FACEBOOK, THE NEW GRANDSTAND FOR RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

FACEBOOK, A NOVA ARQUIBANCADA PARA O MARKETING DE RELACIONAMENTO

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to relate the marketing strategies adopted by football teams in social media networks with an increasing number of users and their interactions on the fanpage of each football club. Information was gathered from the top Brazilian football teams in the first and second divisions in 2013 on Facebook. The findings show that Authenticity, Disclosure and Information Dissemination are positively related to increasing the number of users. Authenticity impacts directly in the number of interactions, reinforcing the need for an active management of the fanpages. The findings show that the professional management of a Facebook page contributes positively to the increase in the number of fans on its pages. This allows clubs to model new relationship strategies with their fans and sponsors.

Keywords: social media, social network sites, relationship marketing, marketing strategy, Facebook, sports management.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo relacionar as estratégias de *marketing* adotadas por equipes de futebol em redes sociais com o aumento no número de usuários e de suas interações na *fanpage* de cada clube. Para atingir esse objetivo, coletaram-se informações das principais equipes da primeira e segunda divisão de futebol brasileiro em 2013 no Facebook. As descobertas mostram que a Autenticidade, a Divulgação e a Informação são positivamente relacionadas com o aumento de usuários. A Autenticidade impacta diretamente no número de interações, reforçando a necessidade de uma gestão ativa das páginas. As descobertas mostram que o gerenciamento profissional de páginas do Facebook contribui positivamente para o aumento do número de fãs em suas páginas. Isso permite aos clubes modelar novas estratégias de relacionamento com seus fãs e patrocinadores.

Palavras-chave: mídia social, sites de redes sociais, marketing de relacionamento, estratégia de marketing, Facebook, marketing esportivo.

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INTRODUCTION

Facebook, with 1.59 billion users is today considered the biggest site among the so-called social network sites (SNS), with an estimated number of users of over a billion people, or one in seven people on the planet (BBC Brasil, 2012; DMR, 2013). This size makes this SNS into an important communication platform, and therefore, a social networking platform between brands and consumers. Major brands such as Coca-Cola, Gillette, Guaraná Antártica[2], among others, have their pages within the SNS and work with it in order to interact and foster the relationship with the consumer. In the world of football, it is no different or at least should not be. The major leagues in the U.S., as well as major football clubs in Europe and various non-profit sports organizations have already adopted social media as a strategy of communication (Meadows-Klue, 2008; Taylor *et al.*, 2001).

Since the beginning of this century, the SNS have been attracting consumers and consolidating itself as a major means of communication between users. In many cases, SNS such as Facebook are replacing the use of communicators and email (Nielsen, 2009). Thus, it is natural that sports teams are attracted to these platforms as a means to interact with their fans. These platforms eliminate issues related to barriers in the domestic market, enabling teams to seek new fans outside their geographical boundaries. Actions in this direction can be seen especially in the pages of European football clubs, which are more innovative than Brazilian football clubs, seeking in this tool a channel of effective communication. Even more emblematic is the work done by the teams of major U.S. leagues - National Football League (NFL); National Basketball Association (NBA); National Hockey League (NHL); and Major League Baseball (MLB). They are ahead of Brazilian teams when it comes to communication and relationship via SNS, including in terms of rules that regulate the use – by both teams and players (Fleury, 2011; Pavarin, 2009).

In 2012, Brazil ended the year as the country with the highest growth, in terms of users, in the use of social networking. It was ahead of countries such as India, Japan and Indonesia (Socialbakers, 2012). This fact helped the country take the second position in the ranking of users of SNS (Carneti, 2012). However, football clubs are still newbies in their virtual strategies. Although the teams have official channels within the main SNS, their efficiency as a social networking platform has not yet been tested empirically. Actually, there are few studies, even abroad (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012), that analyse how strategies of SNS influence the participation of user on major networks.

This study aimed to gather information from 40 Brazilian football teams in the first and second divisions in 2013,

within Facebook. And, after that, assess whether the strategies adopted by the football teams lead to positive results in terms of increasing the number of users and the interaction of fans in the fanpage of each football club. Thus, we analysed whether Facebook contributes to building a relationship between football clubs and fans, as well as whether it helps Brazilian football clubs to attract their virtual consumers and if they can, moreover, assist in the competition with foreign clubs within a new market without borders.

As a model of study, we used the replication of the model proposed by Pronschinske *et al.* (2012) to determine which factors influence the participation of fans within the fanpages – which are pages created for the organizations, companies, celebrities and others to have a relationship with their followers or audience who choose to connect to them – and the results generated in the pages.

This study seeks to contribute to the literature with regard to the use of SNS as a social networking platform and their use by sports organizations. It is possible to realize that Facebook contributes to profound changes in the forms of relationship between companies and consumers and enables the formulation of new marketing strategies to leverage the relationship between the football club and its fans. We seek to contribute to the improvement of the model by including a new variable in the model proposed by Pronschinske *et al.* (2012): the number of posts on Facebook pages and thus present new hypotheses to those already tested by the previous authors.

The results of the study point to the confirmation of three of the four hypotheses presented in the original study. Overcoming, therefore, the study of Pronschinske *et al.* (2012). This result suggests that the professional management of fanpages positively influences the increase in the number of fans in the pages. Thus, from the management standpoint, the departments in charge from each club are able to outline the best strategies to enhance the relationship with fans and activate their brand and sponsors.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks are an important part of the everyday life of a large part of the world's population. They assist people in the business planning and growth, social contacts, and personal relationships (Anderson and Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Tomaél *et al.* (2005) reported that social networks arise from a collective phenomenon that translates into relationship between groups, individuals and organizations. This gathering allows the construction of various relationships such as work, study and friendship. Castells (1996) defines networks as a set of interconnected nodes, that is, these nodes are the points of

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[2] Guaraná Antártica is the main soda brand of Ambev and the strongest Coca-Cola competitor in Brazil.

contact between the actors of the network. Each node depends on the type of relationship created between the participants.

The development of the media, especially after the advance of the Internet, has changed the existing form of social relationship. They no longer need the connection between the physical and geographical space and start existing disconnected from time and space (Tomaél *et al.*, 2005). Thus, according to Tredinnick (2006), SNS are created through the participation of users, who build their personal networks, and especially, who have contents generated by the users and share them through their connections. These connections are essential for building the network as much as the content generated, because according to Taylor *et al.* (2001), the SNS should be useful for us. The notion of usefulness of social networks is associated with the usefulness of the information that is distributed over its links (Zauner *et al.*, 2012).

The new possibilities brought through the rise of the Web 2.0 presented by O'Reilly (2007) allows that fans collaborate and share their experiences with their teams. Those new media include social networks and blogs (Pedron *et. al.*, 2015). Web 2.0 also provided new horizons for exchange and sharing systems, making it significantly easier to share texts, musics, images and other products in digital media (Belk, 2014).

Facebook is not the first social network created on the internet. Since networks such as MySpace, companies have been investing in the creation of profiles and pages to become active members of social networks and get closer to their target audience (Waters *et al.*, 2009). The constant entrance of users in the SNS over the past decade served as a warning for companies to begin to see social media as potential platforms of communication to strengthen the bonds with their consumers (Zauner *et al.*, 2012) creating an innovative process in the marketing strategies and in the relationship between brands and consumers, becoming an increasingly profitable marketing tool for the companies (Ulusu, 2010).

The ease of access and increasing use of SNS make these communication platforms increasingly important as a communication and community platform between football clubs and their fans. As Sanderson (2013) states that SNS have proven to be fertile ground for expressions of sport fandom. Fans express themselves via social media using one-sided declarations or attempts at interactions with users, athletes and clubs (Frederick *et al.*, 2016).

For each model of social network site, there is a different use by the sports organizations. Facebook has been used for information, videos, photos and events. On the other hand, YouTube is used for sharing videos and Twitter as a quick access to information (Witkemper *et al.*, 2012). Although these three are not the only SNSs available, it can be seen that, by studying the official pages of football clubs, they are the most commonly used as communication channels with fans and that generate differentiated strategies, with specific content to each type of fan.

The Brazilian football clubs are still far from the potential achieved by the teams and leagues in the U.S. market in relation to the number of fans on their Facebook pages. By analyzing Brazil Facebook Statistics (Socialbakers, 2013), it was found that Corinthians is the number one in the list of fanpages with the highest number of fans. However, among the top ten, only two more national football clubs appear: Flamengo and São Paulo. The ranking also includes two foreign football clubs (Barcelona and Real Madrid) and five athletes.

In the U.S. market, on the other hand, where the Sports Leagues have strength and a method of action different from the Brazilian market, among the ten largest fanpages we found two leagues (NFL and NBA) and four clubs (LA Lakers, Dallas Cowboys, New York Yankees, The Pittsburgh Steelers). The U.S. ranking further includes three athletes from basketball and the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), which can be described as a fighting league (Socialbakers, 2012).

The difference in the number of fans among the participants of the so-called TOP 10 also helps to demonstrate the existing disparate among the participants of the Brazilian and U.S. sports market. While in Brazil, Corinthians has 3,820,661 local fans, in the United States, The Pittsburgh Steelers, tenth in the ranking, has 3,982,932 local fans (Socialbakers, 2013).

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

While relationship marketing is one of the most recent approaches to marketing, its impact in the way organizations are dealing with their customers is already apparent (Lopes *et al.,* 2012). Few studies have been conducted involving relationship marketing in sports (Bee and Kahle, 2006), even though the topic, over the past two decades, has gained more space, especially in the international scenario (Gray and Wert-Gray, 2012) and has been growing both in practice and in academia (Kim and Trail, 2011). However, various reasons has been favouring the development of relationship marketing in the sports universe, such as: technological innovations, improvement in marketing research models, and especially, the sport assuming its role as entertainment activity (Stavros *et al.*, 2008). Within the proposal of the authors, perhaps no technological innovation has contributed more than Facebook, especially after 2009 (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010) to approximate the brands to their consumers, in this case, football clubs to their fans.

This new relationship, which emerges without geographical barriers, may change the existing marketing mix (Meadows-Klue, 2008) and thus impact the model of supporting of Brazilian fans, who have always been present at the stadium (Malaia, 2012). That is because, according to Wallace *et al.* (2011) due to the scope of social media, several companies now include SNS actions in their marketing strategies. This is one of the consequences pointed out by Ross *et al.* (2009) regarding changes in the communication practices with the growth of social networks.

There are several definitions with respect to the concept of relationship marketing (Kim and Trail, 2011). If, on the one hand, relationship marketing has a transactional side that seeks sales increase; on the other hand, there is a focus on long-term relationship (Parvatiyar and Sheth, 2001). While in the first case, we can use methods more focused on database marketing, aiming to generate more purchases and higher average ticket; in the second, we aim at long-term relationship, less transactional and more relational, after all, the football club emphasizes cooperation and interaction, resulting in shared values (Bee and Kahle, 2006). Ross *et al.* (2009) states that one of the functions of SNS is to help users find other people with similar interests, both for romantic, social or professional purposes, but also to maintain pre-existing social relationships. These actions help to strengthen the existing bond, enhancing the long-term relationship and even facilitating the development of this relationship. Kim and Trail (2011) also highlight that relationship marketing is also used to build strong brands and enhance the relationships with customers. In many of these cases, the desired result is an improvement in the overall performance of the company.

When improving the relationship between football club and fans, football clubs should pay attention to the peculiarity of the sport, stated in Malagrino (2011), which refers to the notion that fans go beyond collaborating with the club – collaborating means the direct participation in the Facebook page, according to Tredinnick (2006). Often, the fan becomes part of the spectacle it creates, because "they are the ones who, uniformed and characterized as fans, with their flags and horns, fill up the stadium bleachers, producing an image capable of giving even more value to the final product: the match" (Malagrino, 2011, p. 39). In this new relationship, the football clubs could try to turn Facebook into a new grandstand, with no limits for the impulse of fans. This mutual relationship between team and fan enables a relationship of co-creation of value created through the interaction existing between clubs and fans (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). This fact helps us understand why football teams, as well as other sports teams, have been seeking technologies that facilitate the interaction between the parties.

This exchange is the basis of the strategy adopted by the football clubs, as these actions may provide information that helps in the growth of the relationship between fan and team (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012). The fact that SNS are a free platform available to any user anywhere favours the update of information in real time about the teams in an active rather a passive manner, like in more traditional media outlets (Walker *et al.*, 2010). Bee and Kahle (2006) suggest three ways to improve the relationship between fan and teams: conversation about sports; hospitality; and gifts. The conversation about sports is the simple conversation between fans about the football club or a player that helps establish shared values between the parties.

In this regard, the social media, as active information platforms, help further accelerate the sharing of this relationship by allowing users to freely talk about their team. The participation, not only of the club in the process, but of other fans, further drives the democratization of information. Groza *et al.* (2012) argue that both clubs and sports leagues have been seeking to better develop their brands, and because of that, they have chosen to develop good strategies of relationship marketing. This is happening due to the advancement of technology and the development of sports marketing.

Therefore, the fact that Brazilian clubs, despite the difference between teams and leagues in the U.S. market, have their fanpages and accounts in several other SNS arouses the interest of this study and poses the question to be answered: How are Brazilian clubs strategically managing their Facebook pages in order to attract more users and enhance the relationship with them through interaction (user feedback) in their fanpages?

HYPOTHESES

To help answer the question of this study, we chose to use the model proposed by Pronschinske *et al.* (2012), which has four attributes (authenticity, disclosure, engagement and information dissemination) with nineteen variables distributed among the attributes developed in the model to determine how they are correlated and reflect the responses of the fans. Based on that, we created the conceptual model proposed in this study (Figure 1).

With regard to the attributes, according to the definition of Pronschinske *et al.* (2012), it is worth noting that:

• Authenticity

Trust is a key aspect in consumer and brand relationship (Brown *et al.,* 2003). Morgan and Hunt (1994) had shown that trust plays an intermediate role in relationship marketing since it refers to one party having confidence in the other and works as a mechanism to reduce complexity in uncertainty situations. Also, trust has been recognized as a construct that affects relationship quality (Kim and Trail, 2011; Verma *et al.,* 2016). Nonetheless, the challenge to build trust through online content had increase (Schlosser *et al.,* 2006; Pengnate and Sarathy, 2016; Zhou *et al.,* 2016)

Pronschinske *et al.* (2012) noted that many fans had created fake team pages. Resulting in compromise the number of potential fans drawn to the team site. This represents a critical barrier to increase fan participation for the authentic team Facebook page, limiting the overall impact of the page. As in other industries, advancing online consumers from attention to action in sports website had proven difficult (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012; Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2015). One reason for that attitude is the "lack of faith the exists between organizations and increasingly cautious Internet consumers" (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012).
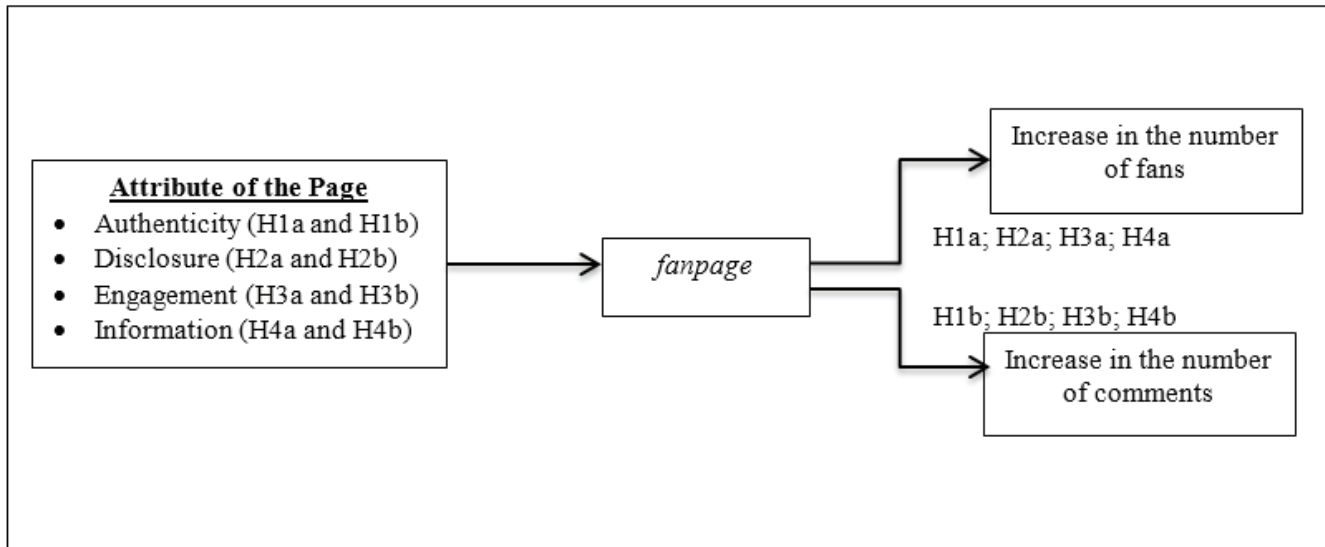
Figure 1. *Conceptual model proposed.*

Source: Adapted from Pronschinske *et al.* (2012).

Authenticity refers to the transparency and organizational legitimacy by showing that it is the official fanpage of the club. This aspect builds trust for internet users and, at the same time, credibility to the page. Both Facebook and various other media on the internet allow the creation of fake pages or that fans create pages to worship their clubs and idols. In many cases, these fanpages can be direct competitors of the fanpages of the clubs. Therefore:

- **H1a: Authenticity positively influences the number of fans in the official fanpages of the clubs.**
- **H1b: Authenticity positively influences the number of comments in the official fanpages of the clubs.**

- Disclosure

The demand for disclosure in sports is increasing since the last events involving organizations and medicine. On one side, the sport business climate fraught with FIFA, CBF (Brazilian Confederation of Soccer) and other organizations' scandals creates a feeling that those organizations are purely self-interested (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012). Also, the Russian doping raised a doubt on the candour of the Olympics Games. On the other hand, the American sports (e.g NFL and NHL) are creating protocols to improve protection to athletes disclosing concussion information (Kerr *et al.*, 2014; Ribbans *et al.*, 2013).

As the need for information grows, the consumer demand for transparency increases too (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012). Many sport fans now look to SNS to provide up-to-date and detailed information on clubs, athletes and organizations. The SNS presents elements unique to this medium, for example, sport teams are using Facebook to create a distinctive organizational-presentation (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012). The self-presentation is another drive for sports organizations use

SNS, since they can show positive facts for their fans (Encel *et al.*, 2016).

Here we understand Disclosure as the presentation of the club on the fanpage. Its history, mission and services are associated with this item (Robbins and Stylianou, 2003). Similar to authenticity, transparency in this attribute helps fans to identify the fanpage as the official fanpage and consider the page as a reliable place to search for information about their club.

- **H2a: Disclosure positively influences the number of fans in the official fanpages of the clubs.**
- **H2b: Disclosure positively influences the number of comments in the official fanpages of the clubs.**

- Engagement

Researchers (in and outside of sport) have noted that consumers feel more identified with a brand or organization as their engagement increases (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012). The result of that engagement and identification form a lasting relationship with the organization (Kwon and Armstrong, 2006). Building relationship through identity formation is not instantaneous. Identification will be formed over time, though repeated engagement with other fans of the club and the club itself (Greenwood, 2007; Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012).

As engagement grows fans try to show their fandom and "Facebook allows organizations to create fan pages where they can share information and interact with consumers who have chosen to become Facebook fans by liking the pages" (Achen, 2016). Facebook and others Web 2.0 platforms can be used to enhance commitment and engagement of fans by sports organizations (Meng *et al.*, 2015).

Engagement is the channel through which football club and fans are able to strengthen their relationships. When

building a long-term relationship, it becomes essential. The engagement, or commitment between the parties, happens through identity formation and exchange of complicity.

- **H3a: Engagement positively influences the number of fans in the official fanpages of the clubs.**
- **H3b: Engagement positively influences the number of comments in the official fanpages of the clubs.**

- **Information Dissemination**

One of the most attractive functions of SNS is disseminate information (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012). Not only organizations can use that function to quickly reach their fans but also coaches have been using it in college games (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2016). Microblogging site Twitter since its inception in 2006 gained space between sport organizations to disseminate information about their events (Clavio and Kian, 2010). However, Facebook had performed better showing more functions them their Web 2.0 'competitors'.

Pronschinske *et al.* (2012) noted that the ability to use Facebook for disseminating information in real-time provides the club with an added communication strategy. However, to reach the objective of increasing fans participation in the SNS pages the information should be different from that of club's websites.

Information Dissemination is the method used by fanpages to inform their fans and, through this information, approach them and create bonds of complicity favouring strategies of long-term relationship.

- **H4a: Information dissemination positively influences the number of fans in the official fanpages of the clubs.**
- **H4b: Information dissemination positively influences the number of comments in the official fanpages of the clubs.**

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

The initial sample of this study would include the 40 football clubs in the first and second division of Brazilian Championship 2013, however, the football clubs Guaratinguetá and Oeste were excluded from the sample after surveying the initial information. This is because both clubs indicated problems on their fanpages due to error in their creation by those in charge of it. Thus, the SCUP, software used for gathering information, was unable to adequately capture the necessary information. Thus, the collection of information covered the 38 remaining clubs of 1st Division and 2nd Division of Brazilian Championship, as seen in Table 1.

For the data collection of information, we attempted not to damage or privilege a particular football club. Therefore, for the Numbers of Fans of each football club we used the number of likes (fans) shown on the page of each club on December 31, 2013. For the number of interactions on the fanpages, the period used was from June 1 to December 31, 2013. For gathering the information, we used the SCUP software, which allows the monitoring of several SNSs.

In this way, through the SCUP, the pages of the teams participating in the research were monitored for seven months. The number of comments made in the period in any fanpage post (excluding posts made by fans), which had a direct relationship with the football team, was adopted as the criterion of fanpage interactions. The number of fans of the fanpage was also taken from the report of the SCUP of December 31, 2013, as already mentioned.

METHODOLOGY

As methodology, this study used three distinct forms. First, through interviews with five experts, we sought to develop the main issues to be mapped within the fanpages of the clubs. Thus, in May, through e-mails, we presented to the experts the four attributes and nineteen variables proposed by Pronschinske *et al.* (2012) so that they could give their opinion regarding the gathering of information and their contribution to judge whether the presence of these attributes and variables could confirm that the clubs do a good job in their fanpages.

Each specialist was asked to answer whether or not they agreed that the items presented could be used to measure teams' work on fanspages. It was requested that the specialists justify their answers and also if they thought there was a needed to include some additional item to improve this

Table 1. *Brazilian teams.*

Division	Teams
1st Division	Atlético-MG; Atlético-PR; Bahia; Botafogo; Corinthians; Coritiba; Criciúma; Cruzeiro; Flamengo; Fluminense; Goiás; Grêmio; Internacional; Náutico; Ponte Preta; Portuguesa; Santos; São Paulo; Vasco da Gama and Vitória
2nd Division	ABC; América-MG; América-RN; ASA; Atlético-GO; Avaí; Boa Esporte Clube; Bragantino; Ceará; Chapecoense; Figueirense; Guaratinguetá; Icasa; Joinville; Oeste; Palmeiras; Paraná Clube; Paysandu; São Caetano and Sport

measurement. In addition, the expert could recommend the exclusion of any of the variables.

For the purpose of analysis, it was defined that items that presented four equal opinions would be maintained (positive opinion) or excluded (negative opinion). If the item presented three equal opinions, then it would be presented to the experts the opinions of each one on the variable (maintaining the anonymity of the respondent) for the experts to evaluate the responses contrary to theirs. This criterion was not used, since no item presented a result of three opinions against two. All items were rated higher than or equal to 4x1.

The experts were Ricardo Cobra (chief editor of the website http://www.homemnacozinha.com/), Eden Wiedemann (expert in social media), Rafael Fiuza (Press Relations and Social Media at Koch Tavares). We interviewed two other experts who, for professional reasons, asked not to be identified. There were several recommendations from the experts regarding the model chosen. Some caveats were made and should be mentioned. In general, they all agree that the points raised are the minimum required to build a professional and customer-focused page, even though some items may be circumvented by any user, as pointed out by Wiedmann: "The items presented in the attribute authenticity of the page help give credibility to it, but can be easily forged. Especially if developed in isolation." Cobra also shares this view and mentions an example: "We know the case of the fanpage of a club which was run by a fan and the page was stolen from him without any explanation from the club. They suggested the inclusion of an item, considered important

by all of them, in the attribute authenticity of the page: Check whether the official website of the club includes the information and link (forwarding) to the fanpage. As highlighted by Cobra: "The clear exposure of the fanpage, on the website of the club, is a real demonstration that the club recognizes the page as its property." Fiuza complements "Having a direct link to the fanpage within the website of the club undoubtedly provides security for internet users and helps the idea of presenting the page as an official page."

Thus, following the recommendation of the national experts, in the attribute authenticity of the page we included the variable called: link on the official website forwarding to the fanpage. The study, then, presented the proposal for the identification of a well-managed page (see Table 2).

The next stage of the study consisted of the identification of the official fanpages of the 40 clubs in the first and second division the Brazilian league and survey of the attributes and their variables. For this, we used, following the original model, a survey on the fanpages of each club. Based on the twenty variables defined, the researchers coded based on when it had a variable . At the end of the survey, we used the equation (1) to reach a final index for each attribute.

$$(1) \; Attribute = \frac{(variable \, (1) + \; variable \, (2) + \; variable \, (3) + ...)}{\sum variable}$$

In the attribute disclosure, it was identified that the fields organizational affiliation and mission statement are not used

Table 2. *Proposal for the identification of a well-managed page.*

Attribute	Variable
Authenticity of the Page	(1) Username and all the login information on the Welcome page; (2) Statement of official page; (3) Official logo and copyright statements; (4) A statement that the site is monitored; and (5) Link on the official website forwarding to the fanpage.
Disclosure	(1) Organizational affiliation; (2) Organization summary; (3) Mission statement; (4) Description of the organization; and (5) A link forwarding to the website of the organization.
Engagement	(1) List of events of the club; (2) Discussion forum; (3) Use of wall; (4) Creation of other applications; (5) The presence of an official email; and (6) other relevant contact information.
Information Dissemination	(1) Links to news of the organization; (2) Organization notes; (3) Photos published by the organization; and (4) Videos sent by the organization.

by any of the teams belonging to the sample. In the attribute engagement, the item forum was also not used by the clubs because this function has been deleted from Facebook. Thus, these items were excluded from the final model.

Finally, in the third stage, we used the econometric model proposed by Pronschinske *et al*. (2012) with adaptations to the reality of the Brazilian scenario. Therefore, to test the hypotheses presented we performed the regression testing. Given that there would be two equations to be estimated simultaneously, according to Wooldridge (2010), the most efficient way to estimate a system of equations is the SURE (Seemingly Unrelated Regression Equations) method, this method correct any possible correlation between the residuals of the equations (the problem is observed by the independence test of Breusch-Pagan, if the descriptive level is lower than 0.05, there is evidence for correlation between the equations, which shows a better use of SURE).

First, the system was estimated with the dependent variables Log(Nfans) and Log(Ncomment) with restrictions of Authenticity, Disclosure, Engagement and Information Dissemination equal to zero (Mod. 1 - Log(N Fans) and Mod. 1 – Log(N Comment.)). Secondly, the models were estimated with all variables, that is, without any restriction (Mod. 2 - Log(N Fans) and Mod. 2 - Log(N Comment.)). Thus, the base models for the hypotheses testing were equations 2 and 3:

(2) *Log(Nfans)=Pop+Wimpct+Week+PostClub+Division*

(3) *Log(N.comment)=Pop+Wimpct+Week+PostClub+Division*

Log(Nfans) is the number of fans in the Facebook page of each club. We opted to use a logarithmic equation in order to equalize the differences from large, intermediate or small clubs. Log(N.comment) represents the number of interactions in the fanpage within the period assessed. For gathering both information, the SCUP software was used. The original model did not include the test on the number of activities of Internet users. However, due to the resources used in this study, which enabled the collection of this information, the researchers chose to test this new hypothesis and extend the scope of study of the model of Pronschinske *et al*. (2012), thus contributing to the enrichment of the model.

In the original model, the variable Pop is the population of the city where the club is located. This model adapts to the U.S. sports standards, but not to the Brazilian. Thus, we chose to use the number of fans instead of the city population. To measure the number of fans, we chose the survey conducted by Pluri and Stochos (2013). Thus, the final sample of clubs studied, specifically for this variable, was reduced to 23 clubs. Winpct is the percentage of points earned by the clubs. We chose not to use the winning percentage, proposed in the original model, because in football there is the possibility of tie the matches. However, in the U.S. leagues, this effect does

not occur. Therefore, the winning percentage of a club would not necessarily represent its performance in the field. Week is the number of weeks of the Facebook page of the club. This number was obtained by scrolling the fanpages and identifying the official Facebook seal: created on or, when the seal was not identified, through the first post in the fanpage. PostClub is the number of insertions that the club made on its page in the period analysed. This information, despite not being included in the econometric model proposed by Pronschinske *et al*. (2012) was included because it is considered an independent variable that may influence the dependent variables presented by the model. It was used to replace the variable presented in the original model that was related to the participation or not of American clubs in the playoffs of the corresponding leagues. For gathering this information, the SCUP software was used. Division is a dummy variable to control the test of division A or B in "Campeonato Brasileiro". Equations 2 and 3 created the basis for testing the hypotheses in equations 4 and 5:

(4) *Log(Nfans)=Pop+Wimpct+Week+PostClub+Division +Authenticity+Disclosure+Engagement+Information Dissemination*

(5) *Log(N.comment)= Pop+Wimpct+Week+PostClub+Division+Authenticity+Disclosure+Engagement+Information Dissemination*

Equations 4 and 5 are identical to equations 2 and 3, for all hypotheses studied, but has the inclusion of variables: Authenticity, Disclosure, Engagement and Information Dissemination. Each of these variables represents their percentage on the date of analysis of fanpages.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The analysis of Table 3 allows us to understand the behaviour of the variables in the sample studied. Although this study intended to work with the 40 clubs of 1st Division and 2nd Division of Brazilian Championship, as explained earlier, we chose to work with a sample of N=38. In the independent variables, we found 1,806 insertions as the average postings of the clubs. The minimum posted by a club was 97 and the maximum 4,981. The average points was 46.2%, being the best utilization 69.3% and 17.5% the worst. The average period that clubs are on Facebook are 148 weeks, which indicates that it has been a while since they have their profile, but not necessarily see on the platform a channel for the communication with their fans.

The variables called attributes help understand how clubs are managing their fanpages. Authenticity, an attribute that helps Internet users to make sure that the fanpage is an official page of the club had an average of 81% positive responses. The fanpage with the least attention in this regard worked with 40% of the five variables studied. Disclosure, which represents

the presentation of the fanpage to the Internet user is used by the clubs 0.72% of the variables met. Engagement indicated the average of 79% of variables met. Information Dissemination reached an average of 72% of the variables met.

Before estimating the regressions, we verified, individually, the correlation between the attributes and the dependent variables. In the correlation test, it was possible to identify that, among the four attributes studied, authenticity, disclosure and engagement indicated positive and significant correlation with the dependent variable Log(N fans), similar to the other independent variables club posts and number of fans. In the analysis of the dependent variable Log(N comment) except for the variable disclosure, the result was the same of the model Log(N fans).

The results of model one and two are presented in Table 4. The comparisons between models 1 and 2 (equations 2 and 4) are used to check whether the coefficients of the variables Authenticity, Disclosure, Engagement and Information Dissemination are important to explain Log(N fans) and Log(No Comments). By comparing the table, it can be seen that R² increased with the inclusion of the variables, we noticed that the increase was significant in both Model 1 (Log N Fans) and Model 2 (Log N Comments). In the case of the dependent variable Log N Fans, the variables that explained in a significant manner were "number of fans", "percentage of points earned,"

participation in the first division, "Authenticity", "Engagement" and "Information Dissemination", all indicating a positive relationship. In the case of the dependent variable Log(N Comments), the variables that explained in a significant manner were "number of fans", "percentage of points earned," "participation in the first division" and "Authenticity", all indicating a positive relationship.

Thus, we can conclude that H1a - authenticity (b=2.13, p<.05), H3a - engagement (b=1.69, p<1) and H4a - information (b=1.20, p<.05) were confirmed. By comparing the results obtained in the original survey, we add the confirmation of the hypothesis H3a, which was rejected in the study of Pronschinske *et al.* (2012).

In the hypotheses B's, included in the survey through the dependent variable Log(N Comments), this study confirmed the hypothesis 1b - authenticity (b=2.38, p<.05). It can be seen that the coefficients of engagement and information were positive but not significant.

The heteroscedasticity test was performed to check whether the variances of the models remained constant. In all estimated models, we found that there were no problems of heteroscedasticity (all p values were above 0.05). The Breusch-Pagan test of independence was conducted to check whether there was independence between the residuals between the models estimated simultaneously. The descriptive level of

Table 3. *Descriptive analyses.*

Variables	N	Average	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Numbers of Fans	38	753.424,30	1.333.256	3.296	5.513.543
Number of Comments	38	34.580,76	35.889,57	375	112.338
Authenticity	38	0,81	0,16	0,40	1,00
Disclosure	38	0,72	0,26	0,33	1,00
Engagement	38	0,79	0,19	0,40	1,00
Information	38	0,72	0,19	0,25	1,00
% Points	38	46,17	10,11	17,54	69,30
Week face	38	148,05	36,43	60,00	222,14
Club Posts	38	1.806,47	1.196,49	97,00	4.981,00
Pop	23	3,27%	4,39%	0,30%	16,80%
1st Division	38	52,63%	–	–	–

Table 4. *Regression Analysis.*

Variables	Hypotheses	Mod. 1 – Log(N Fans)	Mod. 2 – Log(N Fans)	Mod. 1 – Log(N Commen.)	Mod. 2 – Log(N Commen.)
Const		8.9827***	5.3529***	7.4701***	5.1277***
Pop		0.2165***	0.1411***	0.0899***	0.0590*
% Points earned		0.0439***	0.0416***	0.0219*	0.0274**
Week face		0.0064	0.0047	0.005	0.0025
Club Posts		–0.0001	–0.0002	0.0001	–0.0001
1st Division		0.9023***	0.8616***	0.8824***	0.9452***
Authenticity	H1a / H1b		2.1348**		2.3898**
Disclosure	H2a / H2b		0.2037		–1.1185
Engagement	H3a / H3b		1.6967*		1.1936
Information	H4a / H4b		1.2063**		0.788
Heter. [1]		0.8548	0.2941	0.5626	0.1282
Indep. [2]		(0.00)a	(0.00)b		
R^2		0.8039	0.9026	0.5873	0.6909

Notes: (1) White's heteroscedasticity test. (2) Breusch–Pagan Test of Independence Significant for *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; * $p<0.1$.

(0.00)a meant that there was no independence between the residuals of model 1 (Log N Fans) and Model 1 (Log N Comment). The descriptive level of (0.00)b meant that there was no independence between the residuals of model 2 (Log N Fans) and Model 2 (Log N Comment). Therefore, these results confirm the suitability of the SURE method for estimating the models.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Even though Facebook is not the first of the so-called SNS, it has been creating a series of innovations over the years, improving the relationship with users, in order to keep them increasingly inside its platform (Ulusu, 2010). Thus, we can identify Facebook as an SNS that has been contributing to changes in the form of work of clubs and other organizations that use the SNS to strengthen the relationship bond with their users and consumers and, consequently, the strategies adopted by these organizations.

Along these same lines, with regard to Brazilian football, it is known that the fan of a particular club tends to have a high degree of fidelity to this club (Fleury *et al.*, 2014). The use

of Facebook as a critical point of the strategy of relationship can further reinforce this fidelity by improving the relationship between the parties involved. Meadows-Klue (2008) points out that the introduction of SNS, particularly Facebook, created in the market a new generation of relationship marketing. Thus presenting new challenges for companies and consumers and, in certain circumstances can lead the way for the reconstruction of the marketing mix. Requiring from the so-called Facebook generation a new way of acting and thinking. This innovation in the model of relationship with fans allows clubs to gather more accurate information about their target audience, creating more effective and efficient actions (Pronschinske *et al.*, 2012).

Relationship marketing can and should be used to attract, develop and retain consumers (Bee and Kahle, 2006). The SNS can and should be used as a communication channel for relationship strategies (Zauner *et al.*, 2012) between football clubs and their fans. In this regard, Facebook, among the various SNS existing today, stands out not only for being the largest, but for being the one that has been seeking to improve its tools (Ulusu, 2010). By analysing the recent marketing actions of

Brazilian clubs (Malagrino, 2011), there has been an intensive effort from marketing departments in the search for innovative solutions capable of attracting fans and turning them into consumers. The SNS may be the key to streamline this process.

However, it is important to note that few studies has been carried out, even abroad, regarding the use of social media through leagues and clubs that participate in them (Pronschinske et al., 2012). Thus, this study gives an opportunity for a new research front to be conducted. Therefore, this study tested the influence that some specific attributes have on increasing the number of fans and increasing their participation within the pages. The confirmation of Authenticity (H1a), Disclosure (H2a) and Information (H4a) corroborate to show that the professional management of Facebook pages contributes positively to increase the number fans in the pages. This allows clubs to model new relationship strategies with their fans and sponsors, two of the main stakeholders of the sports industry (Landau, 2012).

Despite the confirmation only of Authenticity (H1b) regarding the issue of participation of internet users through comments, it is possible to identify a positive relationship between the key factors to enhance the engagement of the fans in the fanpages. Thus, with the joint analysis of the two models proposed, it can be inferred that the professional management of Facebook pages can be a path to building a long-term relationship, a key point for the development of relationship marketing (Bee and Kahle, 2006).

The confirmation of H1a, H1b, H3a and H4a helped to understand the importance of clubs in keeping a direct dialogue with their fans. If, according to Tredinnick (2006), the SNSs are platforms that require the participation of internet users and their engagement is associated with the model of participation of the administrator of the fanpages, as demonstrated by the hypotheses, we not only found a point of intersection between clubs and fans, but also a focal point for football clubs to start developing specific strategies for their growth within the SNS.

The identification of the factors number of fans, the percentage of points earned and the presence in the first division show the gap between the national football model and major U.S. sports leagues. While in the United States we found 122 teams, divided into four major professional leagues, here in Brazil, soccer stands out as the major national sport and, in many cases, inhibits the growth of other leagues. Moreover, even within football, clubs rely heavily on their size to get closer to their fans. Clubs located in large cities, and that are in the elite of professional football, are those that have more facility to increase their fan base.

Although football has an air of cruelty in the relationship club/fan, according to Fleury et al. (2014), because the more the fan interacts with the club, the more it adds value to the spectacle and, consequently, the more expensive is this relationship to the fan, while in the virtual universe this conflict does not occur. On the other hand, the Brazilian virtual fan stands out as a momentary fan, since the victories directly reflect this growth in the fan base.

Through the survey conducted on the fanpages of each club, it was also possible to identify that many clubs, even the so-called big clubs, still do not use the full potential of Facebook pages. Many clubs do not work with some of the variables proposed or when they do, they do it incorrectly. Clubs lack a more serious work regarding the administration of fanpages. Several clubs, after surveying the 20 variables, seem not to identify on Facebook a direct channel with their fans. This may be contributing to the rejection of H2b, H3b and H4b and helps us understand the importance of the number of fans, the percentage of points earned and the presence in the first division in the number of fans in each fanpage.

LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

This study indicates some limitations that should be presented. First, there is a big difference between the U.S. and the Brazilian sports market. In the U.S. model, the initial sample started from N=122 and after adjustments, it ended up with N=114, covering the four major U.S. sports leagues. In the research conducted in Brazil, only football clubs were studied. We chose to expand the sample by including the second division of Campeonato Brasileiro. Thus, the initial sample was N=40 and, after adjustments, it ended up with N=23.

The differences are not restricted only in terms of the model of the competition, but also in terms of economic and business models. These differences affect the strategies adopted by these markets with respect not only to the use of SNS as a social networking platform, but also the entities that face the use of relationship marketing. This point could and should be studied for further research.

These same differences also make room for an important point. From the Brazilian perspective, using the variable population, as originally proposed, does not seem to be the most suggested option and for this reason, we chose, in this work, the number of fans, which despite limiting the sample indicated better results than population size. In this sense, the limitation of broader studies regarding the number of fans in Brazil ends up being a limiter.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The sample size is also another point that deserves reservations. The study gives the opportunity for future research to focus on the expansion of the sample size. As a suggestion, we highlight the inclusion of foreign leagues or clubs and even clubs of other sports modalities in Brazil. Within this scenario, it is also necessary to expand the crossings of the variables presented and check their influences. This study arouses in the authors themselves and, hopefully, in other researchers, the need to deepen this study.

Another important aspect concerns the posting of each club. The difference in the types of content generated in each fanpage was evident. While some clubs choose to replicate news from other media, other clubs post exclusive news. Photos are also widely used, though many clubs included in their content the description of the match of the club, as a bid-to-bid. These posts contributed to the growth in the number of insertions. As a future research, it will be interesting to analyse the impacts generated by different content models used by each club.

We used the position in the 2013 Brazilian championship as one of the independent variables of the proposed equation. However, several Brazilian clubs participate in simultaneous competitions in which they can present different results. Thus, a club may be a successful in a competition and unsuccessful in the other. The choice of position in the main national championship is because this competition is the only that in which all clubs participate together. However, this factor becomes a major limitation of the study and gives opportunity for further studies to present alternative solutions to this issue.

Although the focus of this study is Facebook, it is worth noting that only studying Facebook is not enough to understand the use of social networks. Even though Facebook is the most important social network currently and Brazil is the second country with the largest number of users (Carneti, 2012), Waters *et al.* (2009), Zauner *et al.* (2012) and Ulusu (2010) already pointed to the use of SNS by companies for relationship strategies and the strengthening of their brands. These networks served, since then, to break with geographical boundaries. Therefore, for future research we recommend studying other social networks such as Google+, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, Foursquare, Vine and others.

It is still not part of the common sense of Brazilian fans to look to their football club, the so-called favourite team, and identify them as an organization. However, in the new scenario that stands out in football as part of the entertainment industry, clubs should be seen beyond the four field lines. Clubs should be seen as organizations that require professional staff in all areas and who extend their performance off the pitch. Therefore, it is necessary that these clubs are prepared to create new products to meet the increasingly latent demand of their fans/consumers. To generate new products, it is necessary to have ideas, create new things and different processes. It is necessary that the clubs see themselves as companies and seek their space in new markets.

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