

**DEVELOPMENT MODEL OF FAN ENGAGEMENT
ON SOCIAL MEDIA TOWARDS MOTIVATIONS,
ACTIVITIES, AND THE IMPACT ON BRAND
LOYALTY AND BRAND ATTACHMENT
IN OMAN SPORT CLUBS**

ISSAM NASSER KHALFAN ALSIYABI

UNIVERSI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2025

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LOYALTY AND BRAND ATTACHMENT IN OMAN SPORT CLUBS

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE
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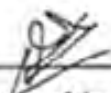
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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the motivations for engaging with sports clubs' social media accounts using the Use and Gratification Theory (U&G). Furthermore, it explored engagement activities based on the Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs) approach. In addition, the study examined how engagement motivation influences engagement activities and how these activities affect brand attachment and brand loyalty. It used a quantitative approach with a questionnaire administered to 939 football fans in Oman and employed Smart PLS for structural equation modeling. The results indicated that "Consumption Activities" were rated highly ($M=4.71$), "Contributing Activities" received a medium rating ($M=3.92$), and "Creating Activities" were considered low ($M=3.18$). Information-Seeking and Brand Love were the most potent motivators, with means of ($M=4.75$) and ($M=4.42$), respectively, while Remuneration and Entertainment were the weakest, with means of ($M=3.28$) and ($M=3.53$), respectively. The results showed that information, integration, social interaction, and brand love positively influence consumption, while entertainment, personal identity, empowerment, and brand love significantly affect contribution and creation. Consumption and creation positively impact brand loyalty and attachment, but contribution does not significantly affect brand loyalty, although it positively impacts brand attachment. This study helps sports marketing experts develop strategies to customize social media content, build brand loyalty, and enhance customer engagement.



PEMBANGUNAN MODEL PENGLIBATAN PEMINAT TERHADAP MOTIVASI, AKTIVITI DAN KESAN KESETIAAN JENAMA SERTA KETERIKATAN JENAMA BAGI KELAB SUKAN DI OMAN

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan mengenal pasti motivasi bagi melibatkan diri dengan akaun media sosial kelab sukan menggunakan Teori Penggunaan dan Gratifikasi (U&G). Selain itu, kajian ini turut meneroka aktiviti penglibatan berdasarkan pendekatan aktiviti berkaitan jenama dalam talian (COBRAs) pengguna. Di samping itu, kajian turut mengkaji bagaimana motivasi penglibatan mempengaruhi aktiviti penglibatan dan bagaimana aktiviti ini mempengaruhi keterikatan jenama dan kesetiaan jenama. Ia menggunakan pendekatan kajian kuantitatif yang menggunakan soal selidik sebagai instrument utama kepada 939 responden peminat bola sepak di Oman. Pengkaji turut menggunakan Smart PLS (Structural Equation Modelling) bagi tujuan pembentukan model akhir. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa "Aktiviti Penggunaan" dinilai tinggi ($M=4.71$), "Aktiviti Menyumbang" menerima penarafan sederhana ($M=3.92$), dan "Mencipta Aktiviti" dianggap rendah ($M=3.18$). Pencarian Maklumat dan Cinta Jenama adalah pendorong paling kuat, masing-masing dengan cara ($M=4.75$) dan ($M=4.42$), manakala Ganjaran dan Hiburan adalah yang paling lemah, dengan cara ($M=3.28$) dan ($M=3.53$), masing-masing. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa maklumat, integrasi, interaksi sosial dan cinta jenama mempengaruhi penggunaan secara positif, manakala hiburan, identiti peribadi, pemerikasaan dan cinta jenama mempengaruhi sumbangan dan penciptaan dengan ketara. Penggunaan dan penciptaan memberi kesan positif kepada kesetiaan dan keterikatan jenama, tetapi sumbangan tidak menjejaskan kesetiaan jenama dengan ketara, walaupun ia memberi kesan positif kepada keterikatan jenama. Kajian ini membantu pakar pemasaran sukan membangunkan strategi untuk menyesuaikan kandungan media sosial, membina kesetiaan jenama dan meningkatkan penglibatan pelanggan.



TABLE OF CONTENT

	Page
DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK	ii
DECLARATION OF THESIS	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABSTRAK	vi
TABLE OF CONTENT	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF FIGURES	xviii
APPENDIX LIST	xix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xx
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background Research	5
1.3 Problem Statements	7
1.4 Research Objectives	11
1.5 Research Questions	13
1.6 Theoretical Framework	14
1.6.1 Social Media	14
1.6.2 Fans Engagement	15



1.6.3	The uses and gratification theory	16
1.7	Conceptual framework	17
1.8	Operational Definition	18
1.8.1	Social Media	19
1.8.2	Fan Engagement	19
1.8.3	Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs)	20
1.8.4	Fan Motivation	20
1.8.5	Brand Attachment	21
1.8.6	Brand Love	21
1.9	Limitations of the Study	22
1.10	Study Delimitation	23
1.11	Importance of Research	24
1.12	Summary	25

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction	28
2.2	Consumer Engagement	29
2.2.1	Theories of consumer engagement	33
2.2.2	Information drivers	41
2.2.3	Brand drivers	43
2.2.4	Consumer Drivers	45
2.2.5	Social drivers	47
2.3	Football Fans	49
2.3.1	Sports Fan Engagement	50

2.3.2	Fans behaviour	52
2.4	Uses and Gratification Theory	53
2.4.1	What is the Uses and Gratification Theory?	53
2.4.2	History and Development of the Uses and Gratification Theory	55
2.4.2.1	Uses and Gratification Theory in the 21st Century	56
2.4.2.2	Uses and Gratifications Theory on the Internet	57
2.4.2.3	Uses and gratifications with social media	60
2.4.3	Uses and Gratifications Theory Assumptions	63
2.4.4	Strengths and Weaknesses of Uses and Gratifications Theory	64
2.4.5	Criticisms of uses and gratifications theory	65
2.4.6	The basic elements of uses and gratifications theory	68
2.4.6.1	Active Audience	68
2.4.6.2	The Social and Psychological Origins	70
2.4.6.3	Needs and Motives	71
2.4.6.4	Expectancy (Potential gratifications)	73
2.4.6.5	Gratification	73
2.4.7	The uses and gratification theory in this research	75
2.5	Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs)	78
2.5.1	Brand Awareness	81
2.5.2	Brand Attitude	82
2.5.3	Brand Loyalty (Purchase Intentions)	83
2.5.4	Customer Satisfaction	87
2.5.5	Brand Equity	88

2.5.6 Brand Trust	88
2.6 Fans Loyalty	91
2.7 Brand attachment	93
2.8 Fan Engagement Model	94
2.9 The history of football in the Sultanate of Oman	97
2.10 Studies that examined the attendance of fans	99
2.11 Social Media	108
2.11.1 What is social media?	108
2.11.2 Social Media Spread as a Communication and Marketing Tool	109
2.11.3 The Emergence of Social Media in Sports	110
2.11.4 Sports Media Consumption	112
2.11.5 The importance of social media	115
2.11.6 The effect of social media on brand communities	117
2.12 Summary	120

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction	122
3.2 Research Approach	123
3.3 Population And Sample	124
3.3.1 Population	124
3.3.2 Sample	127
3.4 Instruments	128
3.4.1 Fans' engagement motivation on social media	130
3.4.2 Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs)	133



3.4.3	Brand Attachment/ Fans Attachment	135
3.4.4	Brand Loyalty / Fans Loyalty	136
3.5	Validity and Reliability of the Instruments	138
3.5.1	Validity of the Instruments	138
3.5.2	Reliability of the Instruments	146
3.6	The back-translation methodology	149
3.7	Data Collection Procedure	158
3.8	Methods / Techniques of Analysing Data	159
3.9	Summary	160

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

4.1	Introduction	163
4.2	Data Preparation	164
4.2.1	Creating Structure	164
4.2.2	Data Cleaning	165
4.2.2.1	Blank Responses	165
4.2.2.2	Straight Lining	165
4.3	Outliers	166
4.4	Assumption Testing	167
4.4.1	Multivariate Normality	168
4.4.2	Normality of the error terms	169
4.4.3	Linearity	169
4.4.4	Constant Variance-Homoscedasticity	170
4.4.5	Auto-Correlation	171



4.5	Common Method Variance	171
4.6	Descriptive Analysis of Respondents	172
4.6.1	Sample Profile	173
4.6.2	Participants' Usage of Social Media	175
4.7	Descriptive analysis of the constructs	181
4.7.1	Brand-Related Online Activities	182
4.7.2	Motivations for Social Media Engagement	184
4.7.3	Descriptive analysis of the Brand Attachment	187
4.7.4	Descriptive analysis of the Brand Loyalty	188
4.8	Measurement Model	188
4.8.1	Internal Consistency (Reliability)	189
4.8.2	Indicator Reliability (Outer Loadings)	191
4.8.3	Convergent Validity	191
4.8.4	Discriminant Validity	192
4.9	Structural Model	195
4.9.1	Assessment of Collinearity	195
4.9.2	Structural Model Assessment	196
4.10	The Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	200
4.11	Assessment of the Effect Size (f^2)	202
4.12	Final model	205
4.13	Summary	210

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

5.1	Introduction	213
-----	--------------	-----

5.2	Fans' motivation on social media	214
5.2.1	Information seeking Drives	217
5.2.2	Brand Love Drives	219
5.2.3	Integration and Social Interaction drives.	220
5.2.4	Empowerment Drives	222
5.2.5	Personal Identity Drives	222
5.2.6	Entertainment Drives	222
5.2.7	Remuneration Drives	223
5.3	Fans' Activities on Social Media	223
5.4	Influence of Fans' motivation on the level of Fans' Activities	226
5.4.1	Information has a positive impact on consumption	226
5.4.2	Entertainment does not significantly affect consumption	230
5.4.3	Integration and social interaction	234
5.4.4	Personal identity does not have a significant effect	239
5.4.5	Empowerment does not have a significant effect	243
5.4.6	The Remuneration does not affect consumption	247
5.4.7	Brand love positively and significantly impacts consumption	251
5.5	Influence of different levels of Fans' Activities on social media	255
5.5.1	Brand Attachment is positively affected by all engagement	257
5.5.2	Brand Loyalty is positively affected by consumption	262
5.6	Theoretical and practical Contribution to research	265
5.7	Limitations and suggestions for future research	267
5.8	Recommendations	268

5.9 Conclusions	276
-----------------	-----

REFERENCES	280
------------	-----

APPENDIX	312
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LIST OF TABLES

Table No.		Page
2.1	Characteristics of The Included Studies	36
2.2	Gratifications Based on Social Media Study	63
2.3	The Typology of Audience Activity	70
2.4	Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities Typology	80
2.5	Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities Studies	89
3.1	Number of Twitter and Instagram Followers for Oman's Clubs	126
3.2	Literature Supported Scales For Motivations For Engagement	131
3.3	Measurements Used for Questionnaire Design	132
3.4	Literature Supported Scales for Consumers' Online Brand-Related	133
3.5	Measurements Used for Questionnaire Design	134
3.6	Literature Supported Scales for Brand Attachment	135
3.7	Measurements Used for Questionnaire Design: Brand Attachment	136
3.8	Literature Supported Scales for Brand Loyalty	137
3.9	Measurements Used for Questionnaire Design: Brand Loyalty	137
3.10	Score Values of The Experts' Score	140
3.11	Values of Content Validity by Experts	140
3.12	Values of Content Validity by Experts	141
3.13	Values of Content Validity by Experts	143
3.14	Values of Content Validity by Experts In The Customer Engagement	144
3.15	Values of Content Validity by Experts In The Brand Attachment	145
3.16	Values of Content Validity By Experts In The Brand Attachment	145
3.17	Interpretation of Cronbach Alpha Score (A)	147
3.18	Cronbach Alphas of The Constructs of The Instrument	148





3.19	Final Translation of The Phrases " Information Seeking"	152
3.20	Final Translation of The Phrases "Entertainment"	152
3.21	Final Translation of The Phrases "Personal Identity"	153
3.22	Final Translation of The Phrases "Integration And Social Interaction"	153
3.23	Final Translation of The Phrases "Empowerment"	154
3.24	Final Translation of The Phrases "Remuneration"	154
3.25	Final Translation of The Phrases "Brand Love"	155
3.26	Final Translation of The Phrases "Consuming" From English to Arabic	155
3.27	Final Translation of The Phrases "Contributing"	156
3.28	Final Translation of The Phrases "Creating" From English To Arabic	156
3.29	Final Translation of The Phrases "Brand Attachment"	157
3.30	Final Translation of The Phrases "Brand Loyalty"	157
4.1	Multivariate Outliers	167
4.2	Participants Gender	174
4.3	Participants Age	174
4.4	Participants Educational Level	175
4.5	Hours On Social Media Per Day	175
4.6	Frequency Of Use Of Different Social Media	177
4.7	Clubs Most Followed On Social Media	178
4.8	Game Attendance And Game Watch	179
4.9	Interest In Following The International Club's Social Media	180
4.10	Descriptive Analysis: Cobras	182
4.11	Motivations For Social Media Engagement	185
4.12	Descriptive Analysis: Brand Attachment	187
4.13	Descriptive Analysis: Brand Loyalty	188
4.14	Measurement Model Assessment	190
4.15	Fornell And Larcker's Results	193



4.16	Technique Results Before Cross-Loading Remedy	194
4.17	Inner Vif Results	195
4.18	Summary of Hypotheses Testing	198
4.19	Structural Model Assessment	199
4.20	Assessment Criteria	201
4.21	R ² Results	202
4.22	Effect Size Assessment Criteria	203
4.23	Results of The Effect Size	204



LIST OF FIGURES

No. Figure		Page
1.1	Conceptual Framework	18
2.1	The Revised Model For Uses And Gratification Theory	72
2.2	Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities Model	94
2.3	Fan Engagement Through Social Media Model	95
2.4	Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities on Sns Brand Pages Model	96
2.5	Social Media Engagement With Luxury Brands Model	97
4.1	Multivariate Normality	168
4.2	Normality Of The Error Terms	169
4.3	Partial Regression Plot	170
4.4	Age Of Participants	174
4.5	Hours On Social Media Per Day	176
4.6	Percentages Of Use Of Different Social Media	177
4.7	Compare Between Game Attendance And Game Watch	180
4.8	Interest In Following The International Club's Social Media	181
4.9	Engagement Activities	183
4.10	Engagement Motivations	186
4.11	Measurement Model	192
4.12	Structural Model Assessment	200
4.13	Structural Assessment Model	205
4.14	Issam's Fan Engagement Model (Ifem)	209





APPENDIX LIST

- A List Of Language Proofreaders And Translators
- B List Of Questionnaire Validator
- C Final Questionnaire
- D Partial Regression Plot
- E Model Summary
- F Total Variance Explained
- G Coefficients^a



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CE	Consumer Engagement
CMV	Common Method Variance
COBRAs	Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (Cobra)
SM	Social Media
SNS	Social Networking Service
SST	Social Support Theory
U&G	Uses And Gratification Theory
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sport is big business (De Greef & Kapiteijn, 2016). Therefore, the idea of managing a team as a brand has become a dominant paradigm in the sports marketplace (Azmat & Lakhani, 2015). Sports are not just a matter of people competing with each other anymore. Much money is involved, which has altered how sports clubs operate (De Greef & Kapiteijn, 2016). Being part of a highly competitive and changing environment, sports clubs have been competing for the consumer's/fan's entertainment (Giroux et al., 2017). Managers of various sporting entities and organizations are now placing greater emphasis on brand equity and, consequently, on marketing elements that could help them raise the value of their brands (Ross et al., 2006).



On the other hand, the fans of a sports club play a significant role in the commercial success of a sports club. Not just the regular fans but the most loyal and dedicated consumers and sports fans are essential to obtain this club's commercial success (De Greef & Kapiteijn, 2016). In order to attract these fans, building a unique brand around the club is crucial (Abosag et al., 2012).

Sport also has a vital role in community life (Ozturk, 2016). The Sport has become a global language that encourages greater worldwide awareness and understanding and supports cross-cultural understanding (Alganideh & Good, 2016). This results from sports encompassing various activities that attract young people seeking entertainment and relaxation. Going to a stadium is one of several choices available to football fans interested in seeing national and international games (Alsiyabi, 2018). According to Mogajane et al. (2019), football is considered one of the most popular sports globally as a niche market. It is the most popular Sport regarding media coverage and audience engagement. At the same time, football was credited with shaping and influencing the national and cultural identities of a broad spectrum of fans. The Sport was considered a vehicle to promote socialisation in divided communities (Alganideh & Good, 2016).

In recent years, football has faced change; the internet, satellite receivers, digital publishing, and information technology have contributed to the sports sector's globalisation. Its rise has opened up new communication channels and communities, allowing sports brands to build a global fan base of always-on committed supporters (Fenton, Gillooly, et al., 2021). The European Football Association (UEFA) also played an essential role in the globalisation of football and European football teams, events, and players (Alganideh & Good, 2016). The ability of professional sports clubs to reach





new markets has been dramatically expanded. In the very competitive world of especially European football, European teams strive to set themselves apart and grow their fan base by creating powerful, distinct, and positive images in the eyes of their supporters (Alganideh & Good, 2016). Thus, fans have unprecedented access to European leagues and their favourite clubs, allowing them to form links with teams and players worldwide, regardless of their location. Football is a highly globalised socio-cultural phenomenon with a remarkable transnational, multicultural, and thus often multilingual nature, which is particularly intriguing nowadays (Pérez & Maguelouk, 2019).

Social media is an essential tool for sports organisations to interact with fans (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017). Its popularity and acceptance by clubs, athletes, coaches, fans, managers, leagues, events, and sports governing bodies are widespread (Brett Hutchins, 2014). Sports clubs have become more and more concerned about the media consumption behaviour of their fans (Kim et al., 2011). In 2021, there will be 4.33 billion users of social media, 55.1% of the world's population (Kemp, 2021). This is why sports clubs have noticed the benefits of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram and have tried incorporating them into their communication, overall marketing, and brand management strategies (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017). As clarified in Aichner (2019) study, no club in the four major European football leagues (Spanish Primera Division, Bundesliga, English Premier League, and Italian Serie A) does not have a page on social media.

The word "engagement" seems to be a big one in the business world right now (Grewal et al., 2017). Due to the popularity of social media, marketers are connecting





with consumers and facilitating them to share and exchange information about products and brands by creating social media brand communities (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Fans' engagement in social media brand communities helps to build brand awareness, brand trust, and brand loyalty (Bianchi, C. & Andrews, 2018). Fan engagement involves consumers' passion for the brand due to the close connection between consumers and brands (Leckie et al., 2016). Fan engagement can be considered a collection of brand-related interactions that extend beyond financial transactions and involve sharing and exchanging thoughts, feelings, and ideas regarding brand experiences with other brand customers (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). This is reflected in the literature on sports marketing (Finch et al., 2022; Maderer et al., 2018; Yun et al., 2021). Fan engagement represents a person's psychologically based willingness to invest in focal interactions with specific engagement objects like a brand or company, frequently going beyond actual purchase (Leckie et al., 2016).



Therefore, this research highlights motivations influencing fans' engagement with sports clubs on social media. Through the investigation of the fundamental motives that encourage fans to engage with sports clubs' brands on social media. Based on the theory of uses and gratification. Moreover, this study will examine the level of fans' engagement activities in sports clubs' social media accounts based on customers' online brand-related activities approach, which has three activities (Consumption, contributing, and creating activities). In addition, this study will investigate and examine the influence of different levels of engagement activities on social media (Consumption, contributing, and creating activities) on brand attachment and brand loyalty to the clubs. Whiche aime to propose a fan engagement model for Omani sports clubs through social media.





1.2 Background Research

Based on the research problems and research questions raised, there is a gap that is a shortage of studies in Oman and the Arab Gulf that investigate fans' engagement on social media. As a master's degree holder in sports sciences, the researcher was interested in football fans, which tested the factors affecting the attendance of fans at football matches in the Sultanate of Oman. The researcher is also interested in local and European sports clubs' social media sites. Compared to how certain international clubs manage their social media accounts, Omani sports clubs need to improve in developing brand positioning. Omani football fans are very active on the social media pages of various foreign teams, including Real Madrid, Barcelona, Juventus, and Manchester United.



In recent years, academic literature has received increasing attention about the behaviour of sports spectators. A better understanding of how and why sports fans go to stadiums, travel long distances to support their clubs, and buy merchandise is of great interest to sports marketers (Mogajane et al., 2019). Some scientific studies have been undertaken in the Sultanate of Oman to investigate the elements influencing attendance and the reasons for reluctance to attend the stadium. Alsiyabi (2018) dealt with the factors affecting the attendance of fans for professional league matches in the Sultanate of Oman. Almufadhali (2013), examined the Challenges of Spectators' Attendance In Sports Events in Oman, and als Alshibili (2020), investigated the Means of Attracting Fans to Attend Professional Football League Matches in Oman. Many studies have also been conducted at the level of the Arabian Gulf, such as Abbas (2010), which dealt with the reasons for the reluctance of fans to watch football matches in the Emirates, and the Study of the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics in Qatar (2013), which





searched for the reasons for the reluctance of the masses to attend the Qatari League. While in Saudi Arabia, Binjwaied et al. (2015) and Eddosary et al., (2015) researched the critical factors for attending professional football events among football fans. In addition, Alshaikh (2016), designed a questionnaire to identify the reasons for the fans' attendance diminution of the Bahraini Football League.

It is noticeable that most studies in the Sultanate of Oman and other Gulf countries examine the reasons for reluctance to attend the stadium and the factors that affect attendance. However, Nowadays, social media is considered an effective marketing tool for communicating directly with existing and potential customers. It helps to increase brand positioning with the engagement of many fans (Fenton, Keegan, et al., 2021). Within social media, customers become co-creators and co-owners of brands and play a significant, empowering role in building brand reputation and image (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Therefore, this study developed a questionnaire about factors influencing fans' engagement towards clubs' brands on social media. Through the investigation of football fans' motivations to engage in social media, the level of fans' engagement activities in sports clubs' social media accounts, and the types of content fans interact with clubs' brands on social media; subsequently, it examines the impact of fan engagement on the fan's brand attachment and loyalty to the clubs.





1.3 Problem Statements

Organisations focus on social media to influence their customers to serve them better. In this manner, social media can be a standard communication tool and exceedingly feasible to engage fans (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017). Therefore, companies must know how to motivate their consumers to become involved in social media and engage more in brand-related creating or contributing activities (De Vries et al., 2017). Because within social media, customers become co-creators and co-owners of brands and play a significant, empowering role in building brand reputation and image (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Moreover, Organisations need to know what gratifications fans seek while interacting on social media to develop more customised online content, which can help them achieve other goals like maintaining public interest, reinforcing brand awareness, and growing closer relationships with stakeholders (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017).

Sports fans are known for their strong loyalty and engagement, making the sports field a unique market (Baker et al., 2016). With so many people spending a significant amount of time on social media platforms each day, it is no surprise that marketers have turned to social media as a marketing channel (Appel et al., 2020). Sports clubs have followed suit, recognising the benefits of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for communication, marketing, and brand management (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017). European football teams, in particular, have embraced social media marketing as a key part of their marketing plan, becoming some of the most popular online brands worldwide thanks to football's global fame (Maderer et al., 2018). Overall, fan engagement on social media is both beneficial and profitable from a commercial standpoint (Alonso et al., 2018).





In 2024, there were 5.16 billion users of social media around the world, 59.3% of the world's population (Stefan, 2024). Sports content can be considered one of the most talked-about topics on social media sites (Fenton, Keegan, et al., 2021). Therefore, social media has become an essential tool for sports organisations to interact with fans (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017). Social media has radically changed how sports clubs communicate with fans (Yoshida et al., 2015). On the other hand, sports clubs have become more and more concerned about the media consumption behaviour of their fans (Kim et al., 2011). This is illustrated by investigating the use of social media in sports organisations. For example, Aichner (2019) confirmed that no club in the four major European football leagues (Spanish Primera Division, Bundesliga, English Premier League, and Italian Serie A) does not have a page on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Moreover, all 28 Association of Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) members have platforms or use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017). In the United States, 70% of the adult population follows sports, 42% of sports fans have used mobile devices to consume sports content, and 38% of fans have consumed sports-related content on a laptop or computer (Kim & Mao, 2021).

In Oman, there were 3.97 million social media users as of January 2024, accounting for 84.8% of the total population (Simon Kemp, 2024). Despite this high penetration rate, Omani sports clubs have seen a decline in the average number of followers on their social media accounts. Data collected from official club accounts indicate that Twitter followers total 308,631, with an average of 6,173 per club. Instagram followers number 277,126, with an average of 5,543 per club. Additionally, Omani sports clubs show limited interest in other social media platforms such as





Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and Telegram, resulting in relatively low follower numbers.

A significant challenge in the Omani context is the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the drivers behind fan engagement. Existing models and theories are predominantly based on Western concepts, which may not fully capture the unique cultural and social dynamics of Oman. This gap necessitates a tailored approach that considers local nuances and preferences. There is a notable lack of literature in Oman and the Arabian Gulf regarding the connection between sports fans and sports organizations. Previous studies, such as those by Abbas (2010), Almufadhali (2013), Alshaikh (2016), Alshibili (2020), Alsiyabi (2018), and Eddosary et al. (2015), have primarily focused on factors influencing stadium attendance and reasons for reluctance, rather than the role of social media in sports fans' experiences. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial for understanding the relationship between sports fans and sports organizations and can help inform interventions and support services for this population. However, social media has become a significant part of the fan experience in the digital age, leading to the digital displacement of football fans (Rouchotas, 2020). Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial for understanding the relationship between sports fans and sports organisations and can help inform interventions and support services for this population.

There is a critical gap in the research on how sports clubs can effectively utilize social media for marketing and communication purposes. Understanding the extent to which sports clubs in Oman leverage social media compared to their international counterparts is essential for marketing managers and researchers. Furthermore, there is





a lack of comprehensive analysis of the motivations behind fans' engagement with sports clubs on social media and the different levels of engagement, including consuming, contributing, and creating activities. Additionally, existing studies have not thoroughly explored the impact of social media engagement on brand attachment and loyalty towards sports clubs. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing strategies that enhance fan engagement and strengthen the relationship between sports clubs and their supporters.

Several studies conducted in the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Gulf countries, including those by Ahmed (2011), Al-Muhtady (2014) Al-Mutawa (2019), Almufadhali (2013), Alshibili (2020) and Alsiyabi (2018), have emphasized the importance of sports clubs prioritizing fan relationship management. These studies suggest that sports clubs should enhance their social media presence to promote their identity and expand their reach. Furthermore, there is a need to focus on training the personnel managing sports club social media accounts to ensure they are proficient in their roles. Despite these recommendations, there remains a significant gap in understanding how sports clubs in Oman can effectively employ social media to achieve these goals.

In addition, it is important to highlight that the clubs' statute issued in 2009 lacks specific guidelines or models to effectively manage social media accounts and establish meaningful relationships with fans (Ministry of Sports, 2009). This omission leaves clubs with the challenge of devising their own strategies for managing their online presence and engaging with their supporters. Based on the information provided, it is clear that sports clubs in Oman require a clearly defined system to enhance fan





engagement on social media. The most effective approach would be comprehending the main motivations for engagement and the level of activities.

1.4 Research Objectives

It is imperative to conduct further research studies on the engagement activities exhibited by fans towards sports clubs in the Sultanate of Oman. The researchers aim to achieve five primary objectives in this study, namely:

RO1: To identify the level of fans' engagement activities in sports clubs' social media (Consuming, Contributing, Creating activities).

RO2: To identify the fundamental motives that encourage fans to engage with sports clubs' brands on social media.

RO3: To examine the influence of "Informational" motives on the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities).

RO4: To examine the influence of "Entertainment" motives on the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities).

RO5: To examine the influence of "Personal Identity" motives on the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities).





RO6: To examine the influence of " Integration and Social Interaction" motives on the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities).

RO7: To examine the influence of " Empowerment" motives on the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities).

RO8: To examine the influence of " Remuneration" motives on the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities).

RO9: To examine the influence of " Brand Love" motives on the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities).



RO10: To examine the influence of "Consuming" activities on social media on (a) brand attachment and (b) brand loyalty.

RO11: To examine the influence of "Contributing" activities on social media on (a) brand attachment and (b) brand loyalty.

RO12: To examine the influence of "Creating" activities on social media on (a) brand attachment and (b) brand loyalty.

RO13: To propose a Fan engagement model for Omani sports clubs through social media.





1.5 Research Questions

RQ1: What is the level of fans' engagement in sports clubs' social media (Consuming, Contributing, Creating activities)?

RQ2: What fundamental motives encourage fans to engage with sports clubs' brands on social media?

RQ3: Do the "Informational" motives influence the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities)?

RQ4: Do the "Entertainment" motives influence the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities)?



RQ5: Do the "Personal Identity" motives influence the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities)?

RQ6: Do the "Integration and Social Interaction" motives influence the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities)?

RQ7: Do the "Empowerment" motives influence the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities)?

RQ8: Do the "Remuneration" motives influence the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities)?





RQ9: Do the “Brand Love” motives influence the engagement activities (a) Consuming, (b) Contributing, (c) Creating activities)?

RQ10: Do the “Consuming” activities on social media influence (a) brand attachment and (b) brand loyalty?

RQ11: Do the “Contributing” activities on social media influence (a) brand attachment and (b) brand loyalty?

RQ12: Do the “Creating” activities on social media influence (a) brand attachment and (b) brand loyalty?



1.6 Theoretical Framework

1.6.1 Social Media

Social media is a broad phrase that often refers to applications that enable increasingly popular social activities such as microblogging, blogging, social networking, video-sharing, and photo-sharing (McCarthy et al., 2014). social media takes several forms, and some of the most famous examples include social networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Google+, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram (Abeza et al., 2020). Social media is defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).





Kent (2010) broadly defined social media as “any interactive communication channel that allows for two-way interaction and feedback,” further specifying that modern social media are characterised by their “potential for real-time interaction, reduced anonymity, a sense of propinquity, short response times, and the ability to ‘time shift,’ or engage the social network whenever suits each particular member” (p. 645).

Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to interact opportunistically and selectively self-present asynchronously or in real-time, with both broad and specific audiences who value user-generated content and the impression of interaction with others (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Organizations need to know what gratifications fans seek while interacting on social media in order to develop more customized online content, which can help them achieve other goals like maintaining public interest, reinforcing brand awareness, and growing closer relationships with stakeholders (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017).

1.6.2 Fans Engagement

The literature on sports marketing contends that fans of sports teams have unique relationships and associations with their favourite teams (Vale & Fernandes, 2018a). These high levels of fandom and emotional attachment towards sports clubs have frequently been associated with the term ‘engage’ in sport marketing studies (Yoshida et al., 2014). Highly engaged fans are more likely to engage in non-transactional behaviours, including positive word-of-mouth, showing their passion for sports, interacting with other fans in fan networks, and reading about them (Vale & Fernandes,





2018a). They actively participate in value co-creation (Popp & Woratschek, 2016). Sports fans are prime examples of loyal club supporters who stick by their clubs through good times and bad, retaining a special bond with a team they consider their own (Abosag et al., 2012). These unique behavioural patterns in fan sports can be considered essential manifestations of fan engagement behaviours, defined as "customers' behavioural manifestations toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers" (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Understanding fan engagement has become more crucial since different types of brand-related activities on social media, ranging from merely reading, sharing and commenting on posts to posting a message (Tsai & Men, 2017). May include different levels of engagement (Schivinski et al., 2016). The authors grouped Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities into three hierarchical dimensions: Contribution, Creation and Consumption. These metrics reflect a progression of engagement with brands on social media from low (passive) to high (active) activity (Malthouse et al., 2013). The Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs) is defined as "a set of brand-related online activities on the part of the consumer that vary in the degree to which the consumer interacts with social media and engages in the consumption, contribution, and creation of media content" (Schivinski et al., 2016).

1.6.3 The uses and gratification theory

Numerous academics have recently used the Uses and Gratifications theory concerning social media. Since the Uses and Gratifications theory assumes that individuals are active, rather than passive, in their media use, social media requires the active

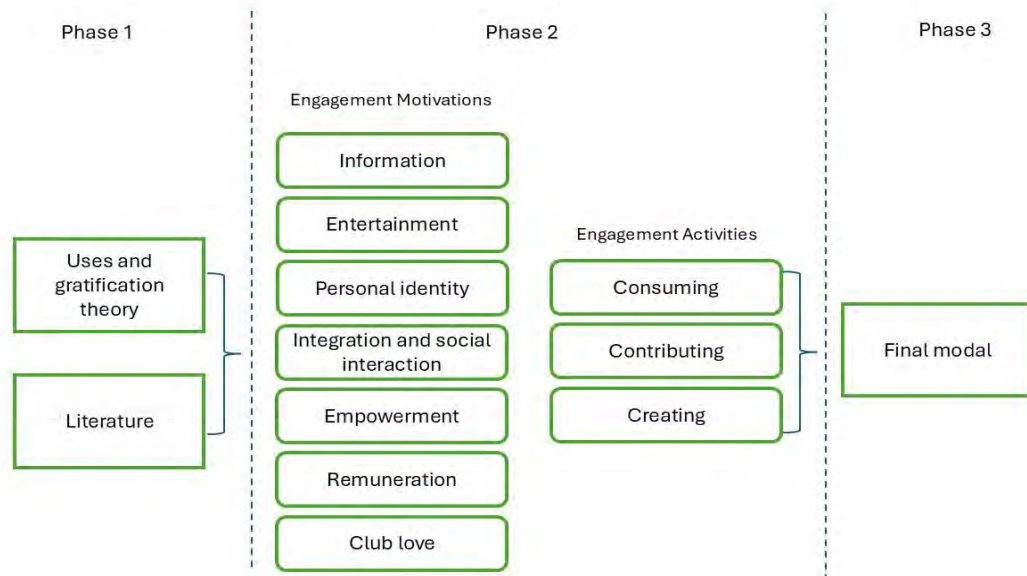


participation of users and a high level of interactivity (Ko et al., 2005). As a result, the Uses and Gratifications theory can be regarded as a cutting-edge approach to understanding individual motivations for media use (Muntinga et al., 2011).

This study follows the uses and gratification theory approach and the Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities framework, as identified in a previous study by (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). That it depends on seven motivations (Information, Entertainment, Personal Identity, Integration and Social Interaction, Empowerment, Remuneration and Brand Love) and three dimensions of online engagement behaviours (Consumption, Contribution and Creation) were considered.

05-4506832 **1.7 Conceptual Framework** Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

Based on the literature review, we developed the conceptual framework in this chapter. The constructs used were adapted to the problem. Consequently, considering our research objective and questions were developed that will allow us to affirm or refute the evidence found in the literature. It becomes necessary to outline a conceptual model to confront the data from an empirical point of view with the theoretical perspective developed. This framework presents a schematic structure capable of representing the relations between the research variables. Thus, this framework (see figure 1.1) illustrates the general direction of this study, which was guided by the literature review evaluation and research methodology in attempting to answer the research questions.

Figure 1.1*Conceptual Framework***1.8 Operational Definition**

As previously stated, this study aims to understand the fundamental motives that encourage fans to engage with sports clubs' brands on social media and identify the level of fans' engagement in sports clubs' social media (Consuming, Contributing, and Creating activities). The following are key terms and definitions to be used in this research study based on many resources, previous studies, and critical readings on the field:



1.8.1 Social Media

Social media sites are defined as online platforms offering people an option to create their profiles and establish a peer-to-peer connection, leading to a network of connected individuals (Trivedi et al., 2020, p.5).

In this thesis, "Social Media" refers to various online platforms and applications enabling football fans to create, share, and interact with content related to sports clubs. In this study, I focus on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Social media serves as a medium for fans to engage with sports clubs, fostering communication, community building, and the dissemination of information.



1.8.2 Fan Engagement

“The state that reflects consumers’ positive individual dispositions towards the focal brand as expressed through varying levels of cognitive, affective, and behavioural manifestations that go beyond exchange situations” (Dessart, 2017, p. 377).

In this study, "fan engagement" refers to the level of interaction, participation, and emotional involvement that fans exhibit towards their sports club on social media platforms. This includes activities such as liking, sharing, and commenting on posts, participating in online discussions, attending virtual events, and creating user-generated content related to the club. Fan engagement is driven by motivations such as passion for the club, identification with the club, and the desire to connect with other fans.





1.8.3 Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs)

“A behavioural construct that 'provides a unifying framework to think about consumer activity pertaining to brand-related content on social media platforms” (Muntinga et al., 2011, p. 14).

This thesis, “Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs)”, refers to the various levels of fan engagement activities on social media platforms related to Omani sports clubs. These activities are categorized into three distinct levels. The first level, Consuming, involves passive engagement, where fans consume content related to the sports club, such as reading posts, watching videos, and following updates without actively interacting. The second level, Contributing, sees fans engaging more actively by interacting with the content. This includes liking, sharing, commenting on posts, and participating in discussions, thereby contributing to the visibility and reach of the club's online presence. The third and highest level, Creating, involves fans generating their content related to the sports club. This includes creating posts, videos, blogs, and other forms of media that showcase their support and attachment to the club.

1.8.4 Fan Motivation

“A self-determined and volitional state that energises a desire to engage in sports goal-directed behaviour to acquire positive benefits” (Funk et al., 2012, p. 364).

In this thesis, “Fan Motivation” refers to the underlying reasons and incentives that drive football fans to engage with sports clubs' social media accounts. This





engagement is measured using the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs and desires. By applying this theory, fan motivation is assessed based on the various gratifications fans seek, such as entertainment, information, personal identity, social interaction, and escapism.

1.8.5 Brand Attachment

“Construct reflecting the mental state and feeling connected or attached to the brand, being a holistic feeling regarding the brand” (Levy & Hino, 2016, p. 138).

In this study, “brand attachment” refers to the deep emotional connection and bond that fans have with their sports club. This attachment is characterized by intense feelings of consideration, joy, and pleasure associated with the club. Brand attachment is measured through fans' responses to statements such as having a deep emotional connection to the sports club, feeling pleasant sensations when thinking about the club, and experiencing joy and pleasure from the club.

1.8.6 Brand Love

“The degree of passionate, emotional attachment a satisfied customer has for a particular trade name’ (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81).

In this study, "Brand Love" refers to fans' emotional attachment and affection towards their sports club. This encompasses a deep sense of loyalty, admiration, and





passion for the club, which motivates fans to engage with the club's social media content, participate in club-related activities, and support the club in various ways. Brand love is measured through fans' motivations and activities, including their passion for the sports club, association of the club with significant life events, care for the club, and identification with the club.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

Despite the comprehensive approach taken in this study, several limitations must be noted. The sample size and diversity were restricted to followers of Omani sports clubs' social media accounts, covering approximately 36 out of 50 clubs due to the widespread nature of the population. The use of an online questionnaire, while necessary for the large population of football fans, may not fully represent the entire spectrum of fan engagement across different regions and types of sports clubs, potentially impacting the generalizability of the findings. Temporal constraints also played a role, as the researcher, working in the Ministry of Education, had to complete the study within three years, limiting the focus to sports clubs in the Omani Football League with similar work and goals. Technological factors were another limitation, as the study concentrated on Instagram and Twitter, excluding other platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, and Telegram due to their limited use by sports clubs. This exclusion could affect the model's applicability in future contexts as technology evolves. The cultural context of Oman, with its unique social and cultural factors influencing fan engagement, may not be applicable or relevant in different cultural settings, thus limiting the cross-cultural applicability of the findings. Additionally, while the study aimed to identify key drivers of fan engagement, it may not have captured all possible



variables, such as economic conditions, political influences, or unexpected events, which could significantly impact fan engagement. By acknowledging these limitations, future research can build upon this study to further refine and validate the fan engagement drivers model, ensuring its robustness and applicability in various contexts.

1.10 Study Delimitation

Delimitation refers to the researcher establishing boundaries or limitations within a study to achieve its aims and objectives. In this context, delimitations are under the researcher's control and may pertain to the study's objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, sample selection, and the investigated variables (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study is designed with specific boundaries to ensure a transparent and manageable scope. It is focused on sports clubs in Oman, enabling an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing fan engagement within Oman's unique cultural and social context.

The study encompasses all football fans across various clubs in the Sultanate of Oman, given its emphasis on social media consumers, without imposing any limitations. It investigates fan engagement through social media platforms but does not confine itself to specific ones. Nonetheless, the research indicates that Instagram and Twitter are the predominant platforms utilized by sports clubs in Oman, as many clubs do not engage with other platforms like YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat. The data collection period is set for three months, from August 2023 to October 2023, offering insights into fan engagement activities and trends during this timeframe without addressing long-term developments or changes.



The study centres on specific fan engagement metrics, including comments, likes, shares, and various activities on social media. It deliberately excludes other forms of engagement, such as offline activities or financial contributions. The researcher chose the uses and gratifications theory because of its strong relevance to social media consumption, a connection well-supported by existing literature. Seven types of motivations were identified to be tested in this study: (a) Information, (b) Entertainment, (c) Personal Identity, (d) Integration and Social Interaction, (e) Empowerment, (f) Remuneration, and (g) Brand Love. Additionally, the researcher employed the Consumer Brand Related Activities (COBRAs) framework, which outlines levels of social media consumption activities and categorizes them into three areas: consumption, contribution, and activity creation. By clearly delineating these parameters, the study aims to offer a focused and coherent analysis of the factors driving fan engagement through social media in Omani sports clubs. These boundaries help ensure that the research remains manageable and pertinent to the specific context.

1.11 Importance of Research

The importance of this research lies in the scarcity of studies related to fan engagement in the Sultanate of Oman, potentially contributing to academic knowledge and practical applications within sports management and digital marketing. As possibly the first research of its kind in Oman, it aims to enhance fan engagement by understanding factors influencing fans' interactions with sports clubs on social media, helping clubs develop effective strategies to connect with their fans, leading to increased loyalty, higher game attendance, and greater support. The study addresses Oman's unique cultural and social dynamics, ensuring the findings are relevant and applicable to the





region's specific needs and preferences. It contributes to the existing fan engagement and social media literature by filling gaps related to the Arab Gulf context, providing a comprehensive model for future research. Sports clubs can utilize the findings to improve their social media strategies, resulting in better marketing outcomes, increased sponsorship opportunities, and improved financial performance.

Additionally, the research may identify the best social media content for fan interaction and optimal use of social media according to fans' goals. The study may draw attention to the importance of fan engagement on social media for sports club managers, policymakers, and sports administrators, helping formulate policies that support digital transformation and competitiveness. By exploring the role of various social media platforms, the research highlights the importance of staying updated with technological advancements and encouraging sports clubs to adopt innovative tools and techniques for effective fan engagement. Effective fan engagement through social media can foster a sense of community among fans, leading to more robust fan bases, increased volunteerism, and significant community support for sports clubs. In summary, this study is crucial for advancing the understanding of fan engagement in the digital era, particularly within the context of Oman sports clubs, offering valuable insights that can drive academic inquiry and practical improvements in sports management and marketing.

1.12 Summary

This research will be at the junction of four areas: this study will introduce the fundamental motives that encourage fans to engage with sports clubs' brands on social





media. The study will also provide the level of fans' engagement in sports clubs' social media (Consuming, Contributing, and Creating activities). In addition, this study will examine the influence of the motives of engagement (a) Information, (b) Entertainment, (c) Personal Identity, (d) Integration and Social Interaction, (e) Empowerment, (f) Remuneration and (g) Brand Love) on the level of engagement (Consuming, Contributing, Creating activities). In addition, this study will investigate the influence of the level of engagement on social media (Consuming, Contributing, and Creating activities) on brand loyalty attachment.

