
From Consumption to Creation: Motivations Influencing Handball Fans' Social Media

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study investigates the motivations behind social media engagement among handball fans in Poland using the Uses and Gratifications (UGT) theory and the Consumer's Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRA) model.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study surveyed 359 fans of top Polish handball clubs through an online questionnaire in 2023, with data analyzed using descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM).

Findings: Our findings reveal that information and brand love significantly drive content consumption, while empowerment influences content contribution. Integration and social interaction primarily motivate content creation.

Practical Implications: These results extend the UGT and COBRA models within the context of sports fans, providing theoretical insights and practical recommendations for handball club managers.

Originality/Value: By understanding and addressing the specific motivations of their fan base, clubs can enhance fan engagement, loyalty, and ultimately improve marketing and revenue outcomes.

Keywords: Social media, consumer engagement; fan motivation; online activities; handball fans.

JEL codes: L83, M31, Z29, D91, O33.

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1. Introduction

Social media (SM) serves as a crucial communication tool for sports clubs, facilitating direct interaction with fans and promoting events and content (Winand *et al.*, 2019; Bańbuła, 2024). Understanding the motivations behind fans' use of these platforms can help tailor content to meet their expectations, which is essential for effectively managing the club's brand and enhancing fan engagement (Ahiabor *et al.*, 2023).

In Poland, handball fans constitute a large and engaged community (Grodecki, 2016). The SM activity of these fans may differ from that of fans of other sports, making the study of this phenomenon particularly intriguing. Analyzing the online activities of specific groups of sports fans can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of their behavior (Vale and Fernandes, 2018).

The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of SM motivations – such as information, entertainment, personal identity, integration and social interaction, empowerment, remuneration, and brand love – on the different levels of SM engagement (consuming, contributing, and creating) among handball club fans. To achieve this, the Uses and Gratifications (UGT) theory (McQuail 1984) and the Consumer's Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRA) theoretical model (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011) were utilized.

This research holds significant practical value and managerial implications. It provides practical recommendations for handball club managers on effectively engaging fans on SM based on the identified motivations. For instance, creating content that meets fans' information and social integration needs could lead to increased fan engagement. A deeper understanding of fan behavior can result in greater engagement, loyalty, and enhanced marketing and ticket revenues.

Theoretically, this study extends the existing literature on the UGT and COBRA models by applying these theories within the context of sports fans, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of SM engagement in sports.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Motives for Using SM: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), originally developed within media and communication, also applies to sports research. It analyzes sports media consumption and associated social interactions, identifying derived gratifications (Clavio and Kian, 2010; Filo *et al.*, 2015, Avnishkumar and Nulkar, 2022, Ahiabor *et al.*, 2023, Kennedy and Funk, 2023). UGT posits that individuals actively turn to media to fulfill specific needs, motivating media use (Katz and Foulkes, 1962).

Media consumption is driven by individual needs and the desire to satisfy them (Rubin, 1983; Kim *et al.*, 2022). Scholars highlight the psychological and socio-environmental determinants of media reception and the specific motives for engaging with media (Benlarbi *et al.*, 2024). They explain how individuals use media to satisfy needs, understand their motives for behavior, and describe their media expectations (Blumler, 1979).

UGT emphasizes the active role of media consumers. Individuals consciously choose content based on their needs and preferences (Dolan *et al.*, 2016). Active content selection serves functional purposes and helps achieve desired outcomes. Individuals seek out, identify with, and use media to satisfy specific gratification needs (Blumler, 2019). Thus, the initiative for media orientation lies with the audience, not the media (McQuail, 2010). McQuail (1984) proposed a comprehensive model of needs arising from media use, encompassing seven basic categories:

1. **Information:** The need to gain knowledge, understand the world, and obtain data on significant events (Rubin, 2008).
2. **Entertainment:** Encompasses movies, music, books, and internet memes, providing emotional stimulation, relaxation, and escape from daily problems (Shao, 2009, Tsai and Men, 2017).
3. **Personal Identity:** Involves identifying with values, lifestyles, beliefs, and social groups through media, shaping self-image by selecting content that supports personal characteristics and aspirations (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Tsai and Men, 2017).
4. **Social Integration and Interaction:** The desire to build and maintain social connections and participate in exchanges through media, supporting social integration through community membership and online interactions (Vale and Fernandes, 2018; Chen, 2020).
5. **Empowerment:** The desire for emotional satisfaction, self-esteem, and ego enhancement through media consumption, affirming beliefs and values via social media (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Dolan *et al.*, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2020).
6. **Remuneration:** The desire for benefits and satisfaction from media consumption, including participation in loyalty programs and non-material gratification (Dolan *et al.*, 2016, Kennedy and Funk, 2023).
7. **Brand Love:** Emotional involvement with a brand or media product, leading to strong emotional ties through loyalty, identification, and positive experiences (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2022).

In sports research, UGT has been used to analyze the impact of various gratifications on sports fans' television viewing experiences (Gantz and Wenner, 1995). Researchers have explored the motivations behind sports organizations and fans using social media (Vale and Fernandes, 2018). Pegoraro (2010) demonstrated that athletes sharing personal life elements on Twitter enhance fan-athlete interaction. Kassing and Sanderson (2010) showed that Twitter increased immediacy and social

interaction between athletes and fans during a three-week race. Clavio and Kian (2010) found that the primary motive for following a retired athlete's Twitter account was affection and perceived physical attractiveness. Li *et al.* (2019) identified information, entertainment, team support, technical expertise, relaxation, and escapism as the main motives for social media use by Los Angeles Lakers fans on Twitter and Weibo.

Vale and Fernandes (2018) suggested that football clubs can more effectively engage fans by meeting their informational and emotional needs and promoting social interactions on Facebook. Meng *et al.* (2015) showed that social media communication with NBA fans enhances team identification, belonging, and social interaction. Ahiabor *et al.* (2023) found that personal, social, and tension-releasing gratifications drive football fans' behavior and positively influence sports teams' brand value.

Gibbs *et al.* (2014) identified interaction, promotion, live game updates, and information as key gratifications for Twitter users following sports teams. Qin (2020) found that consumers' interactions with the Nike brand on social media are supported by motivations such as information seeking and self-identity. Brands should provide valuable information and create spaces for self-expression and identity building to engage consumers effectively.

2.2 Diversity of Consumer Behaviour on SM: COBRA Theoretical Framework

The advent of technology, particularly social and digital media, has increased the number of consumers and transformed them into active co-creators, enhancing the value of sports organizations (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Sports clubs use modern online tools and mobile applications to establish bonds with audiences and provide interactive, personalized experiences (Santos *et al.*, 2019; Fenton *et al.*, 2023; Lebed *et al.*, 2024). These platforms' ease of use enables users to create and share content about brands (Simon and Tossan, 2018).

The proliferation of social media has necessitated systematizing audience behavior. Shao (2008) identified three types of online consumer behavior: consumption, participation, and brand content creation. The dynamic nature of social media led to the COBRA model by Muntinga *et al.* (2011), categorizing consumer behavior into consuming, contributing, and creating. Consuming involves passive actions such as viewing posts, photos, videos, comments, or ratings related to brands (Schivinski *et al.*, 2021). This behavior has largely become habitual, leading to passive media use (Kennedy and Funk, 2023).

A higher level of engagement is contributing, where consumers actively participate by 'liking,' commenting, or engaging in discussions about the brand (Schivinski *et al.*, 2021). The highest level is creating, which involves generating original content such as graphics, videos, posts, web pages, or managing social media profiles about

brands. This content is then consumed and contributed to by other users (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011).

The COBRA model provides extensive opportunities to analyze sports fans' social media behavior (Vale and Fernandes, 2018; Buzeta *et al.*, 2020). It facilitates the analysis of statements and comments about a sports club on social media, aiding in understanding fans' preferences and opinions about the team, players, and marketing activities. This understanding enables sports clubs to personalize their communication with fans (Avnishkumar and Nulkar, 2022).

Tailoring marketing messages or promotional offers based on fans' online behavior can enhance fan engagement and loyalty (Ramos *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, it allows for tracking and evaluating the effectiveness of a club's social media marketing activities (Chen, 2020). By identifying which content generates the most engagement, clubs can optimize their marketing strategies (Machado *et al.*, 2020).

The model is also valuable for public relations, particularly during image crises. Analyzing comment content enables real-time monitoring of fan sentiment, allowing quick responses to mitigate reputational damage (Lanzillo and Stewart, 2017). It also helps identify influencers and brand ambassadors within the fan community who can promote the club (Avnishkumar and Nulkar, 2022).

2.3 The Relationship between SM Use Motives and Consumer's Online Brand-Related Activities

Studies utilizing UGT to explore SM use motives among sports fans encompass a variety of contexts and methodologies. Research indicates that seeking and receiving brand information is a significant motivator for SM use (Shao, 2009, Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). This need for information drives activities primarily related to consuming or contributing to SM content (Azar *et al.*, 2016; Li *et al.*, 2019; Machado *et al.*, 2020; Qin, 2020).

Therefore, users driven by an information-seeking motive are more likely to consume brand content, browsing posts, reading comments, and following brand profiles for up-to-date information (Qin, 2020). This motive has a substantial impact on content consumption, as users with a high expectation of receiving information interact with brand content more frequently (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Vale and Fernandes, 2018).

Information-seeking also influences content contribution, as users not only browse but also share material and information, post, comment, and share brand content to enhance their knowledge and assist others (Buzeta *et al.*, 2020). The need for entertainment is crucial in consuming SM content (Machado *et al.*, 2020). Passive behaviors like scrolling and browsing without active participation satisfy emotional needs, reduce daily stress, and provide indulgence (Azar *et al.*, 2016).

The need for integration and social interaction is linked to consuming, contributing, and creating content (Tsai and Men, 2017; Machado *et al.*, 2020). SM offers opportunities to build and maintain interpersonal relationships. Consuming content keeps users updated with their community, contributing enables active participation, and creating allows self-expression and new connections, fulfilling the fundamental need for social interaction.

Personal identity significantly influences all levels of SM activity (Tsai and Men, 2017; Qin, 2020). Viewing posts and interacting with brand content help users identify with the brand and their community (Qin, 2020). Through contribution, individuals express opinions and build their identity on SM, actively participating in brand interactions by publishing brand-related content, commenting, and sharing experiences (Tsai and Men, 2017).

Research indicates that remuneration influences the contribution and creation processes (Azar *et al.*, 2016; Vale and Fernandes, 2018). Rewards or compensation mobilize users to create valuable content, with the expectation of tangible or intangible rewards increasing motivation to engage in content creation and sharing.

Brand love drives individuals to build positive relationships with brands, experience loyalty, and identify with their values through consuming, contributing, and creating content (Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015; Vale and Fernandes, 2018).

Numerous studies demonstrate UGT's versatility in researching SM motives (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Vale and Fernandes, 2018). Researchers have examined the influence of specific motives on different SM behaviors (Buzeta *et al.*, 2020). The analysis of sports fans' SM activities remains underexplored, prompting the authors to address this gap through research on fans of leading handball clubs in Poland.

The following hypotheses (H) were formulated:

H1: The need for information, entertainment, personal identity, integration and social interaction, empowerment, remuneration, and brand love influences the consumption of content on handball club SM.

H2: The need for information, entertainment, personal identity, integration and social interaction, empowerment, remuneration, and brand love influences the contribution of content on handball club SM.

H3: The need for information, entertainment, personal identity, integration and social interaction, empowerment, remuneration, and brand love influences the creation of content on handball club SM.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context

Handball is highly popular in Poland due to the national team's success, strong league clubs, and an engaged fan community (Grodecki, 2016). Poland has hosted several international events, including the 2016 European Men's Handball Championship and co-hosting the 2023 Men's Handball World Cup, boosting interest in the sport.

The men's national team's success, with a silver medal at the 2007 World Championships and bronze medals in 2009 and 2015, has been crucial (ZPRP, 2024). The Polish handball league, the ORLEN Superliga, is popular among fans (Grodecki, 2016).

The ORLEN Superliga ranks fourth in media coverage among Polish sports leagues, with 42,767 publications valued at PLN 164.4 mln (Dmoch, 2024). Despite its success, handball faces competition from soccer and volleyball, requiring continuous efforts to enhance its appeal (Ślęzak and Mamcarczyk, 2021).

This study focuses on fans of the two leading handball clubs in the ORLEN Superliga: Industria Kielce and Orlen Wisła Płock. These clubs consistently achieve international success, elevating the league's profile. Industria Kielce ranked first in media coverage with 13,340 publications worth PLN 41.9 mln, while Orlen Wisła Płock ranked second with 8,169 publications worth PLN 26.3 mln (Dmoch, 2024).

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) survey was conducted among fans of two Polish handball clubs, Industria Kielce and Orlen Wisła Płock, between January and March 2023. Fans were reached through closed groups of sport fans of these clubs on SM, and data collection was facilitated by publishing a link to an online survey. The survey, containing the study's instruments, was prepared and hosted on Google Forms and was conducted in Polish.

The inclusion criteria for the study required participants to have an account on any SM platform and to follow the SM profiles of the studied clubs. The survey included 361 participants, with two excluded from further analysis for not having a SM profile. The majority of respondents were men (59.6%) aged 37-54 (35.4%) with a university education (56.3%). Detailed characteristics of the respondents in relation to socio-demographic variables are presented in Table 1.

3.3 Measures

The self-administered questionnaire used validated multi-scale tools and consisted of four sections: 1) sociodemographic variables, 2) characteristics of social media use, 3) motivations for media use, and 4) social media engagement behavior. The analyzed sociodemographic and psychographic variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample according to sociodemographic and psychographic criteria of the respondents (N=359)

	Industria Kielce (N=259)		Orlen Wisła Płock (N=100)		Total (N=359)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender						
Male	153	59.1	61	61.0	214	59.6
Female	106	40.9	39	39.0	145	40.4
Age						
≤ 18 years old	24	9.3	11	11.0	35	9.7
19-26 years old	44	17.0	43	32.0	87	24.2
27-36 years old	51	19.7	18	18.0	69	19.2
37-54 years old	103	39.8	25	25.0	128	35.7
≥ 55 years old	37	14.3	3	3.0	40	11.1
Education						
Elementary	16	6.2	6	6.0	22	6.1
Basic vocational	8	3.1	3	3.0	11	3.1
Secondary	84	32.4	40	40.0	124	34.5
Higher	151	58.3	51	51.0	202	56.3
Professional status						
Student	55	21.2	45	45.0	100	27.9
Employed	193	74.5	54	54.0	247	68.8
Unemployed	10	3.9	1	1.0	11	3.1
DK	1	0.4	0	0	1	0.3
Owned profile on SM						
Facebook	258	34.6	99	31.7	357	99.4
Instagram	176	23.6	81	26.0	257	71.6
Twitter	86	11.5	30	9.6	116	32.3
TikTok	84	11.3	41	13.1	125	34.8
YouTube	130	17.4	55	17.6	185	51.5
Inny	11	1.5	6	1.9	17	4.7
Observed profile of the club on SM						
Facebook	255	38.8	85	38.3	340	94.7
Instagram	168	25.5	60	27.0	228	63.5
Twitter	63	9.6	19	8.6	82	22.8
TikTok	46	7.0	29	13.1	75	20.9
YouTube	126	19.1	29	13.1	155	43.2
Frequency of visiting SM club						
Less frequently than 1 per month	1	0.4	3	3.0	4	1.1
Once a month	2	0.8	2	2.0	4	1.1
Once every 2-3 weeks	4	1.5	1	1.0	5	1.4
Once a week	18	6.9	6	6.0	24	6.7
Once every 2-3 days	78	30.1	45	45.0	123	34.3
At least once a day	156	60.2	43	43.0	199	55.4

Source: Own study.

To capture motivations for media use, we employed scales based on drivers of consumer engagement with football clubs on Facebook from Vale and Fernandes (2018). This scale extends the UGT perspective to the digital landscape, considering a comprehensive set of motivations for social media use in a sports context. It includes seven dimensions: information, entertainment, personal identity, integration and social interaction, empowerment, remuneration, and brand love. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (“definitely disagree”) to 5 (“definitely agree”).

We followed standardized procedures for cross-cultural adaptation to translate the questionnaire into Polish, following Beaton *et al.* (2000). Two independent bilingual translators, native Polish speakers, conducted the forward translation. The research team, fluent in Polish, resolved discrepancies through discussions. The final Polish version combined the translated versions agreed upon by the team and translators.

SM engagement behavior was assessed using the Polish version of the COBRA scale (Schivinski and Łukasik, 2017), based on Shao (2009) and Muntinga *et al.* (2011). This scale, adapted to a sports context, included three dimensions: consumption, contribution, and creation. Responses ranged from 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Always”).

3.4 Statistical Analysis

The statistical analyses included: (1) a descriptive analysis of the sample structure and variables, using frequencies, relative frequencies (%), means (M), and standard deviations (\pm); (2) construct validity and dimensionality assessment of the conceptual model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA); (3) reliability analysis of the latent variables using internal consistency coefficients: Cronbach’s alpha (α), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and factor determinacy (λ); and (4) hypothesis testing via structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical significance was set at 0.05. These analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS™ v. 29 (IBM 2023) and JASP v. 0.18.3 (JASP Team 2024).

4. Research Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Facebook and Instagram are key platforms for communication and fan engagement for the clubs Industria Kielce and Orlen Wisła Płock. Facebook is the most popular platform, with 99.4% of respondents having an account and 94.7% of fans following the clubs' profiles. Instagram is also widely used, with 71.6% of respondents having a profile and 63.5% following the clubs' profiles. Other media platforms are less popular among fans. Additionally, the majority of fans visit the clubs' SM profiles at least once a day (55.4%). These regular visits indicate strong involvement and interest in current events and information related to the clubs.

4.2 Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 29.0 was applied for testing the measurement model. Composite measures of identified factors of both engagement drivers and online engagement behaviours were unidimensional and demonstrated good scale reliability. Overall fit indices suggested a good fit of data $\chi^2(359) = 3183.75$, $p < .001$ ($\chi^2/df=2.56$, CFI=.927, TLI=.917, RMSEA=.063, SRMR=.0645) (Kline, 2023).

Additionally, the CFA model yields standardized item loads above the acceptance threshold of $\lambda=0.7$ (Kline, 2023), ranging from 0.7 to 0.968 (Table 2 and 3). All factor loadings for indicators measuring the same construct were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). In terms of discriminant validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was calculated for all latent variables.

AVE values were all above the acceptable threshold of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2019), ranging from 0.572 to 0.718 (Tables 2 and 3). Moreover, internal reliability tests showed strong Cronbach's alpha (ranging from 0.74 to 0.94), exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the factors demonstrated good internal consistency and high levels of convergence both for engagement drivers (Table 2) and online behaviours (Table 3).

Table 2. Motivations of handball fans' engagement on SM (reliability and dimensionality statistics)

Measures	α	AVE	λ	$M(\pm SD)$
Information	0.74	0.572		4.28±0.63
The sport-related information is useful			0.763	4.55±0.61
I want to know what other people think about SC			0.773	4.28±0.97
I can get information about team performance, player profiles, events and games scheduled			0.730	4.69±0.55
It helps me in forming an opinion about SC			0.700	3.64±1.30
Entertainment	0.89	0.698		4.01±0.91
I like participating in this community because it is entertaining			0.709	4.32±0.84
The community provides an outlet for me to escape my daily routine			0.864	3.73±1.21
It arouses my emotions and feelings			0.861	4.03±1.04
It relaxes me			0.847	3.95±1.06
Personal identity	0.88	0.721		3.30±1.18
I want to express what kind of person I am			0.869	3.57±1.26
It gives me self-confidence			0.905	3.29±1.31
I want to impress others with what I know about the SC			0.777	3.09±1.38
Integration and social interaction	0.84	0.626		3.56±1.05
I look forward to talking, discussing, and sharing information with others that also like SC			0.795	3.34±1.29

Being part of this community makes me feel more connected to SC			0.708	3.97±1.14
It makes me feel less lonely			0.852	2.95±1.40
I feel closer to SC			0.766	3.99±1.11
Empowerment	0.89	0.681		3.45±1.10
I want to influence SC to do, or to leave, something			0.834	3.44±1.26
I want to influence other people			0.874	3.24±1.36
I feel good about myself when other community members share my ideas and comments			0.782	3.62±1.17
Receiving more affirmation about my comments makes me want to participate in the community			0.794	3.52±1.26
Remuneration	0.82	0.533		3.38±1.01
When I want to buy a ticket, I use the SC's community to search for bargain prices			0.761	3.14±1.41
I'm motivated to participate in this community because I can earn money, prizes or discounts			0.759	2.97±1.40
I am able to obtain information I want without any delay			0.794	3.96±1.04
I want to get a better service			0.807	3.50±1.18
Brand love	0.84	0.585		4.36±0.73
I'm motivated to participate in the community because I'm passionate about SC			0.742	4.18±0.1.03
I associate SC with some important events of my life			0.759	4.35±0.89
I participate in the community because I care about SC			0.899	4.45±0.81
I identify myself with SC			0.868	4.45±0.80

Note: α – Cronbach's alpha; AVE – Average Variance Extracted; λ – factor loading; M – means; \pm standard deviations; SC – sport club

Source: Own study.

Table 3. Handball fans' engagement behaviour on SM (reliability and dimensionality statistics)

Measures	α	AVE	λ	M(\pm SD)
Consumption	0.85	0.556		4.25±0.69
I read posts related to SC's Brand on SM			0.773	4.51±0.69
I read fan page(s) related to SC's Brand on social networking sites			0.811	4.28±0.82
I watch pictures/graphics related to SC's Brand			0.721	4.31±0.79
I follow blogs related to SC's Brand.			0.717	3.66±1.23
I follow SC's Brand on social networking sites			0.742	4.47±0.74
Contribution	0.94	0.697		3.20±0.99
I comment on videos related to SC's Brand			0.939	2.61±1.32
I comment on posts related to SC's Brand			0.968	2.75±1.33
I comment on pictures/graphics related to SC's Brand			0.964	2.69±1.31

I share SC's Brand related posts			0.747	2.83±1.27
I 'Like' pictures/graphics related to SC's Brand			0.737	4.21±0.95
I 'Like' posts related to SC's Brand			0.733	4.16±0.96
Creation	0.96	0.734		2.23±1.13
I initiate posts related to SC's Brand on blogs			0.838	2.19±1.29
I initiate posts related to SC's Brand on social networking sites			0.850	2.15±1.24
I post pictures/graphics related to SC's Brand			0.874	2.54±1.31
I post videos that show SC's Brand			0.903	2.44±1.32
I write posts related to SC's Brand on forums.			0.797	1.99±1.21
I write reviews related to SC's Brand			0.798	2.22±1.31

Note: α – Cronbach's alpha; AVE – Average Variance Extracted; λ – factor loading; M – means; \pm standard deviations; SC – sport club

Source: Own study.

4.3 Motivations for Media Use Among Handball Fans

Handball fans prioritize their emotional connection to the sport club (Brand Love) and the availability of relevant information (Information) as the primary drivers of their SM engagement ($M=4.36$ and 4.28 , respectively; see Table 2). Within the Brand Love dimension, the highest scores were observed for motives related to identification with the club and community participation driven by care for the sports club ($M=4.45$ for both). In the Information dimension, the most important motives were obtaining information about team performance, player profiles, events, and scheduled games ($M =4.69$) and acquiring useful sport-related information ($M=4.55$).

Conversely, personal identity ($M=3.3$) and remuneration ($M=3.38$) were less significant for fans. Within the personal identity dimension, which reflects the motivation of handball fans to express themselves and their individuality through their engagement with the sport club's community, the lowest scored motive was the desire to impress others with their knowledge about the sport club ($M=3.09$). In the remuneration dimension, the motive of participating in the community for potential monetary rewards, prizes, or discounts was the least important ($M=2.97$).

4.4 SM Engagement Behavior of Handball Fans – Structural Equation Model

Overall, the study reveals that handball fans primarily engage in passive consumption of content ($M=4.25$), with moderate levels of contribution ($M=3.2$) and low levels of creation ($M=2.23$; see Table 3). High consumption scores indicate that fans are highly active in consuming content related to their favorite sports clubs. The high scores for reading posts ($M=4.51$) and following the sport club on social networking sites ($M=4.47$) suggest that fans prioritize staying informed and connected with the club's activities and updates.

The lower scores for contribution imply that while fans are somewhat active in expressing their opinions, they are more inclined to engage in less interactive activities, such as liking pictures and posts ($M=4.21$ and 4.16 , respectively). The creation dimension, which encompasses proactive behaviors such as generating content, has the lowest level of engagement. The low scores for initiating posts on blogs and social networking sites ($M=2.19$ and 2.15 , respectively) indicate that fans are less inclined to create content themselves.

4.5 Relationship between Motivations for Media Use and SM Engagement behaviour of Handball Fans

To verify the hypotheses, ten latent variables were specified in a single structural equation model (SEM). The SEM results indicate a good fit to the data, as evidenced by the following values: CFI=0.94, TLI=0.92, RMSEA=0.06, and SRMR=0.062.

Table 4 presents the hypotheses testing results using standardized regression weights and square multiple correlations to analyze the relationship between the motivations for consumer engagement on SM and different engagement behaviors among handball fans, including consumption, contribution, and creation.

Table 4. Hypotheses testing results: standardized regression weights and square multiple correlations

Motivations of consumer engagement on SM	Standardized regression weights (β)		
	Consumption	Contribution	Creation
Information	0.434**	0.246*	-0.028
Entertainment	0.120	-0.003	0.132
Personal identity	-0.175	-0.033	-0.210
Integration and social interaction	0.194	0.176	0.348*
Empowerment	0.084	0.241*	0.222
Remuneration	-0.114	-0.004	0.179*
Brand love	0.183*	-0.027	-0.091
R^2	0.444	0.282	0.295

Note: *significant at $p<0.05$; **significant at $p<0.01$; R^2 - square multiple correlation

Source: Own study.

The motivation of obtaining information shows a significant positive relationship with both consumption ($\beta=0.434$, $p<0.01$) and contribution ($\beta=0.246$, $p<0.05$), indicating that fans who seek information are more likely to engage in these activities. However, it does not significantly impact creation.

Entertainment and personal identity do not show a significant relationship with any of the engagement behaviors, suggesting these are not primary drivers for consuming, contributing, or creating content.

Integration and social interaction positively affect creation ($\beta=0.348$, $p<0.05$), indicating that fans who value social interaction are more inclined to create content.

This motivation also impacts consumption and contribution positively, though not significantly.

Empowerment has a significant positive relationship with contribution ($\beta=0.241$, $p<0.05$), indicating that fans who feel empowered are more likely to contribute content. Remuneration significantly impacts creation ($\beta=0.179$, $p<0.05$) but not consumption or contribution, showing that potential rewards motivate fans to create content.

Finally, brand love shows a significant positive relationship with consumption ($\beta=0.183$, $p<0.05$), suggesting that fans with strong emotional ties to the club are more likely to consume content. It negatively impacts contribution and creation, though these relationships are not significant.

5. Discussion

An analysis of the influence of individual motives on the SM activity of handball club fans reveals various determinants for consuming, contributing, and creating content. The following discussion outlines the impact of different motives on these three aspects of SM activity.

The analysis indicates that the need for information plays the largest role in content consumption. Fans seeking information about their favorite handball clubs are more likely to consume content on social media to stay updated with match results, transfers, player injuries, and other events. Providing up-to-date information is key to engaging fans. Research shows that informative content has the greatest impact on content consumption (Vale and Fernandes, 2018; Buzeta *et al.*, 2020; Qin, 2020).

Motivation for integration and social interaction was statistically insignificant in content consumption by handball club fans which contrasts with studies by Vale and Fernandes and Machado *et al.* (2020). Handball's niche status and smaller fan base reduce the need for extensive online communities, favoring more personal interactions. Fans focus on watching matches and tracking scores without needing active interaction. Local club organization limits the need for broad social media interaction (Kim *et al.*, 2022).

Brand love significantly influences social media content consumption. Fans with strong positive feelings toward their club's brand are more likely to consume related content actively (Bańbuła, 2024). These fans often feel stronger emotions about their club's successes and failures, motivating them to follow news, posts, and match results.

This finding is valuable for club managers, who can leverage these emotional ties to increase engagement and loyalty by creating content that resonates with their fans'

brand love. The importance of brand love in social media consumption was also confirmed in a study by Vale and Fernandes (2018).

Motivations related to entertainment, empowerment, personal identity, and remuneration do not affect consumption activities. These motivations were significant in brand consumer studies by Buzeta et al. (2020) (entertainment and empowerment) and Muntinga *et al.* (2011) and Qin (2020) (personal identity and remuneration).

Handball content is often more technical and informative than entertaining. Fans may be more interested in match results, tactical analysis, and statistics than in entertaining videos or memes. Consequently, the need for entertainment in handball content consumption is less important.

Handball fans may treat their interest more as a hobby than an identity element, making their need to build a personal identity through social media less important. In handball, there is less emphasis on compensation or rewards for social media activity, making the need for remuneration less important. Handball fans have fewer opportunities to influence club decisions, reducing the need for empowerment.

The results indicate that only the need for information and brand love significantly impact social media content consumption among handball fans, partially supporting Hypothesis 1. These findings underscore the importance of providing valuable information and building emotional attachment to the club as key elements in fan engagement strategies.

Handball fans' active engagement, such as commenting and sharing posts, is most influenced by information-related motivations and empowerment. Fans seek and share information, often creating analyses and commentary on team performances and coaching strategies, which fosters community discussions and debates. Sharing informative posts helps build a knowledge-based community. This aligns with findings by Qin (2020) and Machado *et al.* (2020).

Empowerment shows that fans demonstrate their commitment and loyalty through active participation, enhancing their sense of belonging. Handball clubs should focus on strategies that boost fans' sense of empowerment to increase engagement. Studies by Vale and Fernandes (2018) and Buzeta *et al.* (2020) confirm this importance.

Integration and social interaction were not significant for contributing activities. However, these motives are significant in studies on sports fans and brand consumers (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Vale and Fernandes, 2018; Buzeta *et al.*, 2020; Machado *et al.*, 2020). Handball's niche status and smaller fan base may reduce the need for extensive online communities, favoring more personal and intimate interactions.

Entertainment, remuneration, personal identity, and brand love did not significantly affect contributing activities. Entertainment motives lead to passive content consumption rather than active creation. Handball fans, driven by deeper passion and loyalty, engage more emotionally than for entertainment. Personal identity needs are often satisfied through content consumption, event attendance, and club-related activities rather than active content creation.

Brand love, significant in Vale and Fernandes (2018), shows deeper emotional involvement in soccer fans than handball fans, who have fewer resources and lower global popularity. Remuneration, significant in other studies, is less important for handball fans, who are motivated by passion and community rather than material benefits.

The study indicates that only the need for information and empowerment significantly impact social media content contributing among handball fans, partially supporting Hypothesis 2. Handball clubs should focus on providing valuable information and enhancing fans' sense of importance and influence to increase engagement.

Fans' content creation, such as original posts, memes, or videos, is primarily driven by social integration and interaction. Fans who value social interaction are more likely to create content to build relationships and participate in shared experiences. This importance is confirmed by studies by Muntinga *et al.* (2011) and Vale and Fernandes (2018).

Studies by other authors show that the motives of empowerment and remuneration have a positive effect on creation, suggesting that a sense of empowerment and the expectation of rewards can encourage fans and brand consumers to create content (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Vale and Fernandes, 2018; Buzeta *et al.*, 2020). However, these motives were found to be insignificant for handball club fans.

Handball clubs have smaller financial resources and marketing budgets compared to soccer clubs, leading to fewer and less attractive loyalty programs, contests, and initiatives for fan engagement. This results in fewer opportunities for handball fans to engage in content creation motivated by rewards or empowerment. Soccer clubs, by contrast, often hold contests, give away prizes, and run loyalty programs to motivate fans to create and share content (Ronald and Jean-Pierre, 2019). Handball fan communities are more locally oriented, focusing on direct interactions rather than global campaigns.

Our research shows that entertainment has no significant impact on content creation. Entertainment content is often short-lived, and while fans may create it occasionally, it is not their main motivation for social media activity. This differs from soccer, where the entertainment motive is significant (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Vale and Fernandes', 2018; Machado *et al.*, 2020).

Soccer stars are pop culture icons whose actions provide material for entertainment content, attracting a wide audience and media attention (Aichner, 2019). In handball, players lack the same celebrity status, and marketing budgets are smaller, limiting the creation of entertaining content (Ronald and Jean-Pierre, 2019).

The analysis showed that motivations related to information, personal identity, and brand love do not influence the creation of content by handball fans on SM. The results of the study showed that handball club fans do not feel the need to create new content about club activities on SM. Handball club information is often provided by official sources, such as club websites, sports media, or official SM profiles.

Fans may feel that they have no need for additional informational content, as this is already readily available. Official and professional news sources often offer high-quality content that is difficult for average fans to match. This may discourage them from trying to create their informative content. The information motive was also not important in the creating activities for other researchers.

Motivations related to personal identity are often introspective and individual (Filo *et al.*, 2015). Fans may focus on internally experiencing their identity as fans, which may not translate into a need to share those experiences publicly. Fans may feel that their identity is sufficiently expressed through content consumption, match attendance, wearing club gadgets, and other forms of support.

Content creation may not be seen as a necessary way to express identity. This factor may also apply to sports with a lower degree of commercialization and popularity because it was significant in Vale and Fernandes' (2018) study of soccer fans.

Brand love can lead to intensive consumption of club-related content but not necessarily to its creation. Fans may prefer to absorb content created by others that strengthens their emotional ties to the club. Fans may be fully satisfied with content created by official club profiles, sports media, and other fans. This satisfaction may reduce their motivation to create additional content, as their needs are already satisfied. However, brand love, significant in Vale and Fernandes (2018), shows differences between soccer and handball fans.

The results of the study indicate that only the need for integration and social interaction influenced the creation of SM content among handball fans, partially supporting Hypothesis 3. Other motives, such as the need for information, entertainment, personal identity, reinforcement, remuneration, and brand love, did not significantly impact content creation.

Fans are particularly motivated to create content that allows them to connect and build relationships with other fans. For handball clubs, this means they need to focus on strategies that promote social interaction and integration to increase fan activity and engagement in content creation.

6. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

The findings extend the existing literature on UGT and COBRA models by applying these theories within the context of sports fans, an area that has been relatively underexplored.

This study highlights the specific motivations that drive handball fans' engagement on SM, offering new insights into the dynamics of sports-related SM interactions. By focusing on a niche sport like handball, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how different motivational factors influence fan behavior in a specific cultural and sporting context.

From a practical standpoint, the study provides actionable insights for handball club managers and marketers. Understanding that information and brand love are significant drivers of content consumption, clubs should prioritize providing up-to-date, valuable information and fostering emotional connections with fans.

Enhancing fans' sense of empowerment and integrating social interaction can further encourage active content contribution and creation. By tailoring SM strategies to these identified motivations, clubs can increase fan engagement, loyalty, and ultimately enhance marketing and ticket revenues.

In conclusion, this research not only broadens the theoretical framework of UGT and COBRA in the sports domain but also provides practical recommendations for effectively engaging fans through targeted SM strategies. These insights can help handball clubs and other sports organizations to better understand and leverage the motivational drivers of their fan base, leading to more effective fan engagement and stronger community ties.

One of the primary limitations of this study is its focus on a specific demographic group – fans of two leading Polish handball clubs – which may not be representative of the broader population of handball fans or fans of other sports. The data collection was conducted through online surveys within closed SM groups, potentially limiting the diversity of respondents and introducing a selection bias.

Additionally, the self-reported nature of the survey data may be subject to social desirability bias, where participants could overstate their engagement levels or motivations. The study's cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to infer causality between motivations and SM engagement behaviors.

Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, diversifying the sample, and using mixed-methods approaches to gain deeper insights into fan behavior across different contexts.

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