

Web interfaces for e-CRM in sports: evidence from Romanian football

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Abstract: The commercialization of Romanian football has gained momentum during the past decade, as local clubs increasingly focused their efforts on marketing. At the same time, Romanian customers' access to Internet has improved. The aim of this paper is to explore the nature of Romanian football club websites from a customer (fan) relationship management perspective. The research sets to investigate the level of customer-orientation embedded in the design of club websites and the opportunities of establishing long-term relationships with fans these websites provide. Therefore, the literature review tries to bring into foreground the importance electronic solutions play for CRM, and their applicability to the sports environment. A content research based on secondary data and website evidence, which were later integrated in computations so as to obtain quantitative evidence, has been chosen as a research method. Results show that while clubs use their websites as informational platforms, several issues have to be addressed regarding the use of websites as bonding factors between clubs and fans. Areas such as website functionality and emotionality could be improved so as to draw more attention from the fans. The research also reveals that Romanian clubs have failed to implement business solutions to help fans buy online merchandise products, which would also increase the revenues of the football clubs.

Keywords: sports marketing, customer relationship management, online marketing, relationship marketing, football.

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Introduction

Customer relationship management (CRM) is seen as a key tool in providing customer-centered solutions (King, 2007; Prejmerean and Dima, 2006). The secret of business profitability, especially in highly competitive environments, is the creation of long-term relationships with customers (Garrido-Moreno and Padilla-Melendez, 2011). In order to determine customers to maintain a long-term relationship with it, a business needs to constantly provide added value to the former ones (Damasaru et al., 2011; Pelău, 2008). In this way, Pop (2006) defines CRM as a practical way to gain competitive advantages based on the relationship a business creates with its customers. Services-providing organizations have become increasingly aware of the importance customer relationships play for their success (Karakostas et al., 2005). Nevertheless, research shows that many organizations

find it difficult to implement CRM strategies (Finnegan and Currie, 2010), as this involves sizable financial investments (Brad, 2008), as well as changes in the business process and in the overall leadership and management of the organization (Galbreath and Rogers, 1999).

Scientific literature proposes e-CRM as a cost-efficient and user-friendly solution for managing customer relationships (Pan and Lee, 2003). A relatively new concept in marketing, e-CRM describes the move of “brick and mortar” CRM to online channels (Feinberg and Kadam, 2002; Lee-Kelley et al., 2003). Sivaraks et al. (2011) believe that the ability to manage CRM increases when organizations base their marketing plans on electronic technologies such as the World Wide Web. Bradshaw and Brash (2011) found that organizations which used IT solutions increased their relationship marketing efficiency, as compared to organizations that did not embrace the benefits of the Internet.

Although e-business has witnessed a high improvement in emerging markets such as Romania over the past decade (Mazurencu-Marinescu and Nijkamp, 2008; Șerban et al., 2012), local sports have benefited from only a few of its improvements. Thereupon, this research aims to look at how Romanian football clubs use the Internet in order to interact with their fans. The use of Internet for marketing sports brands is of high importance in today’s sports management, as increasingly more clubs engage with their fans through the online environment, be it for entertainment purposes or other activities such as ticketing or corporate social responsibility (Roșca, 2011). Research shows that, in a world of constant economic and technological changes (Huidumac Petrescu et al., 2011; Pelău and Bena, 2010; Pelău and Zegreanu, 2010), customers nowadays would rather opt for customization instead of generalization (Drămnescu, 2013), and the Internet can be a tool for sporting organizations to provide one-to-one marketing for their customers. However, in order to reach customers, managers should first be aware of the capabilities of marketing (Ignat, 2012). Therefore, and given that the management has a high impact on organizational outcomes (Brătianu and Orzea, 2010; Năstase, 2009; Năstase and Barbu, 2011; Tanțău, 2008), this research tries to provide information which managers of Romanian football clubs could use to improve their fan relationships management.

The paper starts with a literature review which tries to present the importance customer relationship management plays for a good marketing strategy. Therefore, one of the ideas highlighted in this section of the paper is that organizations striving for success will have to interact with their customers. According to this idea, the paper then provides some definitions of customer relationship management, concentrating on its electronic form, wherefrom information relevant to the context of the research can be gathered. The methodology section presents the objectives of the papers and the research instrument used to gather data and analyze them. As a research tool, content analysis has been used in order to process data needed for the study. The main limitation of this paper is that the article is not innovative in terms of research on customer relationship management, similar researches having been done in other contexts as well, as the literature review proves. Customer relationship management in sports, and particularly in football, is a topic already

widely researched, with the works of authors such as Couvelaere and Richelieu (2005) or Karakostas et al. (2005) setting the standards. Moreover, electronic CRM has become a topic of wide interest with the development of the digital economy; the results of this paper weren't able to enlarge the scientific knowledge in neither e-business nor CRM. Nevertheless, the originality of this paper lies in the fact that, as it appears, it is the first paper to analyze certain issues regarding e-CRM in the context of Romanian club football. Hence, the research may prove useful for football club managers in Romania as a means to benchmark the websites of their clubs against others and seek areas of improvement. As a matter of fact, in the discussion section, the paper tries to present some ideas in this area, as well as to highlight some drawbacks currently met in the e-CRM used by football clubs.

e-Customer relationship management in sports

Over the past decades, academics have suggested that business with customers should be done on a long-term relationship based on loyalty and trust (Deming, 1988; Roşca, 2011), advocating, thus, for a paradigm shift in marketing (Brodie et al., 1997; Gummerson, 1997). The transactional approach to marketing needed to be replaced by a more dynamic, client-friendly path, as it was believed that emphasizing a long-term buyer-seller relationship would nurture an otherwise unobtainable mutually beneficial cooperation (Han et al., 1993). Recent years have seen customer relationship management being described as the new paradigm for exchange (Palmer, 1995). Being placed at the heart of modern day marketing, CRM contradicted the transactional approach, according to which marketing efforts ended once goods changed hands from seller to buyer (Pop and Pelău, 2006). As attested by the new school of thought, if marketing only focused on a one-way transaction from buyer to seller, much of its potential was going to be ignored. Recent research showed that collaborative relationships offer higher satisfaction and better performances for clients than transactional approaches do (Whipple et al., 2010). The business environment saw the need of a tool through which to manage the interaction between customers demanding increasingly more product-related information and the organization providing it (Khalifa and Shen, 2005; Foss and Stone, 2001). CRM emerged as a solution creating value not only for customers, but for all the parties involved, while also reducing opportunism-seeking behavior (Liu et al., 2009; Pop and Pelău, 2006).

Widely used in the literature, CRM has been described in various ways, sharing multiple meanings (Rababah et al., 2011). First of all, Light (2001) observes that CRM has unfolded from relationship marketing. Grönroos (1994) defines relationship marketing as a direction of marketing activity aiming to “identify and establish, maintain and enhance and, where necessary, terminate relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all the parties involved are met; and this is done by mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises” (p. 9). Customers are to be perceived as business partners, not merely as buyers of the product (Gruen, 2005; Pelău, 2008). According to Grönroos (2000), not the exchange of goods is important for marketing, but the relationships formed with customers after the exchange has taken place. It is believed that maintaining

long-term relationships with customers costs less than acquiring new ones, while also improving competitiveness (Ganesan, 1994). Nevertheless, costs are to be met in putting together the relational strategy, as relationships need to be built, maintained, and consolidated (Adăscăliței, 2000).

CRM emerges as a relationship marketing tool aiming at improving customer retention so as to drive brand loyalty and create superior brand value (Lee-Kelley et al., 2003; Pravatiyar and Sheth, 2001; Sarkar, 2011). More than retention, authors also discuss the potential of CRM in acquiring new customers, attracted to the brand by the interaction it promises (Reinartz et al., 2005; Rust and Huang, 2012). As a customer-focused business strategy (Chalmers, 2006), CRM helps organizations market their services through relationships with their customers (Bena, 2006; Ryals and Payne, 2001). In a context where buyer-seller interaction is determinant for accomplishing transactions, maintaining close relationships with customers has become a strategic direction for service providers (Wetzels et al., 1998). As such, McKenna (1991) saw CRM as an opportunity to change the marketing paradigm from manipulating customers to transforming them into genuine partners, from whom rich feedback for improving offerings can be acquired.

e-CRM is seen as an intrinsic part of the relationship marketing strategy, amplifying traditional CRM by taking advantage of the developments in informational technology to move customer relationships over the electronic channels such as the Internet (Acatrinei and Nistor, 2012; Adebajo, 2003). Dyche (2001) finds that e-CRM can be split in two directions: analytical e-CRM which centers on using informational technologies to collect, store, process and analyze customer data, and operational e-CRM which focuses on using electronic channels to get and stay in touch with customers. Operational e-CRM can be described as a way of improving marketing communication by offering meaningful brand-related content via the digital cyberspace in order to enlarge customer acquisition and customer retention (Swift, 2001). Mitan and Borozan (2012), for example, regard company websites as branded informatics products that a business offers to customers next to its core products.

Creating a one of a kind online experience by using “online functionality, information, emotions, cues, stimuli and products/services” (Constantinides, 2004, p. 112) can help organizations better engage the customers and motivate their purchase intentions for the traditional products being sold. The preeminent media of creating and sharing the online experience with customers is the organizational website, which serves as an interface between marketer and client in a world where societal and technological factors come increasingly closer (Constantinides, 2002; Dobre and Marinescu, 1999; Orzan, 2002; Vlăduțescu, 2012). Personalized as branded content-oriented interfaces, websites can be adapted for the specific marketing purposes of the business doing e-CRM, encouraging customers to access online data meaningful for their relationship with the vendor (Light, 2003). Websites are suited for e-CRM purposes as they build links between brand and customers, irrespective of time or geographic

location (Bătăgan et al., 2010; Roman and Roman, 2007). Hence, implementing operational e-CRM through web-interfaces can help businesses stay in touch with customers long after the sale has been made, irrespective of their place of residence (Vavra, 1992).

In service industries such as professional football, CRM is a way to improve customer-relationships and gain competitive advantages (Karakostas et al., 2005). To increase their marketing productivity, as well as their sporting results, football clubs will need to change their management from simply producing football matches for the public to more complex business models, based on fan-centered relationships. Adapting Pop's (2006) ideas on relationship marketing to football, one can state that CRM plays an important role in this sport, as the contact between the vendor, in this case the football club, and the buyer – the fan – needs a longer timespan than the one met in transactional marketing in order to ripen value for both parts.

Over the last couple of decades, professional football went through massive transformations, culminating in what Giulianotti (2005) calls an intensive hyper-commodification. Technological developments and market changes converted the sport into an entertainment business (Haas, 2003; Roşca, 2010). Due to the wide amount of entertainment offerings on the market, fans become increasingly unattached to football brands (Mueller and Sutherland, 2010).

The academic literature proposes building fan loyalty as a solution against losing market share to competitor entertainment bidders (Javani et al., 2013). Loyalty would translate in fans going to matches and buying brand-licensed products, which would increase the popularity and the clubs' revenue (Mullin et al., 1993). Loyalty towards football brands can be built in several ways. The fastest and most effective is sporting success: fans are mainly attracted if their favorite team is winning matches. However, as winning is not a constant in sports, football clubs have to search for solutions that could guarantee them the support of fans even if the team is not doing well on the field. Clubs need to constantly provide value to their fans, on and off the pitch.

As many football brands are striving to become fan-centered (Couvelaere and Richelieu, 2005), e-CRM proves to be one solution. The World Wide Web offers access to a target market of supporters which justifies setting up online contact points with fans. Therefore, internet pages have already been integrated in the marketing strategies of football clubs (Beech et al., 2000a, 2000b). However, the mere presence in the online space does not guarantee better fan relationships and brand positioning. Sport marketers have to decide how to use the Internet with the aim of establishing connections with fans. e-CRM helps transforming potential buyers into interactive customers (Berthon et al., 1996). The digitalization of sports marketing allows football clubs to build online brand-support communities based on fan participation (Hutchins et al., 2009). Therefore, Kriemadis et al. (2009) indicate that the websites of football clubs need to be seen primarily as business tasks, not as technical tasks. Websites hence become motors of leveraging fan value and of driving sports marketing forward (Gide et al., 2011).

Content analysis of Romanian football clubs' websites

As web-pages allow a greater involvement with sports brands, football clubs should engage fans over the Internet for successful marketing (Auty, 2002; Ioakimidis, 2010). However, little has been documented about how sports clubs could use the Internet as a relationship marketing tool (Brown, 2003). While research on webpage usage in sports exists (Beech et al., 2000a, 2000b), little attention has been given to how the Internet could be used to build and maintain long-term relationships with fans. Finding this niche, the purpose of this study was to explore the nature of e-CRM in Romanian football. A more elaborated comprehension is needed of online fan relationships – sports marketers have to understand how e-CRM works so as to be able to engage fans and encourage their interaction with the sports brand via the Internet (Ruddock et al., 2010). The research question is: "How can football clubs use their websites to create an online brand experience for fans?" The rationale behind the work was to investigate something still overlooked by the scientific literature: the nature of e-CRM in sports, with a particular focus on Romanian football clubs. The relevance of research lies in the offering of insights into the state of Romanian football's sports marketing. This could prove important for decision-makers trying to get closer to fans by using the online environment.

The research had the following objectives: (a) to determine the marketing potential of Romanian football clubs' websites; (b) to find out areas where Romanian football clubs could improve their e-CRM. Starting from the research of Terzoudis and Kriemadis (2007), a research instrument for measuring website attractivity has been developed. The instrument included nine categories of website attractiveness: Information, E-Commerce, Marketing Promotions, Interactivity, Social Networking, Contact Information, Online Betting Zone, Foreign Languages, and Navigation/Site Map. Most of these categories were also mentioned in the research of Constantinides (2004) as tools for creating an unique online brand-experience. The websites of Romanian football clubs have been analyzed based on the nine categories of website attractiveness, which were then further grouped into four tools for online brand-experience creation, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. *Categories of website attractiveness grouped into tools for creating an online brand-experience*

Tools for creating online brand-experience	Categories of website attractiveness
Functionality	Navigation; Foreign Languages
Information	Information; Marketing Promotions; Contact Information
Emotions	Interactivity; Social Networking
Services	E-Commerce; Online betting Zone

Four of the categories included several other attractivity factors. The categories have been grouped by Roman numerals, while the factors by Arabic numerals. Overall, 31 website attractivity factors have been identified. The attractivity factors are displayed in Appendix 1.

The official websites of 16 Romanian professional football clubs, all playing in Liga 1, the top tier of Romanian football, have been selected for this study. Data has been collected by visiting the websites of the clubs. To make sure the websites

visited were the official ones, the research made use of the Romanian Professional Football League's website (www.lpf.ro), where each club has an „information box” in which the weblink to the official club website is mentioned.

A table containing all 31 indicators was opened with the help of the Microsoft Excel 2010 software, which was used to collect and compute all data needed. Table 2 shows just a part of the entire Microsoft Excel table that has been used: the category „Information” was chosen as an example for explanatory purposes. The category „Information” (highlighted through text bold and underlining, and numbered by Roman numerals) contains 13 indicators (numbered by Arabic numerals). The column „Total” counts how many of the 16 clubs' websites analyzed in the study display each particular indicator (hence, each indicator could range between 0 and 16 websites using it). Next, for each indicator, a percentage of the number of clubs displaying that indicator on their websites was computed by relating to the entire sample of 16. The percentage was written in the column „Percentage”, next to „Total”. The percentages were meant to give an insight about the proportion in which the football clubs use such e-CRM instruments in their online marketing activities (100% would mean that all clubs are using that indicator; 50% would mean that only half of the clubs in the league use the indicator etc.). A general Category Score (CS) was computed by dividing the percentages to 100, then by summing up each of the 13 the obtained scores. The last step was to calculate an Average Percentage (4), by dividing the general Category Score to the number of indicators, then by multiplying by 100%. The Average Percentage shows in what proportion the e-CRM category is used in Romanian football.

Table 2. „Information” Category Table – used for explanatory purposes

No.	Type of Online Offering	Total	Percentage
1	Information		
1	Statistics	(1)	(2)
2	Historical data	(1)	(2)
3	Information about squad/players	(1)	(2)
4	Information about managerial staff	(1)	(2)
5	Information about the club	(1)	(2)
6	Club news	(1)	(2)
7	Results	(1)	(2)
8	Fixtures	(1)	(2)
9	Standings	(1)	(2)
10	Stadium	(1)	(2)
11	Youth Team Info	(1)	(2)
12	Hospitality	(1)	(2)
13	Club facilities	(1)	(2)
		CS	(3)
		Ave.%	(4)

Notes: (1) = number of club websites using the corresponding indicator on the horizontal line. Thirteen cases, one for each indicator.

(2) = (1)/sample number * 100 = (1)/16*100.

(3) = [(Percentage Indicator 1/100) + (Percentage Indicator 2/100) + ... + (Percentage Indicator 13/100)].

(4) = (3)/n Indicators * 100 = (3)/13*100.

Uses and misuses of e-CRM in Romanian football

The results show that, while football clubs more or less constantly update their websites with information, there is still untapped potential in what concerns bonding fans through e-CRM solutions. The prerequisites for building long-term club-fan relationships are still missing: while the information-providing function of websites is used at 73% of its potential, interactivity with fans is still low, 28% of its potential being used. The results come as no wonder, as the Romanian professional football setting is not very familiar with the use of relationship marketing strategies (Roșca, 2012, 2013a). With the exception of several clubs that used their websites in order to build relationships with fans, the majority of clubs handle their websites as purely informational channels.

Results confirm that there are still e-CRM capabilities football clubs could use. A fan-centered web experience is still missing. Improving the e-CRM experience should be a goal for the local football clubs not at least because, given the background of demographic decline the country is currently witnessing (Barbulescu, 2012), potential fanbases may theoretically diminish, which means that, in the future, clubs would have to cope with less fans than desired. In such a context, maintaining a strong relationship with existing fans and delivering added value to them becomes necessary (Roșca, 2013b).

Information

Results show that „Information” is the best used e-CRM category in Romanian football. Local clubs constantly update their sites with relevant information, although there are improvements to be made. All clubs have provided up-to-date information about the squad, the managerial staff, and about the club. Nevertheless, it is the way in which this information is embedded that could improve fan relationships. Many clubs present only the names of the players and of the staff members, also writing their positions or their functions on the team. The more fan-oriented clubs also displayed photos of the players, accompanied by short briefings containing relevant information for each footballer, like for example shirt number, date and city of birth, and several other trivia.

Another offering to be found on all websites was the standings table of the league. In spite of presenting the table, not all the websites did also present the match results that led to this ranking. In the same way, not all the clubs presented their fixtures calendar, which is one of the most searched items by fans visiting club websites. Moreover, even amongst the websites that provided information about the fixtures, many of them only gave information about the next match, although it would better satisfy the wishes of fans to offer all fixtures at once.

Statistics are also an area with high attractivity for fans, but only two clubs have chosen to present match-related statistics on their sites. As can be seen in Table 3, it comes as no surprise that these two clubs (Ceahlăul Piatra Neamț and FC Botoșani) do not have a high investment power and marketing abilities as several established clubs in the league do. Calculating and presenting some statistics on the website proves as a cheap and in-house method to draw the attention of fans, which are generally attracted by the one-of-a-kind information they can find out from these statistics.

Table 3. *Information*

No.	Type of Online Offering	Total	Percentage
1	Information		
1	Statistics	2	12,50%
2	Historical data	13	81,20%
3	Information about squad/players	16	100%
4	Information about managerial staff	16	100%
5	Information about the club	16	100%
6	Club news	16	100%
7	Results	13	81,20%
8	Fixtures	15	93,70%
9	Standings	16	100%
10	Stadium	14	87,50%
11	Youth Team Info	11	68,70%
12	Hospitality	2	12,50%
13	Club facilities	2	12,50%
		Total	9,498
		Ave.%	73%

Other areas that need improvement concern information about the history of the club, used by 81% of the websites, as well as information about the stadium, hospitality and club facilities.

Marketing Promotions

Marketing promotions seems to be one of the best covered areas in the landscape of Romanian football's e-CRM. Nearly all websites – 94% – offer information about the sponsors. Nevertheless, in many cases, all what fans receive is the logos of the sponsors, hyperlinked or not to their favorite websites. To offer greater value to fans, clubs could try to give more information about their sponsors to fans and encourage fan interaction with the sponsors' brands. Club and sponsor could work together to develop joint marketing programs to motivate fans to consume or, at least, try sponsor brands.

Contact Information

88 per cent of the websites offer a "Contact Us" page for fans. The "Contact Us" is a way to encourage fans to get in touch with the football club. It lets the fans perceive that the club is close to them and ready to answer their questions and follow their advice, which also helps improve brand perception. However, many "Contact Us" pages of Romanian football clubs are not optimized so as to allow a proper conversation with fans. Not all webpages offer complete and proper information for fans. "Contact Us" should not be limited to e-mailing, but also allow fans to view the PO address of the club, its telephone and fax numbers, as well as give the opportunity to "ask a question". Last but not least, in several cases during this research, "Contact Us" pages were hidden as sub-pages of other categories, which made them hard to find. To encourage interactivity, "Contact Us" should be visible and easy to find. One way to do this would be to shortcut the page via a dedicated button.

Interactivity

Another component that football club websites widely miss out on is Interactivity. Most of the websites are rather static, providing information, but not encouraging fans to engage with the sports brand. The usage of multimedia content in order to keep contact with fans is rather low: 81% of the clubs display photo galleries on their websites, 56% video galleries, and 19% branded wallpapers. Multimedia could be better used to improve website dynamics. As most of the visitors are in search of such content, clubs should use visually and audio appealing content in order to get fans interested to visit the website. Permanently updating multimedia would make fans eager to return on the website and, so, a long-term contract between sports brand and fans would be established.

E-mail newsletters, one of the most effective ways to nurture online relationships with fans, are used by 38% of the club websites. Offering newsletters would allow sports brands to get in touch with fans of different backgrounds, even those who are not social media savvy. For many people, newsletters are still the first choice of communication, even in an era dominated by social media platforms. The study also revealed that Romanian football clubs do not use at all SMS alerts, Online Video Games, and Podcasts.

Social Networking

In an age when important parts of sport brand management are done via social media platforms, the latter ones being veritable marketing communications tools (Ioanăș and Stoica, 2014; Popescu et al., 2013), it comes out as a negative surprise that Romanian football clubs do not leverage the power of social media on their websites. As Table 4 shows, 81% of the clubs share a link on the website for the official Facebook profile, while less than 40% integrate their YouTube and Twitter profiles. Football clubs ought to use their websites to drive public over to social media platforms. In this case, websites would be used as advertising leads for the social media profiles. In order to improve the visibility of social media, clubs may find it useful to integrate hyperlinked social media buttons on their sites.

Table 4 . Social Networking

V	Social Networking		
51	Link to Facebook page	13	81,20%
52	Link to YouTube Channel	5	31,20%
53	Link to Twitter	6	37,50%
	Total		1,499
	Ave.%		50%

E-Commerce

E-Commerce is an area with still a lot of improvement to be done, as only 31% of the Liga 1 clubs sell tickets online, and only 25% merchandise online. Although many sites provide information about ticket sales (release date, prices, venues where tickets can be bought etc.), few also offer the possibility to buy these tickets

online. The same is true for official club stores: websites offer details about the location and opening hours of the “brick-and-mortar” store, as well as about the range of merchandises and their prices, but the opportunity to buy products online is still limited. Overall, Romanian football only uses E-Commerce at 28% of its potential.

Online Betting Zone

Online Betting Zones are one of the areas with the most potential of improving fan-relationships. Football and sports betting are two activities traditionally associated. Many football fans are also active gamblers, which made bookmakers try to establish their brands in the football industry in order to get access to the market of football fans. A marketing promotions tool widely used in Romanian football has been the sponsorship. By sponsoring local football organizations, bookmakers tried to tap the potential of image transfer, which would allow them to convert fans of the sponsored football clubs into own clients. Hence, the latest years have seen a deal of sponsorships granted by bookmakers to football clubs: SportingBet and Steaua Bucharest, SuperBet and Rapid Bucharest, or Sky Bets and Oțelul Galați. Nevertheless, football clubs were sluggish in creating online betting zones. Therefore, online betting is only used at 6 per cent of its full capacity. Making use of such an online service would allow football clubs to attract visitors over to their websites: online betting would be an incentive for fans to visit the website. Moreover, given the fact that the bets would be made on the team owning the website, hence the favorite team of the visitors of that website, an online betting zone would encourage the interaction of fans with the sports brand, which would improve sports brand reputation and, ultimately, increase fan loyalty.

Foreign Languages

Only 5 of the 16 clubs offer fans the possibility to access the websites in foreign languages. The method of using foreign languages varies: while some websites have dedicated pages, others use the Google Translate Software to translate the original page content. That leaves nearly 70% of the clubs that do not offer translated content for the international markets. Offering translated websites would allow foreign stakeholders to interact with the brand, which would enlarge the potential fan base of the local club with fans from outside the boundaries of the country. Given the globalized society the world has entered into (Zografu, 2009), football clubs could interact with foreign fans and try to make them loyal through specific customer relationship solutions.

Navigation

38% of the websites analyzed used a Navigation function. Navigation should help users to find the content they search on the webpage more easily. Hence, navigation helps shorten the distance between opening a webpage and accessing the desired content, improving usability and saving search time, while positively influencing website perception.

What is there to be done?

Implementing information technology in CRM programs can enhance the competitive advantage and bring new customers (Marinescu et al., 2007; Pai and Tu, 2011; Sandoe et al., 2001). One of the most used e-CRM tools are organizational websites, which Taylor and Terhune (2001) believe can add value to the brand they belongs to when they let users develop an experience of visiting the website. On the other hand, using e-CRM could possibly lead to what is coined as an enhanced quality of life (Enăchescu et al., 2012), with fans rendering more value from interacting with the brand. Research results show that there is still work to be done in order to create a navigation experience, as well as to improve the quality and the reach of e-CRM in Romanian football. Of the four tools for creating online brand experiences Constantinides (2004) suggested in his model, Romanian football does relatively well on providing information, but misses out on the potential of functionality, emotionality and service-provision. Most websites are used as informational platforms, but fail to provide relevant interactive experiences for fans. Gibbons and Dixon (2010) urge football clubs to pay more attention to fan interactions on the Internet. Implementing customer-centered solutions would be a starting point for building long-term relationships that may increase the profitability of clubs. Football clubs' e-CRM could improve the following areas:

- *Functionality*: Football clubs websites could improve functionality by creating a better navigation experience and translating the content in foreign languages. Easy to find content would encourage fan revisits, while foreign languages would attract more clicks per page, given the inputs from foreign followers. Both actions can have positive impact on brand equity, not to mention that foreign languages would be a prerequisite for attracting fans from overseas and, hence, enlarging the fan base of the sports brand.
- *Emotionality*: Photo and video galleries can be improved with constant updates, while clubs can connect with fans through online video games and podcasts, none of which have been used until now. Another issue to be improved would be the integration of social media networks into the websites. Websites can direct public to social media platforms; once they arrive at the official social media profile of the club, fans can sign up as followers, which would allow football clubs to design creative CRM campaigns to keep them captive, hence, connected to the brand. In such a case, the brand would receive additional value from fans.
- *Services*: A customer-centered online strategy can help organizations increase the sales of their services (Chen and Popovich, 2003; Xu et al., 2002). Implementing business solutions to help fans buy online would therefore be a logical step for Romanian football clubs to follow. Up to this moment, only a third of the clubs sell tickets online, while only a quarter sell merchandise products via the web.

As already mentioned in the Introduction, the main limitation of this article is its lack of innovation. Much has already been written on customer relationship management or relationship marketing (see Brătianu et al., 2013; Dumitru et al., 2011; Pop and Iorga, 2012; Pop et al., 2012), so the paper fails to come up with new

ideas that could possibly contribute to the enrichment of the scientific literature in this field. The approach of the paper is static, its structure being based on already existing and proved information. Nor did the paper try to enlarge the knowledge of CRM by presenting new concepts, but it merely focused on analyzing a situation met in Romanian football. Therefore, it can be stated that this is a situational analysis concerning the implementation of e-CRM in Romanian football. Secondly, the paper lacks scientific arguments to support the research results. As little has been written on this topic, the paper is rather making assumptions than confirming hypotheses. Last but not least, results are not backed by real case experience, which could have been obtained through interviews with football managers.

Regarding the fast development of mobile solutions for marketing (Vințe, 2013), further research could extend the findings of this paper to integrate them in a model of CRM based on digital apps. Future research could concentrate on using the online environment for marketing the sports brand as to either attain the long term goal of creating brand awareness or to promote sales on the short term, for example via online ticketing. Hence, research in this area could be done in a marketing perspective, aiming to show how sports organizations could use the Internet in order to win the loyalty of their fans, or in a sales perspective, in order to show how websites could be used to increase organizational revenues.

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Appendix 1: Attractivity factors

Attractivity factor	Description
I. INFORMATION	does the website offer information about the football club?
1. Statistics	does the website provide club statistics?
2. Historical data	does the website offer information about the club's history?
3. Information about squad/players	does the website offer information about the club's players/squads?
4. Information about managerial staff	does the website offer information about the managerial staff?
5. Information about the club	does the website offer information about the address/location of the club?
6. Club news	does the website provide the latest news regarding the club?
7. Results	does the website offer the latest results?
8. Fixtures	does the website offer information about the upcoming matches of the team?
9. Standings	does the website provide the standings of the competitions in which the club participates?
10. Stadium	does the website provide information about the stadium, such as stadium history, stadium capacity, facilities to be found at the venue, stadium address and options to get there by various means of transportation?
11. Youth team information	does the website offer youth team information?
12. Hospitality	does the website provide information about the matchday hospitality services which stakeholders can buy from the club?
13. Club facilities	does the website provide information about club facilities, such as the training venue?
II. E-COMMERCE	is there an e-commerce platform on the websites which to offer fans the possibility to make online purchases of club-branded products?
14. Online ticket sales	does the website provide the fans with the possibility of purchasing match tickets online?
15. Online merchandising	does the website provide the fans with the possibility of purchasing memorabilia online?
III./16. MARKETING PROMOTIONS (Promotions of sponsors)	does the website offer information about the club's sponsors to the fans?
IV. INTERACTIVITY	what behavioural experiences (visual, auditive, or text) does the website offer to its users?
17. Photo gallery	does the website offer a photo gallery where fans can open pictures from the latest football matches, pictures of the football players and other club employees, or any other pictures related to the club?
18. Video gallery	does the website offer a video gallery where fans can open videos from the latest football matches or any other events related to the club?
19. Wallpapers	does the website offer the possibility to download club-branded wallpapers?
20. Club anthem	is the club anthem to be found and played on the website?
21. SMS alerts	do the fans have the possibility to purchase an SMS alert service online?
22. Newsletter	can fans sign up for a newsletter which to provide them, via e-mail, with the latest news in the club?
23. Online Video Games	are there any club-branded video games which fans can play online?
24. Podcasts	can fans download podcasts with club-specific content from the website?
V. SOCIAL NETWORKING	does the website provide hyperlinks to the club's official social networking profiles?

Attractivity factor	Description
25. Link to Facebook profile	does the website provide a link to the club's official Facebook profile?
26. Link to YouTube channel	does the website provide a link to the club's official YouTube channel?
27. Link to Twitter profile	does the website provide a link to the club's official Twitter profile?
VI./28. Contact Information	does the website provide information which interested persons can use in order to contact the club, such as club address, telephone number or e-mail address?
VII./29. Online Betting Zone	does the website provide the fans with the possibility to make online bets?
VIII./30. Foreign languages	is the website translated in foreign languages, so as to be understood by foreign stakeholders?
IX./31. Navigation	is there any „Sitemap“ or search box available which to facilitate the users' website navigation?