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FOOTBALL AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT: the role of online communication platforms

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Abstract

Football clubs, as any type of organization, have a reputation to be managed. More than a sport, football is a business activity that generates high revenues, attracts considerable investments and extreme media exposure. Therefore, reputation management might be considered a key function, when it comes to shape the perceptions of a club's constituents. As Fombrun (1996) noted, reputations are partly a reflection of the organization's identity and also their efforts to develop a favorable image for themselves. For Argenti (1998), the first role of corporate communication is to establish how a firm wants to be perceived by different constituencies and how it chooses to identify itself. Following this point of view, reputation management lies within the corporate communication function. Nevertheless, as Resnick (2004) states, managing

organizational reputation seems to be a difficult or neglected task for most executive managers.

For Argenti and Barnes (2009) in the last decade the business of managing relationships has changed and, consequently, the business reality also changed. However, the opposite is also true, the transformations of the business reality have altered the relationships between organizations and its key constituents. Both authors take as fact the existence of a “stakeholder empowerment”, a scenario within which top executives lose authority that is transferred to the organization’s once-passive audiences, such as employees, consumers, media and investors. The rise of the internet and online communications platforms, like social media - or in other words, the development of a web 2.0 model - sponsored the ability of stakeholders to communicate with one another, to build communities, to disseminate their own messages and the possibility to “talk-back”. For Argenti and Barnes (2009) managers have to redefine their strategies and adapt the corporate communication function to this new paradigm.

If we take this trends as certain and bring the model to the sports context, than football clubs’ everyday life can be changing radically. Especially because it’s simultaneously a sport activity and a business that tends to generate strong emotional responses from their constituencies that seem to be more than willing to “talk-back”.

In order to understand more deeply the surfacing of a “stakeholder empowerment”, the role of online communication platforms and the significance given to reputation management, we have conducted a *multiple case study research* (Eisenhardt, 1989) within the football context. We studied the 16 Portuguese football clubs that are competing in the first division league in the season 2010/11. With this work we also expect to reveal some clues for future research that might lead to the development of an adequate framework analysis for reputation in football clubs.

Keywords: Corporate Reputation, Corporate Communication, Football, Internet, Online Communication

Introduction

Football as business has change radically in the last twenty years, becoming a worldwide phenomenon. Many European football clubs transformed themselves in global enterprises, with growing presence in the American or Asian markets. It was in the beginning of the 1990's, when the battle of private media channels for TV rights in football matches gave clubs the opportunity to get a powerful source of income. At the same time, the Bosman law (established in 1995, allowed players in last year of contract to move freely to other clubs), led to strong market inflation. However, and as Soriano (2010) describes, a large amount of this new revenues fell into to the hands of football players, and the inflation of players' transfers fees left some clubs facing bankruptcy. Leeds United, Servette, Parma FC, Real Sociedad, Boavista FC and more recently Portsmouth, are some examples of clubs that faced this type of problem. In Spain and Portugal, by their own initiative or by government action, clubs left the associative model of organization and took the step to become companies, more open to see football as a business and more able to manage the high revenues that this sport generates.

In the last ten years, clubs like Real Madrid, Manchester United, Barcelona, Chelsea FC and Arsenal became worldwide actors, competing in a more large and global market. For instance, it was expected that the match between Real Madrid and Barcelona, played in 16th April of 2011, in Santiago Barnabeu, for La Liga, had an audience of 400 million spectators. So, besides managing the audiovisual rights, football clubs became brands, and little by little woke up for the need to manage perceptions: image and reputation. The football business environment seems to be maturing itself in parallel with the study of corporate reputation that begun in the 1990's, and also with the development of the digital platforms that, in the last decade, seem to be responsible for a major drift in the relationships within the business context (Argenti & Barnes, 2009).

Football clubs, as any type of organization, have a reputation to be managed. More than a sport, football is a business activity that generates high revenues, attracts considerable investments and extreme media exposure. Therefore, reputation management might be considered a key function, when it comes to shape the perceptions of a club's constituents.

As Fombrun (1996) noted, reputations are partly a reflection of the organization's identity and also their efforts to develop a favorable image for themselves. For Argenti (1998), the first role of corporate communication is to establish how a firm wants to be perceived by different constituencies and how it chooses to identify itself. Following this

point of view, reputation management lies within the corporate communication function. Nevertheless, as Resnick (2004) states, managing organizational reputation seems to be a difficult or neglected task for most executive managers.

For Argenti and Barnes (2009) in the last decade the business of managing relationships has changed and, consequently, the business reality has also changed. Nonetheless, the opposite is also true; the transformations of the business reality have altered the relationships between organizations and its key constituents. Both authors believe in the existence of a “stakeholder empowerment”, a scenario in which top executives lose authority that is transferred to the organization’s once-passive audiences, such as employees, consumers, media and investors. The rise of the internet and online communications platforms, like social media - or in other words, the development of a web 2.0 model - sponsored the ability of stakeholders to communicate with one another, to build communities, to disseminate their own messages and the possibility to “talk-back”. For Argenti and Barnes (2009) managers have to redefine their strategies and adapt the corporate communication function to this new paradigm.

These remarks about how football clubs were evolving as business organizations, how corporate reputation was being more and more recognized as vital to organizational success (Fombrun, 1999) and how the web 2.0 model was being considered highly relevant to the so-called “stakeholder empowerment” (Argenti & Barnes, 2009), led us to focus on the 16 clubs of the Portuguese League, in order to find out if reputation management is being considered and how are the digital platforms being used to shape perceptions, acting as a corporate communication channel (Argenti, 1998).

Corporate Reputation – towards a definition

The increased interest in the field of corporate reputation can be explained by the recognition of a close relation between reputation and the development of a competitive advantage (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Fombrun, 1996; Hall, 1993; Roberts & Dowling, 2002, Walker, 2010). Brown and Perry (1994), Deephouse (2000), Fombrun and Shanley (1990) also discovered a strong connection between corporate reputation and organizational performance. Walker (2010) and Gibson *et al.* (2006) refer to reputation as the most valuable asset of an organization. Abimbola and Vallaster (2007) admit that competitive markets are now more aware of the role of corporate reputation. This statement seems to be relevant to the idea that reputation can become a valuable asset to the globalized football market.

As mentioned by Walker (2010), further analysis on the reputational landscape points out to the relevancy of corporate reputation to create strategic benefits for the organization, in which we can enlighten lowering firm costs (Deephouse, 2000; Fombrun, 1996); charging premium prices (Deephouse, 2000; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Fombrun, 1996; Rindova *et al.*, 2005); attracting applicants (Fombrun, 1996), investors (Srivastava *et al.*, 1997) and customers (Fombrun, 1996); increasing profitability (Roberts and Dowling, 2002); and creating competitive barriers (Deephouse, 2000; Fombrun, 1996). These benefits can also be applied to the football clubs reality. Top football clubs strive to get the best sponsors and investors; attract the best players, coaches and managers for their ranks (applicants); increase stadium attendances; maintain supporters (or customers) satisfied; sell their products as much as they can; and make the transfer bids for their players higher as possible (charge premium prices). This short review takes us more close to the definition of reputation. Seems to be feasible to acknowledge that reputation helps to shape the perceptions of the organization's stakeholders.

Organizational Identity and Image

Before defining reputation, it becomes relevant to distinguish this concept from two important and related notions, identity and image, because the three of them are the core part of the "expressive organization" (Schultz *et al.*, 2000). Albeit, as referred by Barnett *et al.* (2006), these three concepts are often used indiscriminately.

The most used definition of organizational identity and the one that gathers more agreement is the one by Albert and Whetten (1985). It considers organizational identity as the central, distinctive and enduring attributes of an organization. Barnett *et al.* (2006) and Fombrun (1996) add that identity is the central core or character of the organization from the point of view of its internal constituents. That is, it seems of general accord that organizational identity is the result of internal-external influences that concur to the idea of *self*. However, the internal constituencies have the responsibility to crystallize those central attributes and to communicate them to the external environment. Then ultimately identity is based on the perceptions of internal stakeholders, which contrasts with the concept of organizational image.

Organizational image is broadly referred as a multiplicity of perceptions developed by customers and other constituents about organizations as a reaction to communication experiences. It is an holistic and vivid impression hold by a particular group about an

organization, partly as a result of an information process – construction of meaning – carried out by members of that group, and partly as a result of the communication effort developed by the organization (Alvesson, 1990).

As referred by Walker (2010), the majority of the literature emphasizes the external perspective of the image concept, focusing on external publics and excluding the internal constituencies. However, in 1986 Dowling already reported that the image concept is composed of multiplicity, having different shapes according to the different groups where it emerges, including an internal form as well. The author distinguishes the internal and the external image, and supports that there is no organizational image but images.

Unlike identity, which can be controlled by the organization through communication procedures, image is a perception process that happens in the minds of the publics, supported by the contact experiences they have with the company/institution. This mental phenomenon is based on fragile and partial information, happening in very dynamic contexts and resulting in superficial evaluations. These conditions make organizational image an unstable occurrence that can change overnight as a result of a crisis situation or bad publicity.

Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputation can be defined as the stakeholders' overall assessment about a firm over a period of time (Barnet *et al.*, 2006, Fombrun, 1996). As stated by Fombrun (1996), Gotsi and Wilson, (2001) and Winn *et al.* (2008) corporate reputation is an evaluation based on the experiences stakeholders get from the company or on any type of communication provided about the firm. These judgments can be rooted in the perceptions of identity and image that evolve over time. Even if corporate identity might not change significantly over time, corporate image and reputation seem to be more changeable as result of external events (Wei, 2002). Moreover, this notion of time is a core distinctive feature between reputation and image. To build a reputation it takes time (Rhee & Haunschild, 2006), on the contrary, images can change frequently and are a result of superficial evaluations. For Walker (2010), reputations are more stable and enduring.

The establishment of boundaries between these concepts suggested by Barnet *et al* (2006), allows us to look more clearly to the meaning of reputation. The most predominant one is Fombrun's (1996) definition which considers that (a) reputation is

based on perceptions, (b) reputation is accumulated perceptions of all the organization's stakeholders; and (c) a reputation can be compared. Wartick (2002) also mentions that a reputation can be positive or negative and that reputation is stable and enduring. For Walker (2010) this five attributes lead to a more global characterization, having as guides the most important studies within the reputation literature. The author defines reputation as: *a relatively stable issue, specific aggregate perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects compared against some standard*. This description seems to be broad enough to aggregate the most preponderant perspectives about what is a reputation.

Football moves to the digital age

As stated above, if reputation is all about the stakeholder representation of the organization, stakeholder management is deeply intertwined with reputation management. And, as referred by Breitbarth and Harris (2008), modern football reality has woken up to the need of stakeholder management. For the authors this highlights the maturation and professionalization of the football industry. In fact, Brown *et al.* (2006) believe that men's football is now a global industry that is worth billions in broadcasting rights, merchandising and sponsoring. Figure 1 illustrates the difference between clubs business segments before 1990 and today.

Source/ revenues	Clubs/teams (since 1990s)	Clubs (before 1990s)
Football team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Tickets and merchandising > Development and sale of players > Sponsorship and advertising > Broadcasting rights > Secondary spend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Tickets and donations > Sponsoring and advertising > Broadcasting rights (<i>all above relatively low-key</i>)
Premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Multi-purpose facilities, especially stadiums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Publicly-owned facilities

	> Hospitality and services	
Brands	> Promote non-football goods and services (e.g. credit cards, insurances, mobile services, gambling)	> Club membership fees

Figure 1. Main business segments in professional football. Source: Breitbarth and Harris (2008) and Matusiecwez (2000).

To support the argument that modern football has now economic, social and political significance, Breitbarth and Harris (2008) consider four strong reasons. The first one is the recognition that professional football clubs are business organizations under the European law (linked with the “Bosman” judgment of the European Court of Justice, in 1995, which ended up with the times when football organizations considered themselves above the law; Foster, 2000). This led to closer relations between the European Commission, UEFA (The Union of European Football Associations) and FIFA (The International Federation of Association Football) , as a result of the cultural, economical and social importance of sport in general, particularly football, as it is written in the Treaty of Amsterdam¹. The second reason is globalization in areas such as trade and marketing that led clubs to promote their brands, look for players, sell media rights, license merchandising, look for investors and sponsors in a worldwide basis. The third one is the urgency to revitalize urban areas and local communities that made clubs develop partnerships for infrastructure investment, increase place-marketing, and act as ambassadors for beneficial campaigns. And the fourth reason is that clubs started to play a role as public service providers, since the governments begun acting more as allocators and regulators. This scenario pushed clubs to make the game more relevant for society. And this evidence, shaped by Breitbarth and Harris (2008), helps us recognize the important role football clubs have now in socio-economic and political terms that increases their responsibility as business organizations. But, at the same time, new opportunities rise for football clubs to enhance participation and sustain their future.

¹ The Treaty of Amsterdam emphasizes the social significance of sport, specially its role in forging identity and bringing people together. Therefore it calls on the bodies of the European Union to listen to sports associations when important questions affecting sport are at issue. In this connection, special consideration should be given to the particular characteristics of amateur sport.

As a result of this context, managing reputation might be still an ongoing process, but arises as essential for organizational success. Adding to this, the development of the web 2.0 model in the internet, that gives stakeholders the opportunity to communicate with one another (Argenti & Barnes, 2009), is considered to be empowering publics and obliging corporate managers to comply with new strategies to manage the perception of the constituents. The web 2.0 model, where social media (like Facebook, Twitter or Blogs) are playing an important role, is far more interactive and dynamic. It substituted the web 1.0 model, where companies pushed out messages to stakeholders, who digested the received communication without any kind of reaction (Argenti & Barnes, 2009). Even if this new internet paradigm seems sustainable and capable of changing organizational communication profoundly, when it comes to shaping perceptions of stakeholders and managing the reputation of an organization, it is still to prove that companies are already adopting strategies to build their reputations online.

Football clubs, as organizations with strong media exposure and with fans and supporters willing to communicate online, appear to be an interesting example, in which we can extract more clues about how a reputation can be built online and how the stakeholder engagement is being played.

The Portuguese League Case

To obtain a better comprehension of the stakeholder engagement, the role of online communication platforms and the significance given to reputation management, we have conducted a multiple case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989) within the football context. For Eisenhardt and Graebner, case studies are so relevant and popular because they are one of the best, if not the best, bridges between qualitative collected data and deductive research. It is also considered important, within this context, the possibility for a research strategy to be replicated in more than one situation. Eisenhardt (1989) seems to prefer the multiple case study to the simple case study that analyzes exhaustively one reality (Yin, 1984). Eisenhardt e Graebner (2007) defend that the multiple case study creates more solid theory, because the propositions are more profound and the data collection has more variety. We studied the 16 Portuguese football clubs that are competing in the first division league (Liga Zon/Sagres) in the season 2010/11. Seven of these sixteen clubs (*FC Porto, CS Marítimo, SL Benfica, Sporting CP, SC Braga, Vitória FC* and *ULeiria*) are “Sociedades Anónimas Desportivas” (SAD) – Anonymous Sports Societies, which means that these clubs are now enterprises. Three of them, the three major clubs (are the ones with more titles and supporters - *FC*

Porto, SL Benfica and *Sporting CP*), make their presence in the stock market. Besides these seven clubs only one - *Académica OAF* - does not follow the traditional associative model. *Académica* is an Autonomous Football Organism connected to the *Associação Académica de Coimbra* – the students association of the University of Coimbra. The other clubs are *Beira-Mar, CD Nacional, Associação Naval 1º de Maio, SC Olhanense, Portimonense, Rio Ave FC* and *Vitória SC*. The 2010/11 season represents the 77th edition (already own by *FC Porto*) of a championship that only knows five champions: *SL Benfica* (32 times champion), *FC Porto* (25 times champion), *Sporting CP* (18 times), *Belenenses* (now in the 2nd Division) and *Boavista FC* (now in the 3rd Division) that won one time only.

In Portugal, football is under strong media scrutiny and exposure. Even being a small country, there are, since 1995, three nationwide daily sports newspapers (*O Jogo, A Bola* and *Record*), there is a TV channel - *Sport TV* - almost totally football dedicated and an intense television coverage by the main Portuguese channels. Football is also one of the main subjects of the prime time TV news. In the internet, alongside the three sport newspapers already quoted, www.maisfutebol.iol.pt, a football oriented news website, is also a reference. The news contents are mainly focused in the three major clubs, with *SC Braga* recent success in the European competitions being followed with more attention by the media.

In spite of this, the Portuguese clubs face some major difficulties: most of the clubs have their stadiums far from being full; the corruption rumors are permanent; clubs managers in most cases are still amateurs, with lack of vision to understand business; and during the season news about difficulty of paying salaries are recurrent. Inflammatory discourse in the media between rival clubs also is giving tone to violence scenarios in the stadiums. Unexpectedly, this season Portugal has three clubs in the semi-finals of the Europa League, a first time in history event for the Portuguese football. The differences between the three major clubs, that gather all the media and supporter attention, and the ones that are trying to survive or develop as business organizations, can also be of interest to study. Another point that is worthy of note is that the websites of *FC Porto, SL Benfica, and Sporting CP* belong to the same company – *Sportinvest*, which gives the three clubs total responsibility to manage all the non-commercial contents. This same firm owns the *SportTV* channel and holds the broadcasting rights of all the first division clubs. *Sportinvest* is part of one of the biggest Portuguese media companies – *ControllInvest*, which owns the daily newspapers: *O Jogo*

(Sport), *Jornal de Notícias* (general), *Diário de Notícias* (general) and the information radio *TSF*.

In order to figure out how the Portuguese football clubs are adapting to the new web 2.0 reality announced by Argenti and Barnes (2009), to understand how online communication is being managed and how interactivity and the engagement with the main stakeholders is being developed online, a study exploratory was conducted. The E-Reputation Mix, framework developed by Chun (2004) and the work of Gorry and Westbrook (2009) more focused on the internet and in the new ways to communicate with stakeholders are cornerstones of this study. Our research is centered on the official websites and on the official social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube) of the clubs. Our purpose is also to infer if reputation management is already being taken into account by the Portuguese teams.

For Argenti (1998) the organizational communication function is responsible for converting the firms' identity into image and reputation, or in other words, to shape perceptions. So, in the first table (Figure 2 –E-Identity below), online identity traits (E-identity) were considered in the clubs official homepage, with the purpose to understand the relevancy of the page design, the presence of logos and symbols and the identity statements present in the communication. For the categories of **web design** and **symbols/logos** three levels were defined (high, medium and low) and the following dimensions were taken into account: the presence of design elements and the way they are organized, presence of symbols, colors, logos, players, jerseys, design shapes, animations and consistent images (like advertising or marketing campaigns that reinforce the visual identity). For the identity statements an attempt to interpret and to find consistency with the design will be made.

The second table (Figure 3.1 and 3.2 – E-Content, in the page below) comprehends the type of contents available in the website, from news to the presence of sponsors, languages available, interaction possibilities within the official homepage, existence of supporter oriented content and press centre. Furthermore, the social media presence was also taken into consideration as the involvement of the fans and supporters. For the purpose of the study, a content analysis of the messages was not developed. The analysis of the table might give some clues of the strategy followed, the role that is being given to social media by the football clubs, if participation is being incremented and finally if there is a dialogue between clubs and supporters.

Discussion

Following Chun (2004) and the E-Reputation Mix framework developed by the author, the URL or online corporate address is a source of e-Identity. This idea seems to be followed by all the clubs (Figure 2), since the URL address is a reflection of the club's name. However, it is also observed that the mission and vision statements are forgotten. Eight of the clubs do not have even a brand signature, fact that might be a symptom of some difficulty for the clubs to position themselves. The three major clubs, with more resources, try to promote their history and victories (*FC Porto*), their worldwide dimension (*SL Benfica*) and promote a culture of

	URL	Design	Logos / Symbols	ID Statements
Académica	www.academica-oaf.pt/	High	High	None
Beira-Mar	www.beiramar.pt	Medium	Low	None
FC Porto	www.fcporto.pt	High	High	A Vencer desde 1893 (Winning since 1893)
CS Marítimo	www.csmaritimo.pt	Medium	Medium	Orgulho no passado, empenho no presente, confiança no futuro (pride in the past, effort in the present, confidence in the future)
Nacional	www.cdnacional.pt	Medium	Medium	Fundado a 8 de Dezembro de 1910 (Foundation in 8 of December 1910)
Naval 1º Maio	www.naval1maio.pt	Low	Low	A promover o Desporto desde 1893 (promoting Sport since 1893)
Olhanense	www.scolhanense.com	Medium	Medium	None
P Ferreira	www.fcpf.pt/	Low	Low	A paixão do futebol vive-se em Paços de Ferreira (The passion of football is lived in Paços de Ferreira)
Portimonense	www.portimonense.pt/	Low	Low	None
Rio Ave	www.rioave-fc.pt/	Low	Low	None
SC Braga	www.scbraga.pt/	Low	Medium	None
SL Benfica	www.slbenfica.pt	High	High	O Maior clube do mundo (the biggest club in the world)
Sporting CP	www.sporting.pt/	High	High	Esforço dedicação, devoção e glória (Effort, dedication, devotion and glory)
Vitória SC	www.vitoriasc.pt/	High	High	None.
Vitória FC	www.vfc.pt/	Medium	Medium	Feito de vontade e glória (Made by will and glory)
U Leiria	www.uniaodeleiria.pt/	Medium	Low	None

Figure 2 – E-Identity

effort, victory and glories (*Sporting*). *Naval 1º de Maio* prefers a more eclectic signature, since it is a club with tradition in nautical sports, fact that seems coherent. *Paços de Ferreira* and *Nacional* statements do not seem properly relevant and do not appear to transmit any identity trait. When it comes to design and symbols, the major clubs websites, like *FC Porto* (Appendix A), reveal more potential, but are more closely

followed by *Académica* (Appendix B) recent website that reinforces the identity of the club and its connection to the city and the university.

Emerging clubs, like *SC Braga* (Appendix C), try to reinforce their identity and marketing actions (*Braga Minho / Roman Warriors*), but in terms of design and symbols the club seems to be failing to give one step ahead. In spite of this, the club reveals some marketing orientations developed in their website. Smaller clubs, like *Paços de Ferreira* (Appendix D), have an incoherent communication. The passion statement is not reflected by the website identity traits, which can lead us to infer that there is no strategy behind the website conception. Other smaller clubs, like *Portimonense*, *Rio Ave FC*, *Beira-Mar* or *União de Leiria*, reveal similar problems.

About the contents in the website (Figure 3.1. and 3.2 – page below) only the three major clubs and *Nacional* (using google translator) seem to think about developing contents in English. This can be a simple reflection of the clubs ambition and of the pursuit for other business markets. The majority of clubs appear to care about having an introduction page, which is most of the time used for marketing purposes (like match communication). Concerning the team everyday news, all the clubs care about maintain the information up-to-date, nonetheless *União de Leiria*, *Portimonense* and *Naval* do not do it so often. Even if part of the clubs make connection to Social Media when the news are published, none of the clubs allow commentary to the news on their website. The information given is totally controlled. Advertising, sponsor links, supported oriented content and newsletters is a common strategy adopted by all the clubs. The relation with the media is also considered, with some clubs offering a private Press Centre for media professionals. This fact reveals thought and shows that the website is taken into passing information to the press.

About social media, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are the most used ones by the Portuguese teams. In one hand, *Beira-Mar*, *CD Nacional* and *Rio Ave* are not using any social media. *SC Olhanense* does not have the content up to date. On the other hand, *FC Porto* and *SL Benfica* can generate thousand of *likes* and hundreds of *comments* within their wall posts. The major clubs are also using the social media to promote marketing actions and supporter participation. *Sporting* and *Vitória SC* are the clubs that follow *SL Benfica* and *FC Porto*. *Vitória SC* has a large and intervenient mass of supporters, which appear to reveal more willingness to participate. The presence of clubs in social media is significant and seems to be the recognition of the worth of the 2.0 internet model. However most of the clubs have extremely low interaction.

Finally, even if the clubs develop contents for social media and let fans, supporters and visitors participate in this public sphere, we might be inclined to infer that there is no dialogue between clubs and supporters. There is no conversation, the interaction is more between the publics or stakeholders and not directly with the clubs that seem still more interested in trying to control the information conceded to the publics.

		Académica	Beira-Mar	FC Porto	CS Marítimo	CD Nacional	Naval 1º Maio	Olhanense	Paços Ferreira
Website									
Language	Portuguese	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	English	No	No	Yes	No	Yes (google)	No	No	No
Intro Page		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
News	Up to date	Yes	Yes (low freq.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (low freq.)	Yes	Yes
	Social Media interaction	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Newsletter		Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	
Advertising	Internal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	External	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sponsor Presence		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Supporter Content (Videos, Polls Wallpaper)		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes and has a guestbook that allows interaction	Yes	Yes	Yes
Press Centre		No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Social Media		Yes	Unofficial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Facebook	Fans Number	20660	5410	344972	1793	No	3512	4772 (Friend Page)	2794
	Interaction Level	<50 likes and < 20 comments per post)	x	Up to thousands of likes and hundreds of comments	<10 likes, rarely has comments)	x	<50 likes and < 20 comments per post)	Not up to date	LOW (<50 likes and < 20 comments per post)
Twitter	Followers	No	No	Yes (11988 followers)	yes (142 Followers)	No	Failed to connect	Not up to date	Yes (180 followers)
Youtube		No	No	Yes (up to date)	Yes (up to date)	Yes (up to date)	No	Not up to date	No

Figure 3.1 Website an Social Media Data (E-Content)

		Portimonense	Rio Ave	Sporting	SL Benfica	SC Braga	Vitória FC	Vitória SC	U Leiria
Website									
Language	Portuguese	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	English	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Intro Page		No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
News	Up to date	Yes (low freq)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Low Freq)
	Social Media interaction	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Newsletter		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Advertising	Internal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	External	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sponsor Presence			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Supporter Content (Videos, Polls Wallpaper)		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes. Has Fan Zone for private interaction	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Press Centre		No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Social Media		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Facebook	Fans Number	4174	x	169462	467883	5783	10883	13196	1117
	Interaction Level	<50 likes and < 20 comments per post)	x	<400 likes and <100 comments	Up to thousands of likes and hundreds of comments	Medium 50-100 likes and <25 comments	50-100 likes and <25 comments	High <400 likes <100 comments	<50 likes and < 20 comments per post)
Twitter	Followers	Yes (194 Followers)	x	Yes (7326 followers)	Yes (11881 followers)	No	No	No	165 followers (not up to date)
Youtube		No	x	Yes (up to date)	Yes	No	Yes (up to date)	No	No

Figure 3.2 Website an Social Media Data

Conclusion

Our analysis seems to be in agreement with the research of McLean and Wainwright (2009) about football fans, social networks and reality. The authors reject that the stakeholder empowerment is taking place and concur with Foucault (1995), when they consider that the power is still with the broadcasters and not with the narrowcasters. In this study, the findings appoint to an increased attention, by the clubs, to social media and to a purpose of increasing participation of supporters in the club's everyday life. In spite of this, the absence of direct dialogue might suggest a more manipulative or filtered use of social media, rather than its use for a democratic discussion.

The results of the conducted research also point to an importance of constructing images as a product of a projection of an electronic or online identity. Although, even if we can infer that this is taken under consideration by the clubs, a need for professionalization, especially in the smallest clubs, seems to be clear. The absence of consistent declarations of identity might imply that smaller clubs have problems identifying their strategy and/or their competitive advantage. The contents available in the websites and the presence in the main social media suggest that these organizations are susceptible to develop their communication and that they recognize the importance and advantages of engaging different stakeholders, like supporters, fans, media, sponsors and investors. However, it seems to be still early to advocate that reputation management is being considered in the communication strategy developed online. The fact that the majority of clubs present in the social media platforms have low levels of interactions leads us to think that an online strategy must be aligned and integrated with the corporate communication function in order to manage perceptions and gather participation in a wider level.

Future research, more focused on the content analysis of the messages, might allow us to gather more clues about how stakeholders shape their perceptions and if the clubs communication function is achieving its objectives. To conclude, we consider that the combination of an e-identity (an online visual and verbal identity), e-content (creation of online content for different stakeholders) and an e-experience, especially through social media, with strong participation and a more open dialogue, might lead to a sustainable e-reputation that will help to sustain the clubs corporate reputation.

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Appendix A – FC Porto Website (design and images appealing to emotions and victories)



Appendix B – Académica Website with city Icon



Appendix D

The screenshot shows the website for the match SC Braga vs U. Leiria. The main banner features a crowd of fans holding red and white flags, with the text "SC Braga vs U. Leiria" and "Alista-te na Legião." in large white letters. Below this, it says "ENTRADA GRATUITA" and "Estádio AXA 01 Maio | 16h00 28ª jornada". Navigation links for "BILHETEIRA" and "LOJA" are visible. A newsletter sign-up form is present with the text "Subscriva Newsletter: mail...".

FUTEBOL

CONVOCADOS
FUTEBOL PROFISIONAL
18 Convocados para jogo com o SL Benfica
2011-04-27

BOLETIM CLÍNICO
FUTEBOL PROFISIONAL
Boletim Clínico
2011-04-26

IMPRESA
Programa para a Imprensa – SL Benfica – SC Braga
2011-04-26

último jogo
Benfica (0) x (0) SC Braga
28/04, 20:05h

próximo jogo
SC Braga x U. Leiria
01/05, 16:00h

BetClic
A BetClic acredita no Sporting de Braga!

Subscriva as Notícias do Sporting Clube de Braga:
Torne-se Fã do Sporting Clube de Braga no Facebook:
Sporting Clube de Braga on Facebook
Like 5,958

Appendix D – Paços de Ferreira Website poor design. It is not coherent with the passion statement

