

Research article

Social Media Engagement in Sports Clubs: A COBRA-Based Analysis of Age and Club Division Effect

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Abstract: Sports teams use social media to boost fan loyalty and competitiveness. Brands and customers use social media for various reasons. Football fans' social media activity and whether age and club position (first or second division) are statistically significant variables will be examined in this study. Using a descriptive quantitative design, data were collected from 939 followers of 50 Omani football clubs across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Fan engagement was analyzed through the Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRA) framework, which includes consumption, contribution, and creation activities. The results revealed that consumption activities dominated fan behavior ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.54$), followed by contribution ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.53$) and creation ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.63$). The most frequent activity was "watching videos posted by the sports club" ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.94$). Statistical analysis using ANOVA indicated no significant differences in engagement levels across age groups or between first and second division clubs ($p > 0.05$), suggesting a consistent engagement pattern among fans. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$) confirmed strong internal consistency of the instrument. These findings demonstrate that Omani football fans primarily act as passive consumers rather than active contributors or creators. Therefore, sports clubs should prioritize visual and video-based content to enhance engagement. The study validates the COBRA model in the Omani sports context and provides practical insights for developing effective, inclusive social media strategies.

Keywords: Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRA), Engagement Activities, Fan Engagement, Social Media

1. Introduction

Football is considered one of the most popular sports globally as a niche market [1]. It is the most popular Sport regarding media coverage and audience engagement [2]. In recent years, football has faced changes; the internet, satellite receivers, digital publishing, and information technology have contributed to the sports sector's globalization. Its rise has opened new communication channels and communities, allowing sports clubs to build a global fan base of always-on committed supporters [3]. In the very competitive world of especially football, teams strive to set themselves apart and grow their fan base by creating powerful, distinct, and positive images in the eyes of their supporters [2]. Thus, supporters can connect with teams and players anywhere in the world, giving them unparalleled access to their favorite clubs [4].

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 [5]. Fans' engagement in social media brand communities facilitates building brand awareness, trust, and loyalty [6], [7]. Because

consumers and brands have a close relationship, fan involvement incorporates customers' passion for the brand [5], [8]. Fan engagement is the term used to describe a group of brand-related exchanges that go beyond monetary exchanges and include discussing and exchanging ideas, feelings, and views about brand experiences with other brand consumers [9], [10]. This is reflected in the literature on sports marketing [11]–[13]. Fan engagement, which often extends beyond real purchases, is a person's psychologically grounded propensity to invest in focal interactions with particular engagement objects (such as a brand or corporation) [14], [15].

It could be argued that there is a lack of literature in the Sultanate of Oman and the Arabian Gulf pertaining to the connection between sports fans and sports organizations. Several previous studies have highlighted factors that drive stadium attendance as well as reasons for reluctance to attend, but have not addressed the role of social media in the sports fan experience [16]–[20]. However, social media has become a significant part of the fan experience in the digital age, leading to the digital displacement of football fans [13], [21], [22]. 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.

Therefore, this research will shed light on activities that positively influence fans' engagement towards clubs on social media. Through the investigation of the level of fans' engagement activities on sports clubs' social media (Consumption, Contribution, and Creation activities). Based on the Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRA) approach. Finally, this study will investigate the effect of engagement activities on the age variable and the club's position variable (in the first or second division).

Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRA)

Consumers' online brand-related activities on social media are proposed within a unified framework [23]. These brand-related online activities strategically influence digital marketing communications [24], as social media has changed how businesses engage with their customers [25]. Consumers' online brand-related activities are behavioral indicators of their engagement, reflecting how practitioners evaluate the success of their social media communication initiatives [24], [26].

Several studies have proposed three main types of online brand-related activities: content consumption, contribution, and creation [23]. These social media usage types demonstrate varying levels of engagement and can be seen as a continuum from high to low brand-related activity behavior. The Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRA) paradigm offers valuable insight into understanding brand-related social media activity. COBRA 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" [26]. Additionally, COBRA is defined as a behavioral construct that provides a unifying framework to think about consumer activity pertaining to brand-related content on social media platforms [23].

Consumption refers to user behaviors such as viewing brand-related content, including posts and videos, clicking on links, or reading reviews, without engaging in direct interaction or contribution [27]–[29]. This passive form of engagement indicates that users absorb content without reciprocating or participating actively [28]. Among the various types of online activities, consumption is the most prevalent [23], [30], and it plays a significant role in enhancing brand visibility and attracting new followers—objectives commonly associated with the initial stages of the marketing funnel [27].

Contribution-level engagement, representing the intermediate stage of user interaction, involves activities such as liking brand-related content, posting comments, or participating in discussions. These actions reflect a more active involvement with the brand and can transform consumers into informal brand advocates [27], [28], [30]. This form of engagement specifically pertains to user interaction with existing media produced by the brand or other sources [26], [27].

At the highest level of engagement, users engage in content creation, which entails producing, sharing, and co-creating brand-related materials. Examples include the use of branded hashtags, writing articles, or uploading images associated with the brand [27], [28], [30]. Such user-generated content can act as a catalyst, encouraging further consumption or contribution from other users [23].

Table 1. Consumers' online brand-related activities typology as a continuum of three usage types [23].

COBRA Type	Examples of Brand-Related Social Media Use
Consuming	• Viewing brand-related videos • Listening to brand-related audio • Watching brand-related pictures • Following threads on online brand community forums • Reading comments on brand profiles on social media sites • Reading product reviews • Playing branded online video games • Downloading branded widgets • Sending branded virtual gifts or cards
Contributing	• Rating products and/or brands • Joining a brand profile on social media sites • Engaging in branded conversations (e.g., online brand communities, social media sites) • Commenting on brand-related weblogs, videos, audio, or pictures
Creating	• Publishing brand-related weblogs • Uploading brand-related audio, video, and pictures • Writing brand-related articles • Writing product reviews

Research questions

QR1: What (activities) do football fans engage in with sports clubs' social media accounts?

QR2: Do fan engagement activities on social media, namely, consuming, contributing, and creating—differ significantly based on fans' age and the club's league position (first vs. second division)?

1. Methods

2.1 Design

This study adopted a descriptive quantitative methodology to examine fan engagement activities on sports clubs' social media platforms, and to assess whether these activities differ significantly according to fans' age and the club's league status (first or second division).

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study are individuals who follow the social media accounts of Omani sports clubs. There are 50 officially recognized sports clubs in Oman, and all of them have at least one active social media account, such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. So, the 50 clubs were chosen because each one has an official account on at least one social media site. This guarantees that the comprehensive demographic of sports clubs engaged in social media in Oman is included in the research.

Table 2. Age

	Age	Frequency	Percent
Valid	less than 20	120	12.8
	21-30 years	237	25.2
	31-40 years	279	29.7
	41-50 years	217	23.1
	over 50 years	86	9.2
	Total	939	100.0

Table 3. Club Division

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	First Division	682	72.6	72.6	72.6
	Others Division	257	27.4	27.4	100.0
	Total	939	100.0	100.0	

2.3 Scale Development

A questionnaire was developed based on a comprehensive review of academic literature to examine the Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs) typology—specifically consumption, contribution, and creation behaviors. The instrument was designed to allow participants to indicate the frequency of their engagement with sports clubs' social media content. The measurement scales were adapted from previously validated studies [23], [31], [32] to fit the context of sports clubs' social media engagement. Since this questionnaire is part of the researcher's doctoral thesis, detailed information regarding its development, validation procedures, and psychometric properties (content validity by expert judges, internal consistency, and scale reliability) is documented in the scientific publication by [29].

To measure the different levels of Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities, a three-tiered scale was utilized: consumption, contribution, and creation. This scale was adapted to be applicable across various social media platforms. Table 4 presents the items used to measure each engagement level.

In this study, the three COBRA levels are defined as follows:

Consuming: This level represents passive engagement, where fans interact with content without providing feedback or participation. It involves activities such as reading posts and comments, viewing images, and watching videos shared by the sports club. Consumption is considered the most basic form of digital interaction.

Contributing: This level reflects active but relatively low-effort participation. Fans respond to club content through liking, sharing, or commenting on posts, including interactions with other users' comments. These behaviors help enhance content visibility and foster greater interaction within the digital fan community.

Creating: This is the highest level of engagement in the COBRA model, where fans independently generate and publish content related to the sports club. This includes creating posts, uploading personal pictures or videos featuring the club, adding hashtags, or writing reviews and opinions. Creation behaviors indicate strong identification, loyalty, and commitment toward the club by actively shaping its online presence.

Table 4. Measurements used for questionnaire design: Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities

Levels / Activities	Scale
Consuming	I read the content posted by the sports club on social media.
	I view pictures or photos posted by the sports club on social media.
	I watch videos posted by the sports club on social media.

Levels / Activities	Scale
	I read posts, and comments of others about the sports club on social media.
	I like the content posted by the sports club on social media.
	I share the content posted by the sports club on social media.
Contributing	I comment on posts, videos, images or forums posted by the sports club on social media.
	I comment on posts and comments of others about the sports club on social media.
	I initiate posts related to the sports club on social media.
Creating	I post pictures, videos or personal images related to the sports club on social media.
	I add labels or hashtags on social media posts related to the sports club.
	I write reviews, and personal opinions related to the sports club on social media.

Note:

The Statement: Regarding the club you follow on social media, please indicate how often you perform the following activities

**Items were measured using a 7-points rating scale: 1- Never to 7- Always (everyday/almost every day)*

2.4 Validity of the Instruments

In this research, we used content validity for the questionnaire. To establish content validity, a judgmental approach involves conducting literature reviews and then following up with the evaluation by expert judges or panels. In the validation process, the researcher listed 11 experts, comprising academic individuals specialised in sports management, marketing, and psychology. The experts evaluated all the instruments and assessed their suitability according to the research variables and divisions. The researcher used the Semantic Differential scale, which consists of 10 rating scales representing values from 0 (Not Related) to 10 (Very Related). The experts assigned a score to each of the items, as moulded by the researcher, as shown in Table 5 and 6. Among the early studies conducted using the Semantic Differential scale was a survey by [33].

Table 5. Values of Content Validity by Experts in the Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities

No	Consuming	Contributing	Creating	Score
Expert 1	1	1	1	1
Expert 2	1	1	1	1
Expert 3	1	1	1	1
Expert 4	.87	.9	.92	.90
Expert 5	1	1	1	1
Expert 6	1	1	1	1
Expert 7	1	1	1	1
Expert 8	.9	1	.77	.89
Expert 9	1	1	1	1
Expert 10	.9	1	.7	.87
Expert 11	.92	1	.92	.95
Total Value of r = 0.96				

Table 6. Values of Content Validity by Experts in the Customer Engagement on Social Media Activities Items

Items		Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5	Expert 6	Expert 7	Expert 8	Expert 9	Expert 10	Expert 11	Score
Consuming	1 I read the content posted by the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	9	10	9	9	.96
	2 I view pictures or photos posted by the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	9	10	9	10	.97
	3 I watch videos posted by the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	9	10	9	9	.96
	4 I read posts, and comments of others about the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	8	10	10	10	9	10	9	9	.95
Contributing	1 I like the content posted by the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	8	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	.98
	2 I share the content posted by the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	1
	3 I comment on posts, videos, images or forums posted by the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	8	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	.98
	4 I comment on posts and comments of others about the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	1
Creating	1 I initiate posts related to the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8	10	6	9	.93
	2 I post pictures, videos or personal images related to the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8	10	7	10	.95
	3 I add labels or hashtags on social media posts related to the sports club.	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	8	10	7	9	.93
	4 I write reviews, and personal opinions related to the sports club on social media.	10	10	10	8	10	10	10	7	10	8	9	.92

As for the Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities scale, Table 6 shows the validity index obtained an overall total of (0.96), whereas, many experts gave full marks to the scales. While the lowest value was given by Expert 10 (0.87). Looking at Table 6 all items received a higher value than (0.92).

2.5 Reliability of the Instruments

To obtain the instrument's reliability, the researcher implemented a pilot study. A pilot study is implementing a study that resembles a real study with a similar sample to obtain reliability value. For the implementation process of the pilot study, a total of no=40 people have been used for the group of football fans. This constitutes 10% of the target sample. Implementing a pilot study to obtain the reliability value of an instrument is sufficient using a sample of at least 30 people [34].

The study's results found that the value of the Cronbach Alpha (α) coefficient for this study was $r=.95$. This value is considered Very good and effective with a high level of consistency. Table 7 shows the value of the Cronbach Alpha (α) coefficient for all study construct, and all of them are Very good and effective with a high level of consistency.

Table 7. Cronbach alphas of the constructs of the Instrument

Construct	Alpha value
Customer Engagement in Social Media Activities (COBRAs)	.85
Consuming	.88
Contributing	.81
Creating	.70

Regarding the scale used to measure brand-related online activities, it presents a value of (0.85) for all the items, meaning that the entire scale is consistent [34]. The analysis of the alpha was conducted taking into consideration the values of each dimension inside the scales, consumption (0.88), contribution (0.81), and creation (0.70). All the alphas are from (0.70) and above the threshold.

2.6 Data analysis

To address the first research question, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to explore the types of activities football fans engage in on sports clubs' social media accounts. Measures such as means and standard deviations were calculated to summaries the data. For the second research question, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in engagement activities based on age groups and the club's league position (first or second division).

2. Results

3.1 The results of the first question, which states: What activities do football fans engage with sports clubs' social media accounts?

Based on the data presented in Table 8, the average score of brand-related online activities is 3.93 in 7 values. This indicates that sports fans generally have a positive attitude towards the activities mentioned in each item. However, it is important to analyze each dimension of the items, which includes consumption, contribution, and creation.

Table 8. Descriptive analysis: COBRAs

Constructs/Items	M	SD
COBRA	3.93	1.33
Consumption	4.71	1.54
I read the content posted by the sports club on social media.	4.57	2.05
I view pictures or photos posted by the sports club on social media.	4.82	1.98
I watch videos posted by the sports club on social media.	5.00	1.94
I read posts, and comments of others about the sports club on social media.	4.45	2.01
Contribution	3.92	1.53
I like the content posted by the sports club on social media.	4.30	2.05
I share the content posted by the sports club on social media.	3.72	2.03
I comment on posts, videos, images or forums posted by the sports club on social media.	3.76	2.04
I comment on posts and comments of others about the sports club on social media.	3.89	2.01
Creation	3.18	1.63
I initiated posts related to the sports club on social media.	3.29	2.10
I post pictures, videos or personal images related to the sports club on social media.	3.18	2.08
I add labels or hashtags on social media posts related to the sports club.	3.03	2.09
I write reviews and personal opinions related to the sports club on social media.	3.19	2.11

According to Table 8, the results show that participants' response towards the variable of fans' online activities related to sports clubs was gradual. It is clear that the activities of football fans in the Sultanate of Oman on the social media accounts of sports clubs tend to be "consumption activities," as they came at a high level ($M = 4.71$; $SD = 1.54$), then to "contributing" to the clubs' activities on social media, where they came at the medium level with an average ($M = 3.92$; $SD = 1.56$), and in last place is "creating activities" on social media, which is at the low level with an arithmetic mean ($M = 3.18$; $SD = 1.63$).

The most frequent activity is "I watch videos posted by the sports club on social media" ($M=5.00$; $SD=1.94$), followed by "I view pictures or photos posted by the sports club on social media" ($M=4.82$, $SD=1.98$) and "I read the content posted by the sports club on social media" ($M=4.57$; $SD=2.05$). It is noted that all of them fall into the "consumption" activities.

While in the "contribution" activities, the phrase "I like the content posted by the sports club on social media" has the highest mean ($M=4.30$; $SD=2.05$), and it is the only statement that obtained a mean higher than. As for the "creating" activities, all statements had a mean of less than.

3.2 *The results of the first question, which states: Are there statistically significant differences in activities regarding the age variable/ And the club's position variable (in the first or second division)?*

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of the activities items regarding age

Variables	less than 20 N= 120		21-30 N= 237		31-40 N= 279		41-50 N= 217		over 50 N= 86	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Consuming	4.89	1.42	4.90	1.58	4.58	1.60	4.62	1.52	4.65	1.48
Contributing	3.90	1.52	3.63	1.55	3.50	1.58	3.60	1.54	3.68	1.43
Creating	3.54	1.72	3.15	1.67	3.08	1.57	3.16	1.63	3.10	1.61

Table 10. One-way ANOVA analysis output for the activity items regarding the age

Variables		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Consuming	Between Groups	18.86	4.00	4.71	1.98	.095
	Within Groups	2221.07	934.00	2.38		
	Total	2239.93	938.00			
Contribution	Between Groups	13.49	4.00	3.37	1.42	.225
	Within Groups	2217.68	934.00	2.37		
	Total	2231.17	938.00			
Creating	Between Groups	19.33	4.00	4.83	1.81	.124
	Within Groups	2490.57	934.00	2.67		
	Total	2509.90	938.00			

Tables 9 and 10 show the comparison between the activities variables regarding age category. No statistically significant differences were found in consuming, contributing, and creating, $P\text{-value} > 0.05$.

Table 11. Comparison of activity items regarding the Clubs position

Variables	first division N=682		second division N=257		t-test	P-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Consuming	4.74	1.53	4.65	1.58	.821	.412
Contributing	3.60	1.53	3.69	1.59	-.812	.417
Creating	3.14	1.65	3.28	1.61	-1.151	.250

Table 11 shows the comparison of activity items regarding the Club's position (first and second division). The results demonstrated some variations regarding the two divisions. However, these differences were not statistically significant, $P\text{-value} > 0.05$.

3. Discussion

Technology has made it possible to watch sports programs in high quality, which has led sports clubs to overcome their fears of media broadcasting and realize the potential for live broadcasting to expand their fan base and revenue. This prompted sports clubs to monitor fan activity on social media to boost fan participation [35]. They capitalize on fans' social media use. Social media relationships between sports teams and fans boost stadium attendance and team product sales. This study used the COBRA classification, which assumes users engage with brands on social media in three ways: consumption, contribution, and creativity [23]. These stages of engagement have a hierarchical order, being passive (consumption) to active (Creation) [24].

Our results showed that respondents in the Sultanate of Oman were generally positive toward sports club activities online, with "consumer activities" being the first and "contributing" to club activities being the second. Social media "creating activities" ranked last. This result matched many previous studies, including [14], [27], [36]–[43]. Omani fans watch videos, photos, and read the sports club's social media content, sometimes expressing admiration, but they rarely create content. This contradicted the findings that responses, liking, and retweeting are the most common engagements. It was also found that football brand love boosts consumer interaction and loyalty [44]. Football and sports in general offer consumers unique and extraordinary ways to relate, love, commit to, and show loyalty that are rare in other industries. We found similar results to previous research showing that FC Porto fans are more content consumers than contributors to the club's Facebook and Instagram pages [40]. This may reduce fan-club brand interaction. Although FC Porto fans should read the club's messages regularly, a lack of participation may lead to fewer reactions and suggestions, making it harder for the club to adjust and improve its offers, address issues, and ultimately provide better service, one of the expected benefits of higher consumer engagement [40].

As the study showed, football fans in Oman search for information and watch photos and videos on social media, so few want to contribute or create content. Age and club position in the first and second divisions do not significantly affect activities. Activity variables by age are compared in Tables 8 and 9. There were no significant differences in consumption, contribution, and creation (P -value > 0.05). Table 10 compares activity items based on the Club's position (first and second division). The results showed differences between divisions. These differences were not statistically significant, P -value > 0.05 , indicating a consistent engagement pattern regardless of demographic or structural factors. This consistency suggests that digital or participatory behaviors are stable across age groups and club divisions, reflecting club culture or organisation. Omani fans' club loyalty may explain this. Most Omani clubs bear the name of the city in which they are located, which strengthens the loyalty, as the study explained [16]. Thus, future research should examine other variables that may affect activity engagement more, such as education level, digital literacy, motivation, or resource access. These findings suggest that club administrators and content strategists may benefit from a more universal approach to content and participation rather than age or division-based strategies.

4. Conclusions

Oman's football fans' social media engagement with sports clubs' accounts was examined using the COBRA framework to emphasize consumption, contribution, and creation. Consumption activities like watching videos and looking at pictures were most common, followed by moderate contribution and little content creation.

The results also showed no significant differences in engagement levels by age group or club division (first vs. second). This shows that Omani football fans use social media similarly across demographic and organizational groups. This shows how accessible and appealing digital platforms are. It confirms the COBRA model in Omani football clubs and highlights passive engagement methods, adding to the literature.

The findings emphasize the need for clubs to prioritize content formats that match users' preferences, especially visually appealing and easily consumable media like videos and images. Sports teams can boost engagement by using platform-specific strategies, promoting interactive content, and running campaigns or rewarding fans for contributing and creating content.

This study helps improve digital fan engagement and sports industry social media marketing strategies. Future research may examine additional behavioral drivers, platform disparities, and how emerging technologies affect online brand-related activities.

5. Limitations of the Study

This study offers valuable insights into social media engagement in sports clubs through the COBRA framework; however, several limitations must be recognized. First, the study depended exclusively on self-reported questionnaire data, which could be influenced by recall inaccuracies and self-reporting biases. Specifically, participants may have overestimated or underestimated their actual engagement behaviors due to the influence of social desirability. Also, the heavy use of Likert-type scales may make it harder for participants to show subtle differences in how they act online. Second, the research considered solely age and club division as independent variables. Other potentially pertinent factors such as gender, educational attainment, digital literacy, fan loyalty, and the specific social media platform utilized were not examined and may provide greater explanatory significance in subsequent research. Third, the cross-sectional design makes it hard to see how engagement patterns change over time or in response to new digital trends and platform features. The study also did not differentiate between social media platforms, even though each one may allow for different kinds of fan interaction and engagement.

Finally, while the sample size is statistically adequate, the geographic and contextual emphasis on Omani football clubs may restrict the applicability of findings to other sports, regions, or cultural contexts.

6. Future Research Directions

Future studies should explore additional demographic and psychographic variables such as gender, education, digital literacy, and fan loyalty to better understand their influence on social media engagement in sports contexts. Moreover, platform-specific analyses (e.g., Instagram vs. X) may reveal distinct patterns of consumption, contribution, and creation. Expanding the sample to include fans from different countries or sports disciplines could also enhance the generalizability of findings and offer a more comprehensive view of global fan engagement dynamics.

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