

Review

UDK: 796.035:316.47

004.738.5:316.472

Received: 17.5.2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58984/smb2502109d>

Accepted: 25.6.2025

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## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE PROMOTION OF RECREATIONAL SPORTS

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**Abstract:** Social media represents a key tool in modern communication, enabling broad accessibility to information and the creation of communities with shared interests. In the context of promoting recreational sports, these platforms play a significant role in encouraging physical activity, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and attracting participants. This paper focuses on analyzing how social media is used to promote recreational sports, with an emphasis on best practices and strategies. It specifically examines the role of visual content, interactivity, and creative marketing approaches that enable direct engagement with the audience. Through the exploration of various practical examples, the paper highlights the importance of social media as platforms that facilitate access to recreational sports and foster greater inclusivity in sports activities. The aim of this paper is to underline the significance of digital technologies in sports development and to provide recommendations for their more effective utilization.

**Keywords:** social media, recreational sports, promotion, physical activity, marketing strategies, visual content

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## **Introduction**

In modern society, recreational sports play a key role in maintaining health, social cohesion, and improving the quality of life. They represent a means of physical activity, relaxation, and community building, encouraging positive habits and mental well-being in individuals. With the fast-paced lifestyle and increased urbanization, the need for participation in recreational sports is becoming increasingly important, not only from a health perspective but also as part of the social dynamics and the culture of an active lifestyle. Alongside the growing significance of recreational sports, social media has emerged as a key factor in their promotion. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube provide greater access to information, inspiration, and motivation for sports activities. Through various digital strategies, sports organizations, influencers, and individual enthusiasts are able to attract more people toward an active lifestyle. Social media not only increases the visibility of recreational sports but also enables the creation of interactive communities that encourage engagement and participation across different age groups. The aim of this paper is to underline the significance of digital technologies in sports development and to provide recommendations for their more effective utilization.

## **Social media as a tool for sport promotion**

In the modern digital society, social media has become one of the most powerful tools for promoting various activities, including sports. Social media allows for real-time updates, enabling journalists and sports organizations to share news as soon as it happens (Farrington et al. 2017). They facilitate quick and effective communication, global accessibility, and opportunities for interactive audience engagement. Social platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) allow sports organizations, recreational clubs, and individual enthusiasts to reach a wider audience, encouraging people towards an active lifestyle. Social media has evolved from simple communication platforms into complex ecosystems that offer audiovisual content, interactive formats, and targeted promotion.

Since the emergence of Facebook in 2004, the digital landscape has significantly changed, with the rise of visually-oriented networks like Instagram and TikTok, which have become especially influential in the sports industry. The popularity of these platforms has grown due to algorithms that promote relevant content, allowing sports enthusiasts, clubs, and brands to increase their visibility at minimal cost. One of the key factors behind the success of social media in sports promotion is their

ability to create communities. Through groups, hashtags, and interactive campaigns, people with shared interests can easily connect, share experiences, and motivate each other. Recreational sports clubs, fitness instructors, and sports enthusiasts use these platforms to organize events, challenges, and live training sessions, resulting in increased engagement and participant dedication. Social media has a significant impact on consumer decisions, especially when it comes to sports and healthy lifestyles. Users are inspired by success stories, challenges, and trends they see online, which directly influences their motivation to engage in sports activities. Additionally, brands use social media for sponsored posts, influencer marketing, and interactive campaigns, which greatly influence the choice of sports equipment, exercise programs, and recreational methods. Athletes and teams use social media to build their personal brand and engage with fans. (Kunkel et al. 2017) Social media enables real-time communication and interaction with fans, enhancing fan engagement. (Pegoraro, A. 2010)

Social media not only facilitates the promotion of recreational sports but also creates a dynamic environment where users actively participate, share, and motivate each other. This highlights their crucial role in increasing physical activity and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

### **Visual content and interactivity in sports promotion**

Visual content plays a crucial role in capturing attention and engaging users. Especially in the sports industry, where dynamics, emotions, and energy are best conveyed through images and videos, visual communication has become an indispensable element in promoting recreational sports. Social media enables quick and effective sharing of such content, encouraging participation, motivation, and the creation of sports communities. Visual content has significantly greater reach and influence on audience behavior compared to text-based posts. Research shows that posts with images receive more interactions, while videos have an even higher engagement rate. In the context of sports promotion, training videos, motivational clips, competitions, and personal sports challenges are particularly effective for inspiring and encouraging participation.

Leong et al. (2017) In their research, the authors analyze how social media influences purchase intentions and brand loyalty. They emphasize that visual content on social media plays a significant role in consumer decision-making, with images and videos playing a key role in attracting attention and creating positive attitudes toward brands. The authors also highlight that successful social media marketing

strategies are based on creativity in presenting visual material and its ability to stimulate emotional reactions from consumers. Visually attractive content evokes emotions, creates a connection with viewers, and motivates people to take action, whether it's joining a sports club, starting a new workout, or participating in a sports event. Influencers, particularly those active in the sports industry, have a significant impact on users' perceptions and behaviors. Their posts, training sessions, reviews of sports equipment, and personal stories serve as inspiration for followers, who often imitate their habits and lifestyle. Additionally, user-generated content (UGC) plays a critical role in building authenticity and trust. When people share their sports experiences, achievements, and personal stories through videos, images, and comments, they become part of the digital sports community and encourage others to join. Campaigns that use hashtags, challenges, and interactive posts further increase engagement, allowing for organic spread of the sports message. Live streaming is one of the most powerful tools for sports promotion, as it enables real-time interaction with the audience. Viral campaigns, hashtags, and influencer partnerships amplify these messages, reaching different audiences and encouraging public participation (Freeman et al. 2015, Jackson et al. 2021).

Broadcasts of competitions, training sessions, or sports events create a sense of presence and immediacy, which increases the connection between sports enthusiasts. Moreover, sports challenges that spread through TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are a great way to engage a large number of people. Campaigns like the "30-Day Fitness Challenge" or "Run 5 km and challenge a friend" gain massive popularity and motivate many to participate in recreational sports activities. Interactive formats such as polls, quizzes, and Q&A sessions enable deeper engagement and direct communication with the audience. Sports brands, coaches, and organizations use these tools to gather feedback, create personalized experiences, and build long-term loyalty with followers. Visual content and interactivity play a fundamental role in digital sports promotion. The power of images and videos, the influence of influencers, user-generated content, and interactive formats significantly contribute to greater involvement of people in recreational sports. With the proper use of these tools, sports organizations and enthusiasts can increase their audience, inspire an active lifestyle, and foster a sports culture in the digital world.

### **Creative marketing strategies in sport promotion**

In the digital era, sports promotion requires innovative and creative approaches to attract and retain the audience's attention. Social media enables various marketing

strategies that combine authentic user experiences, targeted paid ads, and collaborations with brands and sports organizations. Through effective use of these strategies, recreational sports can become more accessible, attractive, and dynamic to a broader audience.

One of the most powerful ways to attract new participants to recreational sports is through authentic personal stories. User experiences, shared through videos, images, or written testimonies, create an emotional connection with the audience and inspire others to engage in sports activities. Creative marketing strategies leverage storytelling to create emotional connections with fans. (Filo et al. 2015) Marketing campaigns that focus on real stories—such as transformations through sports, personal achievements, or shared sports experiences—have higher engagement and trust from the audience. People are more motivated to start a specific activity when they see real examples of successful athletes or recreational enthusiasts who have achieved positive results. Sports promotion on social media is based on a combination of organic reach and paid advertising. Organic reach involves creating quality content that naturally attracts followers through sharing, interactions, and hashtags. Paid ads enable faster targeting and a wider audience reach.

- **Organic Reach** – This includes posting authentic, valuable, and interesting content that attracts followers through shares, interactions, and hashtags. Video demonstrations of exercises, behind-the-scenes training content, health tips, and motivational messages often receive high interaction.
- **Paid Ads** – Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube offer precise targeting based on demographics, interests, and behaviors. This allows sports organizations to reach specific groups of people, such as fitness enthusiasts, recreational athletes, or families looking for sports activities for their children.

With a well-balanced strategy between organic and paid promotion, sports brands and organizations can increase their visibility and build long-term connections with their audience.

Collaboration with sports brands and organizations is a key element of successful sports promotion. Large sports companies, fitness centers, and sports clubs invest in marketing campaigns that include influencers, sponsored competitions, and interactive challenges.

- **Sponsorships and Partnerships** – Brands often support sports events and initiatives, providing financial support or sports equipment in exchange for

visibility and marketing. This is a common practice for races, marathons, fitness campaigns, and online sports challenges.

- **Collaborations with Influencers** – Engaging well-known athletes, fitness influencers, and trainers helps spread the sports message to a wider audience. Influencers create content that feels authentic and inspiring, which increases the influence of the brand or organization.
- **Promotion through Sports Competitions and Challenges** – Organizing online or offline sports events, such as fitness marathons, yoga challenges, or sports camps, is an excellent way to activate the community. Social media serves as the main platform for promoting and coordinating such activities.

Creative marketing strategies in sports promotion combine authentic stories, effective use of paid ads and organic reach, as well as collaborations with brands and organizations. By integrating these elements, sports enthusiasts, clubs, and companies can build a strong digital brand, inspire people to engage in sports activities, and create long-term audience engagement.

### **Accessibility and inclusivity in recreational sports through social media**

Social media plays a key role in expanding access to recreational sports, enabling greater inclusivity and participation across different social groups. Through digital platforms, sports activities become more accessible to people of all ages, physical abilities, and economic backgrounds, encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle. Social media enables sports organizations to communicate directly with a wider and more diverse audience, improving accessibility (Achen et al. 2016). Traditionally, participation in sports required physical presence, financial resources, and access to proper sports facilities. However, social media overcomes these limitations by enabling:

- **Online training and tutorials** – Free videos and interactive sessions on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok make sports activities accessible to everyone, regardless of geographic location or financial means. Interactive content not only keeps the audience engaged but also allows participants to focus on long-term fitness goals, which was highlighted during quarantine periods and also showcases the potential of social media to support long-term fitness goals (Santos et al. 2023, Bjursten et al. 2017).

- **Digital sports communities** – Groups and forums on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Reddit create supportive environments where people can share experiences, receive advice, and motivate each other.
- **Virtual competitions and challenges** – Social media allows the organization of online sports events, such as virtual races, fitness challenges, or yoga sessions, that involve people regardless of their location. A new dance challenge on TikTok or a fitness challenge on Instagram can quickly gather millions of participants, turning exercise into a fun and social activity. This viral nature helps normalize physical activity and integrate it into daily life, especially among younger generations (Han et al. 2020, Alhabash et al. 2019).

Through these mechanisms, social media facilitates access to sports and reduces the need for expensive memberships, travel, and specialized equipment. Social media enables greater inclusivity in sports by tailoring content for various target groups:

- **Children and youth** – Through interactive videos, challenges, and educational games, platforms like TikTok and YouTube motivate young people to engage in sports activities instead of spending time in passive online interactions.
- **Adults and older adults** – More and more fitness trainers and health organizations are creating content for this population, such as low-intensity exercises, yoga, and mobility programs.
- **People with special needs** – Social media allows for adapted training and programs for people with various physical and cognitive abilities. Online instructors create inclusive videos with modified exercises, and digital communities offer support and experience exchange.
- **Economically disadvantaged groups** – Free online programs and virtual sports initiatives give those with limited financial resources the opportunity to be part of the sports world.

Through these mechanisms, social media contributes to reducing social disparities and enabling equal access to recreational sports. While social media opens new opportunities for sports inclusion, there are also certain challenges and barriers:

- **Digital inequality** – Not everyone has access to quality internet connectivity, smart devices, or digital literacy, which can limit participation opportunities.

- **Physical limitations** – Although there are online programs for people with disabilities, there is still a lack of sufficient adapted content and specialized instructors.
- **Lack of motivation and discipline** – Unlike physical sports clubs, online platforms do not have the same mechanisms for monitoring and motivation, which may lead to dropouts.
- **Fake information and inappropriate methods** – Some online content is not created by professionals, which may result in incorrect techniques, injuries, or misinformation about health and training.

Proper regulation, improved accessibility, and support from sports organizations can help overcome these barriers and make social media an even more powerful tool for inclusion in sports. Social media significantly contributes to improving accessibility and inclusivity in recreational sports. They allow people from various age and social groups to engage in sports activities without geographical or financial limitations. However, challenges remain that must be overcome for digital sports to become even more accessible and inclusive. By improving digital literacy, creating quality online content, and enhancing adapted sports programs, social media can become an even more effective tool for sports integration and motivation.

### Examples of successful promotion campaigns

Social media plays a key role in the successful promotion of recreational sports, offering wide visibility, interaction with the audience, and encouraging active participation. This case study will analyze successful campaigns and strategies, compare different platforms, and extract key lessons from successful projects. Social media is an effective tool for promoting recreational sports, and many brands and organizations leverage these platforms to engage and inspire participants. Examples like #ThisGirlCan, Strava Challenges, and Nike Training Club show how social media can boost the popularity of physical activity and raise awareness of the importance of recreational sports.

Many other campaigns have had similar success in their influence, such as Adidas's "Run for the Oceans" campaign. #ThisGirlCan by Sport England aims to inspire women to engage in sports without fear of judgment. Through emotional videos, authentic stories, and strong community support, the campaign achieved millions of interactions and motivated thousands of women to become physically active. This campaign created a positive atmosphere and a sense of acceptance and motivation



for women who want to start or continue physical activity. Adidas used Instagram, Facebook, and Strava to promote their "Run for the Oceans" campaign, where runners were invited to participate and help protect the oceans from pollution. Every kilometer run was converted into a donation for ocean cleanup. The campaign was successful not only due to its environmental goal but also because it used social media to reach a wide audience.

Similarly, Red Bull's "Wings for Life World Run" was a global event that used a virtual race to raise funds for spinal cord injury research. Through YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, Red Bull encouraged participant activity by engaging them with attractive videos, challenges, and hashtags, resulting in hundreds of thousands of participants from all over the world. REI, with their #OptOutside campaign, focused on stepping away from the consumer race and promoting physical activity through nature, rather than the traditional "Black Friday," which focuses on shopping. This engagement encouraged people to join communal outdoor activities using hashtags on Instagram and Twitter, which led to the campaign's popularity. Decathlon's Virtual Sports Challenges motivated users to participate in fun sports challenges via TikTok and Instagram. These challenges, as part of the marketing strategy, increased brand visibility and generated high engagement. Influencers and users sharing their results helped amplify the campaign's popularity.

Nike Training Club (NTC) uses Instagram and YouTube to promote its free training programs, offering access to professional training and advisory sessions. Campaigns involving professional athletes and fitness influencers successfully encourage users to join the programs and strive to improve their health and fitness.

GoPro used its Million Dollar Challenge campaign to encourage the adventure sports community to film and share videos. By sharing user-generated content, GoPro inspired people to engage in active sports adventures and showcase their skills. The campaign included not only fun videos but also rewards for the most creative shots, strengthening participation motivation. By showcasing this content on their social media channels, GoPro not only demonstrated the possibilities of its product but also built trust and credibility with potential customers. These examples demonstrate the importance of creative marketing strategies, such as virtual races, challenges, humanitarian initiatives, and the involvement of influencers. Social media enables recreational sports to be visible and accessible to a wider audience, and successful campaigns use this opportunity to inspire physical activity and a healthy lifestyle in diverse communities. (Dolan et al., 2019; Moran et al., 2020; Shah-zbazinezhad et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

Social media plays a crucial role in promoting recreational sports, enabling direct communication with target audiences, increasing engagement, and motivating participation in physical activities. The campaigns and strategies used on digital platforms largely focus on visual content, interactivity, and community-building, which makes sports activities more accessible and inclusive. Researching successful examples and strategies shows that the proper use of social media can significantly increase interest in recreational sports and bring positive changes in how people engage in physical activity. Based on the results, the following recommendations can be made to optimize the use of social media in promoting recreational sports:

1. **Developing Personalized and Emotional Content:** Social media should be used to create content that connects with participants' personal experiences. Using authentic stories, motivational messages, and visual content that express the emotions of athletes can inspire new participants to join the activities.
2. **Engaging with Influencers and Brand Ambassadors:** Creating partnerships with fitness influencers and sports ambassadors can help expand accessibility and reach new audiences. Messages from influential figures can have a stronger effect on motivating users.
3. **Encouraging User-Generated Content:** Investing in campaigns that encourage users to share their videos, photos, or experiences from participating in recreational sports can foster a sense of community and inclusiveness. This not only increases engagement but also strengthens the credibility of the campaigns.
4. **Using Interactive Formats:** Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube offer various interactive features such as polls, challenges, live broadcasts, and direct communication. These opportunities should be actively used to create a stronger connection with the audience and encourage active participation.
5. **Supporting Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Social media should be used to create campaigns that include diverse groups of people, including different age groups, genders, and social classes. Campaigns like #ThisGirlCan are excellent examples of how social media can promote equality and inclusivity in sports.

6. **Strategies for Local Targeting and Global Reach:** Sports organizations should develop strategies focused on local communities while also utilizing global platforms to attract international participants. This will allow them to build recognition and expand their activities into new markets.

With these recommendations, sports organizations, brands, and fitness communities can maximize the potential of social media, increasing their influence and encouraging greater participation in recreational sports, while also creating greater inclusivity in physical activity.

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