




Creating a fan bond with a football club on social media: a case of Polish fans

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the factors that influence fan bond creation with a football club on social media. The aim of this work is to show what football fans are guided by when deciding to observe a given club on social media and thus create bonds with it. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of information acquisition, entertainment, pass time, fanship, and social interaction on creating a bond between fan and football club in social media. The study tested six hypotheses, all supported by the results. The partial least square method of structural equation modelling is employed to test the proposed research model. The study utilizes an online survey to obtain data from 202 Polish football fans. Results showed that the best predictor of creating a bond with a club is social interaction, followed by entertainment and information acquisition.

Introduction

Social media allow people to create public or semi-public profiles, connect and communicate with other users, and check their and other community members' list of activities.¹ Currently, these are very popular sites. People use social media to communicate with friends, check news from the world or watch football matches. Social media are widely available and allow reaching many people.

Unlike traditional media, social media are characterized by two-way communication that provides ease of interaction, universal accessibility without entry barriers, subject only to social control, ease of content modification and speed of information delivery.² User can share any content and receive an immediate response without additional requirements. Every football club playing in the first level of European leagues has a Facebook profile, and many of them also have accounts on Instagram, Twitter or YouTube. European football clubs are becoming the most-watched sports brands, and players are among the world's most-watched people.³

The aim of this study is to investigate how social media can help create a bond between fans and the football club. The bond with a club describes the relationship a fan has with the favourite football club and its environment. The bond with the club is created by interaction, which includes observing the club in social media. The study tests a model of how information acquisition, entertainment, pass time, fanship, and social interaction in social media networks influence the bond with a football club. The study uses data collected from Polish football fans with the use of an online survey. The study employed a model, which presents the influence of particular behaviours on creating a bond with a football club. First, we analyse football clubs' different types of activities

on social media. On top of this analysis, we present our research question. Following is the methodology section, with a detailed description of the used procedure. Finally, we present our results and discuss them.

Football clubs' activities

Nowadays, sport is not only a competition but also a thriving industry. Football is of great interest to people of all ages, genders and nationalities.⁴ Football clubs are enormous brands that pay players big money to represent them on the pitch. They have stadiums, training bases with specialized equipment and a wide range of technical staff. People follow football clubs' activities worldwide – they watch the matches, analyse their surroundings, track transfers, and even the players' private lives. Undoubtedly, this has been greatly facilitated by social media, the growth of which has contributed to faster dissemination of information.⁵ Professional football clubs operate in a commercial environment with two primary goals. Firstly, the clubs must achieve the best possible sporting results – winning matches and winning trophies, and secondly, commercial successes, i.e. earnings, are also required.⁶ However, since clubs compete for players and titles, finances and profits can be considered necessary conditions for sporting success. On the other hand, sports success contributes strongly to maximizing profits.⁷

In this specific environment, sport and marketing have always enjoyed a symbiotic relationship.⁸ However, despite their popularity and recognition, football clubs can be considered medium-sized enterprises in terms of income.⁹ Clubs become more dependent on external commercial investments, and commercial success is put above the sporting one. In elite clubs, increased revenues are quickly spent on new players or increased salaries of existing players. Therefore, clubs mainly adopt irrational attitudes instead of making rational decisions. In the pursuit of sports success, clubs compete and adopt similar strategies for contracting and retaining players and recruiting young players to the academy.¹⁰ To some extent, football has become a business activity, as more and more clubs are perceived and treated as if they were standard companies.

In recent years, the importance of social media for companies has continuously been growing. Today, even the most conservative and traditional companies place great emphasis on social media. There is currently no significant company that does not use social media, and the primary purpose of these activities can be summarized in two words – engaging customers.¹¹ However, to use social media effectively, clubs need to learn about their fans, motivation, and behaviour.¹²

Football fans motivation and activities

One of the main reasons for fans' attachment to sport is the desire to escape from boredom or stress of everyday life. Pleasure and anxiety are the experiences that accompany supporters while watching their favourite players. They can react emotionally to the behaviour of other fans, players or specific situations related to the sport. Football fans can also simply enjoy participating in sports events. They enjoy being in this unique environment, which is different from everyday life.¹³

Sports events are an essential stimulus to keep fans satisfied. Strongly connected with the club, the fans have common interests, and together they show support for their team. It creates a sense of community between them, which in turn strengthens their mutual relations. Fans feel very comfortable in their company and want to spend as much time together.¹⁴ Fans are also interested in the club outside the stadium. They share their insights about their favourite club and its environment, analyse club movements on the transfer market, and follow football games' results. Football is important and pleasant part of their life. Such connection plays a vital role in the fan's identification and loyalty to the team and meeting the community's hidden needs.¹⁵

Social media made it easier for fans to contact the club and players. Many fans are very active there.¹⁶ Due to social media's popularity, sports clubs are increasingly investing time and resources to increase their online engagement, making it easier to contact fans.¹⁷ Football fans create a kind of community in which they admire the club and the people associated with it. People in these communities create the right environment for sharing club-related information.¹⁸

Fans in social media show various activities. They write comments under the posts, watch movies related to their supported club or solve quizzes they share. Fans looking for entertainment and information about their team are among the most active social media users, and football-related content is the main topic of online discussion. For example, football topics attract more than 500 million Facebook users per month, while about 28 million people have had 76 million interactions related to the 2015 UEFA Champions League final in Berlin.¹⁹

According to Max Goldstein, Sports Partnership Manager at Google, 'there are 3.5 billion soccer fans in the world'.²⁰ Many people are interested in football and use social media to share their football thoughts.

Football clubs' social media activities

Social media marketing is the latest and viral trend on the market.²¹ Each of the 78 football clubs from the four main European leagues (i.e. Spanish La Liga, German 1st Bundesliga, Italian Serie A, English Premier League) have a profile on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. And 75 of the 78 clubs run their channel on YouTube.²² Social media marketing activities enable football clubs to obtain opinions, comments, and suggestions from their clients through blogs, photos, and service evaluations.²³ With this feedback, clubs can improve their products and services and respond to changing customer needs.

The advantage of using social media is that the company can sell its brand on a larger, global scale.²⁴ Social media platforms are open and accessible to everyone, and therefore provide companies with opportunities to communicate with their audiences and build relationships between them.²⁵ All of the actions taken within social media ultimately lead the user to make a purchase decision. Some of the activities are more accurate in reaching Internet users' awareness, which increases the probability of making a purchase. In contrast, others do not stimulate any action other than social media activity.²⁶

The effectiveness of social media marketing has been studied and developed based on various strategies, including the use of humorous, philanthropic or entertaining channels and posts.²⁷ This kind of activity can be encountered while browsing social media, practically at every step. Such positive content on sports clubs' profiles attracts new potential customers and makes those present come back.

Facebook, as the largest social network is of great importance for marketing. Football clubs can use it to gain contact with potential fans who will become customers.²⁸ The clubs strive to develop their profiles by creating an aesthetic and eye-catching home page. They make brand-related information available to attract customers. They enrich their soccer content with information related to products, services, news or events. Those responsible for running football clubs' profiles interact with the fans in the comments section, thus triggering more lively discussions. It increases the number of recipients of information provided.²⁹ The Italian football club AS Roma has used Facebook to conduct a series of live broadcasts featuring its players. One of these broadcasts was entitled '#AskPauLopez'. The team's goalkeeper – Pau Lopez, answered questions asked by fans in the comments under the transmission. The leader read the questions, and the whole thing was recorded in the club's studio and made an impression of an interview.³⁰

Using Twitter, football clubs strive to create uniqueness. People on Twitter connect and share their ideas. It creates an environment to promote the brand. Users create an account to follow individual profiles and feel connected to their club even on the Internet.³¹ Tweets are usually information about upcoming matches, players returning after an injury, or past events that took

place on a given day. As on Facebook, people responsible for running football clubs' profiles interact with fans by asking them questions and answering the questions they have just asked. They use hashtags to create specific theme threads. An example of using Twitter for marketing activities is the Brazilian club Sao Paulo FC. The club's tactic for engaging its audience was to increase the number of tweets on match days. During the observation, the club took part in the Brazilian League, Copa Libertadores and the Brazil Cup. On such days, the club published an average of 21 posts, and on the remaining 13. Although category 'Match highlights' were only published two days a week, the total number of such posts was 1221, and they generated as many as 400,000 interactions, twice as many as the second most popular category of 'Team news' (666 tweets).³²

When using Instagram, sports clubs have a slightly narrowed field of action because conveying information is through photos and videos. To remain attractive to the spectators, clubs should regularly upload new photos and videos, such as training photos or short videos announcing the next match. Another form of attracting fans are contests that consist of sharing photos and using specific hashtags, where there are attractive prizes to win. Fans willingly participate in such actions to reach new audiences.³³ Clubs also use a wide range of relationship features on Instagram to create interesting quizzes and share advertising content. The London football club, Chelsea FC, uses relationships to engage its fans. Before each match, there are five questions about the history of matches with the next opponent. There are four answers to each question, of which only one is correct and is highlighted in green when marked. After solving the quiz, the fans indicate how many questions they managed to answer correctly. On the graphics of the next questions, sponsors' logos are displayed, bringing measurable financial benefits.³⁴

As the most extensive media sharing site globally, YouTube is ideal for promoting the club's brand. A YouTube account is usually linked to the club's website and profiles in other social media.³⁵ Films shared on this platform are generally longer than those on Instagram, which makes YouTube attractive. Clubs provide extensive shortcuts to matches, interviews with players, the best moments of training sessions. The most important marketing videos are those directly related to the promotion of sponsor brands. The clubs also use players for this purpose. An example of such activities is a film where three Chelsea FC players (Morata, Jorginho and Hudson – Odoi) compete in a shooting competition. Their goal is to hit the shields set up in different parts of the goal for which points are awarded. The shields are the logos of Chelsea FC sponsor – Carabao Energy Drink. The three largest disks even look like cans of this drink.³⁶

Based on football clubs' activities in social media, the research question in this study is: How different football club's activities in social media create a bond with a fan?

Methodology

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is a general, dynamic modelling environment that integrates many different multidimensional techniques and can address many kinds of research questions.³⁷ SEM is beneficial for complex, multi-faceted psychological and social issues (those that are difficult to measure). SEM makes it possible to determine the impact of variables (marked as factors or measured variables) on the model.³⁸

Hypotheses development

Information acquisition (IA) is used to describe the desire to use social media to gain knowledge/information. Quick access to a large amount of information is undoubtedly an advantage of social media. This construct will answer the question to what extent the possibility of obtaining information affects the tracking of football clubs in social media.³⁹ Hypothesis (H1) is 'Information acquisition has an influence on creating a bond with a club'.

Entertaining (ENT) is spending free time so that someone feels good and enjoys it. This variable was used to measure whether the respondents observed football clubs' profiles in social media for entertainment and whether they enjoyed it. The use of media (TV) for recreational purposes was often the subject of research. They showed that fans treated watching sport as a form of entertainment.⁴⁰ Hypothesis (H2) is 'The need for entertainment has an influence on creating a bond with a club' and hypothesis (H3) is 'The need for entertainment has an influence on information acquisition'.

Social media's easy handling can make people use their free time to check their favourite clubs' profiles. Besides, most social media can send notifications that a particular club has posted.⁴¹ Pass time (PT) will show whether fans follow the football clubs' social profiles to use their free time. Hypothesis (H4) is 'Pass time motivation has influence on bond connection with a club'.

People interaction is one of the human needs. Talking to other fans, exchanging observations about the club or matches is a popular practice among football fans. Social interaction (SI) will help determine the extent to which the need to interact with other fans in social media contributes to creating bonds between fans and the club. Hypothesis (H5) is 'Social interaction with other fans influences bond connection with a club'.

Being a fan has been recognized as a motivating factor for practising sport and its consumption through many media, such as television. It is also associated with an emotional attachment to the team or athlete.⁴² Fanship (FAN) measures whether or not to consider yourself a fan of football or a particular club affects social media use. Hypothesis (H6) is 'Fanship has an influence on creating a bond with a club'.

The bond with a club (BWC) describes the relationship a fan has with the favourite football club and its environment. The bond with the club is created by interaction, which includes observing the club in social media. This construct is different from the others because it is a second-order construct. It consists of a certain number of sub-constructs.⁴³ In this case, a second-order construct has five first-order influencing factors (other constructs), and no survey questions have been asked.

Model

SEM modelling starts by determining which variables in the model are reflective and which are formative. After choosing the type and checking the correctness of these variables, structural model evaluation proceeds. This stage includes hypothesis tests and checking the relationships between the variables.⁴⁴

After the evaluation of reflective and formative variables has yielded satisfactory results, a model estimation proceeds. For this purpose, the coefficient of determination R^2 , cross-validate redundancy Q^2 and path coefficients should be assessed.⁴⁵

The path coefficient determines the independent structure's influence on the dependent with which the path is connected. Typically, path coefficients take values from -1 to 1 , where values close to -1 correspond to strong negative relationships on paths and values close to 1 correspond to strong positive relationships. The decision of whether a factor value is satisfactory must be made in the context of the study.⁴⁶

Figure 1 shows a model that illustrates the creation of a fan's bond with a football club in social media. It shows the influence of such factors as the willingness to get information, entertainment and free time management, and the need for interpersonal interaction and identification on creating ties with the football club. The concept of creating bonds with the club, in this case, can also be interpreted as observing and interacting with the club's environment in social media. Each person is guided by different motivations when follows a football club in social media. This study aims to show which factor contributes the most to this, and thus to show which variable has the strongest influence on creating the fan's bond with the football club. In Appendix are survey questions used to collect the data.

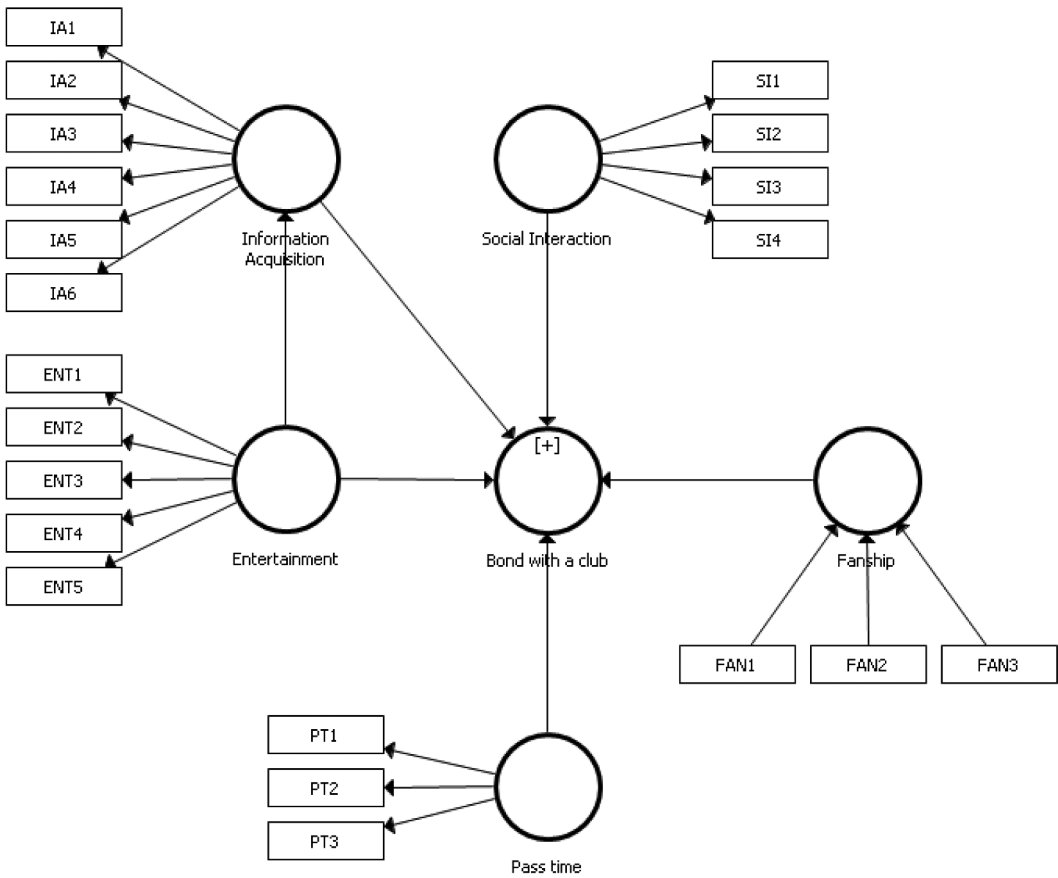


Figure 1. Model showing the creation of a fan's bond with a football club in social media.

Data collection and sample set

The data was collected in the period from 01.02.2020 to 08.02.2020 using a survey created in Google Forms. It was made available on Polish Facebook groups with football major topic, which allowed to obtain answers from people closely related to football, in short fans. We have asked Polish-speaking participants to use the survey designed in the Polish language. We published a survey as the online form in the Facebook group, discussing football (not only Polish football) in Polish. We did not encounter not speaking Polish participants since the survey was provided in the Polish language.

During this period, the survey was filled in by 202 people, and all the answers turned out to be valid for the study. The research group, as one might expect, is mainly men. They accounted for 92.1% of the respondents. People under 24 years of age constituted 72.3%. Among the respondents, 56.4% were pupils or students. Interestingly, none of the respondents was older than 44 years. It was probably because the survey was available only on Facebook groups, where mainly young people are involved. The largest percentage of respondents live in large cities – over 250 thousand inhabitants. Details are in Table 1.

Our study determines a significance level of 5%, a statistical power of 80%, and we would like to discover R2 values of at least 0.10. Our model has a maximum number of arrows pointing at a latent variable as 5. The minimum sample size for this setting is 147. We have 202 participants, so our sample size is enough to be statistically significant.

Table 1. Summary of survey responses.

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage	Place of residence	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	186	92,1%	Village	31	15,3%
Woman	16	7,9%	A city of up to 50 thousand inhabitants	26	12,9%
Age	Number of respondents	Percentage	A city of up to 100 thousand inhabitants	22	10,9
< 18	17	8,4%	A city of up to 250 thousand inhabitants	52	25,7%
18–24	129	63,9%	A city of over 250 thousand inhabitants	71	35,1%
25–34	41	20,3%	Professional status	Number of respondents	Percentage
35–44	34	7,4%	Student	114	56,4%
45–54	0	0%	Full-time employee	80	39,6%
55–64	0	0%	Part-time employee	3	1,5%
> 64	0	0%	Not employed	5	2,5%

Table 2. Reliability of reflective variables.

Variable	Composite reliability pc	Reliability coefficient pA	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
	>0.7	>0.7	0.7–0.9	>0.5
IA	0.862	0.813	0.790	0.612
ENT	0.845	0.757	0.727	0.647
PT	0.841	0.756	0.702	0.649
SI	0.893	0.844	0.839	0.677
BWC	0.859	0.839	0.826	0.500

Results

Model estimation using structural equations modelling was carried out in SmartPLS 3.⁴⁷ To estimate the model, the following functions were used: PLS algorithm – to which the factor weighting scheme was applied, stop criterion 10^{-X} equal to 7 and a maximum number of iterations 300; bootstrap – with the number of samples set to 5000, two-tailed distribution with 0.05 significance level and corrected bias and acceleration (BCa); blindfolding – for which the default settings were used.

Indicators IA5, IA6, ENT4, ENT5 and PT1 were not relevant for the model. They had too low loadings and thus critically influenced the value of the average variance explained (AVE) for their constructs. They were removed from the model. AVE is a very conservative measure, so based on the composite reliability, it can be concluded that the reliability of the model is sufficient.⁴⁸

The data presented in Table 2 check the reliability of reflective constructs. The values of the composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha are standard.

Discriminant validity means that two latent variables that represent different theoretical concepts are statistically different. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) is a measure of similarity between latent variables. If the HTMT is clearly smaller than one, discriminant validity can be regarded as established. In many practical situations, a threshold of 0.90 reliably distinguishes between those pairs of latent variables that are discriminant valid and those that are not. Table 3 shows HTMT values for individual pairs of structures. All of the constructs are clearly below 0.90 conservative threshold, which confirms the reliability of the reflective part of the model.⁴⁹

There are far fewer formative variables in the model than reflective variables. After removing the UT1 item from the model, only two are left. UT1 was removed from the model because its weight and loading have too low values, so it was not significant for the model. Even though the loadings of the UT2 variable was below 0.7, it was decided to leave it in the model as the weight was confirmed by checking the p-value at 0.05 and its overall contribution to the model is significant. VIF for both variables takes low values, so there is no collinearity (Table 4).

Table 3. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations values.

	BWC	ENT	IA	PT	SI
BWC					
ENT	0.894				
IA	0.815	0.468			
PT	0.893	0.744	0.293		
SI	0.780	0.395	0.230	0.342	

Table 4. Test results for the formative variable.

Variable	Variable	T-statistics	Loadings	p-value < 0.05	VIF
FAN	FAN2	4.845	0.627	Yes	1.088
	FAN3	18.100	0.925	Yes	1.088

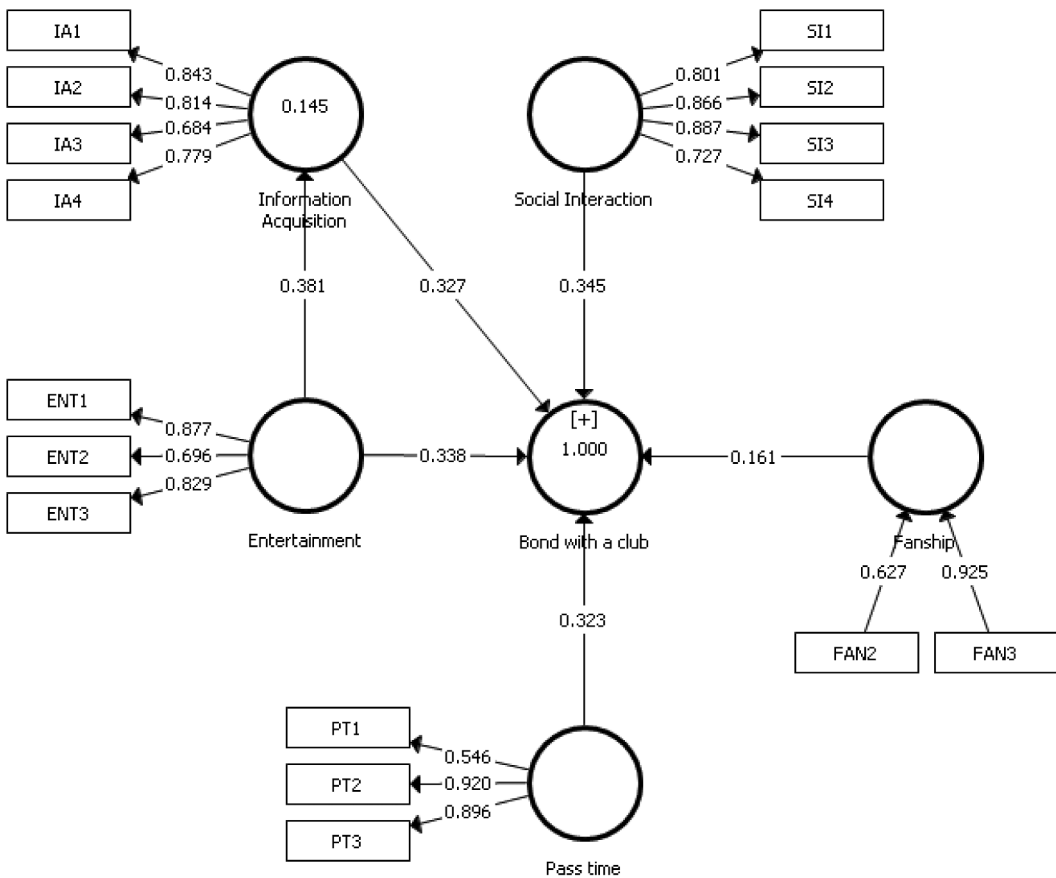


Figure 2. Final model with values of path coefficients and loadings.

The final version of the model is shown in Figure 2 and presents the model from which the incompatible variables have already been removed and is suitable for estimation. VIF values for all variables are less than 5, so there is no collinearity.

Table 5. Results of path hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient	BCa	T-statistics	Confirmed (p-value < 0,05)
			[2,5;97,5]%		
H1	IA to BWC	0,327	[0.220;0.404]	7,039	Yes
H2	ENT to BWC	0,338	[0.276;0.406]	10,108	Yes
H3	ENT to IA	0,381	[0.272;0.499]	6,491	Yes
H4	PT to BWC	0,323	[0.267;0.384]	10,773	Yes
H5	SI to BWC	0,345	[0.259;0.420]	8,327	Yes
H6	FAN to BWC	0,161	[0.108;0.206]	6,609	Yes

Table 6. Values R^2 and Q^2 .

Variable	R^2	Q^2
IA	0,145	0,079
BWC	1,000	0,271

Analysing the estimated model, the strongest relationship is between social interaction and bond with a club (0.345). Very similar path coefficient also occur in entertainment (0.338) and information acquisition (0.327). Entertainment is also related to information acquisition. In this case, the value of the path is 0.388. The effect of pass time management is 0.323. The smallest connection with the bond with the club has fanship (0.161).

Looking at the results presented in Table 5, high values of t-statistics are observed for all paths. The p-value is less than 0,05 for all paths, so it can assume that they are significant.

Table 6 shows the determination factor values R^2 and cross redundancy Q^2 . Value R^2 for the bond with the club is very high and amounts to 1.000. It means that the model's prediction is good, and the model explains 100% of the BWC variance. For information acquisition, however, R^2 is low at 0.145, but this is acceptable in the context of this study. Values Q^2 take values greater than 0 and provide support for the predictive accuracy of the model.

Discussion

Based on the survey and available social media marketing studies, fan bonds with the football club in social media were studied. The survey provided information on the motivation of supporters observing the clubs on social media and thus creating a bond with them. It presents the influence of five different factors influencing the formation of a fan's bond with a football club. All the hypotheses were positively confirmed; however, it was necessary to remove from the model the items that did not fit during the estimation.

The model shows that fans have the most significant importance of interaction with other fans. The term is used to describe the exchange of observations, expressions of opinions on club topics or the desire to meet new people from football circles. They are less interested in actions organized by other fans. Another conclusion, which can be drawn by analysing the results, is that fans care about gaining information and entertainment. It is confirmed by hypotheses H1 and H2. Both of these factors have a very similar influence on building relations with the club. It is crucial for the fans that the information provided by the parties appears as soon as possible (confirmed by hypothesis H3). It is also essential to inform the fans about any events related to the activities of the club. Fans also want to know what is going on outside the pitch, and they are interested in their idols' personal lives. They are not interested in the ways of financing the club, in short, the sponsors. The research shows that the posts made available by the clubs should be attractive to the recipients in such a way that they feel excited when browsing them (confirmed by hypothesis H5). They can be humorous. Respondents' answers show that the competitions and quizzes proposed by the clubs are not attractive to them and have a negative impact on creating bonds with the club. Nowadays, social

media, especially with the help of smartphones, allows spending free time. Research has confirmed that the willingness to kill boredom positively influences the creation of bonds between the fan and the football club (confirmed by hypothesis H4). Similar conclusions in their work were also drawn by other researchers.⁵⁰

The smallest, but still positive influence on building relations with the club has the need to identify with a club (fanship). It is confirmed by hypothesis H6. Analysing the results, it can be concluded that sympathy for a particular player is crucial in this case. Surprisingly, the willingness to get information about the transfers has a negative impact on the model. It would seem that fans want to receive information about transfers as soon as possible. They are interested in gossip, speculation and any reports. When a piece of transfer information appears on a football club's official website, it is only a confirmation of generally known information. From portals specializing in transfer topics, it is possible to obtain this information much faster, hence perhaps such results from this study. Another surprise is the need to remove the UT1 variable from the model, which says that being a fan of a given club affects the creation of bond with it. Probably the respondents assumed that since they are already fans of a given club, the things made available by that club will not affect the way it is perceived, because the emotional connection is too strong. On the other hand, it may also mean that observing the club in the social media and creating bonds with it does not require being a fan of the club. It can be done for many other reasons, which are listed above.

We do not relate these results to Polish football. The paper listed sports clubs from four major European leagues (English, Italian, German, and Spanish). Usually, Poles support Polish clubs, mainly because of their place of birth. Successes attract fans, and Polish clubs are practically non-existent in the international arena, so it is rare for a person from one region of Poland to support a club in another region of Poland. We believe that social media does not significantly impact creating a bond between a Polish fan and Polish football clubs. Social media can deepen the existing bond with the club the fan sympathizes with, based on the place of residence/birth. For most fans, local teams are lower in the hierarchy than foreign ones, which is why we focused on ties with clubs from major European leagues in this study.

We also noticed that second screen practice, which is watching a match and communicating with other fans at the same time, is more and more common. A club can encourage a fan through its performances on the pitch, but the clubs' social media profiles usually only provide graphics with the score or shooters during a match. There are, of course, exceptions (most commonly found on Twitter) when club profile administrators comment on the pitch live with catchy texts. Such cases are, for example, on the occasion of the England Cup matches. Admins of smaller clubs playing with the giants shared humorous posts about the match on Twitter. Fans like it, they make such entries available and at the same time begin to feel sympathy for such a club, which means that a bond is created between them and the club.

Some researchers have combined their work motivations and limitations affecting the use of Twitter for interaction with University sports teams and their players.⁵¹ Others studied how NBA teams build relationships with fans on Twitter.⁵² These and many other researchers are focused on a particular social network or league.⁵³ The study presented in the paper has a much broader scope. It is not limited to a specific football league or social networking site. Answering the research question, the strongest effect on creating a bond with fans has social interaction, followed by entertainment and information acquisition.

The research conducted and its results can significantly help football clubs communicate with their social media audiences. They will allow the people responsible for running the clubs' social media to select better posts' topics on their pages so that they are attractive to fans and attract them.

Based on the research carried out, it can be concluded that the people responsible for running social media clubs should allow the fans to express themselves frequently. If possible, they should interact with the fans. This way, the fan will feel that it is important for the club, and thus the bond between them will be strengthened. Graphic designers also have an opportunity to contribute by creating attractive, e.g. funny pictures – 'memes with players' or modern match graphics. Fun and

excitement are the emotions that fans want to feel while browsing football clubs' social networking sites. As fans are negative about information about sponsors, it would be advisable to keep the number of such posts to a minimum. According to the research, all competitions and quizzes that appear on the club's websites are also not attractive to the audience. The information provided by football clubs using social media is to be many, but it should be concise and presented in an interesting form. Fans are most willing to look for information about events related to the club and its players and coaches. It is important to give people curiosities from inside the club, which will only be available on their website.⁵⁴

Our results lie along with other studies about the growing importance of using social media to create and maintain relationships with fans. On the example of FC Bayern Munich, it was confirmed that keeping fans updated through social media may help to increase the club's brand awareness and the bonds between the club and their supporters.⁵⁵

The most important limitation accompanying this survey is that although the survey questions referred to social media generally, the survey was made available only on Facebook groups. It means that some people answered the questions with experience only on this platform. For the study to be entirely conducted according to this, the survey would have to be made available on different social networking sites.

Since the Facebook groups on which the survey was made available are purely football groups, another limitation appears. In such groups, there are mainly people passionate about football, those for whom it is an inseparable part of life. Therefore, most of the questionnaires were filled in by experts on football, not by people who watch football occasionally, and it is not their passion. Point of view at football in social media may be completely different from those who are passionate about football. Therefore, in the future, they should also be given the opportunity to answer the study questions.

The most obvious limitation is the country from which the respondents came from because 100% of the people surveyed were Poles. This issue could also have had a significant impact on the survey. People from other countries, living in different cultures, may look at individual topics in a completely different way.

Further research should take a more comprehensive look at the problem. The study should be conducted not on a specific, closed group of people, but on the society in general, which follows football clubs in social media.

Conclusions

This study aimed to reveal what football fans are guided by when deciding to observe a given club in social media and thus create bonds with it. To answer this question, a survey was designed, the results of which were analysed employing modelling structural equations, in SmartPLS 3. As a result of the survey, a model was created, which presents the factors influencing the creation of bonds with the club in social media. The chosen study method was effective and allowed to draw specific conclusions about football fans' motivation to observe a club.

The study has shown that the main factor that makes fans observe the club in social media and thus create relationships with it is the desire to interact with other fans. The next places are the desire for information and entertainment. The requests to complete the survey were positively received by the fans, suggesting that this is a topic that arouses their interest.

Notes

1. Boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship."
2. Kim and Kim, "Do Your Social Media Lead You to Make Social Deal Purchases? Consumer-Generated Social Referrals for Sales via Social Commerce."
3. Parganas, Liasko, and Anagnostopoulos, "Scoring Goals in Multiple Fields."

4. Seifi Salmi, Benar, and Honari, "Identifying Value Creation Strategies in the Brand Communities of Sport Clubs Based on the Use of Social Media."
5. Maderer, Parganas, and Anagnostopoulos, "Brand-Image Communication Through Social Media: The Case of European Professional Football Clubs."
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Appendix

Information Acquisition Items:

- IA1: I follow football clubs in social media because they provide information about them quickly.
- IA2: I follow football clubs in social media to get information about events related to them.
- IA3: I follow my favourite football club on social media to get information from 'inside' the club.
- IA4: I follow football clubs on social media to get information about players and coaches.
- IA5: I follow football clubs on social media to get information about sponsors.
- IA6: I follow football clubs on social media to get information about transfers.

Entertainment Items:

- ENT1: I follow football clubs on social media because it is exciting.
- ENT2: I follow football clubs on social media because it's funny.
- ENT3: I follow football clubs on social media because I enjoy it.
- ENT4: I follow football clubs on social media to take part in competitions.
- ENT5: I follow football clubs on social media to solve quizzes.

Pass Time Items:

- PT1: I follow football clubs on social media because I have such interests.
- PT2: I follow football clubs on social media not to be bored.
- PT3: I follow football clubs on social media to take up my free time.

Social Interaction Items:

- SI1: I follow football clubs on social media to meet other supporters.
- SI2: I follow football clubs on social media to express my opinions on club topics.
- SI3: I follow football clubs on social media to share insights with other supporters.
- SI4: I follow football clubs on social media to participate in actions organized by other supporters.

Fanship Items:

- FAN1: I follow football clubs on social media because I am a fan of them.
- FAN2: I follow football clubs on social media because I am a soccer fan.
- FAN3: I follow football clubs on social media because I am a fan of the players in them.