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**Title:** Social media in the image communication of non-professional football clubs

**Keywords:** social media, digital media, communication, image communication, image, sports, football, amateur football club, non-professional football club, marketing, promotion, social media marketing

Digitalisation and the rise of social media are significantly impacting the image communication of people, businesses, countries and other entities including football clubs. The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the use of social media by entities operating in the non-professional football environment. The Author's main intentions include an attempt to determine the role, functionality, possibilities and potential of social media in the process of image communication of non-professional football clubs. The causes and motives of the image-related activities of amateur football teams in social media constitute the research problem. The communication management strategies of the analysed entities are also an important area of the subject under consideration.

The considerations contained in the dissertation are aimed at finding answers to a number of research questions, which were divided into general and specific ones. The author has carried out the analysis according to two widely recognised research paradigms: qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative approach should be considered as the leading research. The quantitative analysis complements and was primarily carried out in the search for answers to the specific questions. The research area consisted of three social networks (interchangeably referred to as platforms): Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The author decided to choose these channels of communication, as he established that they constitute the most relevant place for image activities by the analysed entities. In addition, the content of selected websites, online shops with club gadgets and profiles on YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn and Snapchat were examined.

The research period was determined in a purposive, randomised manner. The author chose to analyse posts made during a two-month period. Accordingly, he purposely decided that one of them would be the period when football games are taking place. The other month was chosen from those when there was a break in league struggles. The contribution of this dissertation to science is the development of a definition of an amateur football club. In addition, the author has developed an author's model of social media marketing of amateur football clubs. Based on

it, it is possible to classify the image communication of a specific club into one of two main strategies - planned activity or spontaneous activity.

Based on empirical research, the author found that amateur football plays a very important function in the life of local communities. It enables the realisation of sporting passions, strengthens the sense of belonging to a group, unites different communities, serves as a showcase for the region and can prove to be a bridge to turning professional. Social media play a fundamental role in the context of the above. Without the presence of amateur clubs in social media, their meaning, function, potential and importance in the process of social development would have to be significantly redefined.