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Kamil Fryszak

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Conditions for Managing Social Communication by Sports Clubs

Kamil Fryszak  University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, Poland, kamil_fryszak@o2.pl
sport, physical activity, sports marketing, stakeholders, communication system, sports club, research material, analysis, deduction, logical reasoning, questionnaire

ABSTRACT

Sport has long been a prominent element of social life, carrying educational, ethical, economic and health-related functions, and shaping lifestyles, fashion and cultural norms. Within this field, sports marketing relies on communication tools directed at key stakeholder groups – fans, sponsors, media and local authorities – in order to build the image of clubs and players, convey positive information and support high attendance as well as a favourable atmosphere during competitions. The present article reports an empirical study of communication structures in top-tier Polish football clubs, focusing on the role of press officers as central actors in club–stakeholder relations. Using a 38-item semi-structured online questionnaire, data were collected from press officers of all 15 Ekstraklasa clubs between August 2023 and February 2024, and analysed with descriptive statistics and logical reasoning. The study examined how organisational and technological arrangements within communication departments relate to the perceived effectiveness of contact with external audiences.

The results indicate that dedicated fan-service points, proactive dialogue on social media, and systematic cross-department coordination are jointly associated with a substantial share of the variance in self-reported quality of service, pointing to the need for continuous adaptation of strategies, methods, and communication techniques. The findings underline that enhancing and regularly updating the content and formats of messages addressed to stakeholders is a key route to improving service quality and strengthening the club's image. Consequently, a thorough understanding of the principles of effective communication, as well as of the specific tools shaping its course in contemporary media environments, emerges as a necessary condition for the professional functioning of football clubs at the highest level of competition.

Introduction

From its very beginnings, sport has been an area of human activity that particularly easily spoke to the consciousness of both its direct participants and its spectators. In the history of sport (as a field of study), spectating is considered a form of participation in the spectacle as a whole, creating a kind of coexistence that, in contemporary terminology, could be called a specific relationship between athletes and fans. The sports historian C. Diem wrote about the traditions of sport: *„sport is the grandchild of the Renaissance and the child of the French Revolution.” The roots of physical activity with autotelic or spectator characteristics, however, lie deep within human nature. Most contemporary sports disciplines originate from play, everyday activities, and those of a military nature* (Godlewski, Sajek, 2018).

Not without significance, often overlooked, is its political role and the consequences of sports' involvement in politics (the so-called football war, or the 100-hour war lasting until July 18, 1969, between Honduras and El Salvador). R. Kapuściński, who was a correspondent for Polish Radio in Latin America (Kapuściński, 2019) at the time, and other sources

(Merwiński, 2016, Opryszek, 2014) wrote about it. Some sports philosophers even claim that sport is a cultural substitute for war (Miżejewski, 2023). The ancient Greeks already said: *if there are games, there is no war*. In modern times, this rule has evolved into the statement: „If there is war, there are no games.” In the context of a kind of advertising for individual political narratives, sport appears as a field of often unjustified interference by political actors who try to smuggle their ideas using broad access to the mass audience and widespread interest in sporting events (The Olympic Games in Sochi, Beijing, Moscow, etc.).

„Contemporary sports, especially at the highest league level or events of the rank of world championships or the Olympic Games, are dominated by economy paired with utilitarianism.” (Grabowski, 2019). In the economic literature, various theories and types of enterprises have been highlighted, among them football clubs and sports enterprises (Noga, 2011). Sport – according to various estimates – accounts for 2% of the world's GDP and 3.7% of the European Union's GDP (Gancarczyk,

2016). It influences a range of industries, from media and advertising markets to clothing and equipment production, and from infrastructure investments and construction to tourism, transport, and hospitality.

Over the past few decades, it has also become, through significant commercialization, an important element influencing the shaping of the image of companies operating not only in industries directly related to it but also in others, in their activities sometimes polar oppositely distant from sport in the strict sense. In 2022, 24 billion PLN of Poland's GDP came from revenues generated by the sports industry (PAP, 2022). In the Polish context, the most recognizable sports sponsors are the corporations: PKN Orlen, Adidas, Nike, and Plus. Other companies that are sports sponsors in Poland include PGE in the energy sector, Lotto in gaming, and PKO BP in the financial sector.

As reported by Nielsen Sports, the global leader in sponsorship analytics and fan insights, sports sponsorship grew by 107% in 2021, and by analyzing 100 sponsorships across seven markets in 20 industries, Nielsen found that sports sponsorship resulted in an average 10% increase in purchase interest among fans. Nielsen's 2021 Trust in Advertising study also found that 81% of global respondents completely or somewhat trust brand sponsorship during sporting events (Nowicka, 2024).

In the Polish context after the systemic transformation, which also affected sports organizations, they were transformed into fully-fledged economic entities. It seems that sports in Poland are still undergoing a period of transformation, as (which is probably worth noting) formal and legal solutions alone are not the only factors guaranteeing actual and desired changes. It is people—their motivations, habits, experiences, and finally, practical actions—that are the main driving force capable of transforming the existing state of reality.

The role of sports in the economy is continuously increasing, and the functions it is beginning to perform are becoming significant not only from a commercial perspective. Alongside the purely business environment, which provides employment and income to thousands of people (infrastructure, stadiums, fields, equipment, medical care, advertising, etc.), sport also plays a cultural role. In the era of the erosion of traditional cultural values, which were previously conveyed through information channels with limited reach (home, family, press, books, or even a given country), most people today have access

to global media, where athletes become transmitters of the ideas of fair play, respect for others, and cultural diversity, shaping the attitudes of people who identify with their idols. The educational influences on younger generations are also significant, as they promote various fields of physical activity through education and sports, supporting health, developing desirable personality traits, and promoting an active (also physical) lifestyle.

The aforementioned commercialisation of sports has led to increased investment in this area of social life, both material and immaterial, as well as other organisational resources, including strategic and human resources (Business Insider Polska, 2022). Because contemporary focus is particularly on building intangible and human resources, this aspect of the enterprise, which is currently a sports club, served as the main axis around which this work was concentrated. Football, as a discipline known and popular in many corners of the world, also attracts relatively the largest capital. Also in Poland, after the period of a centrally planned economy, where sports funding was linked to political goals, the time of slowly entering market realities began. Other sports disciplines (including football) are becoming a battleground not only for sports but also for business. In both cases, achieving success requires professional preparation, wise resource management, and prudent planning. It is not easy, especially in a situation where past habits still persist, the lack of management traditions for an enterprise like a sports club, and a series of other factors that can affect its existence and functioning.

Building and maintaining an image is one of the most important factors influencing a professional sports club's financial results in contemporary economic and social realities.

Sport - its role and functions

„Sport is currently one of the most popular, and perhaps the most important, phenomena in human life.” It began to exist alongside humanity, whose history also includes a long, rich, and astonishing record of sports achievements. From the moment of its existence, humanity began to improve itself and the surrounding world, and this improvement also encompassed the field of sports. With the advancement of civilization, sports have developed into their current form, and their rank and significance continue to grow.” (Pytlik, 1997).

The ancient Greeks aspired to the ideal: *mens sana in corpore sano*, meaning: a healthy mind in a healthy body.

They believed that physical activity is essential for the development of the mind's virtues. In this perspective, one cannot overlook the influence of physical culture on a person's moral sphere. Ethical norms should serve as a guide and a test when undertaking various actions in sports life.

The European origin of sport is most emphatically highlighted by the etymology of the very name „sport.” The word originates from Vulgar Latin used at the end of the Roman Empire. In its French form, „disporte” meant engaging in recreational activities and was brought to England during the Norman invasion of 1066. During the 18th century, sport began to expand across Europe and encompassed all forms of physical competition of a playful nature (Lipoński, 2002).

In the Polish language, this word was first documented in 1856 by the prose writer and poet Konstanty Gaszyński in the one-act comedy „Horse Racing in Warsaw”:

*„Poland is advancing swiftly on the road to progress.
We have stood on par with England and Paris
We have horse racing, the sport is growing everywhere
And if the government allows, the Jockey Club will be.”* (Gaszyński, 1858).

The Act of June 25, 2010, on Sport states that: *„sport encompasses all forms of physical activity that, through occasional or organized participation, contribute to the development or improvement of physical and mental condition, the development of social relations, or the achievement of sports results at all levels.”* Sport is also considered to be *„competition based on intellectual activity, aimed at achieving a sports result. Sport, along with physical education and movement rehabilitation, constitutes physical culture.”* (Act of 25 June 2010 on Sport, 2010).

Sport, as part of the cultural heritage of humanity, its history, and traditions, has become the subject of research for historians and experts in other humanities disciplines (Lipoński, 1974). They describe various aspects of sports, often mentioned in literature, art, theatre, film, etc., which attest to their resources and humanistic values. Sport can be viewed from both a philosophical (metaphysical, essential) and a non-philosophical perspective. (descriptive, phenomenological, non-essential). *„The phenomenological aspect definitely prevails today, it is visible and seems obvious to everyone.”* (Mylik, 1997).

Sports activity from a social perspective fosters the

creation of groups that organize themselves in the form of associations or other organizational units, bound together by the practiced discipline, the organization of competitions, and the establishment of interpersonal contacts. This also translates into strengthened interpersonal bonds and the construction of identity, a community of engaged individuals. The emergence of communities focused on sports strengthens social competencies, builds social trust, and establishes clear, consensus-based rules acceptable to the community. Strong local structures and bonds connecting people in the immediate neighborhood, municipality, and city serve as resources for building national sports potential, which has its roots in strong local units that can organize themselves.

„It is precisely the social role of sports that provides the opportunity to strengthen bonds among residents, amateur and professional structures both within the European Union and beyond. Therefore, both public entities in the EU and in each country, from central authorities to local governments, bear a great responsibility for supporting sports.” (Jedel, Kończak, 2019).

„The society of the 21st century faces many opportunities, but also socio-cultural threats. It therefore requires actions aimed at creating a tolerant civilization that provides the foundations for existence in the spirit of friendship, dialogue, respect for others, and adherence to and respect for norms defining the principles of social life. Sports activity is currently perceived as a common social phenomenon and a source of many emotions, influencing the value system and behavior of individuals.” (Każmierczak, 2018).

The concept of the pedagogical values of physical activity has been represented over the centuries by Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Sebastian Petrycy, Jędrzej Śniadecki, Pierre de Coubertin, Władysław Osmolski, and Eugeniusz Piasecki. All of them perceived the practice of physical exercise and sports not only as a system of hygienic and health treatments shaping physical fitness, but also as an important element of social life, particularly highlighting its broader educational values. The educational values of sports periodically emerge in the consciousness of those responsible for education amid a crisis in upbringing, in academic environments, and in the absence of authority figures. The proper attitude in sports activity constitutes an essential manifestation of education, to which ancient kalokagathia canons are attributed: health, fitness, beauty, grace, peace, honesty,

and wisdom (PWN, 2025).

Communication of a sports club with its environment

Communication, derived from the Latin words *communicare* and *communicatio* (transmission of information, interaction), generally means a two-way flow of information (Kruk, 2004). T. Goban-Klas notes that „communication is a complex category, one can speak of forms of knowledge about communication, because: ‚in essence, there is no universal ‚science of communication,‘ but various planes and ways of practising it.” (Goban-Klas, 2004).

„Communication is a symbolic, social process, it is a reciprocal relationship, but it is based on the individual interpretation of the message, and thus assumes a community of meanings attributed to specific messages, takes place in a specific context, is a conscious and purposeful action, and consists of continuous and alternating verbal and non-verbal interactions (Sobkowiak, 1998).” *One of the shortest and oldest definitions of communication states that: „communication is a transactional process of creating meanings.”* (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2004, Terry, 1956).

Communication has a specific context. It depends on the situations in which the communication process occurs. In the literature on the subject, four functions of communication are distinguished:

1. informational,
2. motivational,
3. monitoring,
4. emotional.

Thanks to the informational function, information necessary for making decisions regulating social interactions, achieving goals, etc., is obtained. The motivational function is an element of communication that conveys incentives for achieving various types of goals. The control function ensures that the content of social communication includes information about the sphere of duties and responsibilities of people, groups, organizations, and societies towards each other, defining subjects, norms, and the scope of social control. The emotive function allows for the expression of emotions and feelings, thereby satisfying essential psychosocial human needs (Aldag, Stearns, 1987).

The interdependence between the sender's and receiver's actions is called interaction. Communication is always an interaction because the sender's action always elicits a response from the receiver.

Building on Roman Jakobson's classic linguistic-communication model, any act of communicating involves four indispensable components: context, addresser (sender), message and contact (channel). Later theorists extended the scheme. Kowalik (2007), for example, emphasised two further elements — noise (disturbances that distort the message) and feedback (the receiver's response) — to capture features of modern, bidirectional communication processes. The context of the discussed process is the entirety of the conditions (the specific environment) in which the communication process takes place. One can talk about various aspects of it here, such as psychological or physical. The channel is all the possible paths through which the message can reach the recipient(s). In the era of tremendous increases in the number and variety of information channels, this is particularly an interesting area of activity for, for example, sports clubs. Noise is another element of the communication process that indicates the presence of „additional” or unnecessary stimuli and signals, which disrupt the smooth course of communication and impede the transmission and reception of information. Feedback is information from the receiver to the sender that can influence future messages.

Communication is a social, creative, symbolic, and interactive process. It is generally purposeful and conscious, as well as irreversible; it cannot be undone, repeated in the same situation, or altered in its course. As Kowalski writes: „The main element that differentiates the marketing communication model in sports clubs from other companies is the inclusion of not one, but four basic groups of recipients, between which there is also an exchange of messages.” In this way, the sports club is forced to control the flow of information about itself on many levels, as each group can be equally crucial to the club (Chłodnicki, Zeller, 2004). The main stakeholders and at the same time the recipients of sports clubs' messages are: fans, sponsors, media, and local authorities. Characteristic tools of communication in sports marketing are:

- „sports sponsorship,
- personal endorsement, meaning the use of an athlete's image in the company's promotional activities,
- licensing a sports brand.” (Waśkowski, 2007).

Sponsoring, broadly speaking, is the support of socially beneficial activities, including sponsoring clubs, athletes, events, or sports competitions. Personal

endorsement is taking advantage of an athlete's popularity and success. In such a situation, it is easier for sponsoring companies to gain the trust of individual fans who see that the company is using the player's image. Licensing, on the other hand, is the purchase by a company of the rights to use the name and/or logo that distinguishes a given sports entity.

M. Chłodnicki and P. Zeller, in relation to the values shaped by a sports club, identified six groups of entities. The primary groups of stakeholders, according to this trend analysis, are:

1. Media.
2. Sponsors.
3. Fans.
4. Local, national, and football authorities.
5. Financial institutions.
6. Public services and transportation (Chłodnicki, Zeller, 2004).

The role of the communication system is to build the club's and players' image, convey positive information, and undertake all actions to ensure high attendance and a good atmosphere during competitions. The effectiveness of its application will depend on the work of the people involved in its implementation, on the practical implementation of the rules and procedures aimed at orderly operation. At the core of such a system lies the awareness that, today, information has virtually unlimited reach and that full control over the relationships between stakeholders is not possible.

In the division of media, the essential role is played not so much by ownership as by the ability to manage information and shape its form. Such understood means of communication can be divided into:

- own media
- foreign media

Own media are:

- club website,
- official profile on social media platforms,
- pages and profiles of fan groups permanently associated with the sports club,
- bulletins,
- informational materials issued by the club,
- posters,
- announcements,
- information on billboards, light boards belonging to the club, etc.

Foreign media, on the other hand, are means of communication through which the information is not managed by the sports club conveying the message. These are primarily media of an informational nature:

- paper and electronic,
- fan club pages,
- local and regional press,
- internet editions of press titles,
- foreign pages on social media,
- television, radio, etc.

The encoded message reaches recipients through various communication channels. Regardless of the medium used, it reaches various stakeholder groups. Subsequently, stakeholders, without any further intervention from the club, also share information, thus creating communication systems among themselves. The efficiency, effectiveness, and intensity of the messages will depend on the level of development of the internal systems and their own activity (Kowalski, 2000).

As Kowalski (2000) postulates, for the practical functioning of the communication system between the club, whose task is the effective transmission and reception of information important to the club's activities, and the environment, several basic conditions must be met. They are meant to support the club's image and influence marketing. These conditions include:

- Having a website as well as a profile on a social media platform is an essential element of the communication system with the environment.

- At the level of contacts with sponsors, it is necessary to develop methods for acquiring sponsors, maintaining regular contact with them, analyzing the effects of their cooperation with the club, as well as building connections between them (relationship marketing).

- In contacts with fans, it is essential to create a communication platform, co-create or collaborate with the club's supporter pages. Such a role is mainly fulfilled by the profile on the social media platform and the fanpage.

- Cooperation with the media should be based on elements such as:

- o information policy
- o organization of club conferences,
- o designation of individuals responsible for maintaining media contacts and their oversight
- o determination of the role of local and regional

media in shaping the club's image and conveying information.

- Cooperation with local authorities is conditioned by the degree of dependence on local government units, the media strength of the club, and its role in building the foundations of territorial marketing. In this case, the mutual relationships between the club and the authorities at many levels of communication are important.

The most effective use of the communication system can occur when the club is organized in such a way that all the mentioned elements are developed, organized, and active. Researchers note that, in the Polish context, particularly for clubs from lower leagues, meeting the above conditions leaves much to be desired.

The British PR Institute proposes the following definition of public relations: „*a conscious, planned and ongoing effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its environment.*” (Chrisford 1974).

International scholarship likewise stresses the strategic role of communication management in sport — see Pedersen & Thibault (2014) on organisational alignment, Schwarz & Hunter (2018) on digital fan engagement, and Skinner, Smith & Swanson (2021) on revenue impacts. Juxtaposing these global perspectives with Polish studies provides a more balanced analytical backdrop.

Communication and cooperation with the environment - research results

Materials and Methods

Research objective. Identify organisational and technological determinants of effective social communication by Polish Ekstraklasa football clubs.

Research questions.

RQ1: Which structural features of club media offices are associated with higher self-rated communication effectiveness?

RQ2: How do fan-oriented service points influence perceived service quality and revenue?

Hypotheses.

H1: Clubs that operate a dedicated fan-service point report higher service-quality ratings.

H2: Clubs that publish interactive social-media content ≥ 5 times per match-week report higher sponsorship-revenue shares.

Method. Semi-structured online questionnaire (32 closed-ended and 6 open-ended items).

Data-collection window. August 2023 – February 2024.

Sample. N = 15 press officers (1 per Polish Ekstraklasa club; 11 male, 4 female; mean tenure = 5.3 years).

Ethics. Participation is voluntary and anonymous; informed consent is obtained.

The following section presents the empirical results of that survey. The study was carried out by the authors between August 2023 and February 2024 and encompassed 15 press officers – one from every Polish Ekstraklasa club.

The relationships between the structures responsible for communicating with the media in top-tier football clubs in Poland were examined in the context of their interactions with the surrounding environment.

The study examined the media environments of 15 football clubs in the Polish Ekstraklasa. Research material was collected between August 2023 and February 2024. The scope of the research also included the clubs' interactions with the external environment, aiming to provide an additional cognitive component that describes potential differences among the clubs studied.

The main research questions were formulated as follows:

1. How is the role of the press officer positioned within the operational framework of Polish Ekstraklasa football clubs?
2. What is the process of communication between press officers and internal and external audiences?
3. How does the practical dimension of press officers' and clubs' activities manifest in terms of marketing strategies, evaluation of work outcomes, and responses to crises?

Given the observed professionalization of communication processes in the media space of sports clubs and athletes in many countries, and the necessity of developing effective communication methods, addressing this topic can provide additional insights into the relationships between clubs and their environment within the studied context.

The collected research material underwent preliminary processing, including coding responses from the questionnaire according to a predefined response schema. The coded responses were entered into a database, and subsequent steps included summarization and analysis.

Open-ended questions were structured so their responses could be quantified. Once all the questionnaires were collected, the responses were categorized.

The responses to both closed- and open-ended questions served as the basis for comparisons and presentations using appropriate scales. The summarized results were presented in the form of tables, figures, and charts. In addition to the methods mentioned above, other research methods such as analysis, deduction, and logical reasoning were employed. These were essential for verifying, evaluating, and classifying both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as for synthesizing them at various levels of organization and structuring.

The primary research tool was a questionnaire (Stupnicki, 2003), containing 53 research questions (p. 269, Interview Questionnaire with Press Officers). It included closed questions with categorical responses, closed questions with quantitative responses, and open-ended questions. Due to the limited number of cases studied (determined by the number of clubs), the questionnaire was relatively extensive, allowing a detailed exploration of the issues and enabling a deeper analysis of the results. To collect, graphically present, and process the data, the MS Excel spreadsheet was used. The theoretical considerations were based on an exploration of available literature, publications, and other accessible sources. Methods such as logical and substantive analysis of texts, as well as quantitative and qualitative data, were also employed. Deduction was used to make comparisons and formulate conclusions.

Due to the small sample size, limited by the number of teams (clubs) in the league, an exhaustive research method was used. The study was conducted through direct meetings (in two cases) or via electronic communication channels (telephone, video conference, chat). The research material was collected between August 2023 and February 2024. The study included 15 representatives from Polish football league clubs responsible for media relations (so-called press officers). A quantitative breakdown by age, gender, and years of work experience is presented as follows:

Table 1. Quantitative summary of the studied cases in the categories of gender, age and length of

Sex		Age (years)				Length of service as a spokesperson (years)				
		Up to 25	25-36	36-45	45+	Up to 3	3-5	5-10	11-20	20+
M	10	1	5	3	1	2	3	4	1	0
W	5	0	3	1	1	2	2	0	1	0
Total	15	1	8	4	2	4	5	4	2	0

The analysis of various aspects of communication and cooperation with the environment began with questions about the structure and functioning of the fan service point. In the majority of cases, this point is connected to the ticket office, which seems to be a logical solution given cost savings, and for most clubs, this is a significant factor. In 1 out of 5 cases, respondents indicated that three or more people were employed at the fan service points. Such information may indirectly indicate the percentage of clubs that, on the one hand, have the appropriate financial resources and, on the other hand, are aware of this type of marketing activity and invest in it. The remaining small percentages (after 2 cases) answer indicating one or two people employed at the customer service point close the pool of responses on the discussed issue.

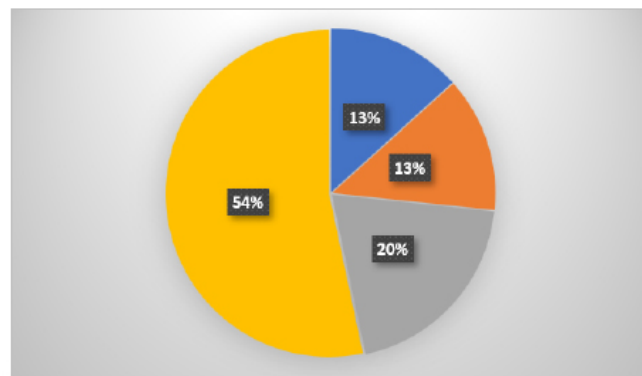


Figure 1. Organizational structure of the fan service point - frequency analysis. Own study.

In the open-ended question about formal subordination within the customer service club, three categories of responses were identified. They were:

- Marketing and Advertising Department – 11 indications
- Director – 3 indications
- Organization Department – 1 indication

As can be seen, in the vast majority of clubs, the marketing and advertising departments were responsible for this aspect of communication and cooperation with the environment, indicating that most clubs use the organisational structures of enterprises operating in economic conditions, with organizationally distinct structures responsible for individual areas of activity.

The next piece of information, which takes on practical value in the context of external relations, is a set of characteristics of a press spokesperson, extracted from responses to an open-ended question that asked respondents to identify five such characteristics.

Characteristics of a press spokesperson according to the respondents:

Listed features	Number of occurrences
eloquence	10
communicativeness	8
ability to work in a team	6
openness	6
flexibility	5
creativity	4
intelligence	3
sharpness	3
assertiveness	3
loyalty	3
mastery	2
care for image	2
responsibility	2
conscientiousness	2
the ability to persuade and negotiate	2
stress resistance	2
media presence, independence, availability, consistency, ease of establishing contacts, engagement	Each 1

Table 2. Desired characteristics of a press spokesperson by the number of mentions. Own study.

The collected information was sorted into four groups distinguished by the number of occurrences throughout the entire material. The most frequently mentioned desired trait among respondents was eloquence (2/3 of cases), which, alongside the almost equally frequent communicativeness, is undoubtedly an important trait in the field of communication, especially in interactions with the external environment. It is difficult to determine whether the aforementioned frequently mentioned traits are associated with conscious goals worth working on, or if they belong to the resources that the respondents utilize. The second most frequently mentioned group of traits in the survey sheet is led by the ability to work in a team, accompanied by openness, flexibility, and creativity. The mentioned traits somewhat harmonize with each other, and the fact that they were mentioned a similar number of times may indicate a similar perception of communication and conveying messages among the surveyed representatives. The next group of traits is more varied in terms of meaning and emotional connotation. A similar number of citations connects them. Finally, in the last group, the remaining traits were included, but mentioned only once. These „undervalued” traits, by almost all spokespersons, include, for example, independence, commitment, and consistency. These traits were mentioned by two men whose experience as spokesmen ranged from 3 to 5 years, and there was a significant age difference between them (one in the „under 25” group, the other in the „36-45” group).

The area of media relations, specifically its technical side, was the subject of a question that asked respondents to list the tools spokespersons use in their daily work. As in the previous case, a summary of the number of occurrences for each tool was prepared. Most often, spokespersons used the phone and email in their work. Slightly less frequently, they used the acredited system and social media. Definitely less frequently, various types of messengers were used, and in rare cases, video conferences and electronic press offices were conducted. In the latter case (electronic press office), the acredited system can be used; however, the respondent did not explicitly mention this form of contact, so it remained unchanged.

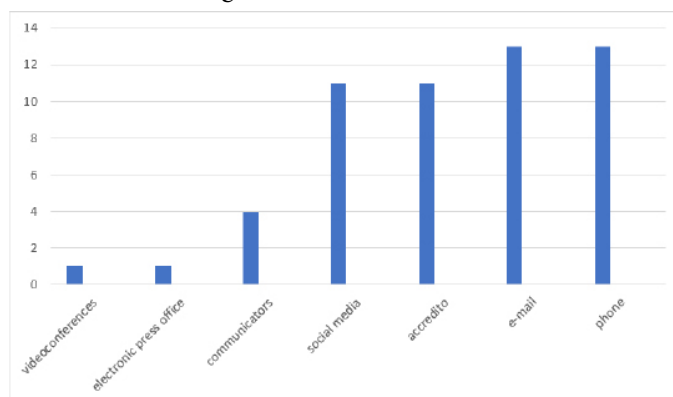


Figure 2. Communication tools most frequently used in media relations. Own work.

The justifications for the conferences called by the spokespersons present a range of possibilities, likely dependent on several factors, such as the clubs' media policy or the quantity and intensity of media events. Responses describing the reasons for convening press conferences have been summarized and grouped into the following categories:

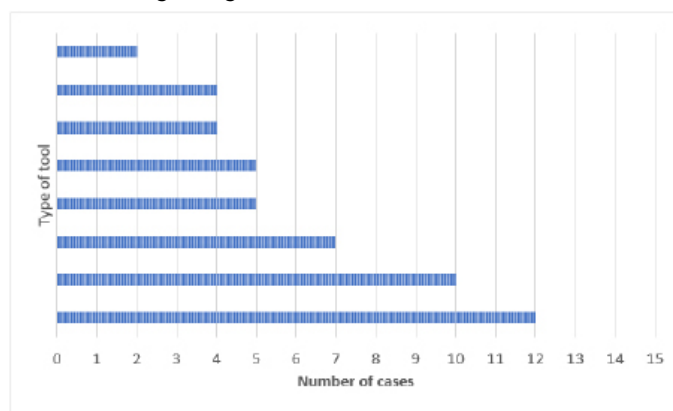


Figure 3. Justifications for convening press conferences by spokespersons. Own work.

Important events in the club's operations (as the respondents phrased it) were the most frequently recurring reasons for convening conferences, and, alongside sponsorship agreements or the acquisition of new sponsors, they accounted for 2/3 of the cases. Half of the respondents justified convening the conferences with issues related to the coach's work, his changes, etc. Pre- and post-match conferences were organized by 1/3 of the respondents. The same number of people at the convened conferences presented various changes in the club. A characteristic in the context of the club's functioning as a business was the approach to players. In fact, press conferences were held in only a few cases directly related to players, and this mainly occurred for major transfers (Figure 3).

The spokespeople included informing the public and cooperating with the media as the goals of the convened press conferences. 1/4 of the respondents indicated that the goal was to facilitate contact with the media. In individual cases, other goals were indicated. An average of 16-17 journalists participated in the conferences. (8-25). The varying number and range of conference participants could have depended on factors such as the team's ranking position, the club's media activity, the popularity of the players, the presence of so-called stars, and additional bonuses and attractions prepared for the „media world.”

According to 2/3 of those surveyed, the perception of the journalistic environment was positive. 1/3 rated it as „varied” (sometimes good, sometimes not), with the rating depending on the type of event. The respondents did not specify in what situations they encounter negative reception by journalists.

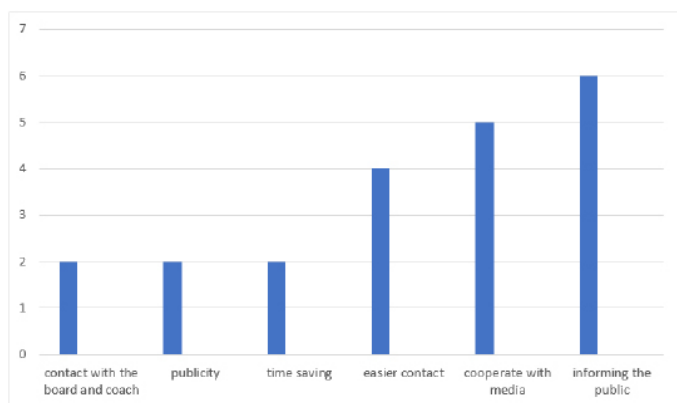


Figure 4. Purposes of convening press conferences. Own work.

The number of conferences (besides the obligatory pre- and post-match ones) ranged between 3 and 10 and concerned important club events, as the respondents

put it. The total number ranged from 30 to 50.

„Does the press office apply online office management principles?” is the following question in the group, focusing on the technical aspects of spokesperson work. Among the available responses, everyone except one case has and applies such rules. Regarding the forms clubs use to manage their online offices, the most frequently mentioned were photo galleries for journalists and online conferences. The response „other” was supplemented with actions related to accreditation processes. They undoubtedly concern everyone, but in only two cases were they mentioned within the discussed category.

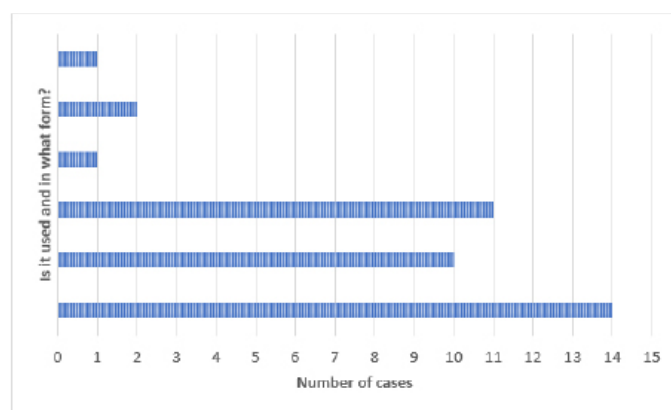


Figure 5. Application of online office management principles. Own work.

Spokespersons edited press articles for the media, mostly a few times a month (8 responses); in 6 cases, once a month; and in 1 case, once a quarter. As can be seen, the range of activities in this area was quite large, similar to the form of the edited materials. The most frequently mentioned were the article and the interview. Besides the mentioned ones, there was also a note, but no other forms of materials edited by the respondents (apart from those covered by the survey question) were recorded.

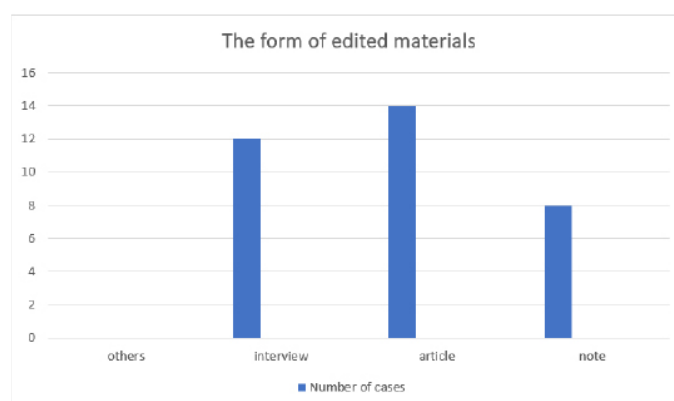


Figure 6. Format of press materials edited by spokespersons. Own work.

When asked about the most common reasons for preparing such press materials, spokespersons most frequently mentioned *important club events* (10 cases), followed by *increasing the media value/reach of the club* (5 cases) and transfers (4 cases). Other reasons include: crisis situations, on-field situations, issues not directly related to the regular schedule, youth matches, first team training, unofficial meetings with journalists, and player injuries (each 1 case).

In the question about respondents' opinions on how the spokesperson's contacts with journalists should look, the answers mainly fell into one category. The vast majority of respondents supported regular contact. 1/5 stated that they should be limited solely to conveying interesting information. However, one was mentioned.

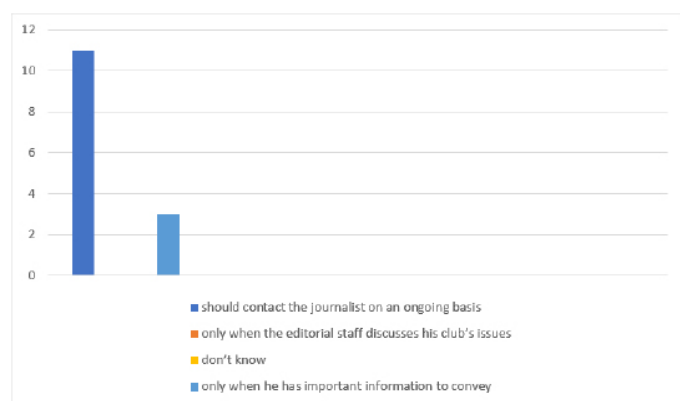


Figure 7. Responses to the question „What should the spokesperson's contacts with journalists look like, in your opinion?“ Own work.

A response stating that the spokesperson should wait for contact from the interested journalist. In this case, the spokesperson had less than 3 years of experience in this position, believed that he was fully independent in his actions, did not need to consult his actions with superiors, did not need their approval, and indicated that the main purpose of calling press conferences was to save time. He believed that the reception of the press conferences he organized was positive.

Analyzing the relationship between the obligation to consult on one's actions and the conditions of contacts with journalists, no significant differences were observed in the responses given by those who consult and those who do not consult their actions (Figure 8).

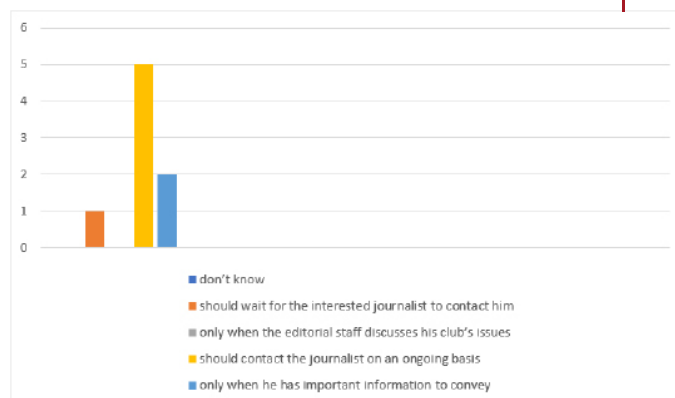


Figure 8. Dependencies between the obligation to consult actions and the conditions of contacts with journalists. Own study.

The most frequently mentioned obstacles in contacts with journalists included: sensationalism, exaggeration of the problem, bias, unreliability, and selectivity in publishing materials. When asked whether there are attempts to inspire, coerce, or refrain from publication by journalists, in 12 cases, the spokespeople answered yes, and in 3 cases, they answered no.

The individuals responsible for social media and preparing materials for the media in the studied clubs are press officers and press offices. In some cases, additional positions such as image director or social media manager. In one case, a separate marketing and communications department operating alongside the press office was indicated.



Figure 9. Responsible for social media and preparing photographs, videos, articles, etc. in football clubs. Own study.

The diversity of activities carried out by clubs for various communities turned out to be interesting. To enhance readability, these activities were divided into several categories: children and youth, adults and seniors, people with disabilities, and general. The spokespeople mentioned many diverse forms, most of which were aimed at children and youth. This is a special group to which clubs devote a lot of attention in both marketing and training activities. After all, it is from hundreds of thousands of children, through selection and sports training, that future champions emerge, who then become role models for future generations. But for this to happen, the younger generation must somehow be encouraged to make an effort. (both physical and mental). The natural need for movement in a young organism, supported by specific actions aimed at directing natural motor predispositions, can, in a relatively short time, more than repay the investments made in encouragement, recruitment, and sports training. This part of young people, who did not reach a master level in the sports selection process, becomes a valuable social resource, in the form of strong, healthy, and mentally resilient individuals, as practising sports at an amateur level not only strengthens physical fitness but also, and especially today, mental resilience. It is worth noting that the increasingly frequent offerings of activities for people with disabilities may indicate the recognition (at least by some clubs) of this segment of the audience, which, with appropriate support and infrastructural investment, could become a desirable group of clients both in terms of image and market. When asked about the role of a spokesperson in activities aimed at children and youth, they provided the following responses:

- raises awareness about the positive aspects of engaging in physical activity,
- takes actions to encourage the local community to support the club on various levels,
- informs the media about initiated events,
- encourages participation,
- consults with the marketing department on matters related to activities aimed at children,
- informs the public about such activities,
- is present during the event,
- takes photos and publishes them. In three cases, the spokespeople did not participate in such activities, and in two cases, they were coordinated in a different way (e.g., within a football academy or by individuals specifically responsible for organizing the so-called „events”).

Children and youth

- Football academies
- Children's entertainment animators
- Attractions during the games
- Activity for children- free organization of physical activities
- Supporting, integrating, helping the foundation
- Free entries for groups to games
- Footballers read to children;
- „Tropem wilczym" Run
- Stadium tours
- Organization of trips for children to games;
- Christmas Eve for children from orphanages
- Picnics
- Tournaments;
- Visits to schools, municipalities, hospitals
- Actions promoting cultural doping
- Passing on shirts, autographs, balls

Adults and seniors

- Free organization of physical activities for people aged 60 and over
- Amateur running
- „Słodka Polska" games
- Family sectors

People with disabilities

- Free tickets for the disabled
- „Legia bez barier" Program
- Separate sectors with facilities;
- Audio description for blind and visually impaired fans ;
- Disabled Supporters Club;
- Blind Football Section;

General

- Charity events
- Collections for those in need;
- Honorary Blood Donors Club;
- Patriotic runs;
- Cooperation with local governments

Table 3. Examples of football clubs' activities in interactions with their environment. Own work.

Conclusion

Concrete practice directions emerge from the findings. Three priority improvements are recommended:

1. Diversify real-time fan-engagement channels – e.g., launch moderated match-day group chats and interactive Instagram “story” polls managed by the press-office team.
2. Formalise sponsor-content calendars – task the club's marketing director and press officer with producing, each quarter, a co-branded social-media plan that pairs match highlights with sponsor storytelling to maximise revenue visibility.
3. Introduce a cloud-based media asset hub – assign the club's communications IT specialist to create a password-protected repository where journalists can instantly download match photos, video snippets and

press notes, cutting response times and broadening media reach.

Survey data underscore these priorities: clubs with a permanent fan-service point scored $M = 4.3/5$ on service-quality metrics versus $M = 3.1$ for those without, while teams posting interactive content ≥ 5 times per match-week reported an average of €0.73 million higher annual sponsorship revenue. These quantitative gains illustrate how the recommended improvements translate directly into both fan satisfaction and financial performance.

Available examples and case analyses, which provide an insight into specific situations illustrating the functioning of sports clubs and their representatives, demonstrate the need for continuous adjustment of strategies, forms, methods, and communication techniques with the environment. Especially in the so-called new media (internet platforms, social media, online games, the Internet of Things, etc.), improving and updating content and communication formats seems to be a way to enhance service quality or increase revenue. All these forms and new technologies are obviously related to communication processes. In this regard, a thorough understanding of both the principles that facilitate effective communication and the specific tools that shape its course can provide a basis for meeting the demands of improving operational quality and efficiency.

Available examples and case studies demonstrate the need for continuous adaptation of communication strategies, forms, methods, and techniques to the environment. Especially in the area of so-called new media (internet platforms, social media, online games, etc.), improving and updating content and communication formats seems to be the way to enhance service quality. All these forms and new technologies are obviously related to communication processes. Therefore, a thorough knowledge of both the principles of efficient communication and the specific tools that influence its course can lead to fulfilling the postulates for improving the quality and effectiveness of action. In the area of communication and cooperation with the environment, more than half of the clubs combined the activities of customer service points with those of the ticket department, and in 20% of cases, they employed 3 or more people. The most frequently used tools for communicating with the environment were e-mail and the telephone. The least frequently used were videoconferencing and the electronic press

office. The most common justification for convening press conferences was an important event in the club's life or activities related to sponsors. According to the spokespersons, the most important goals for convening press conferences were: informing the public and cooperating with the media. Among the forms of statements edited by the spokespersons, the most popular were: articles, interviews and notes. Therefore, given the limited number of communication tools used by spokespersons, it seems advisable to increase their diversity, which may improve communication quality and expand its reach.

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