Chapter 5
Website Interaction between a Football Club and its Supporters: The Case of Sporting Clube de Portugal

João Silva
University of Lisbon, Portugal

Pedro Isaías
Universidade Aberta (Portuguese Open University), Portugal

ABSTRACT
Football teams can explore the benefits of Websites and increase their popularity through the creation of a well-designed Website that will attract users. The fact that football is the leading sport in most countries constitutes an advantage, as it becomes an appealing subject for Internet navigation. This chapter explores the type of relationship that the supporters of Sporting Clube de Portugal have with the football team on the club’s official Website. This objective demands an analysis of the characteristics that a Website is required to have in order to attract and engage its intended users. Through a survey conducted via different social media and email communication, this study asked Sporting Clube de Portugal’s supporters about their engagement with the Website. In addition, this chapter presents the features that users consider to be most important in a football club Website.

INTRODUCTION
The Internet has an assorted range of users with different interests and requirements. “In order to arrange for high-quality websites, we need to consider the HCI aspects of the phenomena, which require knowledge about the users, their prior experience, expectations and needs” (Sørum, Andersen, & Vatrapu, 2012, p. 698). The definition of a good website depends on the person doing the evaluation. The effectiveness and user-friendliness of a website are not guarantees of its success among internet users (Sørum et al., 2012). The increased competition between companies that focus entirely on a particular business activity drives companies to expand to several points of...
the globe in search of other markets. A company that focuses on the customer should take into account the type of needs that each client has. It is important to understand their consumption patterns and levels of satisfaction, so it can guarantee customer retention and loyalty.

According to Miranda, Chamorro, Valero, and Maestre (2010), the number of Internet users has grown significantly over the last few years, having reached approximately 1.04 billion, which represents 16% of the world’s population. Hence, the creation of a website has become essential to the dissemination of news about companies and their products to various parts of the globe. The website should reflect the image that the company is trying to project and it should be one that the users will remember and want to return to (Cox, & Dale, 2002). Football and the Internet have shown early signs of a prosperous marriage (Miranda et al., 2010). Technology has become settled deep within football fandom (The Social Issues Research Centre, 2008). They allow the company to publicize its business, and, if they reflect a good company image, they are a way to achieve success. In light of the power of the Internet and the popularity of football, the creation of an effective and user-friendly website, offering various services and products, is a valuable asset. Through their websites, football clubs would be able to reach both the local and the international supporters. On the one hand, the website is useful for the supporters who are local to the club, in the sense that it provides digital and immediate access to the club’s services, products and news. On the other hand, via the website, national supporters who live abroad and foreign supporters in general can be in contact with the club and know more about what it offers, despite being geographically distant.

This chapter intends to explore the link between football and the Internet, by providing an outline of the Internet’s current situation and an analysis of how football can benefit from its power. This chapter is divided as follows: the first section presents a review of the literature, which reveals the demand for football and the kind of media the fans use to check news. This review analyses current academic literature regarding football teams and their websites to determine what the supporters use to keep up to date about the team’s news and where they purchase the club’s products. In the next section, this chapter analyses what features should be present on a quality website and on a football club website, and finally it determines the type of relationship that exists between football and the Internet. In the third section, the methodology is presented and the hypotheses are formulated. There is also a description of the research approach, the sample, and the tests performed. In the fourth section, the results are analyzed, and finally conclusions are drawn.

FOOTBALL AND ITS SCOPE

Football is not only a social phenomenon but also big business: large amounts of money circulate; there is a multiplicity of stakeholder groups that are interconnected worldwide; and the clubs have changed from simple sports teams to international entertainment companies, especially the highly competitive teams that try to obtain the best business strategies (Dolles, & Söderman, 2005). The media contribute, in many ways, to the expansion of football. The next section explains how media and other kinds of communication methods disseminate news about football. To start with television, cable and satellite television have contributed to engagement between fans and sports, providing debates via text, phone or email (Cleland, 2011). Sports fans can now be informed about sports 24 hours a day, anywhere.

There are some clubs which have their internal media, i.e. media sources that the clubs control, such as the match day program and the official club website (Cleland, 2011). Although there have been advances in the relationship between ‘new’ media and football, many football fans still prefer