

# Building Sports Brands and Fan Relationships During a Global Pandemic

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## ***Introduction & aim of the study***

Social media (SM) platforms and applications have become widely used by organizations across all industries, for different reasons (Malik et al. 2019; Abeza et al. 2021). With the sports industry well-positioned to profit from using SM as an engagement platform (Williams & Chinn, 2010), SM can also be used as a tool for future brand- and relationship-building activities (Thompson et al. 2018). Research into sports organizations' use of SM has revealed that it is often an under-utilized brand management tool, with little evidence of it being used to create or maintain a relationship dialogue with fans as well as to build a sports organization's brand (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Walden & Waters, 2015).

As emphasized by Yoshida et al. (2014), there is the need for contemporary research to delve into areas that seek to investigate whether the engagement process between SM and its users has aided in building brands or relationships. Because there is little research to be found on SM-based branding and relationship marketing by hockey clubs, let alone during a global pandemic, and the small number of studies on relationship marketing and engagement that do exist do not address activities and commitments such as advocacy, brand association, etc., connected with SM engagement (Filo et al. 2015), there is a need to fill this gap.

Hence, this study aims to close the gap by investigating the measures taken by hockey clubs, using SM, to build their brand and fan relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden. To this end, the study looks at a variety of activities and commitments connected with SM, as well as taking into consideration the perspectives of both the hockey clubs and their fans. In pursuit of our aim, we formulized the following question:

*How have hockey clubs used social media to build their brand and relationship with fans during the global pandemic?*

## ***Methods***

The study employed a qualitative method based on an inductive approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with hockey clubs and their fans, to which a content analysis was later applied.

### **Results & findings**

The study shows that for clubs to build their brands using social media during a global pandemic requires a focus on promoting distinctive content, whereas building relationships with fans requires consistent level of interactions and engagements.

### **Conclusions & significance**

A framework for the factors that influence the effectiveness of social media in building a sports organization's brand and fan relationship during a global pandemic is introduced, and new factors that affect the organization's brand and relationship building during a global pandemic are identified.

### **References**

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