magazines' and 'blogs'). That requires qualified personnel and consequent costs increased with human resources. In other hand, the provision of Accessibility tools can be made only once while tools from Commercial dimension can bring direct return to the club's financial investments, justifying its higher incidence in the sample.

The lack of tools for live content ('Web streaming' and 'live scores') may be related to the business model of sports clubs and broadcasting contracts, as well as the low incidence of 'advertising', could be related to sponsorship contracts and the allocation of website spaces for sponsors. The low incidence of 'smartphones apps', 'mobile compatibility' and 'tablets apps' reveals the unpreparedness of clubs in relation to mobile sports consumption.

With regard to the functionality of the website, we can infer that the platform is still used for the provision of multimedia content at the expense of interactivity with fans. Among the most commonly used tools, 4 are linked to content, 2 to accessibility and 1 to monetization. The 2 interactive tools in the list don't optimize the time spent by the fan on the website since they drive them to other platforms.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Understanding the features of each digital platform as well as the tools that can be implemented on them can help online strategy decision making by sports clubs. In order to achieve the fan engagement and his frequent return to the official website, the literature tells us that it's important to provide multimedia content, interactive options and navigation facilities. This work revealed that, for the selected sample, the supply of content and accessibility override interactivity. This doesn't mean that the club doesn't offer interactivity but suggests that other platforms may be playing this role, such as social networks.

Diversify the digital presence can be a good strategy to develop sports brand on the web. Increase interactivity through blogs, online multiplayer games and polls may increase the time that the fan remains connected to the club through Internet. Promote differentiated multimedia contents, accessible by any device can minimize the barriers of sports content consumption.

More studies are needed to determine the functionality of the website in the overall digital marketing of sports actors. Finally, further studies could determine the relative sports consumption as well as the impact of digital marketing on the expansion and enhancement of sports clubs brands, furthermore the advantages and disadvantages of implementing each tool on the website. Understanding the relationship between the fan and his favourite team through social networks could clarify the relation of the website inside the digital presence of clubs and offer solutions to optimize actions developed in the web.

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USING DIGITAL MARKETING TOOLS IN SPORTS CLUBS WEBSITES

The development of technology and social media has changed our daily lives. Post- digital sports clubs evolved to provide, by digital platforms, different forms of interaction and experience to fans, a phenomenon that already took scientific attention (Beech et al., 2000; Ioakimidis2010; Hur, Ko & Claussen, 2012). In this scenario, the website saw a big change with the emergence of social networks and new ways of using web, while reinvents itself to correspond to the fan's needs. The incorporation of digital marketing tools in sports websites is a result of this reinvention. This work investigates how the 20 soccer clubs from Brasileirão Série A 2013 use the digital marketing tools on their websites to offer content and promote interaction with the fan. The method comprises a checklist of 32 implementable tools on the platform, categorized a priori in accordance to the given literature. The results shows that few clubs are using more than 50% of all digital marketing tools searched in their websites and that the 'ease of use' dimension is the most present. From this work, sports professionals can benefit from the information regarding the functionality of the website platform and marketing tools, as seen with Brazilian sports clubs.

KEY WORDS: Sports marketing; sports website; Sports management

UTILISATION D'OUTILS DE MARKETING DIGITAL DANS LES SITES WEB DES CLUBS SPORTIFS

Le développement technologique et des médias sociaux ont changé nos vies quotidiennes. Les clubs sportifs Post-numériques ont aussi évolué pour fournir, par les plateformes numériques, différentes formes d'interaction et expérience pour les fans, un phénomène qui a déjà pris l'attention de la communauté scientifique (Beech et al, 2000 ; Ioakimidis, 2010 ; Hur, Ko & Claussen, 2012). Dans ce scénario, le site web a vu un grand changement avec l'émergence des réseaux sociaux et de nouvelles formes d'utilisation du Web, dont il se réinvente pour correspondre aux besoins des fans. L'incorporation d'outils de marketing digital dans les sites Web sportifs étant le résultat de cette réinvention. Ce travail étudie la façon dont les 20 clubs de football de la Série A du Brasileirão 2013 utilisent les outils de marketing digital sur leurs sites Web pour offrir contenu et promouvoir l'interaction avec le fan. La méthodologie comprend une liste de 32 outils intégrables sur la plateforme, classées a priori conformément à la littérature donnée. Les résultats montrent que peu de clubs utilisent plus de 50% des outils de marketing

digital recherchées dans leurs sites Web et que la dimension 'facilité d'utilisation' est la plus présente. De ce travail, une variété de professionnels du sport peuvent se bénéficier des informations concernant les fonctionnalités de la plateforme site Web et les outils intégrables, à exemple des clubs brésiliens.

MOTS CLÉS: Marketing sportif; site web sportif; Management sportif

EL USO DE HERRAMIENTAS DE MARKETING DIGITAL EN SITIOS DE CLUBS DEPORTIVOS

El desarrollo de la tecnología y los medios sociales ha cambiado nuestra vida cotidiana. Clubes deportivos post-digitales también se desarrollaron para proporcionar, por las plataformas digitales, distintas formas de interacción y experiencia para los fans, un fenómeno que ha capturado la atención científica (Beech et al, 2000; Ioakimidis, 2010; Hur, Ko & Claussen, 2012). En este escenario, el sitio web vio un gran cambio con la aparición de las redes sociales y las nuevas formas de utilización del Internet, se reinventando para corresponder a las necesidades del fan. La incorporación de herramientas de marketing digital en los sitios web de clubs deportivos es el resultado de esta reinvención. Este trabajo investiga cómo los 20 clubes de fútbol del Brasileirão Série A 2013 utilizan las herramientas de marketing digital en sus sitios web para ofrecer contenido y fomentar la interacción con el fan. El método comprende una lista de control de 32 herramientas integrables en la plataforma, categorizadas a priori, en conformidad con la literatura cientifica. Los resultados muestran que pocos clubes utilizan más de 50% de las herramientas de marketing digital buscadas en sus sitios web y que la "facilidad de uso" es la dimensión más frecuente. A partir deste trabajo, profesionales del deporte pueden beneficiarse de la información con respecto a la funcionalidad de la plataforma de sitio web y herramientas integrables.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Marketing deportivo; Página web deportiva, Gestión deportiva

O USO DE FERRAMENTAS DE MARKETING DIGITAL EM WEBSITES DE CLUBES ESPORTIVOS

O desenvolvimento da tecnologia e das mídias sociais mudou nosso quotidiano. Os clubes esportivos da era pós-digital também evoluíram no sentido a proporcionar, pelas plataformas digitais, diferentes formas de interação e experiência aos fans, fenômeno este que já captou a atenção científica (Beech et al. 2000; Ioakimidis2010; Hur, Ko & Claussen, 2012). Neste cenário, o website viu uma grande mudança com o surgimento das redes sociais e os novos modos de utilização web, ao mesmo tempo em que se reinventou para corresponder às demandas dos fans. A incorporação de ferramentas de marketing digital nos websites esportivos é consequência desta reinvenção. Este trabalho investiga como os 20 clubes de futebol do Brasileirão Série A 2013 utilizam as ferramentas de marketing digital em seus websites na oferta de conteúdo e promoção da interação com o fan. A metodologia compreende um checklist de 32 ferramentas implementáveis na plataforma, categorizados a priori de acordo com a literatura apresentada. Os resultados revelam que poucos clubes utilizam mais de 50% das ferramentas procuradas e que a principal dimensão presente nos websites é Acessibilidade. A partir deste trabalho, profissionais das áreas de marketing esportivo, gestão esportiva e marketing digital podem ser beneficiados pela disposição de informações referentes à funcionalidade da plataforma website e das ferramentas imbutiveis.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Marketing esportivo; website esportivo; gestão esportiva