

Online Communities in Sport

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Chapter 3: Online Communities in Sport

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Chapter Objectives:

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Distinguish between on-domain communities and communities hosted on social media
- Categorize different types of communities in different sport business contexts
- Analyze and assess online community success in the context of sport management
- Describe and assess business impacts of sport communities
- Recognize the key tasks and skills required for community managers
- Outline future trends and directions for communities in the field of sport management

Keywords

business impacts

community health

community management

community success

on-domain communities

online communities

sport communities

Introduction

Online communities have been part of the technological developments surrounding social media. Often, the terms social media and online communities are used interchangeably, however, there are some noteworthy distinctions, which we will explore in this chapter. **Online communities** can be defined as “virtual space(s) where people come together with others to

converse, exchange information or other resources, learn, play, or just be with each other” (Kraut & Resnick, 2011, p. 1). Online communities are social in nature and usually aimed at sustaining relationship building among members. Traditionally, researchers have emphasized a commonality among community members, for example, through the existence of shared experiences, conditions, goals, or convictions (Sproull & Arriaga, 2007). More recent studies of online communities present them as new organizational forms, because they differ in the way tasks are divided and allocated, as well as in respect to the way information flows are designed and rewards distributed, (i.e., key parameters of organization design, Puranam et al., 2014). Even if not all of them classify as new organizational forms, they frequently extend beyond digital marketing and have the potential to shape the digital strategies and competitive advantages of modern organizations (Bussgang & Bacon, 2020; Wagner et al. 2017).

The field of sport provides a fertile ground for online community building (Lupinek, 2019; Popp & Woratschek, 2016). There are several reasons for this. First, emotional bonds between fans are a defining feature of sport; fans are often passionate about the teams they support and are actively seeking to engage in exchanges with other fans (Smith & Stewart, 2010). Second, fandom of a specific team or discipline can be viewed as creating a shared identity which binds community members together (Lock & Heere, 2017). In fact, research has shown that engagement in **sport communities** enhances identification with the organization, team and stadium attendance (Yoshida et al., 2015). As we will see later, there are different types of communities when it comes to the objectives they are designed to meet. Communities may cater to sports entities at different levels. For example, there are online communities operating at the team level (e.g., Manchester United), at the association level (e.g., English Premier League), at the sport level (e.g., soccer), or sport at large. The mini cases provided in this chapter illustrate some of these online communities.

As an introductory example, you can think of Reddit, the news site and self-proclaimed “front page of the internet” (Reddit, 2020a), as hosting multiple sport-related communities. The biggest and most general one, Reddit Sports, has more than 17 million subscribers and ranks 26th in size compared to all communities hosted on the platform. On average, Reddit Sports receives 42 posts and 243 comments per day (Subreddit Stats, 2020). Furthermore, there are more than 70 subreddits, i.e., dedicated forums to specific topics, in the field of sport, featuring all major leagues and numerous smaller sport disciplines (Reddit, 2020b).

Based on the definition of online community introduced above, one could argue that the primary community may be identified by common emotional bonds and a shared identity. For example, take a basketball team, and its primary community would be the sum of all fans of the team. However, the primary community may be dispersed and interact across multiple physical and digital channels. Fans of a team, for instance, would meet physically at games or in sport bars, or distant fans of the team can come together and unite on digital channels, including different social media sites, with a dedicated online community being one – potentially the most important one – of them.

This chapter focuses explicitly on self-hosted communities or so-called **on-domain communities** (which are hosted on the web presence of a specific sport entity, therefore the name *on-domain*). They are treated as an independent class of communities, apart from Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and the other prominent social media platforms. On-domain communities come with certain advantages and disadvantages, requiring online marketing and social media teams to weigh them carefully before opting for one or the other. Integrating and accounting for on-domain communities in sport will help professionals to evaluate strategic options and implications when deciding where to invest scarce digital marketing budgets.

Learning activity 1

In your experiences being online, have you come across any self-hosted or on-domain communities in a general business context? How about communities in a field related to sport (e.g., health, tourism)? How about specific ones in the context of sport business? What makes them communities, i.e. what is it that binds their members together? Please identify examples and briefly discuss them.

History

Some of today's online communities were started in the 1990's as forums or message boards, but, as growth continued, were later migrated to more modern technology infrastructure. The online community phenomenon is strongly related to the rise of the internet (Kim, 2000) and, more specifically, the proliferation of Web 2.0. While the first generation of internet-based applications, i.e. static web pages, largely carried one-way messages supplied by publishers, Web 2.0 incorporated participatory and collaborative content (e.g., text, audio files, photo, video), produced and controlled by users. The term Web 2.0 denotes the shift in the nature of these applications (O'Reilly Media, 2005), which was essential for more sophisticated community-building to take place. Scholars of sport management and sport marketing have since discovered online communities as a worthy sub-field of investigation (Lupinek, 2019; Popp & Woratschek, 2016). Lately, sport management scholars have focused on the topics of digital transformation (Ströbel et al., 2019) and digital innovation (Ratten, 2016), yet online communities remain an integral part of these conversations. That is because they (still) are novel, digital channels with significant untapped potential to create value for a multitude of sport stakeholders, such as fans, players, coaches, league officials, club owners, club executives, suppliers, event organizers, publishers, sponsors, and many more.

Key Concepts for Understanding

What Kind of Community is Right for Me? Exploring Community Types

The term community, with its positive connotation and focus on shared conviction or interest, is appealing to many, especially from a marketing perspective. For this reason, the community label is commonly used in practice, whereas, in theory, this would be hard to defend. Thus, we should be careful when distinguishing between different types of communities. This chapter deliberately starts with the term online community in its general notion. Below is an overview of the different community types as they can be found in the world of sports (adapted from Wagner et al., 2016).

Brand communities

Brand communities are virtual spaces that specifically focus on an organization's brand or product (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The Harley Owners Group by Harley Davidson is frequently cited as an example of a successful brand community. Brand communities also seem to have attracted most of the research attention in the field of sport management and marketing (Lupinek, 2019). This may not be surprising, given that consumers normally like to engage in a dialogue surrounding their hobbies, in particular sport. Mini Case 1 presents an example of a brand community run by FC Bayern München.

Mini case 1 - A brand community hosted by a club: FC Bayern München

Community site: FCB Forum available at <https://forum.fcbayern.com/>

Fußball-Club Bayern München, commonly known as FC Bayern Munich, is a professional German sports club based in Munich, Germany. It is best known for its professional soccer team, which plays in the Bundesliga, the top tier of the German soccer league, and is the most successful club in German soccer history. FC Bayern won a record 30 national titles and 20 national cups, along with numerous European honors.

FC Bayern Munich is not only the best football club on the field, it is also a German social media champion, placed at the top of the Social Media Index 2020, curated by the International Football Institute (FC Bayern Munich, 2020). FC Bayern's social media team is active on the main social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube – but it also runs its own community forum, which was founded in 2006. The FCB Forum is publicly accessible and integrated into the FC Bayern Munich website. As of August 2020, the FCB Forum has 2.860 topics, 2.342.097 posts and 9.868 members. Fans talk about the team, rumors of players' changes, practice and much more. Through the use of gamification, community members can collect points, e.g. for starting a discussion, commenting or liking others' contributions. Based on these points, a ranking is built, retaining a competitive element. Through the FCB Forum, supporters from around the world have the opportunity to become “more than just a fan.”

Themed or branded communities

In contrast to a brand community, where the focus is on a specific brand or its products, a themed community addresses a theme of general interest to many. Popp and Woratschek (2016) suggest that some organizations may find it attractive to widen the scope of an online community beyond their immediate product or service. As a consequence, they introduce the term *branded communities* to denote a brand's sponsorship of a themed community. A good example of a branded community in sport is fussball.de (<http://www.fussball.de/>), a soccer portal, which is run by the German Football Association in cooperation with Deutsche Telekom, a telecommunication provider (see Mini Case 2). Examples for other themed communities include sports technology (<https://www.starters.co/latest>) or communities dedicated to specific sport disciplines, such as soccer (<https://www.reddit.com/r/soccer/>).

Mini Case 2 – A themed community hosted by an association: Fussball.de

Community site: Fussball forum available at <http://www.fussball.de/ugc/-/foren/11#!/>

Fussball.de is a platform provided by the DFB, the German Football Association, one of the biggest professional associations in the world (Deutscher Fußball-Bund, 2020). Fussball.de is the central portal for amateur soccer in Germany. The portal is developed and maintained by Deutsche Telekom (Deutscher Fußball-Bund, 2019), a German telecommunications firm, which is a sponsor of both FC Bayern Munich and the German Football Association (Deutsche Telekom, 2020). With help of the community, the DFB aims to establish a lively exchange of opinions about German amateur soccer, coaches, games and players. The community is structured around subforums focused on men's football, women's football and youth football, with further subdivisions in each category. Beyond a regular (fan) profile, through which members can create and share content, there is also the option to register a player profile. After verification, this extended profile allows the automatic publication of additional personal data in the user's profile of the DFBnet database, for example the personal club history or player statistics.

Service communities

Service communities, as the name implies, focus specifically on the service component of a specific brand or product. They are often more problem-centered and designed to quickly answer fan/consumer questions about certain products or resolve complaints. The community-aspect comes into play when both formal customer support specialists, paid by the organization, as well as motivated community members, normally volunteers, answer the questions posted. While improving service is a concern to sport organizations and research has shown that social media is used specifically for this purpose (Abeza et al., 2017), there is a lack of examples for dedicated service communities in the domain of sport management. However, plenty of examples exist in other industries, such as consumer electronics

(<https://www.dell.com/community>), telecommunications (<https://crowdsupport.telstra.com.au/>, which includes a sport subsection) or travel (<https://community.withairbnb.com/>).

Innovation communities

Often based on the concept of open innovation, innovation communities are focused on integrating (lead) users and other external stakeholders into organizational problem-solving (Chesbrough, 2003). A prime example of such an innovation community is OpenIDEO, which serves as a platform to bring ‘problem sponsors’ and ‘problem solvers’ together, often with a focus on grand societal challenges. One of the more recent sport-related challenges carried out on OpenIDEO is the Nike Circular Innovation Challenge, seeking to create waste-free products using Nike Grind materials (<https://challenges.openideo.com/challenge/nike-design-with-grind/top-ideas>). Initially, more than 400 ideas were generated by contest participants, of which 12 were later selected and further developed jointly with Nike, Inc.

Internal communities

Social intranets, or social network sites used in work settings, have become a standard instrument to connect internal stakeholders of organizations, often employees of large organizations. For example, Nike, adidas, and other multinational sport organizations all run social intranets to connect their global workforces. Through social intranets it is possible to set up and support internal communities that share certain interests or work collaboratively on joint projects, (e.g., novel products, Wagner et al., 2017). Internal communities may prove particularly valuable to membership-based organizations, such as sport clubs and sport associations, where members are often geographically dispersed and do not interact personally on a day-to-day basis. In a survey about the use of digital instruments in voluntary sport clubs across Germany and Austria, administered to club chairs, board members and executive directors, Ehnold and

colleagues (2020) found that internal and external communication is the most frequently cited category of digital instruments in use, reported by 93.7 % of respondents.

(Online) Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice were popularized by Wenger (2000) and describe the exchange and learning processes among peers who work in similar functional roles. Culver and Trudel (2008) apply the concept of Communities of Practice to the field of sport management, citing multiple examples of coaching communities. While existing studies were conducted in offline settings, usually by interviewing coaches, there is an opportunity for these Communities of Practice to assemble in virtual spaces. The International Coaching Federation, for example, sponsors a number of virtual Communities of Practice (<https://coachfederation.org/communities-of-practice>) on the topics of, for instance, career coaching, coaching science, and ethics.

The abovementioned community types may be viewed as generic types and in isolation, but they may also come in mixed forms. The main point of the discussion was to make readers aware of the conceptual differences between and the application of different community types across the spectrum of sport management.

Learning activity 2

Take a look at the communities below and assess whether they fit any of the categories introduced above. Do they neatly fit one category? What criteria would you use to assign them to a particular classification? Discuss your assessment with a classmate.

1. <https://www.reddit.com/r/nba/>
2. <https://www.theamericanoutlaws.com/>
3. <https://innovation.ispo.com/pages/ueber>
4. <https://www.usultimate.org/>

Why Choose an On-Domain Community? Factors to Consider from a Business Perspective

As outlined earlier, the decision for or against an on-domain community is somewhat strategic and the section below outlines relevant criteria which need to be considered.

Community and data ownership

On-domain communities can also be called proprietary communities. That is because they are owned and operated by their host organizations. This is in stark contrast with creating a specific page or profile on a social media site, where the account (and the content produced by it) belongs to the platform that runs the service, e.g. Facebook. In fact, owning the data that is generated in the community and having access to user profiles (and thus, the possibility to directly interact with fans/consumers) may be considered some of the key drivers to set up an on-domain community.

Community governance

Community governance is about control and direction of the community. Contrary to social media outlets, where the big platforms decide on the rules that are being enforced, on-domain communities enable community hosts to develop and enforce their own community rules. Many of you will have seen 'netiquettes' on community sites that describe the behavioral norms guiding social interactions. These may include details about what kind of content is desirable in a community, the type of language that is deemed adequate, and how rules are being enforced. The Australian Institute of Sport, for example, has developed a guideline that can be used and adapted by all kinds of sport organizations (<https://www.ais.gov.au/networks/social-media-principles>). Governance also includes autonomy over strategic decisions, such as whether and how online advertising or sponsorships can be integrated into the community, (i.e., its monetization).

Community design

The big social media sites are often the benchmark and role models for community sites. Many of the core functionalities and design features observed on major social media sites will inspire the design of community sites. Nevertheless, the ultimate decision of how a community will look like and which components it will have rests with the host. While it may be desirable for many to be able to design a community platform from scratch, it can also be pricey. Having some default options to draw on may be beneficial to community hosts, especially to novices who may not have a clear idea what an optimal community design should entail.

Website and ecommerce integration

Many organizations still focus their online marketing endeavors on their website, which means that the website is the central hub through which all other channels get connected. This model is often referred to as a hub-and-spoke model in digital marketing. One of the key advantages of on-domain communities is the fact that they are *on-domain*, meaning that they are normally part of a domain of a specific website (e.g., community.companyxyz.com). This, in turn, means that the social interactions with fans/consumers take place on home turf (i.e., the company's website) which, among other things, helps to enhance search engine rankings. The benefit may be even bigger if there is a tight integration with the company's e-commerce offerings (i.e. their web shop), as it facilitates easier access to different offerings. For example, there is a high chance for a visitor to navigate directly from a community discussion to the online shop in order to purchase an item that was featured in the discussion.

Costs involved

On-domain communities are (initially) more expensive to set up than communities run on social media sites. Although revenue models of software providers differ somewhat, the general cost structure for on-domain communities usually consists of the following pillars: monthly basic

fees for use of the software (often dependent on the different modules used), fees tied to the number of members in a community (i.e., community size), fees tied to the visits to a community (i.e., community attention) and fees for customizations (i.e. the adjustment of the software to the individual needs of each community host). There are further costs involved for the marketing of the community, so that host organizations get potential members to visit the site and sign up. Ultimately, there is also an overhead for **community management** activities, (i.e., the manpower required to moderate and run the community). Indeed, 6-to-7-digit community budgets (on an annual basis) are not unusual for larger organizations (Ellermann et al., 2016).

Does It Work? Assessing Community Success

Of course, managers of online communities will be interested in and evaluated on how well their communities are doing. Their main objective is to develop a thriving community. That may sound easier than it is. Researchers have found that most communities struggle to activate their members. According to Nonnecke and Preece (2000), up to 90% of community members never become active upon joining a community, with lurking behavior (i.e. passive observation) being a dominant and common problem (Kokkodis et al., 2020).

According to Wagner et al. (2014) the extent to which an online community's vital systems are performing well is referred to as online **community health**. The authors, based on previous research, interviews with community managers, and a data set from MOTOR-TALK, Europe's biggest Auto and Motor Community, derived seven dimensions of online community health. These seven dimensions are presented below.

Dimension	Description
Content (quantitative)	Content is normally considered the life blood of communities. It denotes the addition of new content, such as new threads and new posts.

Content (qualitative)	Value of content in the eyes of the community members (i.e., information quality or, alternatively, social satisfaction online).
Interactivity	A high level of interactivity can be characterized by long threads with many posts and many community members contributing to it. This equals more individual viewpoints being heard and/or a broader integration of expertise.
Atmosphere	The general ‘touch and feel’ of the community (e.g., flaming and constructiveness of exchanges). Community members need to feel comfortable in order to contribute. Highly relevant in the context of hate-speech, prevalent in many online spaces.
Members	The number of community members. Of particular interest is the retention of central or core community members over time. Monthly active users seem to be an established metric frequently reported in the media.
Responsiveness	Responsiveness denotes the tendency for community members to respond to queries by others. A response may provide answers to a question, advice or support to someone in need as well as opinions on a discussion topic. The timeliness of the response also matters.
Trust	The ability to trust people’s actions or what they say. Members who have a longer track record in the community or those with a significant amount of contributions are likely to be more trustworthy. Such details are often provided on profile pages and serve as signals to other community members. Highly relevant in the context of online mis-information.

Table 1. Dimensions of community health, adapted from Wagner et al. (2014), pp. 7-8

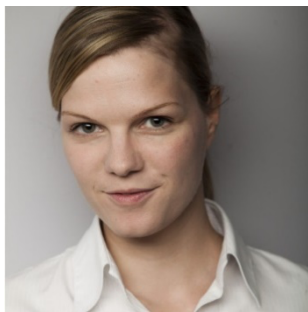
It is worth mentioning that for some of the dimensions introduced above, indicators for measurement are readily available (e.g., the quantity of content measured by new threads and

posts), while for others, measurement is much trickier and requires more sophisticated ways of working with available data, or, in their absence, simple proxies that can be used instead.

Practitioner Perspective

Practitioner: Bianca Oertel, Senior Community Manager & Team Lead at MOTOR-TALK, Europe's biggest Auto and Motor Community

Education: Master's degree in business administration with a specialization in marketing, HTW Berlin - University of Applied Sciences



MOTOR-TALK.de was founded in Berlin in 2001 as a special interest community through an integration of 30 automotive forums. Since then, it has evolved into Europe's largest online community focused on cars and car-related topics. Besides cars and motorcycles, motor sport is an important thematic pillar. The community, consisting of 4.5 million unique users, attracting 4.1 million unique visitors a month, has produced more than 60 million posts, which appear in roughly 700 thematic and branded forums, with distinct sub-communities dedicated to the Formula 1 and private motor sport, as examples. In 2015, the company was acquired by Mobile.de GmbH, Germany's largest vehicle trading platform, and a subsidiary of eBay.

From 2004 to 2010, Bianca Oertel studied marketing at HTW Berlin. During her studies, she started working for MOTOR-TALK in the field of community management. Today, she is a Senior Community Manager and runs a community management team, which includes both employees and volunteers (moderators). Next to her job at MOTOR-TALK, she is a member of

the German Association for Community Management (BVCM) and an examiner in the certification program for social media and community professionals, which the association runs. Since 2010, she has been organizing Berlin's Stammtisch of social media and community managers, a community of practice. "At MOTOR-TALK, the community management team is the interface between the company and our community of users. We are here to protect the interests of both parties; that is our primary mission."

Box title: The original interview was published in German in Clauss et al. (2020). For the purpose of this chapter, it was shortened and translated into English by the author.

Learning activity 3:

Take a look at one of the communities that has been introduced in this chapter. Following this examination, take a more detailed look at a couple of threads (approximately 5 to 10) and try to assess the dimensions of community health introduced above, both objectively and subjectively. Would you classify the community as healthy? Why or why not? Discuss your results and support your argument.

What Do We Get Out of It? Business Impacts of Communities

In a recent survey of the German Association for Community Management (BVCM), Clauss et al. (2019) surveyed more than 300 social media and community managers about the specific business objectives they are pursuing with their activities. The study found that the participants' primary goal was the increase of media reach, which 78% of them named as an objective. Next on the list are increasing engagement (61%), brand awareness (54%), and customer retention (34%). A considerable number (43%) of them stated that they were interested in winning new customers, and 27% of them directly attempt to increase sales. This is roughly in line with a comparable survey by The Community Roundtable (Happe & Storer, 2020), based in the United States.

In one analysis of the ‘social dollars’ generated by a customer community, Manchanda and colleagues (2015) take a look at customer expenditures after joining a community of a multichannel entertainment products retailer. They found that there is a significant increase in customer expenditures that is explained by the social behaviors of community members. More active members (in terms of posting) and better-connected members (in terms of friendships ties created) contribute 3% and 16%, respectively, to the additional expenditures generated by the community. They further calculate that the community broke even with about 33,000 community members. However, the community counted more than 260,000 members within the first 15 months after the community launch, thus making the community a “very profitable investment” (Manchanda et al., 2015, p. 384).

The objectives above mainly relate to the class of external communities, i.e., of those facing external stakeholders, such as fans/customers. As mentioned in the section on community types, there are also internal communities, such as the social intranets that connect members of (voluntary) sport organizations or communities of practice. Here the goals differ somewhat. Internal communities, according to Clauss et al. (2019), are normally aimed at connecting employees or community members (indicated by 93%), accessing expertise (indicated by 87%) and identifying experts (indicated by 47%), as well as strengthening collaboration (indicated by 80 %). Interestingly, engagement, named by 60% as an explicit goal, scores equally high for both internal and external communities.

Key Skills for Practice

In previous studies of social media and community managers by the German Association for Community Management, Ellermann et al. (2016) distinguished between five broad sets of skills, based on routine tasks these professionals engage in on a daily basis.

Strategic skills

Community managers will normally develop their own community strategy, which requires a plan for implementation, the development of performance measurement indicators and routines for continuous measurement, the drafting of reports for senior management, but also the promotion of the community both internally and externally as well as the benchmarking against competitors. Many of the inputs for these documents were discussed in the sections above. Importantly, the community strategy is rarely a stand-alone document. Very frequently, it relates and feeds directly into the broader marketing, innovation or digital (transformation) strategies, hereby aligning with corporate strategy.

Content production

As mentioned in a number of chapters in this book, content production and distribution are central aspects of online community work. This includes the planning, production and scheduling of internal content and curation of externally produced content. Social media and community managers are also frequently involved in conceptualizing and running campaigns of different sorts. Importantly, given the nature of social media and the multiple content formats used in different settings, content no longer just represents texts, but images, infographics, voice-recordings, video and more. A comparison of social media and community managers reveals that content production is the most time-consuming category of work for social media managers.

Nurturing social interactions

Community managers need to find creative ways to activate the community and foster social interactions. They do this by recruiting new community members, writing responses to queries and requesting contributions, connecting community members with each other, designing incentive programs for power users and recruiting (volunteer) moderators that will help with the management of sub-communities, e.g. local chapters. A comparison of social media and

community managers reveals that nurturing social interactions is the most time-consuming category of work for community managers. Thus, for the community manager, the work is more about creating leverage (through community members) than producing the content alone.

Leadership skills

Community managers are normally part of a community team and may thus find themselves in different leadership roles. They may, for example, recruit additional people to their team, be responsible for developing individual team members in certain areas, coordinating service providers and leading of project teams. The leadership category does not seem to be prevalent in terms of where most time is spent on a daily basis, however, it is an important category. Specifically, it is telling that social media and community managers frequently seem to be engaged in cross-functional teams and initiatives, e.g. with marketing, product development, or innovation units, thereby having to leverage soft power – or distributed leadership - instead of being formally in the position to determine the team's course of action.

Technical skills

Ultimately, there are also a number of technical skills required for the work in this domain. Social media managers are used to working with a number of content-related and analytics tools, such as content management systems (e.g., Wordpress), image processors and video cutting (e.g., the Adobe Suite), social media management systems (e.g., Hootsuite), social media monitoring solutions (e.g., Brandwatch) or web analytics (e.g., Google Analytics). The work of community managers may be slightly more technical, because, specifically in the case of on-domain communities, community managers are frequently overseeing development work. This may include coordination with internal or external software developers, for example, being able to articulate (unique) technical requirements or new feature requests and, thereby, influence

the future development of the underlying community software. In case of a community migration, knowledge of relational databases and data structures is important.

Trends and Current Issues

Keeping up with the field's speed of development

One of the key challenges for most social media and community management teams is the field's speed of development. New platforms are joining the social media ecosystem on a regular basis, sometimes changing the types of media used, e.g. the recent focus on voice and video, and frequently introducing new features, such as stories or moments. Think of TikTok or Snapchat as some of the latest entrants to the field. Keeping up with these developments and translating current trends into community features is a recurring challenge for community managers.

Communities for marketing *and* innovation

The field of user innovation has witnessed a rise in popularity over recent years. There is much potential for including lead users in initiatives surrounding new product development or the enhancement of existing products. Currently, however, innovation communities are just a small niche in the community space. Social media and community management teams are frequently unaware of this opportunity. This does not come as a surprise, given that community teams are normally reporting to marketing departments (Clauss et al., 2019). This may also explain the prominence of brand communities in sport. It is time for innovation departments to step up and get involved. Never before has it been so easy to reach out to diverse stakeholders and leverage open innovation in the field of sport management (Ratten, 2016).

The rise of communities in esports

Esports is a field that is particularly conducive to community-building. Game publishers have a long track record for running communities. This makes a lot of sense, since players are

already interacting in a digital environment and are normally sophisticated users of digital technologies (Kramer et al., forthcoming). It seems natural to establish a virtual community where professional and personal exchanges can take place, and bonds between players of certain game titles can develop. The rise in popularity of esports over the recent years leads to a growth in potential community members. As a result of the spread of the Corona pandemic in early 2020, severe lockdowns were implemented in many countries around the world. Esports has been a beneficiary of the pandemic, with player numbers and revenues surging during the lockdown. In conjunction, community participation (e.g., at EA Games) increased significantly.

Chapter Summary

This chapter is about online communities in sport. While communities may be hosted on social media sites, the focus of this chapter is to shed light on proprietary or so called on-domain communities as a specific class of communities. The chapter started with a short review of the history of online communities and situating the phenomenon in the field of sport management. It then described different types of online communities in the context of sport management. Judging from a business perspective, the chapter discussed important factors to consider which distinguish on-domain communities from other social media platforms. A system for the measurement of success was put forward, followed by a discussion of **business impacts** of online communities. Key skills for community managers were then described. The chapter concluded with future trends and developments at the intersection of communities and sport management.

Key resources

Software providers in the field of online communities:

Providers of internal communities:

- Higher Logic: <https://www.higherlogic.com/>

- Jive: <https://www.jivesoftware.com/>
- Microsoft Sharepoint: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/sharepoint/collaboration>

Providers of external (customer) communities:

- Brandslisten: <https://www.brandslisten.com/>
- Khoros: <https://khoros.com/>
- Vanilla: <https://vanillaforums.com/en/>

Providers of innovation contests and communities:

- Hyve: <https://www.hyve.net/en/>
- InnoCentive: <https://www.innocentive.com/>
- OpenIDEO: <https://www.openideo.com/>

Professionalizing the discipline of community management world-wide:

- CMX Hub: <https://cmxhub.com/>
- The Community Roundtable: <https://communityroundtable.com/>
- German Association for Community Management: <https://www.bvcm.org/>

Knowledge review & discussion questions

1. Name of few reasons why sport is a fertile ground for online community building.
2. What has Web 2.0 to do with online communities?
3. What are some of the key differences between communities hosted on social media compared to on-domain communities?
4. Name and explain the generic types of communities that were introduced in this chapter. Please give an example for each.

5. Why would you consider an on-domain community as potential alternative to hosting a social media community? Please explain the underlying factors.
6. What is community health? How can you measure it?
7. What are some business objectives for running communities? To what extent do objectives differ for internal and external communities? Why?
8. What are some of the key skills that community managers need to possess?
9. Please name and explain three trends in the field of sport communities.

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