

MASTER'S THESIS:

SOCIAL DATA IN THE BUSINESS OF SPORTS

Student:	Linda Camilla Boldt
CPR-nr.:	
Supervisor:	Professor Ravi Vatrappu, Department of IT Management
Programme:	Cand.merc. Management of Innovation and Business Development
Minor:	Data in Business
University:	Copenhagen Business School
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Abstract

The omnipresence of social media provides sports organizations with the opportunity to interact with fans, and potentially strengthen fan loyalty and business performance. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate current social media managerial practices in the Danish Superliga football clubs. In order to do that, I set up a research framework based on theory, and conducted a case study of the clubs through a triangulation methodology, employing Kozinets' (2002) netnographic study, Big Social Data Analytics, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with social media managers.

The study contributes to the emerging literature on the use of social media in sports by exploring the use of leading social media platforms by all clubs in the Danish Superliga. Findings demonstrate that the clubs have embraced social media for a number of organizational functions, and uncover how the clubs use the social media channels to stimulate interaction, thereby, likewise to former studies, establishing social media as an effective vehicle for sports organizations to engage with fans. The insights offer implications for sports managers seeking to maintain or enhance their fans' identification with the club.

Furthermore, the study explores how and to what extent the clubs engage in social media analytics.

Results indicate that some of clubs have analytical processes related to social media; however, they are on an initial stage in extracting business value.

Keywords: Social media, social business, big social data analytics, team identification, Superliga.

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List of abbreviations

B2B	Business-to-business
B2C	Business-to-customer
BSDA	Big Social Data Analytics
CRM	Customer relationship management
HRM	Human resource management
IT	Information technology
KPI	Key performance indicator
ROI	Return on investment
smA	Social media analytics
smE	Social media engagement
smM	Social media management

1. Introduction

Winning in sports is crucial. Nevertheless, for the business of sports, winning on the field is not everything. It is about winning by controlling the game, through securing unpredictability and competitiveness, and staging the excitement. Over the past years, growth in professionalism of sports has intensified (TSE Consulting 2013) and an increased focus on commercial aspects has tested the fundamental values and management methods in the sports industry. Hence, winning is also about managing the experience on the venue for all stakeholders, including fans, media, volunteers, sponsors, employees, first-time visitors etc. Much evidence points to the fact that proper strategic fan relationship enrichment is associated with positive profitability margins, as enhanced fan connectedness can result in e.g. increased consumptive behavior (Wakefield and Wann 2006).

Sport is social. Sport is passion and excitement. We want to identify ourselves with our sport and the athletes/teams that we are following. We want to share the sport experiences with others – otherwise sport is just sweat. In football, loyalty is seen on the streets where fans wear the club's brand identity as a display of their commitment to the club. Less-enthusiastic fans might follow a team because of specific star players or because of their geographical identity. These fans do not necessarily bring much value to the club, as their affiliation with the team may not translate into purchase of tickets or merchandise. The most valuable fans are those who build a lifestyle around the brand, attend matches, and engage in a long-term relationship with the club and the surrounding community.

In the digital era, there are plenty of opportunities for sports marketing, in the sense of customizing and personalizing the relationship to the customer and engaging them more effectively. The widespread use of social media provides sports organizations with opportunities to interconnect with fans and as a result, potentially strengthen team identification and business value (Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015).

Almost every business within sport has a social media profile on Facebook and several other channels. Whether it is a club, the league or the single athlete, social media has huge potential in the sports industry landscape to drive engagement and create a type of relationships that would not have been possible just a few years ago. Social media has therefore gained increased focus from sports businesses and sports marketers. By opening these communication channels to their fans, sports clubs can engage fans at a deeper level, and make social media a powerful vehicle for fan interaction, which is highly valued by

sponsors. Besides utilizing social media for deeper fan engagement, it may be useful for organizations to dig into the data generated from social media. These large amounts of digital information is labeled 'big social data' (Vatrapu 2013). Digging into data management in sports can be powerful, since it provides knowledge to the clubs in terms of what their target audience engage in, which is valuable for sponsor agreements. Social data can be collected and analyzed in order to obtain new insights, thus social data analytics becomes more than just informing, but also a factor for decision-making. The current state of knowledge and practice regarding organizations' utilization of social media is rife, and given the multi-faced and unstructured nature of social data, many organizations experience difficulties in extracting meaningful and actionable information in a timely fashion.

The increasing adoption and use of social media channels in organizational settings has caused a new kind of organizational paradigm: 'social business' (Vatrapu 2013), and this thesis introduces the theory as research framework. One must note that the term 'social business' is also used in other academic fields being more cause- than profit-driven businesses (e.g. Yunus, Moingeon, and Lehmann-Ortega 2010), however, in this research context, 'social' refers to social media.

The overall aim of this thesis is to contribute to the emerging research on the nature of social media use by sports organizations. To do that, I chose to study the case of the Superliga, which is the highest ranked league in professional Danish football. The research is limited to the 12 clubs playing in this league, and their associated social media channels. Thereby, I do not include the official league's channels, neither the athletes nor any unofficial pages. A case description is provided in chapter 3.1.

Relevance and motivation

Sports clubs have a special relation to their customers (fans) compared to other industries, and as company-customer relationships changes, impacted by social media, it has become relevant to study the new opportunities offered by social media. Football in itself is highly popular – and thereby should generate interest in research. According to Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrapu (2015), there has been an over-emphasis in research exploring the characteristics of social media, and an under-emphasis of the organizational processes and functions for which social media is adopted and utilized.

The motivation behind this study is an interest in social media in the context of sports and data-driven management, which resulted in creation of the following research questions.

Research questions

The research is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent and for what organizational functions do professional Danish football clubs engage in social media channels?
2. What, if any, are the associated social media engagement, analytics, and management practices, requirements, and challenges experienced at the organizational level?

Report structure

The thesis is structured in six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the scope of the thesis. Chapter 2 consists of a review of relevant literature and the theoretical research framework. This is followed by the research methodology in chapter 3, in which I present the case, and outline the research strategy and methodological choices. Hereafter, I present the data analysis and findings in chapter 4, followed by a discussion of these results in chapter 5. The report is completed with a conclusion in chapter 6.

2. Theoretical background

The thesis is written within the area of the minor 'data in business', which reflects the choice of theories. However, theories from the MIB programme are also applied. Furthermore, I have included relevant literature found in CBS' databases, and build on the knowledge gained in my bachelor's sports management programme as well. The following chapter provides a literature review of relevant studies, introduces the research framework, and clarifies the concepts used.

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Social media

Our social world is becoming more digital as social media has become a vital part of our lives; we share our lives on diverse social media platforms and interact with our network on these digital communities (Lassen, Madsen, and Vatrapu 2014). Montalvo (2011, 91) defined social media as "*fundamentally scalable communications technologies that turn Internet-based communications, (...) into an interactive dialogue platform*". According to the latest report by Global Web Index (2016), who surveys Internet users every quarter, 92 percent of online adults have at least one social media account, and 78 percent are actively using it. The average consumer has close to seven social media accounts and engages with 3,5 of them, which is double up since 2012. The increasing use of these interactive platforms has created new opportunities for utilizing these channels to enable interaction between organizations and individuals, and between individual. The interaction on social media can be seen as an extension of the traditional word-of-mouth communication and differs from previous marketing communication tools by enabling customers to communicate directly with each other and to co-create value within a community at a time and place that best suit the individual customer (Mangold and Faulds 2009).

Information technology (IT) and media have had a vast impact on the relationship between sports and business over the past decades (Söderman and Dolles 2013). Media has become a significant source of income for all kinds of sports events, and developments in IT has made it possible to serve the needs of sports fans all over the world, resulting in opportunities for the promotion of sports and benefits of its' partners. Sports clubs can communicate directly with their fans through these online channels, and

provide fans with additional means to engage with their club. Thereby, social media has a potential to be a valuable forum for the sports organizations to understand fan motivations better and strengthen fan relationships (Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015).

2.1.2 The domain of sports

The traits of sports are unique when compared to other industries and alternative forms of entertainment. The sports industry is characterized by rabid fans and high uncertainty (Söderman and Dolles 2013). Sport has the ability to evoke emotional responses due to a great sense of personal connectedness (Sutton et al. 1997), which often result in sports fans becoming more emotionally attached to a specific brand than seen in other industries. The association, commitment and emotional involvement, often referred to as identification (Ashforth and Mael 1989), are often seen in the domain of sports (Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015).

Professional football today has emerged into an international business; players are transferred worldwide, international leagues are created, and top events are broadcasted around the globe (Söderman and Dolles 2013). One might say that the world of football can be referred to as an industry in its own right and with its own characteristics. Football is a fast-growing business, but still in need of more systemized knowledge.

Team identification

Identification describes the emotional attachment and allegiance that a consumer has to a particular entity (Ashforth and Mael 1989), which in the domain of sports is seen as the spectators' perceived connectedness to a team and the experience of the team's failings and achievements as one's own, as sports consumers identify themselves with the sports teams (Sutton et al. 1997). Lock et al. (2012) interviewed individuals who became season ticket holders of a newly established Australian soccer team in order to understand how team identification evolves in sports. They found that the respondents considered their affiliation with the sports team as representing their self-concept, and that this increased identification was evident through a greater desire to pursue team-related information and promoting the team to others.

Higher levels of identification creates longer relationships with consumers (Wakefield and Wann 2006), it reduces price sensitivity, and strengthens game attendance and merchandise sales (Sutton et al. 1997), and results in less switching of team affiliation (Harada and Matsouka 1999). Due to fans' cultural and emotional ties to a sports brand, the sports clubs surpass organizations operating outside the realm of

sports in brand adoration and loyalty. This loyalty creates potential for strengthening business performance of the club and making it a more profitable sports business. Therefore, it is important for the clubs to recognize and cater to their fans, and to target their marketing and communication activities so they create positive associations to enhance the team identification (Funk and James 2006). Additionally, committed fans are more resistant to negative media coverage (Funk and Pritchard 2006), and are more likely to remain loyal to the team despite on-field performance (Harada and Matsouka 1999), which are factors that cannot be fully controlled by the sports managers.

‘Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing’ is a well-known quotation in sports, and obviously sports performance has huge financial impact and drives business performance, but sport is also a business that can, and should be, run professionally ‘independently’ from sporting results. Football clubs has become more focused on how to prevent their business performance from the direct effects of the volatility in the sports results (Söderman and Dolles 2013). Furthermore, the special relationship that fans have towards a brand creates a complex environment for sports managers to maneuver in, thus requiring careful management and anticipation. Football without fans would not be the same industry as it is today, as they are the base of a football club’s economic model. Fans fill up the stadium, buy merchandise, and are valuable for the club’s possibilities of attracting sponsorships. The football clubs are competing to fill their stadium against the many options within entertainment, leisure and sports events that fans are exposed to.

Social media in sports

Recent studies of social media in the business of sports have investigated areas such as how information spread within sports social networks (Hambrick 2012); how professional athletes have used Twitter (Frederick et al. 2014; Hambrick et al. 2010; Pegoraro 2010); how the use of social media by sports organizations impacts team identification (Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015), and motivations underpinning the desire of fans communicating on Facebook sites (Stavros et al. 2014).

In developing relationships online with stakeholders, interactivity plays an important role. Jo and Kim (2003) found that interactivity was essential if organizations were to develop relationships with their stakeholders – social media provides this opportunity to interact with customers online. Essentially, social media is the virtual sports bar; fans flock there before, during and after the games, which implicates that a fan’s perception of a team or an athlete can be directly influenced by the behavior of that team or athlete on social media. For fans, social media provide an environment for them to extend their sports

experiences and identities (Stavros et al. 2014). By attending a game, fans have the opportunity to communicate their affiliation with the team in an outward way. Furthermore, they may wear team clothing or buy season tickets as it adds to their credibility to claim their strong identification as a team supporter. However, attending a game is a relatively short-lived connection, and wearing team colors do not communicate anything specific, neither are their motives not easily communicated to other fans (e.g. not all fans wear team merchandise). Conversely, Stavros et al. (2014) found that social media offers fans the opportunity to express their relationship to the team with fellow fans, even those following the team from abroad, in a more personalized and targeted way. Moreover, they found that it was important for fans to engage with other fans on a range of team, player and sports related issues and identity related meaning, and that they appreciated comments they were receiving in the community.

These former studies suggests that sports managers should actively facilitate opportunities within social media to engage with fans to strengthen their identification in order to capture the related advantages (Stavros et al. 2014; Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015). Furthermore, sports organizations should *“personalize communications, genuinely inform and involve fans and provide relevant marketing communications”* (Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015, 199), which can be implemented within existing marketing efforts. Still, there is limited understanding of how sports organizations utilize the data generated by social media interactions, and in particular the way in which this communication technology can influence team identification.

2.1.3 Data analytics in sports business

Only a few studies, e.g. Woodcock, Green, and Starkey (2011), have investigated the ways in which a customer relationship orientation might be enabled through usage of social media technologies. The focus on fan relationships is based on the principle that competitive advantage is achieved and maintained by satisfying customers' needs through an ongoing mutually beneficial exchange relationships (Coltman 2007). As mentioned, social networks play a crucial role in engaging fans. From in-season to off-season content delivery, from the time a ticket is sold to the in-game experience. A weak fan base leads football clubs to ruin, which emphasizes the importance of fan management. Analyzing social data may help sports organizations in cracking the code of even deeper fan engagement, and strengthening of team identification, which, as noted, has the potential to increase business performance. In a blog post, Métral (2016) distinguishes between two types of data analytics within sports: Sport analytics and business

analytics. The former concerns the science of learning from data to improve sport performance, the latter concerns learning from the data to improve business performance.

For business purposes, ticketing analytics allows for a more dynamic pricing by using algorithms to measure demand (considering factors such as weather, winning or hitting streak, day of the week etc.), and the price sensitivity to a particular game instead of setting the ticket price half a year in advance. Secondly, as most clubs now rely on huge sponsorship contracts for stabilizing business performance, sponsorship analytics aims at computing return on investment (ROI) through data to prove the value of their partnerships. Thirdly, and relevant for this study, is fan engagement analytics, which is the exploration of analytical tools to better improve fan engagement strategy. The financial part aims at computing and managing the 'customer lifetime value' of fans as well as their 'customer equity', whereas at a more practical level, clubs can implement data driven strategies in order to acquire and improve the loyalty of the existing fans.

Fans expect their club to be successful and win championships, but at the same time, they will always want match tickets to be cheaper. Nevertheless, the clubs need to make enough profits in order to purchase and train players, which for many clubs are difficult to obtain. The rise in player costs and salaries has encouraged football clubs to expand their business to off-pitch activities, including the importance of managing and understanding their customers. The field of customer relationship management (CRM) deals with understanding, what ties the customer to the business in order to develop and implement a business strategy, where customer satisfaction and loyalty are key performance indicators (KPI) (Reinartz, Krafft, and Hoyer 2004). The logic of CRM encourages firms to move from a product-focused approach of doing business towards a more customer-focused approach, and is defined as a process that *"entails the systematic and proactive management of relationships as they move from beginning (initiation) to end (termination), with execution across the various customer-facing contact channels"* (Reinartz, Krafft, and Hoyer 2004, 295). CRM is considered an important way to enhance customer loyalty and firm performance, which emphasizes the relevance of the field to team identification. However, CRM has also been criticized for being expensive and for not living up to expectations (Hillebrand, Nijholt, and Nijssen 2011), and before engaging in some costly CRM projects, the clubs need to make sure that the outcome will translate into business value and not only customer value.

2.2 Research framework – the social business

A social business is “*an organization that strategically engages, analyses, and manages social media to structure organizational processes and support organizational functions in order to realize operational efficiencies, generate comparative advantages, and create value for customers, shareholders, and other societal stakeholders.*” (Vatrapu 2013, 151). The term describes the emergence of organizations that adopt and use social media channels to increase organizational effectiveness, enhance operational efficiencies, empower employees, and create value with stakeholders for strategic reasons. According to the definition of a social business, there are three critical aspects of social business: Social media engagement, social media analytics, and social media management, which I will present in the following section.

2.2.1 Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement (smE) refers to the strategic use of social media channels to interact with the organization's internal and external stakeholders for purposes such as knowledge management, marketing, customer support, product development, etc. (Vatrapu 2013). The fundamental aspect of smE is for the organization to have a social media strategy that is aligned with the corporate strategy (Ibid.), and for the strategy to guide decisions and tactics (Kozinets 2014). The social media strategy exercise should survey the entire organization to identify the different organizational stakeholders regardless of which organizational unit that initiated the smE (Wollan et al. 2011 in Vatrapu 2013). Furthermore, the social media strategy should be accompanied by guidelines for the employees.

smE is an effective degree to measure users' interaction with the organizations (Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrapu 2015). Engagement levels are reflected in basic interactions such as commenting on content, sharing content, or 'liking' content. High engagement would indicate that the clubs are producing content that users find interesting enough to spend time on, however, it is difficult to calculate the exact value of these customer-brand interactions. According to the data collected by Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrapu (2015), they find indications that silence is bad, and that the social media managers think that the brands need to be part of the ongoing conversation. However, in sports organizations, daily operations steers focus away from exploring new opportunities (TSE Consulting 2013), and the management must balance between daily operations and exploring new opportunities. Questions regarding prioritizations arise,

whether they are just doing social media because everyone else is doing it, or do they have actual KPI's and a strategy related to the effort made.

Using content analysis, Meng, Stavros, and Westberg (2015) examined over 2.000 posts on Facebook and Twitter by the 30 teams in National Basketball Association in the United States. Their results indicated that these teams predominantly engaged with their fans using four types of communication (informing, marketing, personalizing and activating), with the potential to strengthen team identification among fans. Table 1 provides a description of these categories and their associated sub-categories (Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015, 206–207), as the concepts will be used in the analysis.

Table 1: Types of communication

One-way communication		
Informing	Organizational news	News and information directly associated with the team and the organization in relation to the sport
	Activity outside of the sport	Information related to players, staff, or the organization participating in non-sport-related activities
	Diverting fans to other content	Direct readers to other content including pictures, blogs or web sites
Marketing	Promoting	Providing relevant marketing communications through advertising or promotion of the team, games, competitions or events
	Direct sales	Providing fans with the opportunity to easily purchase items online, such as tickets and merchandise
Two-way communication		
Personalizing	Initiating contact	Direct, interpersonal contact with an individual fan, initiated by the organization
	Direct responses	Directly responding to individual questions or comments
Activating	Group involvement	Ensure, where possible, fans are included in relevant general interactive processes. Can also include group discussions
	Gathering feedback	Collect fan opinions before developing or implementing a new idea

2.2.2 Social Media Analytics

In the social business, social media analytics (smA) is concerned with the collection, storage, analysis, and reporting of social data stemming from the smE interactions (Vatrapu 2013). The interactions on social media generates large volumes of unstructured social data, and *“social media has become one of the most representative and relevant data sources for big data”* (Bello-Orgaz, Jung, and Camacho 2016, 46). Big data refers to questions that can only be analyzed at large scale in order to gain new insights or create new forms of value that may change organizations, industries and society (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier 2013). Big data has also been described through the concept of the ‘3V model’, which was defined by Laney (2001) as high-volume, high-velocity and high-variety information assets and refers to the large amounts of data, the speed of data transfers, and the different sources of data collection.

The huge amount of this social data can seem irresistible for those interested in human behavior in order to improve decision-making. In response, this new discipline of big data analytics is emerging (Fisher et al. 2012), which fundamentally is a workflow that transforms terabytes of low-value data into, in some cases, single bits of high-value data. Hence, big data can be viewed as a new resource for organizations and societies. Similarly to the recent study by Bello-Orgaz, Jung, and Camacho (2016), it is assumed that big social data comes from joining the efforts from the two domains of social media and big data. However, given the large and unstructured nature of datasets from social media, it becomes challenging to identify the valuable data, and many organizations strive to extract meaningful and actionable information (Vatrapu 2013). Furthermore, there are critical challenges involved in integrating social data with existing in-house data, and in assessing/evaluating its combined relevance to the organization’s KPIs. In order to analyze social data productively, traditional data analysis requires adaption and integration with new big data paradigms that has emerged for massive data processing.

The term analytics (including big data) is broadly used to cover any data-driven decision making (Fisher et al. 2012), where an analysis team use their expertise in various analytical fields to answer questions posed by corporate leaders – often based on inside business information, and sometimes in combination with public data (such as social media). Big data analytics aim at providing an alternative to traditional solutions based on databases and data analytics in order to make sense of the unstructured data and exploit its value (Bello-Orgaz, Jung, and Camacho 2016). Many models and approaches for data analytics exist, and data analytics can tell different stories (Davenport 2014). As this research aims at reporting an analysis of past and existing practices using big social data, descriptive analytics are used to aggregate data in order

to provide these insights. Descriptive analytics are useful because they allow the researcher to learn from past behaviors, and understand how they might influence future outcomes.

The intersection between social media, big data, and data analytics forms the basis of big social data analytics (BSDA). BSDA can be undertaken in two main ways: 'social graph analytics', concerned with the network of actors, and 'social text analytics', concerned with the online content in form of interactions, conversations, and discourses (Vatrapu 2013). This conceptual model of social data is shown in Figure 1.

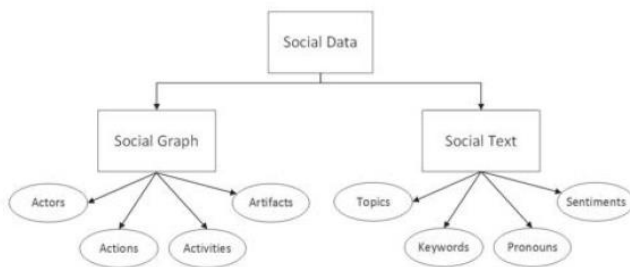


Figure 1: Social data

Critical aspects of Big Data Analytics

The emergence of big (social) data analytics has several consequences; it allow us to analyze big datasets, while we are then forced to embrace and accept data's real-world messiness. Like any other research method, big data analytics has its limits and pitfalls (Fisher et al. 2012). The large amount of data does not guarantee representativeness of a sample, nor finding the ground truth around e.g. consumer needs from behavior logs. boyd and Crawford (2012) argue that working with big data is subjective, the data collection is not self-explanatory, and requires selection and interpretation of the researcher. Additionally, focus is shifting from looking for causation to looking for correlation; correlations may not tell us *why* things are happening, but that they *are* happening (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier 2013).

2.2.3 Social Media Management

Large corporations are adopting social media for organizational functions such as marketing and sales, customer support, recruitment and retention, product innovation and strategic communication (Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrapu 2015). Social media management (smM) is concerned with the adoption and use of social media channels in an organization both internally and externally, and the related operational issues and managerial challenges (Vatrapu 2013). smM supplements the six traditional organizational functions in the research and practice of management (human resource management (HRM),

operations/production management, strategic management, marketing management, financial management, and IT management).

Competitive advantage

Different conceptions exist on how a strategy creates a competitive advantage for a firm. Strategy sets guidelines for management decisions and functions as the vehicle for coordination and communication within the firm (Teece, Pisano, and Shuen 1997). As strategy scholars have searched for sources of competitive advantage, two prominent views have emerged: The Industrial Organization (IO) and the Resource-Based View (RBV). The IO view, associated with Porter (1980), suggests that the potential of gaining profits in a specific industry is a function of the actions firms can take to create a position in the industry and how it defends itself against competitive forces. On the other hand, the RBV perceives the firm as a bundle of internal resources and capabilities, which are the source of creating a competitive advantage, if the firm is able to accumulate those resources and capabilities that are rare, valuable, non-substitutable, and difficult to imitate (Barney 1991). The RBV also invites consideration of managerial strategies for developing new capabilities, which is where the dynamic capabilities approach (Teece, Pisano, and Shuen 1997) can contribute. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997, 516) defines dynamic capabilities as *“the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure intimal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments”*. The dynamic capabilities theory can therefore be understood as an extension of RBV that addresses managerial processes, positions and paths. The approach is especially relevant in a fast-paced industry, and dynamic capabilities aim to achieve congruence with the changing business environment. Dynamic capabilities theory builds on the idea that resources are materials from which higher order capabilities can be developed upon, thereby emphasizing the importance of strategic and tactical competencies in using these resources. The capabilities of blending resources with strategic organizational processes are dynamic in the sense that organizations must continually reconfigure them to adapt to the changing business environment. However, they also note that the capabilities generate profitable rents only if they are based on resources that are difficult to imitate. This perspective has been used in information systems and marketing research to understand how technological resources, such as social media, are integrated into organizational processes. With point of departure in the RBV, the dynamic capabilities theory (Teece, Pisano, and Shuen 1997) was used in a study by Harrigan et al. (2015) to suggest that a combination of organizational capabilities (CRM) and raw technological resources (social media) can be used to develop a competitive advantage strategy.

In contrast to the IO and RBV, Dyer and Singh (1998) suggest a relational view on the firm, and argue that *“idiosyncratic interfirm linkages may be a source of relational rents and competitive advantage”* (Dyer and Singh 1998, 661). The authors argue, that the IO and RBV perspectives have overlooked the fact that *“the (dis)advantages of an individual firm are often linked to the (dis)advantages of the network of relationships in which the firm is embedded”* (Dyer and Singh 1998, 660). smM also taps into the collaborative potential of organizations, and according to Vatrappu (2013), smM is grounded in this relational perspective of the firm's competitive advantages. Additionally, as emphasized in the literature review, a strong relationship to fans is essential to the success of a professional football club, hence the relational capabilities of the organizations seems relevant for the upcoming analysis and discussion.

According to Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997), the different approaches are in many ways complementary, and a full understanding of competitive advantage on a firm-level requires an appreciation of all approaches and more. The challenge is to work out which frameworks are appropriate for the problem at hand. Addressing the research questions, I find the RBV and the dynamic capabilities appropriate as starting point for the analysis, as the questions relate to resources on the individual organizational level. However, the relational view can contribute by emphasizing that the critical resources may extend beyond firm boundaries (Dyer and Singh 1998), which seems appropriate for discussion of resources and capabilities concerning smE, smA, and smM.

Challenges in social media management

In an empirical study, Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrappu (2015) investigated current social media managerial practices by conducting a multiple case study at some of the leading multi-national companies headquartered in Denmark. They found eight categories of challenges experienced by the managers. I will shortly review their findings as it is an important input to the analytical framework: Firstly, the nature of social media interactions taking place 24/7 creates a challenge for social media managers regarding control, as conversations takes place day and night, across many time zones, and on many different channels. Secondly, the consumption of content takes place with high speed, which is challenging for the production teams, as it takes time to create quality content that is relevant and appeals to the user, and if several team members manage the same channel, they have to find a consistent view on what type of 'person' the company is, and based on this, how they respond to customers. Thirdly, the interviewees in their study found social media being more testable and measurable than traditional media. It is easier to run campaign tests on social media; on traditional media it is more difficult to perceive for instance which

half of the spent money on advertising were wasted. Despite social media to some extent being testable and measurable, managers still find it hard to create KPI's related to social media, and thereby communicating the value was found as the fourth challenge. Integrating social media into the organization was identified as a fifth challenge, as the growth and diversity of social media channels are resource demanding – the corporations in the study did not see themselves as first movers, and felt the need to see proven performance before diverting resources into new channels or social media software. The authors found no uniform optimal structure for integration. The sixth challenge is closely tied to the former, as once the structure is given, it is still a challenge to navigate in the social media chaos and coordinate a team effort addressing the social media strategy. Respondents highlighted listening to customers as an important step in creating strong relationships with customers, which requires a willingness to listen and learn from the customers. Central activities for the managers are therefore to overview and monitor the channels, requiring heavy resources, in order to be in control, as mentioned above. Lastly, managing the content production and publishing across multiple networks were challenging, as the social media managers not only needed to be social media specialists, but also be familiar with each product strategy and other marketing strategies.

3. Methodology

In the following chapter, I will outline the general scope of my study. In order to structure the research methodology, I followed the research 'onion' framework (Figure 2) presented by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009, 108). As the authors point out, it is important to consider the outer layers (philosophy and approach) before moving to the central research strategy.

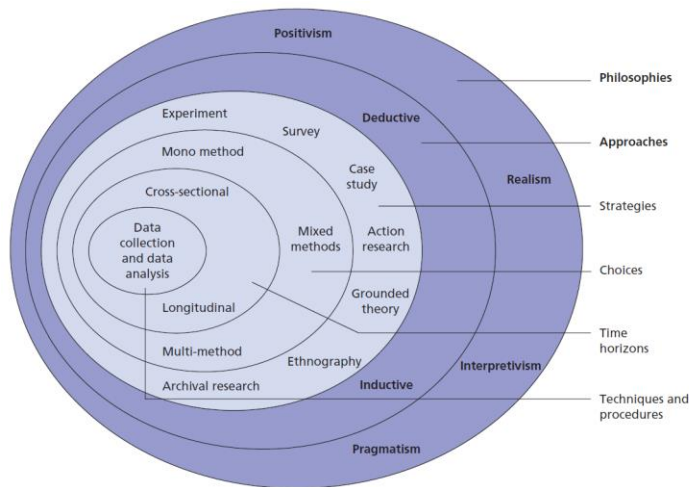


Figure 2: Research onion – general

Figure 3 shows the specific research onion of this thesis.

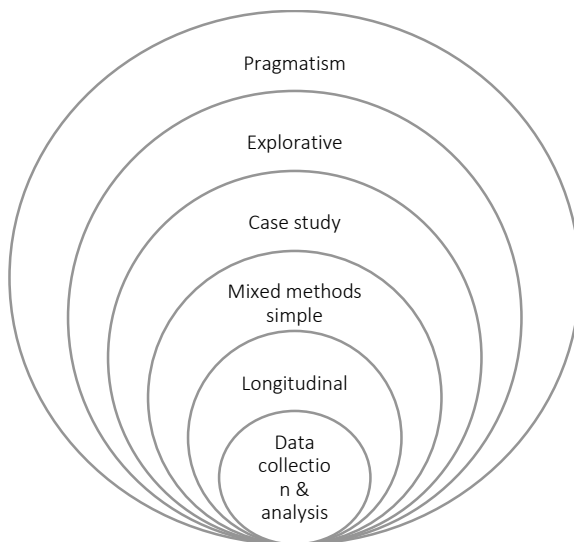


Figure 3: Research onion – specific

In the following, I will present the case (the Danish Superliga), then I will outline my reflections on the outer layers of the research 'onion' (research philosophy and approach), which ensures that the further process (inner layers; research strategy, choices, and core of data collection techniques and analysis procedures) in the research undertaken are both appropriate and coherent (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2009). Lastly, I explain how the data analysis can provide answers to the research question.

3.1 Case description

The Danish Superliga was selected as the focus for this study as the 12 clubs playing in the Superliga (see Table 2) can be considered the pinnacle of Danish commercial sport, and a leader in adopting social media practices in sport (in Denmark). The Superliga is the highest ranked league in Denmark for men's football. The official name is ALKA Superliga. ALKA is a Danish insurance company and is the current sponsor.

Table 2: Superliga clubs

CLUB	LATEST RANK ¹
Brøndby IF (BIF)	3
Esbjerg fB (EfB)	8
F.C. København (FCK)	2
FC Midtjylland (FCM)	1
FC Nordsjælland (FCN)	6
Hobro IK (HIK)	7
Odense Boldklub (OB)	9
Randers FC (RFC)	4
Sønderjyske Fodbold (SE)	10
Viborg FF (VFF)	Promoted
Aalborg Boldspilklub (AaB)	5
Aarhus GF (AGF)	Promoted

Since 1912, there has been a tournament structure aiming at crowning the Danish football champions, but the league has had many different structures throughout history². Professional football was introduced in 1978, and the Superliga was founded in 1991 (Sperling, Nordskilde, and Bergander 2010). Today, the 12

¹ Season 2014/15

² http://www.dbu.dk/turneringer_og_resultater/Landsdaekkende_turneringer_herrer/Superligaen/DM-historie.aspx, accessed April 13, 2016.

clubs play against each other three times during a season, which turns into 198 Superliga games a year. The season runs from summer to summer, and has a long winter break of two and a half months. Besides these matches, the clubs have several other events including international tournaments, the national cup (DBU Pokalen), and friendly matches during off-season.

The clubs are located in the larger cities in Denmark. There are noteworthy differences in historical existence and results, in fan base, and not least in financials³ between the 12 clubs. The differences are also reflected in great variation in their social media fan base and their organizational smE, smA, and smM processes, which will be further discussed later on.

3.2 Research philosophy and approach

The research philosophy influences how a research question is understood and the associated research design (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2009). I have adopted the position of the pragmatist, where the view on ontology is that the nature is external, and that *“no single viewpoint can ever give the entire picture and that there may be multiple realities”* (Saunders and Tosey 2012, 58). The epistemology, concerned with what constitutes acceptable knowledge, has its focus on practical applied research that integrates different perspectives in interpreting the data. This implicates that both observable phenomena and subjective opinions can provide the knowledge, which is required for the research strategy presented later on. The pragmatic view implicates axiology by assigning values a role when interpreting the results, which means that the researcher can adopt both objective and subjective points of view. This is rather important, as the data collection is affected by subjectivity.

The pragmatic view argues that the research question is the most important determinant in designing the research (Saunders and Tosey 2012). The importance of pragmatic research is in the findings' practical consequences. It does not mean that all pragmatist researchers use a variety of data collection techniques and analytical procedures; rather that the research design enables credible, reliable and relevant data collection, which supports subsequent actions.

The research was conducted through an explorative, empirically driven approach. The aim of the research has not been to test a theoretical framework, but rather to use a relevant group of theories to inspire and set a direction for the research in order to answer the research questions.

³ http://www.idan.dk/nyhedsoversigt/nyheder/2014/a510_den-turbulente-superliga/, accessed March 14, 2016.

3.3 Research strategy, choices and time horizon

A case study with a *mixed methods simple design* (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2009) was chosen for the empirical study. According to the authors, the adopted pragmatic view makes it possible to work with variations in epistemology, ontology and axiology, which mirrors that mixed methods are highly appropriate within one study. The methods were conducted as triangulation by covering three different approaches to the investigation of the research question in order to enhance the confidence in the following findings. Triangulation facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources, and often implies either combining qualitative and quantitative methods or several of any of them in its investigation (Ghauri and Grønhaug 2005). Thereby, triangulation becomes an alternative to traditional criteria like reliability and validity. The methods selected were two qualitative approaches; a netnographic study and semi-structured interviews, and a quantitative method; Big Social Data Analytics (BSDA), which will be elaborated below.

I structured the research by firstly conducting the netnographic analysis, hereafter the BSDA to comprehend to which extend the clubs use social media channels, and for what organizational functions they utilize them. During the process, I also went back and forth between the netnographic method and the BSDA to confirm findings. Furthermore, the BSDA was conducted to investigate the possibilities within the available data to be prepared for the interviews. This initial research provided me insights into the field, which I was able to use in preparing the interviews in order to achieve a deeper understanding, and to confirm the findings from the netnography and BSDA. How the research strategy contributes to answering the research questions are outlined in section 3.4.

Addressing the question of trends in the data, the problem necessitates data being collected for an extended period, and therefore the research is longitudinal. The strategy for each of the three methods is outlined below.

3.3.1 Netnographic study

The netnographic method was applied to analyze social media content. Netnography is an adaptation of the traditional ethnographic research method in an online community context. It was first introduced by Kozinets and defined as “*a specialized form of ethnography adapted to the unique computer mediated contingencies of today's social worlds*” (Kozinets 2009, 1). The purpose of netnography is to examine

groupings, gatherings, or collections of people at a 'meso' level of analysis (not the micro of individuals, nor the macro of an entire social systems, but a smaller group level in between) (Kozinets 2009), making it appropriate for studying subject field of this study which is the football clubs. Observations, rather than participation, can be used in netnography, which makes it possible to gather naturalistic data at 'low cost'. Consistent with previous research on social media in the same industry (Stavros et al. 2014; Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015), the unit of analysis was the content of social media channels (in this case: five different social media channels) and the coding units were the individual posts and comments by fans.

Data analysis process

The research design of the netnographic part took the following form: Identification of the dataset, a period of immersion in the data to familiarize myself with the findings, and a qualitative analysis of the posts to firstly identify organizational functions, and secondly to determine which categories of types of communication existed, and if those outlined in the research framework (Table 1 p. 10) could be used or adapted.

Data collection

Firstly, as to investigate for which organizational functions the clubs have adopted social media, I created a 'Social Business Matrix' to plot the data while collecting (Table 5 p. 30). Hereafter, I conducted a pilot study on two random clubs (BIF and EFB), and found both the matrix useful, and that the categories of Meng, Stavros, and Westberg's (2015) typology fitted well as inspiration for investigation of communication types. However, there were a few posts that did not fit perfectly in the coding (related to sponsors and networking events), which seem to call for addition of a category. Since the categories by Meng, Stavros, and Westberg (2015) were created from studying fans' team identification, they did not include communication types for other stakeholders. As the research questions address for what organizational functions the football clubs utilize social media, I considered if I should add more categories to the communication framework. Yet, I assessed that a new category for other organizational functions would overlap too much with the category of informing, as stakeholders like investors and sponsors in many instances are fans, or at least interested in the sporting results as well. In other cases, such as announcements of a new sponsorship deal, job postings, or need of volunteers (e.g. "*Oplev Esbjergs mest spændende arbejdsplads fra ringside. Vi har brug for dig som frivillig på Blue Water Arena!*"), the posts were also aimed at fans. Therefore, no new categories were added, and the results could be analyzed within the framework, as it was.

There are numerous sites and apps in the social media landscape today, and it is difficult to estimate definite numbers on the usage of social media in Denmark. To determine which channels to include in my study, I visited the official websites of the 12 clubs at the preliminary stage, and followed their links to each of the social media platforms they were engaging in. The total number of followers for each club spread over the largest channels (at the point of time for data collection; February 12, 2016) are stated in appendix 1.2. It was not surprising that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube were the dominant social media used by almost every club (only SE did not use Instagram). Facebook accounted for the largest amount of followers with 630.000 followers⁴ in total. The majority of the clubs link to these four platforms at their website, but they are also active on other platforms (e.g. LinkedIn and Snapchat). Based on the number of followers, and in order to obtain a distribution of channels with different purposes and possibilities, and majority, these five channels were chosen for the content analysis: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. Thereby, channels such as Vine, Google+, Pinterest, YouTube, Periscope, and Flickr were left out. YouTube and Google+ profiles had more followers than LinkedIn, but for the reason that YouTube content was more or less always posted onto the other channels, it was not included, and similar with Google+; the channel did not have its' 'own' content as it almost exclusively contained a stream from YouTube. See appendix 1.3 for a briefly description of each of the included channels.

In netnography, the element of communication is necessary (Kozinets 2009). Communication on social media is not limited to writing or talking; it is also exchange of symbols and pictures, which are shared through these information networks. Therefore, I decided to screenshot examples from every category that described their engagement (appendix 6), and categorize them due to the communicative framework in order to being able to identify trends in the analysis. It is not possible to go back in time and look at their postings on Snapchat as it is on the other four channels. Therefore, I followed their profiles and took screen-prints, for later analysis of these data together with the remaining netnographic data. Due to time usage considerations, the time span of the netnography was limited to updates from the first half of the 2015/16 season (fall of 2015, and off-season between 2015 and 2016). Links and profile names are listed in appendix 1.1.

⁴ One user can follow several clubs, so the 630.000 is not the unique number of users, but rather a total of each clubs' amount of followers of all 12 clubs.

Kozinets (2002) noted that no clear consensus on the public or private nature of message boards had at that time emerged and thus the requirement for consent for usage was not clear. For that reason, he stated that consent should be sought due to ethical issues in consideration. Langer and Beckman (2005) developed the argument that because of the likelihood of interference with findings by the intervention of a researcher, one should conduct netnographic studies without informing the subjects nor seeking consent for sensitive topics. I do not believe that the topic of my study is a sensitive one, and drawing on this argument by Langer and Beckman (2005), and the increasing normalization of e-communication since Kozinets developed the netnographic methodology (Beaven and Laws 2007), I assert that the social media walls are now established as public forums of communication. Thereby consent has become unnecessary for analysis of public postings. Furthermore, Vatrappu et al. (2015) found that Facebook walls function as online public spheres, which I assume can be generalized to the clubs' other social media platforms.

3.3.2 Big Social Data Analytics

As outlined in the framework, descriptive analytics are conducted concerning the usage of social media. As the social graph analytics is concerned with the structure of the relationships within social media, this structural information can be used to map the breadth of the smE by looking at posts and their affiliated user interaction.

Dataset description

The dataset consist of social data from Facebook, thereby excluding the four other channels investigated in the netnographic study. According to theory, the social graph analytics are concerned with the data containing information about actors involved, their actions taken and activities engaged, and the artefacts they create.

The analyzed data were downloaded in two types of data extracts: A 'daily file' including a daily distribution of actor actions and a 'full raw data file', including all fetched data for the specific wall including text. See appendix 2.1 for an overview of available data. The daily file contains 16.138 data points. A distinction is made between 'Admin' and 'NonAdmin': Admin is the administrator of the Facebook Page (the club), and NonAdmin is every other user or page. For the full raw data files, the number of data points ranges from 61 thousands to 2.7 million (see summaries in appendix 2.2). As the files contain all activities for each club, the amount of data points varies a lot from club to club and is due

to differences in the period of the club's presence on Facebook and to the amount of interactions created by both club and followers.

Data analysis process

First in the process is data collection. Hereafter followed preparation, cleaning and selection of relevant data before visualizing the data for analysis. The data collection and preparation process is summarized in Figure 4.

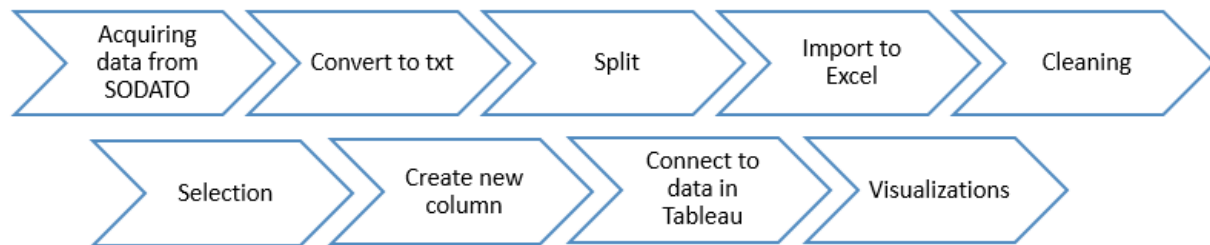


Figure 4: Data preparation process

Data collection

The data collected is the social data created from Facebook interactions between the football clubs and their communities. The social data from Facebook were fetched using the tool SODATO, and was conducted by CSSL⁵. SODATO is a theoretically informed and methodologically grounded IT artifact that addresses the diverse, but interrelated issues associated with social data (Hussain and Vatrapu 2014). The objective of SODATO is to “collect, store, analyze, and report big social data emanating from the social media engagement of and social media conversations about organizations” (Ibid., 414). SODATO is applied to obtain a detailed understanding of trends, dynamics, and mechanisms in the domain of Facebook. The tool supports the analysis in terms of the social graph. The data is publicly available and contains all activities from the 12 Facebook walls.

The period from which the data was collected is from the point in time when the respective club created the Facebook page until 31st of December 2015. In order to compare the pages, the data were in several instances filtered to exclude data from earlier than 2014, as some clubs were later than others to adopt Facebook. Furthermore, social media evolve quickly, and trends 2 years ago may be very different from trends seen today, hence some of the analytics were conducted exclusively for 2015.

⁵ Computational Social Science Laboratory (CSSL) at Copenhagen Business School

Data preparation and cleaning

As big data is characterized by large amounts of unstructured data, the first step in the data analysis were to prepare the data after downloading it from SODATO. The data was acquired in the CSV (comma separated) format. As the daily files were relatively small compared to the full raw files, I could easily combine the daily files and gather them into one single Excel sheet, as this made the connection to Tableau easier. The data set did not contain information about amount of followers, so I added a sheet with this information as it became useful for the data analysis. For the full raw data files, the preparation process was more complex. As Excel has a limitation in the number of rows (maximum of 1.048.576), the data were converted to txt files and checked in Notepad to see how many data rows it contained. Three clubs exceeded this limitation; hence, the files were split up in two and three files respectively. Hereafter, the data were imported to Excel in order to clean it. However, I experienced further technical difficulties in the preparation process as I was not able to merge the files into one sheet similar to the daily files, which implicated that I was not able to compare the clubs in Tableau. Nonetheless, I conducted the analyses for each club, and hereafter conducted comparisons through the individual visual outputs. Furthermore, the part of the data analysis relying on the full raw data files were only conducted for nine clubs due to difficulties in the connection from Excel to Tableau. However, I assessed that it would not contribute with crucial value, so I continued the process after several attempts to fix it. As exemplified in Figure 5, some text-heavy posts were split in several rows, which were inappropriate for the next steps. This was cleaned manually, by copying the data to the correct columns, which was very time consuming, as Excel does not work very well with these large amounts of data. Furthermore, choosing Tableau for visualizations meant that some columns had to be deleted as they contained more than 256 characters (a limitation of Tableau). These columns were those containing the text content, but since the analysis is focused on social graph analytics, and not text analytics, this did not have consequences for the quality of the analysis.

-CM	POST	85142	85142	303017923	14-03-2013 09:02	14-03-2013 10:56	status	3E+14	FC Midtjylland		
-CM	POST	85143	85143	303017923	14-03-2013 01:05	14-03-2013 01:05	photo	3E+14	FC Midtjylland	https://www.facebook.com/fcmidtjylland/	
-CM	Vind trøjen som tæmmede										
-CM	Joshua John i går. Sæt dit navn										
-CM	på trøjen og vind Koljas.										
-CM	Deltag her: http://tinyurl.com/bzjpk64										
-CM	Køb her: www.ulveshoppen.dk										
-CM	(Har du allerede sat dit navn på trøjen										
-CM	deltager du automatisk i lodtrækningen)										
-CM	Vinderen f FC Midtjyll shared_stor FC Midtjyll:										
-CM	POST	85144	85144	303017923	12-03-2013 12:06	12-03-2013 12:06	photo	3E+14	FC Midtjylland	https://www.facebook.com/fcmidtjylland/	
-CM	POST	85145	85145	303017923	12-03-2013 06:31	12-03-2013 08:28	photo	3E+14	FC Midtjylland	https://www.facebook.com/fcmidtjylland/	

Figure 5: Unstructured data

The column 'PostType_assigned' was not available from SODATO, but was created by using the Excel formula VLOOKUP (LOPSLAG in the Danish version) by looking up the PostType of a Post ID, and thereby assigning the PostType of a post to all the related actions to that specific post.

Table 3: Facebook data types

COLUMN	COLUMN TITLE	DESCRIPTION
A	Club	Club name
B	ActionType	Type of action
C	PostDbId	Post ID
D	CreatedDate	Date created
E	PostType	Post type (link, video, photo, event, post)
F	PostType_assigned	Post type (link, video, photo, event, post)
G	ActorId	Actor ID
H	ActorName	Actor name
I	Link	Link in post
J	CaptionNamePost	Title (of e.g. video, or 'AGF's cover photo')
K	StatusType	Action e.g. added_photos
L	Story	Page action (e.g. AGF was mentioned in a post, AGF updated their cover photo)
M	PropertyText	Length of video
N	ShareCount	Amounts of shares

3.3.3 Qualitative interviews

As the third wheel of the triangulation methodology, I conducted four in-depth interviews with employees responsible for social media in four different clubs.

Data collection

The interviews were planned as semi-structured, and an interview guide was iteratively developed to function as a guideline during the interview in order to encompass the research objective and expected outcome. This ensured getting the necessary answers, but also openness to new information, I had not prepared for. Hence, I could ask them to elaborate on their responses, if I found their answer relevant for the research topics. Furthermore, the interviews afforded each interviewee with an opportunity to hear themselves aloud about things they previously have not thought about, which they indicated in a few instances. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), such an approach enables a rich and detailed data set.

When deciding on informants, I chose to reach out to the employees whom were responsible for social media. None of them had the title social media manager, but were either responsible for marketing or communication, and had social media as their responsibility, or had a central position in the organization in relation to social media. I chose to interview a single person in each organization, as the clubs are quite small in terms of employed staff, and adding another interviewee in the same club would probably not provide me with additional information, however this assumption is discussed in chapter 5. See Table 4 for interview list.

When reaching out to the interviewees, I clearly stated the objectives of the research interview and the expectations in terms of length of time required in order for them to agree to be interviewed. The interviews took place at their offices (and involved three trips to Jutland). I recorded the interviews in order to avoid having to deal with remembering it – and to concentrate on the interviewee during the interview, instead of focusing on taking notes. Hereafter, all the interviews were transcribed in order to be able to perform an appropriate analysis. One of the informants required anonymity in order for the club to participate, so I decided to anonymize all interview data, as I did not consider it as a constraint for the following analysis process.

Table 4: Interview specifications

CLUB	DATE	TYPE	LENGTH
Club #1	March 31 st	Personal communication at their office	1 h 7 min
Club #2	March 31 st	Personal communication at their office	47 min
Club #3	April 14 th	Personal communication at their office	28 min
Club #4	April 21 st	Personal communication at their office	30 min

Interview guide

The research framework, together with the preliminary results from netnography and BSDA informed the questions. Interviewees were initially asked for their perceived role and practical approach to the five social media channels and tools in practice. Hereafter, the questions were structured in categories in relation to the research topics within the research framework. Consequently, the three aspects of the social business (smE, smA, and smM) were used as categories. Some organizations were using a series of different social media tools for their smA and smM processes, and some were not using any, but since the research question concerns to what extend they engage in social media, any answer was useful.

I used the same interview guide for the first two interviews as they were conducted on the same day. For the third and fourth interview, I adjusted only a little bit, so for all four interviews they were almost alike. However, since the interviews concerned the same topic, my understanding of the field developed along the way, and in the third and fourth interview, I could ask for more details and facets. Furthermore, I had a better understanding of what information I needed, and could ask the questions more precisely, which is also why the length of the two last interviews were shorter than the two first. The interview guides can be found in appendix 3.

3.4 Data analysis strategy

The previous section outlined the six layers of the research onion. In the following, I will briefly summarize how the method and data may provide answers to the research questions.

The scope of the study is to understand the social business in the domain of sports by empirically investigating the managerial practices, requirements and challenges in the adoption, use, and impact of social media in football clubs. The three aspects of the social business conceptualize a framework to answer the research questions. As stated in theory, smE is concerned with the use of social media to interact strategic use of social media channels for organizational functions, smA is concerned with the collection, storage, analysis, and reporting of social data stemming from the smE interactions, and smM is concerned with the adoption of social media related operational issues and managerial challenges.

The two research questions have guided the methodology: The netnography and BSDA were undertaken to investigate to what extent the football clubs utilize social media and for what organizational functions. While the activity such as likes or comments that each Facebook post receives can be quantified, a finer-grained qualitative analysis of the content of these interactions were necessary to provide the insights these platforms can provide, which were how the netnography and BSDA methods could complement one another. The data from the interviewees were used for two purposes; firstly, to have the interviewees elaborate on the findings from the netnography and BSDA, in order to deepen the insights, and secondly, to investigate managerial practices, requirements and challenges related to smA, smE, and smM processes. The data were analyzed separately for the three methods in order to focus the analysis on what each method could contribute with. Throughout the conduction of the netnographic study, I was able to gain insights into what kind of posts the clubs publish, which channels they use, how they

communicate, and for what organizational functions, thereby facilitating questions regarding their social media strategy for smE.

In the BSDA analysis, I used the tool Tableau, which was introduced in the Big Data Analytics course, to conduct social graph analytics and visualize the results. The visual analytics were conducted to tell the descriptive stories. Visual analytics is "*the science of analytical reasoning facilitated by interactive visual interfaces*" (Thomas and Cook 2005, 4), and aims at making data transparent. The interactivity of Tableau made visualization useful in order to analyze to what extent the clubs have adopted social media, and the richest visualizations were reported in the findings section. As stated in theory, social graph analytics are concerned with the network of actors, which are information about actors, actions, activities, and artefacts. Creating visualizations required a number of judgments and one must determine which questions to ask (Heer, Bostock, and Ogievetsky 2010). My starting point was to explore how the data could contribute in order to answer to what extent the clubs use social media, so I selected the appropriate data such as likes, comments etc. as proxies for engagement.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the aim of understanding relationships found in the former methods (netnography and BSDA), to identify the managerial requirements and challenges concerning smE, smA, and smM processes. By combining multiple theories, concepts, methods, and empirical data, I hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method, single-observer and single-theory studies such as big data analytics' focus on correlations (however it is accepted knowledge), the qualitative data provides deeper insights and have the potential to explain causations, such as *why* they do what they do, challenges they experience, and tools and data sources they utilize.

Before moving on the data analysis, I will shortly comment on the quality of data. The netnographic findings may be exposed to researcher bias, as the categorization of communication heavily relies on my interpretations. SE has only been present on Facebook since ultimo 2014, which generates 15 months of data, which has consequence for some of the figures that are based on 2014 and 2015 data. However, the amount of data is still big, so I assess it does not have essential consequences for this study. Furthermore, during the period of data collection, some of the clubs have been relegated to or promoted from 1st division. Nonetheless, I assume that fan engagement is still important and a prioritized area for those clubs, so I do not perceive this as having big consequences for the findings. Research using qualitative interviews cannot be used to make any statistical generalizations about the population, but structuring

into themes enabled identifying general patterns, although more research is needed to confirm the initial findings. The interviewees freely shared their thoughts and knowledge, so I carefully clarified meanings of responses and topics discussed, and read through the main themes several times before analyzing the data. The interviewees were chosen according to my assessment of who would have the knowledge about smM in the organization, thereby the data may be affected by their view of (and believe in) the potentials of social media. I find that reliability may be an issue for the findings of the study, as interviewer and response bias may be present. Interviewer bias in terms of I in a few instances may have put words in their mouth, and response bias towards over-interpretation of some inaccurate answers. Follow up interviews could have provided with more accuracy in order for them to confirm the analytical results. However, the triangulation methodology compensate for some of those inaccuracies, as the findings from the two other methods often were in line with the interview findings.

The interviews and text on social media are Danish, and were not translated to English in order to keep the exact words. However, the citations or screenshots does not stand alone without an explanatory context, which therefore should not be an issue for reading the thesis.

4. Data analysis and findings

In the following section, I will present the results gained through the triangulation methodology outlined in the previous section. I present the results separately for the three methods, starting with netnography. In chapter 5, the results are discussed in conjunction.

4.1 Netnographic study

The netnographic study was undertaken in order to analyze content to extract common elements from the online text. Appendix 6 contains documentation for the findings (screen-prints of posts).

4.1.1 Organizational functions

Firstly, an overview was sought to investigate for which organizational functions the clubs had adopted social media. For this purpose, a 'Social Business Matrix' was created. In the left side of the matrix are the social media channels, and in the right side the organizational functions for what clubs were utilizing social media (the six traditional management functions mentioned in the social business theory).

Table 5: Social Business Matrix

	Social media channel									Organizational function					
	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	LinkedIn	YouTube	Snapchat	Vine	Google+	Periscope	HRM	Operations	Strategic	Marketing	Finance	IT
BIF	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		
EFB	x	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x		
FCK	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x		
FCM	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x		
FCN	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x		
HIK	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x	x		
OB	x	x	x	x	x			x				x	x		
RFC	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	x		
SE	x	x			x			x				x	x		
VFF	x	x	x	x	x			x		x	x	x	x		
AaB	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x		x	x		
AGF	x	x	x	x	x	x				x		x	x		

As indicated in Table 5, the clubs have adopted many of the available and largest social media channels, but differed in which and how many channels. There exist many more social media channels than those in the matrix, but those shown have at least one club present on the specific channel.

I examined over a thousand posts from the fall of 2015 published by the 12 Superliga clubs, and found marketing as their primary reason for adopting social media for their business, as the majority of posts indicated that they were published for marketing purposes. The marketing posts contained information such as direct links to tickets, special campaign offers, launch of new merchandise, competitions to win prizes such as tickets or merchandise, etc. Social media was also used for strategic purposes. Posts such as promotion of a business network to sponsors, signing of sponsorship deals etc. were found in all clubs, but it was clear from the quality of the posts, that some clubs definitely put more effort in them than others. For example, some clubs would announce a signing of a sponsorship deal as a regular news post, while other would use it to promote their business network at the same time, and provide other with information about the benefits of being a part of their network in particular. HRM functions primarily occurred on LinkedIn in the terms of job postings, but were also in some instances found on Facebook and Twitter. Operations were found in one club as they engaged their fans in t-shirt production, and several clubs presented news such as convening general meetings or safety instructions on social media as well, but these were only a few out of the many sports related posts such as marketing. Financial and IT related posts were not found during the netnographic study. Trends related to how the clubs use the different channels, and how they communicate applying the typology presented in the research framework, are presented in the following.

4.1.2 Channel specific results

Table 6 highlights which of the five chosen channels the clubs had adopted by February 12, 2016. The red color indicate that the club was absent from the channel, yellow indicate that they had a profile on the channel, but was not actively using it; and green indicate an active use of the channel.

At the time of data collection, all clubs were present on Facebook and Twitter, and SE was the only club not being present on Instagram. The adoption of LinkedIn and Snapchat were more fragile. However, the table shows that the clubs use a variety of platforms to communicate, and they appear to embrace new platforms as they become available and adopted by consumers such as Snapchat. SE differs from the

other clubs, as they only have adopted two of the five channels. Furthermore, their Facebook page was launched in November 2014, which is late compared to the other clubs.

Table 6: Channels

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	Snapchat
BIF					
EFB					
FCK					
FCM					
FCN					
HIK					
OB					
RFC					
SE					
VFF					
AaB					
AGF					
Amount of clubs present	12	11	12	10	7

Clubs with greater resources, such as BIF and FCK, clearly have more professional and insightful content than clubs with fewer economic and human resources. The two-way nature of social media interaction was evidenced by the efforts of clubs, not just fans, to provide material that would act as a catalyst for engagement. However, the majority of efforts by clubs were one-way communication. In the following section, I will present the results concerning the clubs' smE and interactions with their fans and followers for each of the five social media channels.

Facebook

Facebook is, of the five, the channel with the most diverse range of content; video, photos, links, statuses, and events, which all were widely used among the clubs. There were great differences in the quality of the content – especially the videos that the clubs published. The clubs post information and content directly on their wall, but they also provide links to e.g. their website and YouTube.

The Table 7 provides examples from each category from the Facebook channel.

Table 7: Types of communication – Facebook

One-way communication		Examples
Informing	Organizational news	<p><i>"Højdepunkter fra træningskampen mod Lyngby Boldklub – se med her!" (EfB)</i></p> <p><i>"MATCH FC Midtjylland 2 - 1 Manchester United</i></p> <p><i>Let's dance ;o)" (FCM)</i></p> <p><i>"Se startopstillingen til dagens kamp mod FC Dnipro.</i></p> <p><i>David Jensen - Ramón Rodrigues, Pascal Gregor, Andreas Skovgaard, Mads 'Mini' Pedersen - Stanislav Lobotka, Emiliano Marcondes, Gudmundur Thórarinnsson - David Moberg Karlsson, Emre Mor, Tobias Mikkelsen.</i></p> <p><i>(link)</i></p> <p><i>Matchen livestreames: (link)" (FCN)</i></p>
	Activity outside of the sport	<p><i>"FØDSELS DAG Pione Sisto # fylder 21 år I dag. Ønsk ham tillykke her;o)" (FCM)</i></p> <p><i>"I dagens videodagbog kan du blandt andet høre Rasmus Lyng og Jesper Bøge fortælle om, hvorfor den ene holdleder og denne ene presseansvarlig kom på afveje, og var ved at komme i klammeri med en tyrkisk landsby." (HIK)</i></p>
	Diverting fans to other content	<p><i>"LÆS LOKALAVISENS SÆRTILLÆG OM SØNDERJYSKE (link)" (SE)</i></p> <p><i>"De næste 9 dage, er truppen på træningslejr og vi har givet spillerne adgang til vores Instagram- og Snapchat profil. Følg med og kom helt tæt på." (AaB)</i></p>
Marketing	Promoting	<p><i>"QUIZ: Kan du genkende de nye AGF'ere? Spil og vær med i konkurrencen om 2 VIP-billetter til AGF – Hobro d. 2. april. Klik her og spil med: (link)" (AGF)</i></p>
	Direct sales	<p><i>"Kig forbi på Øster Allé og se nærmere på de mange nye produkter. Du kan også finde produkterne på (link)" (FCK)</i></p> <p><i>"FANS Et parti billetter er kommet retur, og de sættes i salg online i dag klokken 14.00. Billetter: (link)" (FCM)</i></p>
Two-way communication		
Personalizing	Initiating contact	No content
	Direct responses	<p><i>"William sender en lille videohilsen efter at han har svaret på jeres fine spørgsmål den sidste halve times tid" (FCK)</i></p> <p><i>"Tak for opbakningen, Villy. emoticon" (SE, comment)</i></p>

Activating	Group involvement	<p><i>"Wow! Tusind tak for de mange fortællinger om, hvordan I fik Brøndby i blodet. Det vidner om den store passion, der er for klubben i alle afkroge af landet – og i alle aldre. Vi har samlet et lille udvalg her. Vil du læse endnu flere passionerede historier fra dine medfans, kan du dykke ned i tråden på vores side. #Brøndby #passion #fællesskab" (BIF)</i></p> <p><i>"Vi jubler over mål, vi begejstres over gode redninger, og nu fejrer vi de syngende tacklinger. Spillerpanelet kårer i denne video efterårets bedste af slagsen. Er der nogen tacklinger, du husker bedre end andre fra efteråret 2015? Kom med dine eksempler i kommentarerne nedenfor" (BIF)</i></p> <p><i>"Der er stadig ledige pladser til vores optaktsmøde hos Viborg Folkeblad på onsdag. Her kan du høre Johnny Mølby, Jeppe Curth og Jeppe Grønning fortælle om opstarten og forventningerne til foråret, og du får også mulighed til at få svar på dine egne spørgsmål." (VFF).</i></p>
	Gathering feedback	<p><i>"Vi præsenterer stolt vores nye 3. trøje – lavet i samarbejde med jer..." (FCK)</i></p>

The majority of Facebook posts were informing and/or marketing. The informing posts were related either to sports (training, matches etc.) or outside of sports (e.g. players visiting a school or happy birthday wishes). Marketing posts were promoting competitions or directing users to merchandise or ticket sales.

Findings indicate that the clubs do not initiate contact to individual fans. The clubs were not very active in responding to fan posts; generally, those clubs who actually did respond, almost exclusively responded to questions regarding sales (e.g. when is the game, what is the price, etc.), and seemed to be more occasionally than an aimed effort towards engaging with fans:



A few examples of comments unrelated to sales:



Fans of BIF, FCK, FCM, HIK, RFC, and VFF were also unable to initiate topics on the clubs' Facebook wall and were only permitted to comment in response to official club posts, further limiting the opportunity for interaction. However, fans did not express confusion or annoyance at the restrictive nature of such an approach, which Stavros et al. (2014) found for the NBA fans.

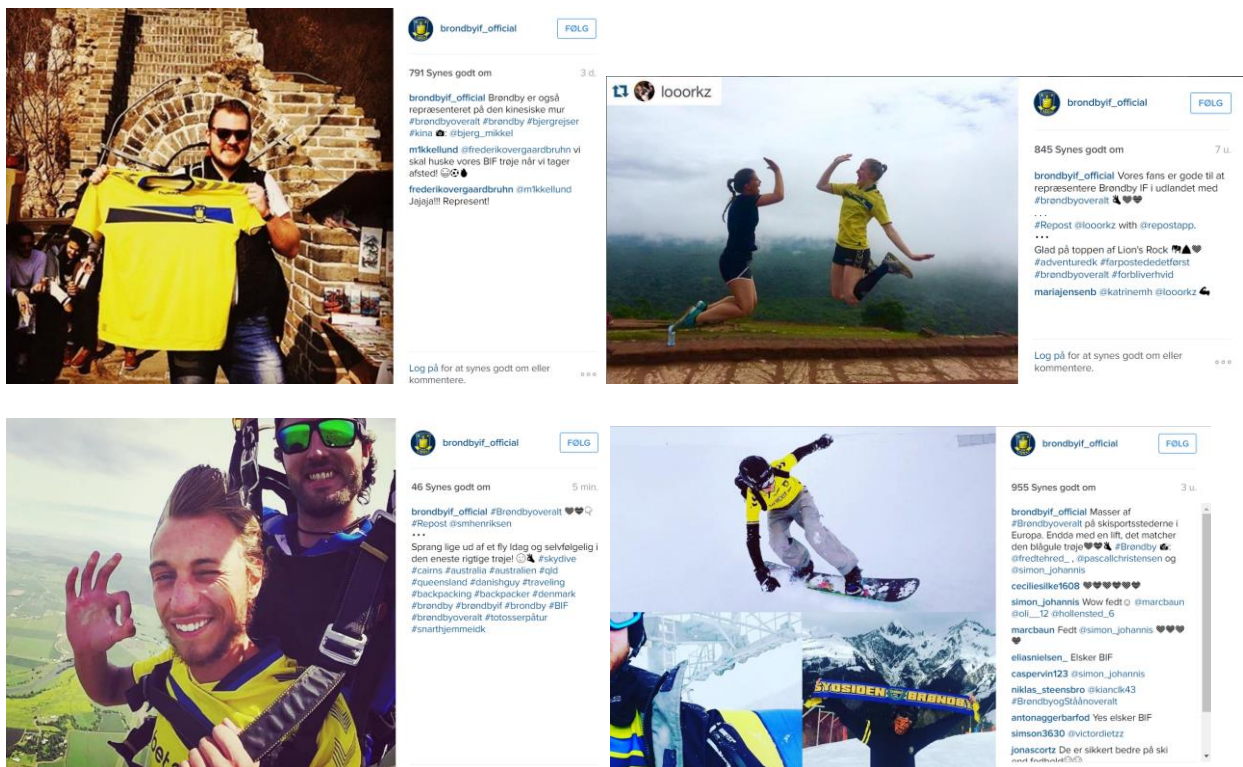
Besides commenting on posts, which were categorized in direct responses, this type of communication also occurred in video interviews, where players and/or coaches responded to questions the fans had asked on an earlier post initiated by the club (group involvement posts). Those posts were appreciated by the fans, as comments such as: *"Jeg synes det er vigtigt at takke BIF generelt for at komme ud til deres fans på denne måde. Sætte tid af til, at lade spørgsmål blive besvaret og agere personligt herfor. Tak fordi i er hos jeres fans, et vigtigt aspekt i dansk fodbold og sund markedsføring!"* and *"Jeg synes virkelig at det er fedt at han stiller op til disse ting. Har stor respekt for TF! Tror han er den rigtige for BIF også på den lange bane!"* were found on those types of communication posts. Additionally, many of the clubs did group involvement (and promotions) with external partners – such as Superliga.dk's manager game, and personalized games at Oddset. The content were often posted on other channels as well.

The cover photo, which is the picture that occurs when entering a page on Facebook and fills half of the screen, where used in different manners. Approximately half of the clubs used it actively as a part of their marketing, and changed it for every game with information about tickets, bus tours, or whatever being relevant in that particular moment. The remaining clubs had the same picture for a long period with had a

picture presenting the club in a positive way such as an emotional picture, or a picture of the stadium connecting the profile with their physical appearance.

Instagram

Instagram were typically used for informing purposes, e.g. sports-related match information or activity outside of sports such as happy birthday wishes to current and former players. Besides informing, the clubs also used Instagram for marketing purposes, e.g. posting pictures of merchandise, or match related informing posts with small call-to-action instructions to buy tickets. A few posts of activating were seen in a few clubs hosting a competition such as best fan picture on Instagram. Furthermore, in activating fans, BIF 're-grams' photos that fans have taken wearing BIF merchandise around the world, inspiring other fans to post their photos with the hashtag #brøndbyoveralt ('Brøndby everywhere'). There are current⁶ 1458 photos with that specific hashtag posted within the last 95 weeks (approx. 2 years). A few examples:



Instagram offer the admin of a page the opportunity of following fans. A count of how many users, the clubs follow ranges from 19 in AaB to 97 in FCM. The majority of profiles the clubs followed were players, other clubs or leagues. In addition, with the amount of followers ranging from 1.716 to 22.417, this

⁶ By March 21, 2016

indicates that the clubs are not interested in following their fans on this channel – or at least not making it visible from their official account.

Twitter

The majority of Twitter posts were informing news related to games, either lineups or live updates.

Examples of 'live sessions':



Besides live updates, given the space limitations of Twitter, followers were often diverted by the club to other social media channels or their website for additional information. This would be links to their website, or posts diverting fans to something going on, on another channel. Posts diverting fans to Periscope were found in the beginning of the 2015, and a few in the beginning of the 2015/16 season, whereas from the 2015/16 season the seven clubs who have adopted Snapchat, began to put greater effort into this channel. Similar to Instagram, the clubs did not follow many other profiles, except for FCK, who followed 5570 other pages, which could be an indication of initiating contact to each of the respective users.

LinkedIn

The primary use of LinkedIn was information with focus on sponsor and network related news, or job postings. A few marketing posts were found as well, especially in FCK. Two examples of usages is seen below, where AaB has written a post about their jersey-launch, and FCN is telling a story about their business network and provides contact information for any interested followers.

FC Nordsjælland I dag havde vi Lone Schilling Andersen på besøg i FCNetværk, for at tale om talent- og medarbejderudvikling. Det gav konstruktiv input og stof til eftertanke til både de større og mindre virksomheder. Netværket mødte som altid ind kl. 7:30 til uformel networking over morgenmad og herefter fulgte oplæg samt efterfølgende debat og networking i grupper. Er du interesseret i at opleve FCNetværk indefra, så kontakt salgschef Anders Kjær Madsen og hør om mulighederne. Mail: akm@fcn.dk less



Like (28) • Comment • Share • 11 days ago

AaB A/S Til AaB's preseason-arrangement i aften blev den nye hjemmebanetrøje lanceret. Trøjen er udviklet i samarbejde mellem AaB og hummels designere. Den kan udover AaB's webshop købes i Sportmasters tre butikker i Aalborg fra fredag.

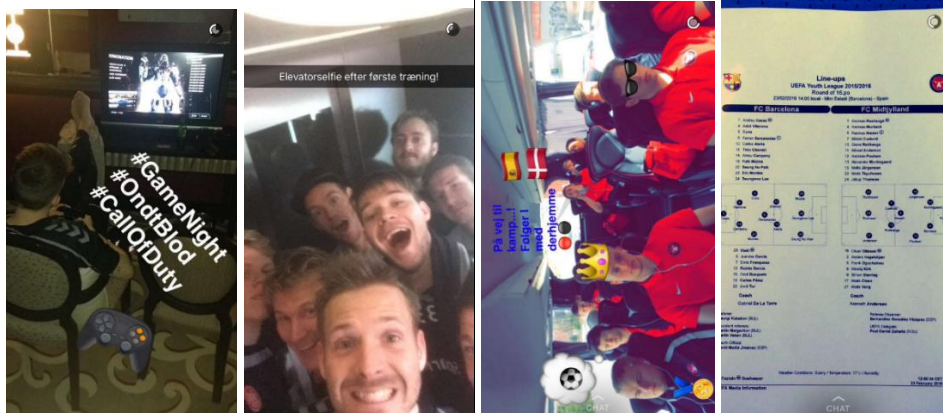


AaB lancerer ny hjemmebanetrøje fra hummel
 fodbold.aabsport.dk • Presentationen skete til det årlige preseason-arrangement på Nordjyske Arena, hvor 300 fremmødte sæsonkortindehavere fik æren af at få første glimt af den nye trøje.

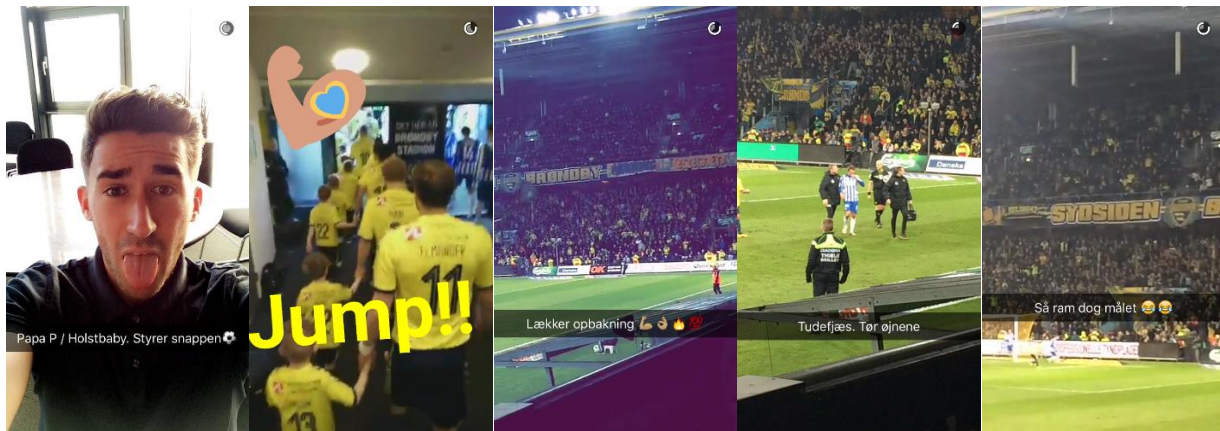
Synes godt om (28) • Kommenter • Del • 21 timer siden

Snapchat

Snapchat were primarily used for informative communication by providing real-time updates on matches, as well as insights into activity outside of the sport, such as what the players are spending their time with before and after a game, on a training camp etc. Below is a few from AaB and FCM:



'Take-overs', where players take over the club-profile, were used to provide the followers insights from the players point of view. For example, BIF had a quarantined player post during a match:



On the examples we see that take-overs contains more direct language than the 'official' clubs posts would be; we would probably never see the club write 'tudefjæs' (cry-baby) about an opponent. A few of the clubs have used the channel for group involvement by having their fans sending them snapchats with the opportunity to win either merchandise or tickets (which then makes the post a marketing post as well). The competition would often be promoted on Facebook and Instagram as well in order to increase the audience on Snapchat:



Informing communication often related to matches and the players. In the absence of ongoing matches in off-season, clubs focused on news related to expectations for the upcoming games, or utilized the break to interview the players about non-sport related stuff. Furthermore, they took advantage of the training camps, where they had the opportunity to follow the players almost day and night, and thereby providing their fans with an opportunity to get to know the players off the court. Marketing communication allowed the clubs providing relevant and engaging promotions or advertisements directly to followers. The communication was not limited to online purchases, such as tickets and linking to their merchandise web shop, but was also pop-up events, pre-sale offers or launching new equipment in stores. Furthermore, the players would make appearance for special-fan events, adding value to the whole fan experience, which were promoted or reported on social media as well. Informing and marketing communication were often overlapping. Personalized communication occurred where the clubs responded directly to fan comments, or provided them with an opportunity to ask staff and players questions. No instances of initiating contact were found, whereas many posts were found, where the clubs tried to engage with fans, but always on group level. Activating communication was seen in group-involving efforts to activate the online fan-base, for instance competitions (non-promotions), group discussion or storytelling. Especially BIF were engaging

in this type of communication, for example the former mentioned hashtag. Other examples are that they had their fans write stories (comments on Facebook) about how they became fans in the first place, emphasizing having 'BIF in their heart', and when they launched their profile on Snapchat, they asked their fans to send their most creative BIF snapchats, and hereafter they posted these onto their Facebook page in order to start group discussions. This approach relies on an elevated level of involvement, through an ongoing interaction and dialogue, rather than directly responding to individual comments. Informing communication was often also a catalyst for group discussions about the sporting results. Besides group involvement, Meng, Stavros, and Westberg (2015) identified gathering feedback as a common way of communicating on social media for the NBA clubs, but this type (and opportunity) were very uncommon among the Superliga clubs. One single example was found on Facebook from the current season, when FCK created a jersey in cooperation with their fans.

Table 8 shows how each channel, in general, are used. A few posts may differ from this; however, the aim with the table is to show the general picture gained from the netnographic analysis.

Table 8: Types of communication – overview

		Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	Snapchat
One-way communication						
Informing	Organizational news	x	x	x	x	x
	Activity outside of the sport	x	x	x	x	x
	Diverting fans to other content	x	x	x	x	
Marketing	Promoting	x	x	x	x	x
	Direct sales	x	x	x		
Two-way communication						
Personalizing	Initiating contact					
	Direct responses	x				
Activating	Group involvement	x	x			
	Gathering feedback					

4.2 Big Social Data Analytics

The goal of big data analytics is to see the big picture from the minutia of our digital lives (Fisher et al. 2012). This view is applied in the following analysis, where I have sought to create a picture of the Superliga on social media through social graph analytics. Some of the findings may seem obvious to the

regular football fan, however, the results contribute in two ways: Firstly, in providing insights for me as researcher in order to get deeper knowledge into the area, which has been useful for the interviews, and secondly, in providing findings in order to answer the research questions later on.

4.2.1 Trends

Data shows a clearly seasonal trend, where activity on social media follows operational activity. Figure 6 and Figure 7 (stacked graphs of activity level) shows that when there are no games, the activity level decreases. Activity by Admin is measured through posts, and activity for NonAdmin is a sum of activities (posts, likes, comments). The periods of less activity were during summer and winter breaks, and when the players attend national team gatherings. During 2015, there were national games in the following weeks: week 14, 24, 36 & 37, 41, and week 46 & 47⁷, which is clearly seen on the figures as low activity periods for both Admin and NonAdmin. Furthermore, the two figures show relatively similar pattern across clubs, but obviously a larger variation in actions by NonAdmins due to different amount of followers and actors.

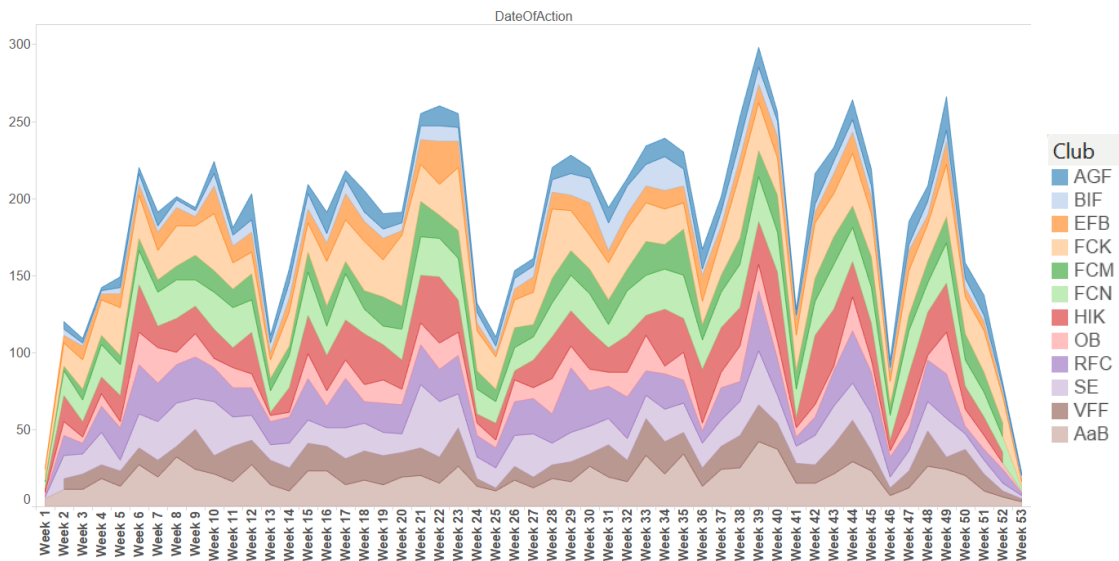


Figure 6: Yearly Admin activity⁸

⁷ <http://www.dbu.dk/landshold/Landsholdsdatabasen/lbasematch.aspx?s=1&sDateF=1-1-2015&sDateT=31-12-2015&sGender=1&sTType=330&sPSize=50>, accessed April 14, 2016.

⁸ Sum of PostsbyAdmin for each DateOfAction Week. Color shows details about Club. The data is filtered on DateOfAction Year, which keeps 2015.

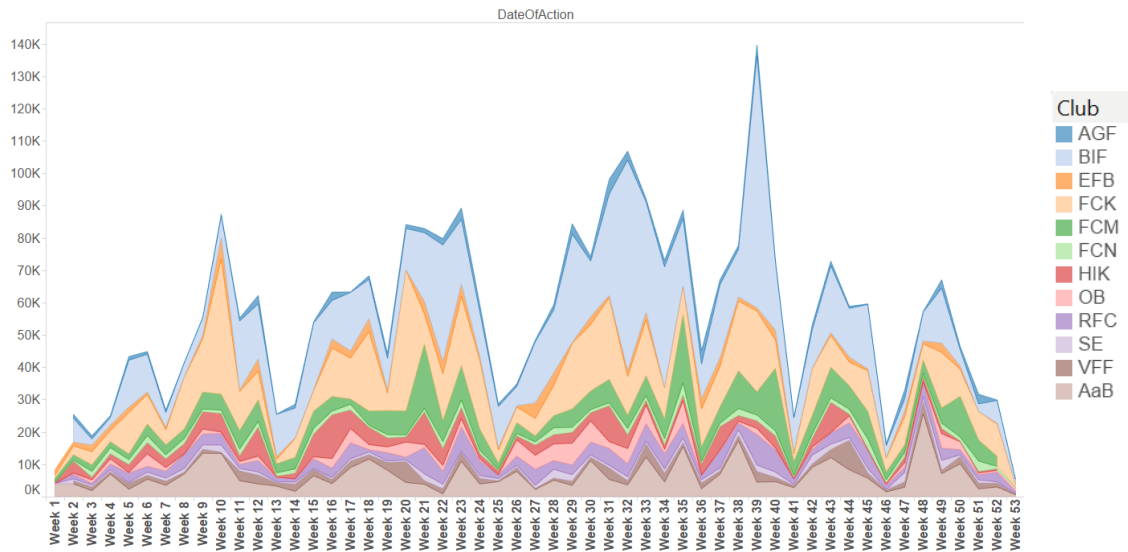


Figure 7: Yearly NonAdmin activity⁹

In order to see a possible pattern on average posts by admins I included both year 2014 and 2015 in Figure 8. The average posts per week is just below three.

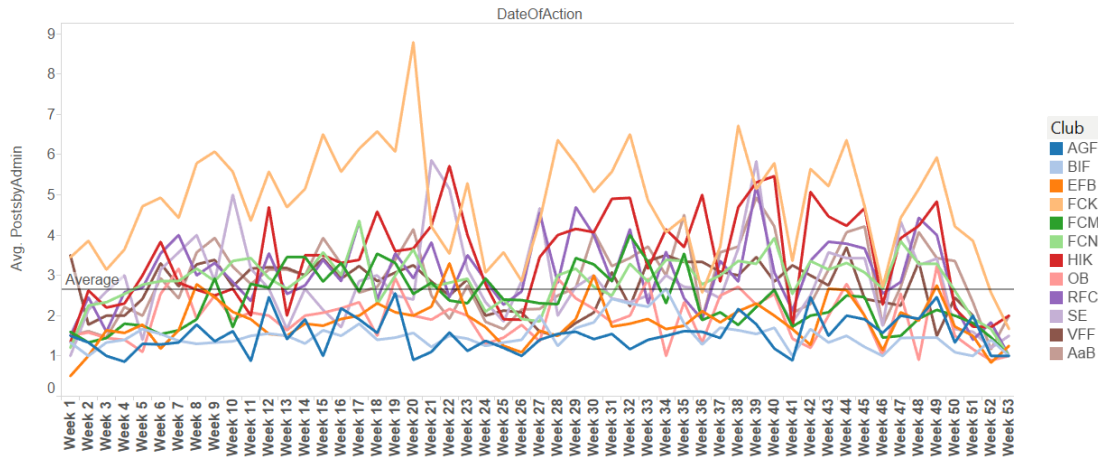


Figure 8: Average PostsbyAdmin¹⁰

Weekly activity figures (seen in appendix 4.2) also show some patterns. Similar to Figure 8, year 2014 is included to have more data to rely on. Again, a pattern is seen as activity increases when there are

⁹ Sum of CALC_TotalNonAdminActivity for each DateOfAction Week. Color shows details about Club. The data is filtered on DateOfAction Year, which keeps 2015.

¹⁰ The trends of average of PostsbyAdmin for DateOfAction Week. Color shows details about Club. The data is filtered on DateOfAction Year, which keeps 2014 and 2015.

matches. It differs when matches are held, but as a thumb rule, the largest clubs play on Sundays (and some Saturdays) due to television rights, and smaller, and less interesting games, are played on Fridays and Mondays. This is seen in FCK and BIF (largest clubs), where the activity clearly increase on Sundays and are relatively even throughout the rest of the week, and e.g. in EFB (smaller club), where they have most activity on Mondays. FCM has increased activity in mid-week as well, which is assumed to be due to participation in European leagues in the 2014-15 season on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and those games are highly attractive. For all clubs, there is a tendency towards Saturday being the weekday with the least activity (both AdminPosts and TotalLike). However, more research is needed to confirm these initial findings; though, they suggest the same as the seasonal trends regarding social media activity level following sports activity level.

4.2.2 Followers and actors

The amount of TotalLikes, TotalComments and TotalUniqueActors (dataset overview in appendix 4.1), which are metrics that can be seen as a measure for reach, indicate that the Superliga overall reaches the same amount of fans in 2014 and 2015 respectively, but that it differs quite a lot among the clubs. The club's, who has experienced a decrease in these metrics are especially EFB and AaB, but also AGF, BIF, HIK, OB. Clubs such as FCK, FCM and RFC has a relatively large increase, and there is a little increase is seen in FCN, VFF and SE. The increase in SE is explained by the fact that they created their profile in ultimo 2014, and the increase in VFF could be explained by their promotion from 1st Division to the Superliga in mid-2015.

Figure 9 shows the median of TotalUniqueActors in the first row, the maximum of TotalUniqueActors and the amount of Facebook followers per February 2016. The figure show that actors engaged to some extent follow the size of the follower fan base. However, FCK has the greatest amount of followers, though BIF attracts most unique actors per posts. Figure 10 shows a calculation of NonAdmin activity per Admin post. This shows how much activity a post by a club create on average. Columns are ordered by amount, and similar to Figure 9, BIF is by far the club with most activity per post, despite FCK having more followers.

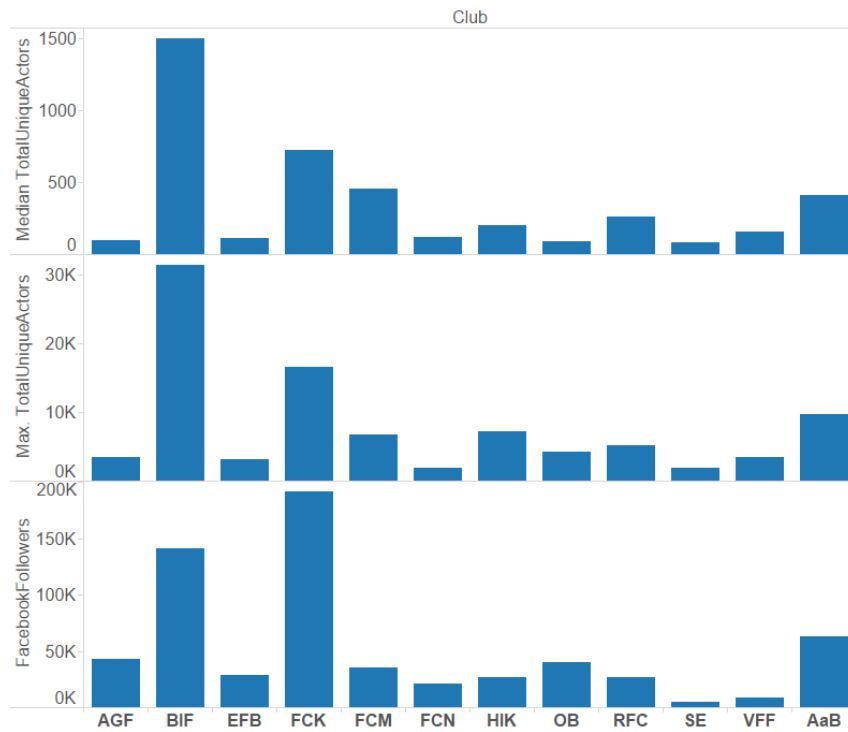


Figure 9: Followers versus Actors¹¹

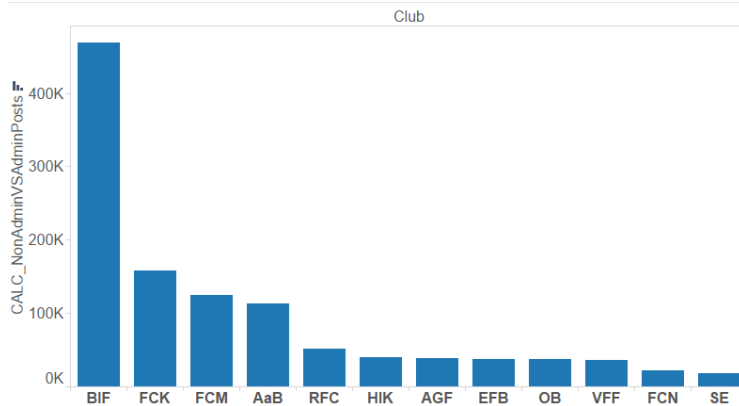


Figure 10: Followers versus NonAdmin activity per AdminPost¹²

Data in appendix 4.3, which shows actions by Admin and posts by NonAdmin, indicate great variation in how much the clubs respond to posts. In the netnographic study, it was found, that some clubs engage more than others in commenting and responding to fan questions, and that neither of them seem to

¹¹ Median of TotalUniqueActors, maximum of TotalUniqueActors and sum of FacebookFollowers for each Club. The data is filtered on DateOfAction Year, which keeps 2015.

¹² Sum of CALC_NonAdminVSAdminPosts for each Club. The data is filtered on DateOfAction Year, which keeps 2015.

prioritize to answer on fan posts. Additionally, some clubs have prohibited fans from posting on their wall, by deactivating this functionality, which are seen in half of the clubs, where there are no posts by NonAdmin.

4.2.3 Post types

There are five categories of post types: event, link, photo, status, and video. Figures in appendix 4.4 show the distribution of post types published for the clubs. From these figures, there has not been found any common practices regarding preferred post type. However, the common practice is variation in content. The majority of the posts for all nine clubs¹³ are visual (either photos or videos). Links are also used to a large extend in all clubs, and are the most frequent post type in VFF and AGF. A more fragile usage when it comes to status posts (only text) was found. However, EFB and OB use statuses a lot. As this information seems useless, the figures can contribute with one obvious, yet important, finding: Fan actions (engagement) follow how much clubs post, as the interaction are highest for those types, the clubs have posted the most, which may implicate that fans will engage in any post type.

Neither did the top posts (highest engagement level) reveal any preferred post types. Therefore, I decided to look into causations. Examination of those Admin posts that has received the greatest attention (appendix 4.5) revealed that creative and innovative content might not always be vital to get attention: The news that evoke great emotions, e.g. a great sports result or a tribute to a star player, are the ones with the highest engagement level. A few posts deviate from the general trend of the action 'like' being the most used activity – those posts contain competitions that encourage followers to comment such as guessing the results of a game in order to win a prize. Furthermore, some of the posts that received most attention were not even post published by Admins, but by another page who tagged the club in the post. For example, FCN's most popular Admin post received around 1350 actions (a competition, where followers would win by liking). However, the data showed a post from 2012 that received 62.014 likes, but that was because they were mentioned in a post by Chelsea FC's (an English Premier League club). Chelsea has 45 million followers, which, compared to FCN's 20 thousand, is basis for generation of far reaching attention.

¹³ As outlined in the methodology, the analysis based on full raw files were undertaken for nine of the twelve clubs.

4.3 Qualitative interviews

The interview guides were structured by theoretical concepts so the findings easily could follow those themes. However, several findings and clear sub-themes emerged from the interview data analysis. For instance, the interviewees had a shared view when comparing social media to traditional media. They had similar approaches to content production, but very different approaches to dealing with strategy, as well as utilization of data. Similarities were discovered regarding which social media channels were given priority, but with differences in the form of allocated resources and marketing budgets. In the following sections, I will present the concrete findings from analyzing the interview data.

4.3.1 Industry specific findings

As found in the BSDA, certain characteristics of the sports industry affect the clubs' utilization of social media channels. The interviewees were all clear about the fact that the primary business of sports is to sell an experience with all that it entails, and that social media is one of many tools to create and increase team identification, which, according to the literature, enhance business performance on the long run.

Often will fans' identification with a certain club be determined by geographic and social affiliations (Cortsen 2016b). Geographic 'ownership' is seen in the clubs' intentions to associate certain areas with their brand such as FCK's desire to be 'byens hold', BIF embracing the culture of 'Vestegnen', OB positioning themselves as 'øens hold', and the name of FCM and FCN containing a geographic region. This may explain why the employees in the football clubs does not see each other as competitors. As interviewee 1 states it: *"det der med at få nye fans er måske ikke det vi skal sigte så meget efter, fordi vi er byens hold, og der er ikke nogen andre hold i området, (...) vi har et helt område gerne skulle støtte [club name] og vi laver også tiltag så vi kommer ud i området, men det er dem jeg gerne vil ramme, og sørge for at de får en større tilknytning til"*. They do not seek to attract many new fans, and thereby compete for spectators because of different geographic locations and thus different target groups. Instead, they focus on strengthening the relationship to those within the geographic target group. Interviewee 4 said: *"jeg ser ikke de danske klubber som mine konkurrenter, altså vi er egentlig alle sammen kollegaer, der bare skal få et produkt op og stå, fordi vi er jo ikke Bilka og Føtex, der kæmper om at sælge den samme mælkekande, (...) der er fodbold noget andet, der kæmper vi ikke om de samme mennesker, men vi kæmper alle sammen om at løfte, så der kommer flere mennesker til, så det er i hvert fald, set fra min stol, i alles interesse at vi laver nogle fede produkter"*. Instead of competing, they rather they see each other as are colleagues of

the Superliga working towards a shared goal of growing the interest for commercial football in Denmark. For smM, this implicates that they need to know how social media can contribute in strengthening team identification, but also how to balance between physical and virtual investments in order to use some, but not all, resources on social media. As said by interviewee 1: *"[football] er eventbaseret jo, (...) dit primære fokus er jo at få flest mulige mennesker på stadion, fordi det er det du sælger billetter på og det er det der skaber interesse omkring det, hvordan gør du så det bedst muligt, og hvordan skaber du bedst muligt værdi for dem, er det ved sociale medier? Til en hvis grad, men du skal også sørge for at de har en god oplevelse herinde"*.

The characteristics of the football industry benefit the clubs: *"der er bare nogle muligheder der [social media] som er ufatteligt enkle et eller andet sted hvis man bare kan finde ud af det, og så specielt for oplevelsesøkonomi som det her jo er, så er det bare lettere at bruge de medier, jeg tror det er lettere for os og engagere folk i stedet for hvis jeg solgte oksekød eller et eller andet"* (interviewee 4). Their followers are more connected to the brand compared to e.g. regular B2C companies like food stores, and therefore is their role different according to interviewee 4, and he constitutes their roles as being more about activation than direct selling. *"Det er også der hvor fodbold er lidt en sjov størrelse, fordi vi er jo ikke, du bliver jo ikke fan af et hold over tre uger fordi der ikke sker noget, det er noget der ligger, og så skal vi bare aktivere det"* (interviewee 4). However, with high team identification and brand loyalty follows great expectations. Interviewee 2: *"selv om man er en fodboldklub, så er man jo ikke en kæmpe virksomhed (...) der er faktisk rigtig mange fans som, det er det der kommer bag på flest fans, for det første tror de at vi sidder ude på stadion, og det er der vi har kontor, vi er rigtig mange ansatte osv., og så tror de også bare fordi man er en virksomhed, (...) og et stort brand, at man så også derefter har lige så mange kræfter og penge osv. og det er nogen gange svært at leve op til"*. Fans expect much from their club, as a large brand for some fans should be mirrored a huge organization behind, and that is a challenge to meet those expectations.

4.3.2 Social Media Management – part 1

As found in the netnographic study, social media is widely used among the clubs, and is adopted for several business functions with marketing being their primary reason for engaging in social media. As the following sections will present, interview data confirm that marketing is their primary focus for smE. In

order to understand the smE and smA practices in the context of each of the four organizations, I will briefly present how smM is organized in the four interviewed clubs.

The management of social media is embedded in the marketing and/or communication departments of the clubs interviewed. In club 1, the media coordinator is the responsible for social media, and there are no other employees engaged in social media. They have no marketing department; hence, as he is the person with knowledge about social media, he takes on the marketing role, as well advising on how to use social media for other functions such as HRM. Club 2 has a marketing team, which are responsible for social media mainly in relation to B2C activities and content creation, whereas the sales department contributes with B2B activities. In club 3, the communication manager is responsible for social media, though he work closely with their marketing manager, a journalist and a TV responsible. For example, the marketing manager creates visual content due to graphic skills and the TV responsible produce their videos. In club 4, the marketing manager is responsible for all B2C activities related to sales and marketing, and he manages a team consisting of five people whose tasks include all social media activity. According to interviewee 4, the team functions similar to an editorial board on a newspaper with weekly meetings where they talk about the upcoming week's tasks and challenges. Similar to club 2, they also have sales persons contributing to B2B activities.

4.3.3 Social Media Engagement

All four interviewees indicated that they see great potentials in social media for fan engagement, but due to limited resources, the clubs differ in how much they engage in the different channels, and what tasks they prioritize and make human and financial investments in.

Social media strategy

The netnography and BSDA findings showed different approaches to social media. Some clubs posted content with great emphasis on quality, as it was obvious that they had put a lot of effort into creating it. Conversely, it was obvious that the smaller clubs did not have the same resources to create the same quality. Therefore, I asked all interviewees whether they had a social media strategy, and if not, how they prioritized their smE.

Club 1 has no strategy for smE, but the corporate strategy sets some guidelines for the engagement, such as focus on the geographic area surrounding the club. Interviewee 1 said: *"det vi skal sørge for, det er at vi er synlige i lokalområdet, både online men også lige så meget fysisk, det tror jeg har en stor effekt, (...)*

det er også det jeg kigger på når jeg ser på hvor mange Facebook følgere vi har". Their smE is not aimed at looking for new fans, but rather extending the relationship to the existing fans for geographic reasons: *"jeg tror allerede vi rammer de mennesker vi kan ramme, så vi skal ramme de mennesker som i forvejen kommer her, men måske kommer her i en mindre hyppig grad".* Furthermore, they have a corporate goal of wanting to teach and 'raise' the young people to make noise on venue, and to create a strong relationship to the kids from a young age, in order to create a stronger fan group when they grow up, as they now only have a smaller group of evocative fans. This priority is mirrored in their social media effort, as they try to target the young people. For example, they will soon adopt Snapchat as they think this will give them access to more young people. The existing unofficial fan group does not get much attention from the club administration besides receiving help when needed such as planning bus trips, tifos (large banners) etc., however, the majority of social media posts such as sports results are of course still in their interest as well. As they only have one employee responsible for social media, who in addition is responsible for other communicative tasks and manages some of their physical events such as jersey signings, indicates a low prioritization of social media from the executive management. However, the interviewee 1 has ideas of how they can use the different channels and other relevant goals and issues that would be included in a social media strategy. Furthermore, he sees potentials in engaging more in social media, and has ideas of how they could invest more in the field of digital marketing, but he has no time for it, and the CEO does not allocate more human resources to the area, nor does he allocate financial resources to e.g. social media advertising. Interviewee 1: *"det er jo meget med hvad man erfarer og hvad man føler fungerer, finde en rytme i det, det er ikke den helt store forkromede sociale medie strategi vi har nu, det kommer forhåbentlig når cheferne indser hvor stort et område det egentlig er, hvor tidskrævende det egentlig er, så det er lidt ad hoc lige nu".* Another area, where the interviewee disagrees with the current 'guidelines' concerns which news they publish and hold back. The management has decided that as a thumb rule they hold back negative news, whereas, the interviewee's view on social media is that the users are going to get the news anyway, so rather use the opportunity to turn a negative story, such as a leaving player, into a goodbye and thanking the player for his effort.

Club 2 has a clear, structured and well-developed strategy and approach to social media – and their digital efforts in general. Social media is a part of a digital strategy, and the digitalization process is the interviewee 2's main responsibility. Four people are involved in social media; however, two of the employees are more involved in the daily social media maintenance than the interviewee. According to

interviewee 2, their overall goal is to create an experience and to improve that experience, and they do that by enhancing the fan relationship and getting to know them better. Thereby, they can provide more relevant and automatic marketing; though, they are not there yet. Interviewee 2: *"som udgangspunkt har det jo altid bare været nyhedsmedie, vi lægger de nyheder, vi vil bare gerne have at folk de læser nyhederne, men hvad hedder det, efter jeg også er kommet til så er vi begyndt at lave noget mere kommercielt, det er jo hvad kan man sige en del af strategien, blandt andet at vi skal sælge mere merchandise, gerne også flere billetter til kampene"*. For now, they approach social media as a news channel (both positive and negative news), however, as he said, they are moving towards a commercial approach. They have a written social media strategy for each channel, which contains information about how they communicate, the tone of their 'voice', and what content should be posted on which channel. The website functions as a central gathering point of all news, so everything they post to social media are news from the website. However, they are aware that each of their channels should provide the user with added value: *"der skal være noget merværdi i at følge på Instagram frem for Facebook, så den tankegang bevæger vi os mere over imod, at det skal være forskelligt på alle fronter, det skal være relevant for den målgruppe"*. Even though they had agreed on a social media strategy, data indicated a lack in their understanding of why they are present on some of the channels. They are clear about Facebook, but for example regarding Twitter, the following statement indicated more doubt: *"presse kommunikations chefen han bruger det rigtig meget, og hans et eller andet sted kolleger er der, så jeg tror det er én ting, og så også bare fordi Twitter er nu og her, du kan poste et eller andet sted hvert minut (..) uden at der er nogen der nødvendigvis følger sig spammet af det, det er ofte hashtag du søger på osv., jeg tror det er lige så meget bare få det ud, hvis der er nogle der så ser det, så ser de det, men det er langt fra der vi har mest interaktion, men det skal bare derud, for at det er ude"*. Moreover, they have their employee in charge of video content take care of Snapchat, as he often are present where the players are, but neither do they seem to have a clear goal for their Snapchat presence.

Club 3 formed a social media strategy in 2013; however, they do not use it as a guideline in daily operation and tactics as it is outdated. Nevertheless, the goal is still the same: to strengthen team identification. They use social media to create transparency, grow a closer relationship to the fans, and especially to facilitate a feeling for the fans of coming closer to the players. As interviewee 3 said: *"vores mål med de sociale medier det er at komme tættere på fansene, og fansene skal komme tættere på os, så de føler at de får et forhold til klubben og især til spillerne og dermed støtter klubben bedre og bliver mere*

loyale". As a consequence, they do not post commercial content, and interviewee 3 explained that he is afraid of commercial posts being viewed as spam, which affects their reach. Furthermore, they have divided their Facebook activity into three pages, also with the reason of not wanting to spam their fans with irrelevant information: A regular club page, like the other clubs, a page for the venue business, and a page for their network with other clubs in the same geographic area. Content on the venue page are related to both the football business and other event businesses. The football posts could for example be photos taken on venue, where they have a fan photographer encouraging people to tag themselves on the pictures to increase their reach. Similar to club 2, club 3 perceives social media as a news channel for both positive and negative news. They view posting of negative news as a way of monitoring the online conversation, as they otherwise would have various people posting on their wall and commenting on other posts anyway.

Club 4 does not have a social media strategy, but the marketing team, whom are responsible for social media, have a well-integrated and shared approach to tactics and the daily operation of the channels together with the rest of their marketing efforts. Similar to the others clubs, interviewee 4 also believes in delivering interesting content for their fans in order to strengthen the relationship and thereby the loyalty. Instead of focusing on boosting the amount of followers, they focus on enhancing the relationship to the existing fan base. Club 4 have allocated financial resources for smE: *"vi vil hellere give en masse ressourcer, økonomiske ressourcer, og så tage det fra måske vores printmedier, som traditionelt har været meget brugt her i klubben, (...) i stedet for at give 20.000 for en avis annonce i [printed media], så for 20.000 på Facebook kan vi få meget mere, så det er en del af strategien, det er at bruge en masse penge der"*. For that reason, they also have a full time employee to do video content, as they believe quality video is what makes them interesting for the fans to follow. Content marketing in general is what the marketing manager believes is the best way of reaching the main goal of getting people to buy tickets and merchandise. They are not as afraid of losing fans as for example club 3, and they integrate commercial call-to-action elements within their content. Neither do they fear losing fans during holiday, which implicate that they do not prioritize presence in the three weeks of summer holiday much.

Besides focusing on their official club profiles, the interviewees were asked whether they took advantage of their players' profiles on social media. They all had the same approach; that it was the players' own responsibility and they did not encourage them to post any specific themes or sponsor posts. However,

some had set guidelines, and some just interfered on postings if they were e.g. too offensive, or posted pictures with another retailer than their official sponsor.

Channels

For every question related to social media strategy, interviewees automatically started talking about Facebook, indicating that Facebook is their primary focus, which they also confirmed when asked. For the remaining channels, there were variances in usage; however, in general did they spend time on Instagram, and to some extent Twitter and Snapchat (those present), whereas LinkedIn seemed more ad hoc when the sales people had news to post. All four interviewees shared the view that Facebook content should have a certain level of quality and posts should contain professional language. Additionally, one club had a rule for not using emoji. The interviewees confirmed the netnographic finding that their presence on Facebook was primarily for marketing reasons. They were all aware of not posting too much on Facebook, in order not to spam their followers.

For Instagram, the interviewees were unsure of how to use the channel, and had a hard time figuring out exactly for what purposes they should engage in Instagram. Club 4 though, had a more focused usage than the others, as they spend time on having the players do 'take-overs', which they had good experiences with: *"det er fedt for spillerne, og det er fedt for fansene, spillerne er rigtig gode til at svare dem, så de svarer dem derinde på kontoen"*. In the three remaining clubs, the posts were more routine line-ups and pictures from whenever they were with the players, which also is in line with the netnographic findings regarding Instagram posts being most informative. However, they also did take-overs but awareness of how it actually provided business value was more fragile. Despite not knowing whether if the users found the content interesting, one interviewee said that a few hundred likes showed him that the users liked their content, which was enough for him to continue what they were doing.

Former results showed that they published more often on Twitter than on Facebook (either linking to content on the website or other channels, or else a large amount of live updates during matches), and the usage being more communication than marketing. Interviewees explained that Twitter was given lower priority in all of the four clubs. The downgrading was explained by their assessment of the target group: that would be journalists and other media or 'hardcore' fans, as one stated, and for that reason they prioritized Facebook for a broader reach. Furthermore, club 3 and 4 explained that as Twitter were more of snapshot in time, they did not really care about grammar and quality content, it was more important to be real time.

LinkedIn is the professional channel with a more serious crowd, which is also reflected in their posting of more serious content. As found in the netnographic study, the interviewees confirmed that the content is more aimed at B2B sales, and that they do not post B2C marketing nor sports results on LinkedIn. In club 2, they have a strategy for LinkedIn as well as the other channels, but the sales department provides the content, conversely to the other channels, where the marketing department is the primary driver. In the three remaining clubs, content also come from salespeople, but more ad hoc. Besides promotions, job offers were also posted on LinkedIn. They benefit from the crowd here being more serious. Interviewee 1 told that once they posted a job offer on Facebook, it resulted in too many unserious applications, so now they only post it on LinkedIn.

Snapchat seems to be the new social media craze. Currently, seven of the twelve clubs have adopted the channel. Of the four interviewed clubs, two of them (club 2 and club 4) had Snapchat in their social media portfolio. In club 2, where they had channel specific strategies, they had not made it for Snapchat yet, but assigned the task of posting to the TV responsible, who often was nearby the players. Club 4 had begun to think more strategically about the channel, as they had an external consultant to inspire the marketing team, and tell stories about how large corporations use it so they could move away from ad hoc posting towards creating stories and value for their audience. Club 1 had not adopted it yet because of their former mentioned issue regarding lack of resources allocated to social media. However, the employee's ambition were to be present on Snapchat by next season, as the channel's target group is well suited for their strategy of targeting more young people. Club 3 did not want to adopt the channel – or at least that was the opinion of the interviewee. He mentioned that some in the organization disagreed with him. His opinion was that Snapchat is too similar to Instagram: *“jeg synes det minder for meget om Instagram, det er den samme målgruppe vi rammer, på Snapchat bliver det mere en-til-en og man føler at det er specielt til en selv, mens på Instagram så synes jeg bare at det er noget der bliver der, og ikke et øjeblik-kommunikation, men noget vi kan få værdi for i længere tid, og det er derfor vi har prioriteret Instagram over Snapchat”*. Conversely, club 1 saw opportunities within the snapshot characteristics of Snapchat: *“jeg synes det er meget fedt med at man lige kigger en story igennem og lige får det kørt på den måde uden at man skal forholde sig til ret meget og sidde og læse side op og side ned”*.

Communication

One-way communication was found as the most frequent type of communication in the netnographic study. As found in sections above, interviewees also had their focus on marketing, but also informative

communication in order to provide their fans with interesting content. According to the literature, team identification is important for business performance, and in order to strengthen it, clubs should involve fans. For that reason, the clubs were asked how they use social media for two-way communication (personalizing and activating). Regarding personalized communication, no contact to individual fans were initiated by the clubs, and for direct responses, their approach were overall to let other fans respond to questions. Sometimes they answered specific questions, which is in line with what was found in the netnographic study; that the comments by Admin were answers to questions related to sales.

Neither did they use social media for feedback purposes. The netnographic study revealed no feedback usage, and this was confirmed as a deliberate decision: *"der sender vi spørgeskemaer ud og sådan nogle ting når vi vil det, jeg mener stadigvæk at Facebook er lidt for meget, vi har gjort det én gang, men der var simpelthen for meget shitstorm og for meget useriøsitet"* (interviewee 4) and *"der er jo sindssygt mange holdninger, og hvordan tager man så den beslutning, er det sådan noget med hvor man så kan stemme 1, 2 eller 3, sådan kunne det jo være, men igen er der jo så ikke så meget dialog over det, hvis de ikke kan lide nogle af de 3"* (interviewee 2). Those opinions show that they prefer other ways of gathering feedback such as focus groups and questionnaires sent by e-mail, as Facebook becomes too random. However, club 3 recruited their focus group through social media. Subsequently, the fans have become ambassadors for the club on social media. Thus, the club does not have to defend their decisions, as some of the fans have deeper insights and understanding of the club, and talks about it with other fans in real life and on social media, which, according to interviewee 3, had been successful for them. Club 2 had used Facebook for recruitment of fans to a merchandise commercial. A further benefit of social media for relationship building was found in some examples the interviewees provided. In club 1, where only one employee was engaged in social media, he could recognize fans from social media (users who commented on posts) on venue. This, he could use in real life, and when he needed fans for certain tasks such as appearance in videos, he could turn to those fans. Club 3 had also used online relationships in real life, as their coach recognized a fan on venue: *"vores chefræner havde udtalt jeg viste gejst og vilje, så var der en der havde kommenteret (...) 'sådan det lyder godt [coach name]', så var der en anden der havde svaret hende 'tror du selv at han ser din kommentar herinde?' Da han så hende på stadion så råbte han op til hende i hele fanhjørnet så alle kunne høre det: 'jeg så godt din kommentar på stadion', så det var meget populært og det er jo også det de kan lide, at der er et forhold mellem spillere eller klub og fans"*.

4.3.4 Social Media Analytics

Interview data showed variation in how much the clubs track their smE, and utilize the information from the data for analytics. Club 2 and club 4 were using data strategically; whereas data tracking and analytics were more ad hoc in club 1 and club 3, and reporting were conducted for partners' interests.

Club 2 started a digitalization process in the summer of 2015, which was grounded in a strategy of becoming more digital and moving towards more personalized marketing: *"vi kan begynde at måle hvem det er, der interesserer sig for de budskaber vi kommer med og hvem der reagerer på dem, hvem køber via de her kommercielle opslag vi nu laver"*. Furthermore, they were starting to gather more information about their users, which social media is a part of: *"CRM snakker man jo egentlig om i gammeldags tale at det er ét stykke software (...), men det er jo i og for sig alt hvor vi samler information fra, det er jo både sociale medier, det er vores hjemmeside, hvis man havde en applikation osv."*. An example of how they use data is that they target specific groups created from their smA practices by creating a campaign towards a group that historically converts a lot, with good results. Moreover, they use the data to create partnerships: *"fx være vi kan gå ind og se hvor mange af vores fans, Facebook fans, som også liker en anden side, og det kan vi jo så bruge, det kan salgsafdelingen bruge ved at sige 'vores fans, vi har så og så mange af vores fans der også liker jeres firma, eller jeres virksomhed, det ville være relevant at vi lavede et eller andet samarbejde' og på den måde skabe noget god værdi for vores fans, og så samtidig også for deres, så det er meget konkret måde vi bruger det på"*. Club 2 is also the one of the four clubs who conduct and use reports on social media. They manually conduct a report every month, which is distributed to the whole organization. Different departments use those sections that are relevant for their activities – for example, the sales department's interest is the reach. They gather social data by using the tool Fan Page Karma and together with newsletter data and Google Analytics¹⁴ results for website traffic, these metrics provide them with a comparable picture for the month. The social data is limited to Facebook data, as they focus on the commercial value, and, according to interviewee 2, Facebook is the only channel where they center their commercial activities. They used the free version of Fan Page Karma as Facebook is included in this version. It is also possible to add Instagram, Twitter and other social sites to the tool, but only in the more expensive pricing models¹⁵. Additionally, the metrics are measured against

¹⁴ Google Analytics is freemium web analytics service offered by Google for tracking and reporting of website traffic. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Analytics, accessed May 4, 2016.

¹⁵ <http://www.fanpagekarma.com/Facebook-Social-Media-Marketing-Monitoring>, accessed April 20, 2016.

organizational KPI's such as promotional expenses per sale in order to see some kind of improvement or potential areas for developments. As they already have experienced pay-off from smA practices, they see potentials in utilizing social data more than at the current level of data analytics: *"det [data] skal vi jo så have sat i system hvordan vi bruger det, bl.a. kan du jo tydeligt se hvilken dag om ugen vi poster mest, og hvilket tidspunkt på dagen er det at folk de engagerer sig mest, er det så her vi skal poste lidt mere, eller skal vi poste lidt mindre nogle andre dage osv., og der er vi ikke helt kommet til endnu, fordi nyheder kommer når de kommer, så der, det vil være sådan noget som kommercielle opslag som vi kunne planlægge lidt mere"*. Their overall goal is gain deeper insights on fans and their behavior: *"tanken er så at vi kan få en eller andet form for Single Sign-On (...), sådan at vi på tværs af alle de her platforme, det er nemt for brugeren, men vi ved også præcis hvad han laver på de forskellige, når han er på hjemmesiden ved vi at han interesserer sig for den og den slags, og måske har købt det og det, og han har måske børn, så har han købt det, så er det måske sådan et opslag han gerne vil se når han er på hjemmesiden, eller de nyheder han gerne vil læse i sit nyhedsbrev osv. så det er det der er målet"*.

According to interviewee 4, club 4 does not collect and report their social media data. However, they use the functions of Facebook Business Manager to plan campaigns, and they use Google Analytics as well to track the performance on commercial Facebook posts. Furthermore, they use the functions of Facebook Business Manager to create different targets group within the tool, and aim their marketing towards those groups. Facebook Business Manager is also used to compare different projects, as their campaigns are organized in projects, which enable them to compare their performance across different metrics provided by the tool. Aligned with their relatively large focus on Instagram (compared to the other clubs), they also tracked engagement on this channel. However, their tracking 'tool' is an intern who manually collecting the metrics for reach (likes and comments). They did try a tool for 20.000 DKK a year, however, according to the interviewee, the insights did not provide them with any value, so they cancelled it again.

The two smallest clubs did not conduct data reporting or utilize the gathered data in a strategic way. Due to their agreements with Danske Spil (betting company), they had to conduct weekly reports on the posts related to the agreement, but they did not produce it for their own organization. Despite partner agreement being the reason for reporting, they both recognized the insights from the process of doing it. Club 3 used the free version of the tool Komfo¹⁶ to gain insights into their Facebook engagement, but it

¹⁶ Another free tool to measure social media engagement. <http://komfo.com/products/analytics/>, accessed May 4, 2016.

was mainly used to confirm the employee's sense of what was working. Similarly, did the employee in club 1 use Facebook Insights¹⁷ every Monday morning to see what had performed good and bad from the past week. As club 1 and club 3 did not conduct data analytics for their own smM, neither did they have any planned upcoming digital projects, nor did they sell data. However, they see potential in engaging in smA practices. In club 1, the employee is eager to engage more in digital marketing, and to dig into what has potential and what is waste of resources, but the CEO does not allocate any resources to test it.

Moreover, the employee has not taken the time to 'pitch it': *"har ikke haft tiden og overskuddet til at sætte mig ordentlig ind i hvordan jeg skulle kunne bruge det for at det skulle kunne gavne mig bedst muligt"*. Neither has club 3 any upcoming projects related to data: *"der er ikke noget rundt om hjørnet nej, men selvfølgelig er det jo interessant når man har så meget data på ens følgere, men det er ikke fordi vi endnu har gjort os de store tanker om hvordan vi skal eller kan bruge det"*. Even though they do not prioritize data analytics, they have gained some useful insights from the social data that have changed some of their ways of doing things: Club 3 found posts concerning young players very popular, which they did not know beforehand. Furthermore, they had the idea that posts should be published during the morning, so the post could develop through the day, but now they post later, as their data shows that people react more at this time of the day.

In addition to their own reporting, the Divisionsforeningen, who are brand owners of the Superliga, conduct half-seasonal reports including social media where the clubs are compared, who performs best etc. Divisionsforeningen has also since the 2011/12 season been engaged in a joint project regarding a CRM software system, as one of several spectator promotional initiatives to help the clubs to strengthen dialogue with the fans, to improve match experience for the spectators and increase attendances (Divisionsforeningen 2014). However, according to several of the interviewees all clubs are moving towards other solutions, as the system was too complex to navigate.

4.3.5 Social Media Management – part 2

This section present the challenges involved with smE, smA and smM practices reported by the interviewees. As reviewed in chapter 2, Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrappu (2015), found eight types of challenges for smM. As the sports industry have its own characteristics, the findings were used as

¹⁷ Facebook's integrated tool for all Facebook fan page managers, which among other insights show page views, post reach, the demographics of the followers.

inspiration for interview, but I found it more relevant to let the data develop its own typology for this specific context in order to later discuss the findings.

Insufficient strategic prioritization

All four interviewees found it a challenge to monitor all channels within the available budget and human resources, as they all talked about 'we could do this and this, but we do not have time and/or money'. Due to minimal allocated resources, the clubs had made prioritizations clear in the social media strategy – some thoughtful and deliberate, and others more ad hoc. All clubs had for example more focus on Facebook than the other channels, prioritized to publish informative posts related to sport, such as line-ups and results in real time. Moreover, they all prioritized to have some level of quality in their video content, and through these videos let their fans come closer to the players. In club 1 and club 3, the remaining activities were more or less left to their daily routines and creativity, as the employees were left in between that and wanting to 'embrace all', but without being able to do more, due to lack of time. In club 2, having a strategy setting guidelines helped them in their daily coordination, and made it easier for employees to carry out tasks towards a shared goal. Conversely, in club 1 that had no social media strategy, the employee had to coordinate with the CEO on what news should be posted on social media (and website), as the CEO had a different view on social media than the employee (according to the employee, the CEO was more cautious, whereas the employee's opinion was, similar to the other clubs, that news should be published despite being negative). Lack of strategy/shared goal were also seen in the fact that for the past year, the employee had put effort into collecting many permissions for e-mail marketing through competitions etc., but they had not taken advantage of them yet, as they had no marketing department. The executive management being more cautious towards social media was also found in club 2, where the employee felt that management had a slightly conservative/old-fashioned attitude towards social media, as he was not always allowed to try out new stuff that he found appropriate.

Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrapu (2015), found navigating and coordinating a team effort addressing the social media strategy as a challenge, but interview data does not expose such a challenge, as two of the involved clubs have one responsible only and in the clubs where they were teams, they had team meetings, or were in the same office, which worked fine for them. Having to work outside 'normal working hours' (e.g. weekend games) was not seen as a challenge for neither of the interviewees, they saw it more as 'a part of the game' of working in a sports club. However, in the club 1, where the same employee was

responsible for all social media related, he found it a challenge to both do deskwork, but at the same time he needed to be present with the players a lot of hours to get interviews and shoot video content – so it was more a question of amount of time available than what time of the day/week. In the other clubs, where they had more human resources, this was not considered a challenge to be with the players, as they had a TV person assigned to that task. Club 2 experienced that it could also be difficult to share the responsibility of a channel: For instance, regarding maintenance of Instagram, the interviewee told that their approach were to remind people to upload pictures when they were around the players, but they experienced that nobody took responsibility: *“når alle var den, så var der ingen der var den”*. Interviewee 1 saw one positive aspect of only being one person managing social media, as he recognizes some of the fans on venue, because he has the overview of all their online conversations: *“nogle af fansene hilser jeg på fordi jeg har set dem på Facebook ikke [laugh], så går jeg og snakker med dem, det er jo en fin måde at få en relation på, når jeg møder dem rundt omkring, så snakker jeg med dem, snakker lidt fodbold (...) det hjælper mig med nogle af de andre ting jeg skal lave, fordi, jeg lærte da måske, så føler jeg at jeg kan skrive til dem fordi jeg kan se de kommenterer meget, det betyder også at det er nogen der interesserer sig for klubben”*.

Uncontrollable factors in the sports industry

Findings from the BSDA showed high popularity of posts regarding sports related news that evoked emotions among fans, which makes it relatively easy to post a picture with some player saying ‘we won’. Having the popularity of content depending partly on sporting results also creates a challenge for the social media managers, as they have no influence on those news with high interest among fans, such as player signings and match results, which then makes content creation challenging to them in periods with less good results *“du er meget afhængig af hvordan spillerne præsterer på fodboldbanen, vi kan jo godt se, det er jo nemmere at lave fede Facebook opslag når vi har vundet end når vi har tabt, og nu har vi ikke vundet i foråret, så det er pænt nederen kan jeg godt fortælle”* (interviewee 1). The interviewees did not find ‘loss of control’ a challenge like Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrappu (2015) found for the companies in their study, and explained it by saying it was normal to them to work at all times of the day. Additionally, they did not experience ‘shitstorms’ in the same ways as other brands may experience. They could have many more or less aggressive reactions on organizational or sports related decisions, but that was also seen as ‘a part of the game’. For example, club 4 distinguished between sports related issues and non-sport issues. For example, when they lost game, the manager found it fine that people outraged etc. and they

cannot do anything about a lost game anyway. On the other hand, when fans had issues related to sales, it was important for him that they were present, and mentioned that in relation to a campaign launch for season tickets, it would be important for them to be ready to answer questions, but this was not very often. Club 1 had experienced maybe one of the largest 'shitstorms' in Superligaen in the weeks before the interview, so this was a very relevant issue for him. But their approach were also to let people rage out, and for the club to follow the discussions, and then let CEO answer questions on other media. Overall, it was not a problem directly related to social media, but more an organizational issue and communication in general. Nonetheless, it affects social media tactics.

Content production

As mentioned, content creation are affected by sports results and available resources. The interviewees did not find it a challenge to create content when the players were not available during holidays, as they could plan ahead in the Christmas period, and for the summer period they could either plan ahead as well, or accept the fact that their activity, and thereby engagement level, declines. According to interviewee 4, it does not affect the overall engagement of fans, as they spend their time on being excited for next season. During the season, several of the clubs ensure that they always have something going on by creating 'themes' such as challenge of the week. Designing the interesting stuff may be a challenge, if the requirement is that it should be innovative and creative. They seek inspiration in other clubs, both in Superligaen, but they also follow other leagues. Additionally they use each other as sparring partners in those clubs where they are a team in contrast to those where one single employee has the full responsibility. However, as interviewee 4 also states, in most cases, it is not important with innovative content, as the fans mainly care about basic information such as line-ups: *"fx sådan nogle ting med truppen, når den bliver lagt ud, med hvem der skal spille dagen efter, altså for mig, som ikke er [name of club] fan, lyder det ekstremt kedeligt, selv om jeg holdt med en anden klub, jeg kan slet ikke forstå det, men sådan er det bare, så det kan man jo bare se, og så er det bare med at få en masse ud af det, opfordre til en masse inde i de artikler hvor vi så ligger truppen ud, for det er bare noget folk går sindssygt meget op i, at se hvem der er udtaget til næste kamp"*. He ensures that they take advantage of those posts that are important for fans in their marketing efforts. Their presence is, as touched upon earlier, important for them in order to strengthen their team identification. Interviewee 1 mentioned that sponsors increasingly demand some kind of social media exposure in sponsorship contracts, but, according to the interviewee, they must deliver interesting content for the fans, otherwise he will not agree to post it.

Adopting to new trends

The clubs find adopting to new trends as a challenge. For example, the interviewees state that they try to keep themselves updated, but some of the interviewees mentioned that they probably do not know all functions of each channel. Club 4 experienced an issue related to a player not recognizing that he was acting in public spheres when being on social media. The clubs do not control the players' profiles, but as they appear on social media, naturally, there is great attention towards the players. One of their players behaved inappropriately on his own profile, which, to the club, was a problem because he is brand ambassador and a role model. Now they have guidelines, and it is not an issue – neither in the remaining clubs. However, they ensure proper behavior when their players do take-overs, and some of them hand out a sheet with emphasis on what 'not-to-do', but also 'we-would-like-you-to-do'. Adopting a new channel is resource consuming, for example has Snapchat demanded focus from all four clubs to consider whether they would adopt it or not. Interviewee 4 said that for him it is 'all or nothing': *"når man tager et nyt medie ind, skal man altid tænke på at det koster en masse ressourcer, fordi ellers skal man bare lade være, hvis man skal være på Snapchat, så skal du også være der, det er ekstremt irriterende at have nogen der ikke kan finde ud af det, eller bare bruger det for lidt, så bliver det bare uprofessionelt, så hellere lade være"*. He also recognizes that it takes time to create a good Snapchat story, and especially at the moment because the channel is new to them, once they get it fully integrated it may become routine just like all the other channels (and then again maybe 'forgot', as Instagram).

Measuring effect

As mentioned, the two clubs who were found to engage in smA practices, were also to some extent able to measure their effect in terms of sales. By using Google Analytics, they could measure the effects of traffic and interaction, and thereby which initiatives led to sales. Club 2 had also managed to see the effects compared to traditional media for one of their campaigns: *"et rigtig godt eksempel det var her i vinter halvåret havde vi halvårs sæsonkort, hvor vi for 2 år siden også lå nummer 2 i ligaen i vinterpausen, og solgte 380 kort, og der markedsfører man sig via radio og trykte medier, aviser osv., i år har vi så brugt markant færre ressourcer, men udelukkende Facebook og nogle andre digitale medier, også noget på hjemmesiden, og har solgt knap 800 sæsonkort, så det er en markant stigning"*. However, measuring the complete smE effort is difficult for them. A lot of manual work is involved, and they have not figured out yet how to measure the effect of their other channels besides Facebook. Furthermore, the connection from value for fans to business value was more of a feeling than documented by their data.

4.4 Summary of data analysis

All interviewed clubs had an overall strategic focus on fan engagement in terms of increasing fan loyalty and thereby increase sales. This was mirrored in their approaches to social media, such as through a focus on utilizing the channels to create stronger relationships to the fans by providing a lot of content close to the players. The netnographic data indicated that the clubs have embraced social media, using several channels to interact with their fans, for various business purposes with marketing as the main function, and that they communicate in the same ways as Meng, Stavros, and Westberg (2015) found for the NBA teams (informing, marketing, personalizing and activating). Individual posts would sometimes contain a combination of the categories of communication. As expected, the content provided by the clubs differed among the different channels, with different types of messages. Facebook was adopted as a main marketing tool, and the posts contained many kinds of content; videos, pictures, interviews, links, live streams, and content from the other channels. Instagram mostly had video and pictures, which also is the main purpose of the channel. Instagram were a channel some of the interviewees were unsure about. However, they still saw potential in the channel for strengthening relationships such as providing insights into players' lives. Instagram users reflect a young target group, thus an opportunity for the clubs to get in contact with the young fans. Twitter was mainly used for live update during games that were not on TV, or distribute organizational news. The clubs shared the view that the target group of Twitter was mostly other media and journalists. None of the clubs were very active on LinkedIn, but the few posts on LinkedIn were often links to their website, and were primarily used for B2B sales, and promotion of networks. Snapchat has the youngest age profile of the messaging apps, and has just overtaken Instagram among the 18- to 24-year old demographic¹⁸ group. For the clubs who had adopted the channel, the netnographic findings found the channel widely used to provide insights 'behind the scenes' into players' lives in a timely fashion. Content on Snapchat was limited to visual informative posts (as restricted by functionalities of the app), and contained more unfiltered, playful content than the other channels. The BSDA findings generally showed the obvious: that engagement level was connected to matches and sports calendar, and that sports results evoke the greatest attention. A general trend was that the clubs received attention from a large amount of actors, who were not followers. Furthermore, the data indicate that fan interaction follows club posting. The analysis of interview data showed that the clubs all engaged in fan

¹⁸ <http://tech.co/create-marketing-plan-snapchat-2016-05>, accessed May 8, 2016

engagement analytics through smA processes; some to a large extent in an organized way, and some only watching the performance on Facebook Insights. None of the clubs used the terms mentioned in the literature review, such as customer equity or lifetime value. However, especially one club was moving toward a data-driven strategy in order to improve the loyalty of existing fans, as well as more advanced segmentation to better target fans and increase sales with organizational KPI's integrated in their reporting. As the clubs had their strategic focus on Facebook, this channel was also their focus when exploring the social data. Despite not having clear reporting processes, they all felt that they got the insights they 'needed' from Facebook Insights, which they found as a very simple and easy tool. Furthermore, as they were few employees, ranging from one to five, it was limited how much coordination etc. they needed to maintain their smE practices. Organizational challenges involved in their smM concerned insufficient strategic prioritization, uncontrollable factors, content production, adapting to new trends, and measuring effects, which are further discussed in chapter 5.

5. Discussion

The data analyses and findings are discussed in the following chapter. Firstly, I interpret the results and answer the research questions. Hereafter, I relate the interpretations and answers to implications to research and practice. Subsequently, I discuss limitations of the study, and lastly, I reflect on learnings.

5.1 Interpretation of findings and answers to RQ

RQ #1: To what extent and for what organizational functions do professional Danish football clubs engage in social media channels?

By analyzing the content of the clubs' social media profiles, this study found that football clubs have incorporated the vast majority of the popular social media channels available to them into their social networking presence. All 12 clubs have adopted numerous social media channels for several organizational functions, such as marketing, strategic, HRM and operations. However, the extent to which they engaged in social media was highly affected by available organizational resources. A further indication of organizations' emergent adoption of social media for organizational functions is seen in new types of employee roles such as Content Manager, Content Marketing-employee, Digital Employee, or alternatively that the job description of the marketing manager comprises responsibilities such as maintaining and developing the different media channels (website, CRM, social media), project management of e.g. IT, and marketing campaigns. Additionally, focus on fan relationships is seen in many of the clubs as they have hired a fan coordinator.

According to a company working with social media in practice, Falcon Social¹⁹ (2016a), social brands must figure out where their prospects are, in order to determine which social media channels to engage in; it is better to have a significant presence on less channels than spreading oneself too thin. This was also somewhat the opinion of the interviewees. At the same time, however, they recognized that they could utilize some channels further, but that this would require additional resources. Facebook was adopted in all clubs, and had become a main marketing tool in the organization. Facebook posts reach the user a long time after they have been posted, which make the platform less appropriate for real-time updates during

¹⁹ Danish founded company, which helps companies understand their customer relationships through CRM technologies

games, and more appropriate for driving attention towards the next game. However, the clubs posted many posts related to a game, which may be because sports news is among the most popular posts. Instagram was used in order to provide a closer view on the players' lives. Moreover, interviewees saw potentials in reaching the younger target group on this channel. Twitter and LinkedIn were not highly prioritized concerning resources; nevertheless, they were kept as a part of the social media portfolio. Snapchat were the latest added channel, which, according to the interviewees, required time and skills to figure out how to use it properly as they had not developed any routines yet. The channel could provide their social media presence with some authenticity that the more staged posts on Facebook and Instagram did not have, as the content were not edited and the language were more relaxed. For the two interviewed clubs, who did not use Snapchat, this was a more or less a strategic decision (either because they did not see potential in the channel, or because of prioritization of other channels within given resources available). One of the main benefits of social media is the ability to communicate in real-time, which especially was utilized on Twitter. However, lately Snapchat have challenged Twitters' 'monopoly' on real-time usage. The clubs were very active on Snapchat during games, which indicate that they appreciate Snapchat with its' real-time, authentic feature, whereas the current use of Twitter were limited to a few posts, or live-updates during non-TV matches. Facebook has also just moved into providing live features, which the clubs are also starting to use. At the time of interview data collection, the clubs had only tried it out a few times, but were very surprised about the amount of their followers watching. The function has mainly been used for interviews or launching products, whereas Snapchat is everywhere; before, during and after matches, and in daily insights throughout the week. However, Snapchat is a collection of small stories, which makes it less appropriate for longer interviews, where Facebook live may be able to provide additional live value – at least the interviewees wanted to test it out more due to great interest.

Winning games and the players are the clubs' biggest assets. Netnographic results indicated heavy focus on the players in content creation. These findings indicate that the players are also their biggest asset outside of court in creating interesting content. The BSDA showed that activity level and content were heavily dependent on sports activity (such as Superliga matches), as seasonal trends were very clear. No statistical calculations were conducted; however, the visual plots indicated correlation between activity level and Superliga matches. Additionally, the interviewees' opinion was also that the content concerning the players were crucial in engaging their followers, which confirm the finding.

RQ #2: What, if any, are the associated social media engagement, analytics, and management practices, requirements and challenges experienced at the organizational level?

Theory established fans as core part of the community that drives football, and understanding fan behavior trends is crucial to fully take advantage of and activate the online communities. Thus, there must be established a strategic focus on this area in relation to creation of competitive advantages. As Harrigan et al. (2015) noted, technological resources have from the RBV perspective been viewed as mobile and imitable resources that enable unique organizational processes, which are often combined with specific business processes, such as customer relationship management. Hereby, the technological resources do not contribute directly to business performance, but provide building blocks to form and enhance capabilities within the organization to improve performance. Social media are readily available technological resources, though widely used and freely accessible, yet providing the clubs with few opportunities for competitive advantage. However, the dynamic capabilities theory suggest that combining the technology with unique organizational capabilities yields a higher order of capabilities in order to gain competitive advantage. Those resources and capabilities required to use social media for strategic reasons are discussed below together with the practices and challenges involved.

Practices, requirements and challenges for smE

According to theory, the fundamental aspect of smE is for the organization to have a social media strategy that is aligned with the corporate strategy. It differed among the interviewed clubs to what extent they had an actual strategy, or if they just shared the same approach to engagement within the club. All the interviewees indicated agreement on goals such as increasing sales by strengthening team identification through smE. However, it seemed like those clubs that had put their ideas into a strategy were also more explicit about why they did this and not that, and how they gained value from it. Conversely, in clubs who did not have a social media strategy, but more or less continued doing what they felt was working, they were less aware of the actual value. Data suggest that having a social media strategy seems crucial in moving away from 'doing what we think works' to 'what we know works', and also help in overcoming the challenges of disagreements upon how resources are prioritized.

Data in this study indicated that the goal of social media was mostly seen as an attempt to facilitate interaction quite broadly (e.g. downgrading of Twitter because of the small target group, and upgrading Facebook because of the ability to reach broadest) through informing and marketing communication.

Personalizing and activating communication facilitated a two-way interaction, exploiting the nature of social media channels that provides an opportunity to increase fan engagement through these interactive approaches, and the promotion of an online 'personality' of a club. Personalizing communication practices were seen in attempts to provide fans with information they were missing to complete an order by responding to comments. However, these comment responses were rare. Furthermore, data indicated that in some instances, they respond to individual comments to avoid wrong rumors, or to clarify questions, in order to explain why they are doing specific initiatives to accommodate negative fans. Fans were seemingly motivated to attempt discussion, but due to the sheer number of posts in such a short period, the club easily overlooked these comments. However, interviewees stated that it was also the intention to have the fans discussing with each other instead of the club engaging in discussions. Informing communication could often turn into something similar to a discussion forum, so further research is needed to confirm whether club engagement in those interactions improve team identification. Furthermore, they published different types of content, different types of posts, across several channels, which indicate that each platform can be used concurrently for different purposes and may lead to the enhancement of team identification.

According to Meng, Stavros, and Westberg (2015), all four categories of communication have the potential to enhance team identification, which indicate that the clubs do not utilize the full potential of social media as group involvement was the only two-way communication type they had embraced. Meng, Stavros, and Westberg (2015) argued, that because team identification stems from a collection of meanings and experiences, the concept of team identification support the idea that all of the categories of communication on social media could contribute to heightened identification.

Data showed that the clubs' communicative activity on Facebook was reflected in the behavior of the users, and that the users' activity was consequently higher than the clubs' – in short: an active club leads to active users. Furthermore, reviewed literature stated that high engagement means that users find content interesting enough to spend time on, which for the page owners mean that they should facilitate ongoing conversation. Interviewees reported it an issue that it was not always easy to publish interesting content, hence they need to have the creative resources and tools to create it. However, findings also showed that they often overcome this challenge by finding inspiration in other clubs.

Furthermore, findings suggest that the actual message in the post may be more important than how the content is presented. However, the interviewees still emphasized that quality video content were crucial

for their online presence. Therefore, it cannot be documented from the data how those specific simple posts would have performed if the content was more creative. In order to increase engagement levels, findings at least suggest that it is required to have insights on which content works, what does not work, as the social media managers must prioritize due to limited resources.

BSDA showed great variety on how many actors the clubs were able to engage. Data indicate that the larger clubs were capable of engaging the largest amount of users. I assume that factors such as the general fan affiliation to the larger clubs also mirror smE levels, however, further research is needed to clarify to what extent the resources and capabilities related to social media affect the engagement level, and thereby how much the engagement level can be affected by managerial decisions and prioritizations.

Practices, requirements and challenges for smA

The literature review stated big data as a new type of resource for organizations. Alongside the professionalization of the football economy, data-driven fan management seems to fit well to the spread of administrative investments and maximizing revenue. Retaining fans during periods of crisis are crucial, and therefore investments outside the court are vital. However, the clubs strive with understanding how to use smA processes (collection, storage, analysis, and reporting of social data) for strategic purposes as the value does not seem very clear to the interviewees. Top managers may ask questions concerning the return of social media investments, which some of the interviewees were trying to seek out, and which was one of the reasons behind participating in the interview. From the RBV and dynamic capabilities perspective, the clubs must have technological resources to collect and organize data, so data itself become a resource with potential, and, not least, the knowledge, analytic skills and capabilities to keep developing their organization in a fast-paced environment.

Commercial software vendors provide software solutions to monitor, measure, and manage social data. However, empirical research on the efficacy of the tools and the impact and solutions they provide is rare (Vatrapu 2013). Many of the software vendors offer freemium²⁰ options, which of some of the clubs had tried several versions. The shared view among the interviewees was that they did not want to pay for tools. This indicates that the free tools are sufficient for their usage, or that they do not know how to use the tools to create business value that exceeds the costs. Likewise, Facebook freely provides insights such as page views, post reach, likes, actions etc., and insights on their followers, reached people, and engaged

²⁰ Freemium is a pricing strategy, typically where a product/service is provided free of charge, but premium is charged for proprietary features. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freemium>, May 13, 2016.

people distributed on gender percentage, age, geographic information, and the spoken language. The Facebook Insights is a short-term view, and does not provide a historical picture, which for instance the BSDA in this thesis does, but the question is, whether this information provides any useful insights in spite of the perception of the interviewees. Google Analytics tracks the path towards consumer conversions across channels, which provide managers with the opportunity to track site visits, and how many of the users that click on their links actually convert to sales²¹. Another factor becomes important, as people are increasingly busy and engage in many different online networks, leaving them little time (and patience) for generic, irrelevant advertising. According to research conducted by Yahoo (Davidson et al. 2014), consumers prefer personalized ads and found them more engaging (54%), educational (52%), time-saving (49%) and memorable (45%) than general ads. Ultimately, personalized communication and marketing become a competitive advantage. If the content provided by clubs continues to tap into the interests of their fans, they stand a far better chance of keeping them engaged and strengthen team identification, which may result in great value of the relationship. In a perfect world, these insights would eliminate all guesswork from campaign design, as it is possible to test different setups.

Irrespective of any chosen software, the technology needs to be easily accessed for the clubs to take advantage of it. The employees are not specialists as they grasp various tasks, and they found the old Superliga CRM system too complex to navigate through due to they only needed to use it for a short time once or twice a week, which now has resulted in all the clubs finding new tools and processes for their CRM. These findings are in line with theory, confirming that in order to analyze big social data, analytical processes must be integrated in the organization. From a large scale survey with marketing managers and CRM experts, Reinartz, Krafft, and Hoyer (2004) found that the implementation of CRM processes has a moderately positive association with company performance. However, their data show that CRM implementation must be aligned with other organizational efforts; the customer focus must be embedded deeper in organizational functions and not be isolated in marketing. Regarding using CRM technology, they find that mere implementation of CRM software will not necessarily lead to a profitable, desired effect – it may even have a negative effect. Therefore, managers need to evaluate the contributions of technology to their CRM processes. Club 2 was the only one actively working towards integrating their social media into another CRM system to measure their overall digital investments, as they believed the possibilities for their marketing activities would increase their business performance in the future. For this

²¹ <http://www.google.com/analytics/standard/features/>, accessed May 4, 2016.

project they had hired an employee with digital skills. On the longer run, club 2 believed that smA skills and tools, together with other data sources, could lead to better profiling and segmentation of customers, and the better prediction of customer behavior, the better would they be able to aim their marketing efforts and resources. For example, similar to what club 4 did by using Facebook tools to publish a message only to those holding season cards.

Regardless of their current analytics level, the barrier to extend smA processes was whether data analytics would add value to their existing practices. Not knowing remains largely unsatisfactory and feels insufficient, especially when the CEO demands evidence of potential ROI before allocating financial resources. For example, the club 1 manager struggled with proving value, as he was not allowed to try paid Facebook advertising out. Knowing the value, in financial terms, of smE opens up opportunities for improvement and development such as reprioritization of resources and comparison of smE to other activities with the overall goal of optimizing the business. Tørning, Jaffari, and Vatrappu (2015) found that the managers they interviewed all agreed that conversions were important, but in the bigger picture, social media were measured like anything else in the corporate world: by observing growth. Falcon Social reports much debate about measuring ROI for social media marketing. Some argue social media is most suited to meet soft measures such as awareness and visibility, and 'anyone who asks, what the ROI of social media is, is a losing player' while others say 'social media is one of the easiest things to track ROI from' (Falcon Social 2016b). Despite being contradictory, both views are useful, as awareness and increased loyalty, and in this case team identification, are not easy to quantify, however, ROI of activities aimed at meeting those goals should not be impossible. An interesting finding in this study is that for some purposes the growth measure was appropriate, and in other instances it was not. The interviewees were aware of the quality and loyalty of fans is important, and noted that growth was not the most important measure – at least for internal reporting. Only one out of the four clubs indicated that they aimed at increasing their base of followers. In this club, data from social media were reported along with several other media investments, and in such comparisons, size and growth most likely do matter. Furthermore, as growth is still the most tangible and easy metric to communicate, it was widely used to negotiate sponsorships.

Nevertheless, interviewees found it challenging to measure the effect (besides, for some of them, those features available in Google Analytics), suggesting that investments in resources and capabilities are required to facilitate smA processes on a strategic level.

Practices, requirements and challenges for smM

According to the social business theory (Vatrapu 2013), smM is a distinct management discipline distinct to the six traditional established disciplines. Thus, it is also an emerging field of research, requiring attention and resources to develop. According to practitioners, a healthy social presence draws upon teamwork across departments, and information exchange, as many of these departments have overlapping business goals (Falcon Social 2016a). Findings indicated that sales and marketing are working together, with the responsibilities embedded in marketing, and the sales department providing them with content here and then. Data analytics provided knowledge for several departments in club 2, yet, only a few metrics were communicated in the remaining three clubs.

Data did not show any unified organization of smM, as the four clubs were organized in four different ways, some more different than others, and all four clubs experienced challenges related to the management of social media as formerly discussed. Additionally, they all mentioned that they needed more resources to develop the area further. However, managers of a specific field would usually say the same, that they need more resources for their own area. As interviewees were not top management, data does not reveal whether lack of smA processes were due to for example top management not being aware of potentials, or to a strategic prioritization well aware of unexploited areas.

Relational capabilities

The RBV (and dynamic capabilities) perspective has shed light over required resources and capabilities involved with smE, smA, and smM processes. However, as reviewed in the research framework, Dyer and Singh (1998) argue that the critical sources of competitive advantage from partnerships cannot be generated by either firm in isolation, and thereby emphasize a collaborative potential that is overseen in both IO and RBV. Based on theory reviewed regarding team identification and the clubs' strategic focus on fan relationships aiming at increasing sales through loyalty, I argue that the competitive advantage of the Superliga clubs to some extent relies within relational capabilities compared to other non-sport industries. However, the RBV view suggests that clubs are less likely to take advantage of relational advantages if missing relational capabilities inside the firm. Those relational specific assets could be CRM software (club 2), organizational human resources and routines (club 2 and club 4), and communicative skills of employees (all clubs).

There are large differences in how many users the clubs achieve to reach as showed in the BSDA, which affects their possibilities of taking advantage of those networks, such as leaving them with very different

conditions for e.g. negotiation of sponsorships. Furthermore, as mentioned, despite the clubs to some extent understand the key role of analytics, not all of them are on an equal footing in terms of maturity, and how to implement it in their own organization and context seems unclear to them. However, they shared the view that there must be some untapped potential. As the clubs do not see each other as direct competitors, it would make sense to cooperate to take advantage of the relations within their organizations. The interviewees mentioned a few areas, where Divisionsforeningen initiate cooperative projects (such as the CRM project, workshops, knowledge sharing etc.), in order to strengthen both the Superliga and clubs' brands. Capturing those relational rents, the requirements and challenges involved must be a topic for another thesis.

5.2 Implications for practice

The research questions, and thereby the nature of the study, are exploratory. The aim was not to provide implications for decision-making in practice, rather to explore and describe current practices. However, in combination with theory, data suggest a few recommendations for case companies.

Theory suggests that in order to capture the value from smE, the clubs should have a social media strategy, which connects to the corporate strategy in order to secure business value, and not only fan value. The statement is not confirmed, but data indicates that those clubs with a social media strategy were also more aware of their decisions and how smE provided value to their organizations. However, these assumptions are based on few interviews. Moreover, literature suggest that teams should make use of the possibilities within the different channels, and, where possible, to personalize their marketing and communication efforts, and data shows there is potential to embrace both one-way and two-way communications further. Learnings from club 2 and club 4 suggest that social media has potential for personalized marketing through better segmentation opportunities than in traditional media.

The clubs focused on their own geographic area, which indicate that they do not prioritize to establish themselves outside of their area – though the latter assumption is not confirmed. According to Cortsen (2016a), stabilizing clubs' business and optimizing their revenue streams from fan relations, requires that exactly fan relations should not just refer to the geographical origin, but must be translated into economic value creation in the form of higher ticket, merchandise and sponsorship sales, which at the same time reaches beyond the geographical borders. Here is the value of utilizing social media, as these online communities can provide the user with a feeling of coming closer to the players, without being there,

which is an opportunity to reach more people, and also people from other geographical areas. For example, when young people move to bigger cities, they can still follow their home team and interact with them and fellow fans online.

All four interviewed clubs had touched upon smA processes, using either Facebook Insights or other freemium services, to dig into data. For instance, club 2 and 3 had gained insights regarding what time of the day is optimal for commercial posts – whereas sports news were posted as soon as they are ready. According to smM practitioners Social Bakers²², there is obvious no ideal timing and number of posts, but they found the range 5 to 10 posts a week appropriate for Facebook²³. Fewer than two posts a week would not engage followers enough for them to maintain the social connection to the brand, and more than two posts per day would lose engagement due to overload. The average number of posts per week among the clubs was just below three, which indicates that they should not be afraid of spamming as some of the interviewees feared.

5.3 Implications for research and future work

The research reported in this thesis contributes to the literature by highlighting the importance of studying interactions similar to former studies (e.g. Stavros et al. 2014; Meng, Stavros, and Westberg 2015). The communication types serve as a good conceptual basis from which to investigate motives and identifying values from social media, as these online communications on social media, according to Montalvo's (2011) definition, forms a platform for interactivity. Fan management often is discussed in terms of relationships, yet social media seems to have potential to facilitate ongoing interaction strengthening these relationships. Previous studies within the sports context examined the use of online social networks to share information where many of them have focused on a single social media channel. This study investigates a portfolio of five channels qualitatively, however, with a focus on Facebook in quantitative results. Furthermore, the study acknowledges the contributions of triangulation with combined qualitative and quantitative methods within this field. Through an explorative approach, the research expands the scope of the theory of the social business, by using it as analytical framework to understand the smE, smA, and smM processes at an organizational level.

²² A global social media management company, who track and analyze over eight million social profiles, <http://www.socialbakers.com/company/about/meet-socialbakers>, accessed May 8, 2016.

²³ <http://www.socialbakers.com/blog/147-how-often-should-you-post-on-your-facebook-pages>, accessed May 8, 2016.

Future research should seek to confirm findings in other clubs or sports, in order to seek generalizable results. Furthermore, the thesis focuses on potentials of engagement; however, whether smE actually strengthens team identification and provide value for business remains unanswered.

The thesis uses the term marketing a lot; however, it does not dig into the academic field of marketing; I assume that concepts such as content marketing could provide insights into e.g. how simple messages contra high quality context production create engagement that improves. Furthermore, other academic areas are relevant for the development of sports business. Emergence of technologies creates potentials in connecting the physical world with the digital domains such as social media. For example, Beaven and Laws (2007) found that event managers must encompass the totality of the experience provided across physical and virtual domains. Interviewees in this study also stated that they think it is important to be present in both domains, however, they were unsure of the value of social media (and digital investments in general) compared to physical presence and events, which future research in the same context could seek to provide answers to in order to improve managerial decisions and prioritizations. Likewise, research on parameters generating ROI in this specific context (such as communication and prioritization of channels) would probably also have implications for practice.

Within the data analytics field, future research may investigate, what social text analytics could provide of insights, and whether e.g. sentiments of texts would have implications for, or further extent, the findings of this study. Furthermore, Facebook has introduced new types of reactions just after data collection: In addition to liking posts, users can now choose between several reactions (such as love, angry or sad). Those may also be useful in studying online social interactions.

Moreover, the study has focused on the official club profiles. How athletes connect directly with their fans is, according to the interviewees, not exploited in the Superliga. Former mentioned studies, (e.g. Pegoraro 2010), found that the most followed athletes on Twitter used the channel to create positive exposure, engage fans, and increase their visibility. To what extent players' engage in social media, and how that may provide value for the Superliga clubs, seems as a relevant topic for future research to extent on the findings within this thesis.

5.4 Limitations of the study

Like any research endeavor, this study was not conducted without limitations. I studied a rapidly developing phenomenon, and capturing the processes over time is difficult. It should therefore be noted

that the study is more a snapshot in time. Data collected from other clubs, other online social networks or from different time periods may have yielded different results. As such, caution when generalizing the findings to other sports, social media channels or even industries should be used.

Regarding the methodology, the downside of netnographic observations was the lack of 'why'. However, adding BSDA and interview data enabled the answers to come closer to a comprehensive picture. Big data theory claims the ability of creating a complete picture, however, as mentioned in the research framework, boyd and Crawford (2012) criticizes big data in terms of questioning this definition of knowledge, and furthermore whether big data is better data and questioning the objectivity. Though increasing validity with triangulation methodology, the criticism is in line with the pragmatic view in this thesis that suggests that no single viewpoint can give the entire picture, which leads to concluding that the findings of this thesis may be one of many answers to the research questions.

The study turned out with an overwhelming amount of empirical data, which provided answers to the research questions on an initial explorative research stage. Focusing on one type of data would maybe enable more narrow, yet generalizable findings. Furthermore, boyd and Crawford (2012) point out that the data sampling and cleaning processes in particular are prone to potential error and bias. Due to unstructured data, some text data may have been lost during cleaning, however this would only be a problem if social text analytics were conducted. By connecting directly from Tableau to the Facebook API, could overcome both SODATO limitations and preparation processes. However, that requires being page Admin²⁴.

The choice of clubs for the interviews were limited by the clubs' responses to my interview request. I contacted seven clubs in total; four responded with a positive answer, one negative, and two did not answer. However, the participating clubs turned out to provide a broad set of data concerning their approaches to social media, which was what I aimed for.

Much can be said about the firm-level practices, resources and challenges, and the potentials within the field. However, one important view is also the customer. One thing is to see things from a data perspective, what generalizations can be made of what works and what does not; however, surveying the fans may provide further insights.

²⁴ <http://tableaujunkie.com/post/123558558693/facebook-web-data-connector>, accessed March 2, 2016.

5.5 Learning reflections

Beyond having learned much about the thesis subject, I have learned to select and adapt a delineated problem, chosen relevant theories as framework for the empirical research, chosen relevant methods and research design, and ensured coherence between the different sections of the thesis. Furthermore, I have learned to argue for the significance of the choices I have made during the process of writing the thesis. Additionally, I have discussed my analytical findings within the research, and extracted the implications in relation to practice and research. Throughout this process, I have learned to evaluate different research possibilities, make a research strategy, and execute it.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated to what extent and for what organizational functions the professional Danish football clubs engage in social media channels, and which associated social media engagement, analytics, and management practices, requirements and challenges experienced are present at the organizational level. By applying a mixed method, I was able to first observe, hereafter dig into data, and then question the findings in interviews. Through an explorative, empirical approach, the research framework functioned as inspiration and guided the chosen methods. The theory of the social business was found applicable as framework for the analyses conducted.

The findings of this study uncover the prevailing perceptions about social media amongst the clubs; that their main reason for engaging in social media was to support fan engagement that strengthens loyalty, and thereby increases sales. Having a social media strategy seemed crucial in prioritizing effort and communicating value of the engagement. Data revealed that all clubs have embraced social media as a communication and marketing tool, actively using multiple platforms, which are promoted extensively throughout their social media channels and respective websites. The findings indicate a high proportion of direct interaction between the clubs and their fans, which differs from traditional media communications. The clubs' engagement in social media was generally undertaken by broad communication on an elevated level of involvement, through an ongoing interaction and dialogue, rather than directly responding to individual comments. Findings indicate that the managers tried to personalize their communication with individual fans and facilitate their involvement within larger groups. However, netnographic results showed that those efforts were very limited, and interview data confirmed that they did not prioritize to communicate with each individual fan. Some clubs' online presence appeared underutilized, since they had a large proportion of posts focusing on traditional one-way communication rather than engaging fans through a more interactive approach.

Furthermore, some clubs were engaging in social media analytics, yet, exactly how to do it and the affiliated value, were more difficult to assess for some clubs. Growth was the most tangible and easy metric to communicate and the reporting on social media engagement were used for organizational functions such as negotiating sponsorships. Nevertheless, interviewees found it challenging to measure other effects, suggesting that investments in resources and capabilities are required to facilitate sma

processes on a strategic level. Managerial challenges were typically tied directly to social media productions, and uncertainty about the ROI for their social media activities. Thus, it appears that there is considerable potential for the clubs to obtain further benefits from social media analytics, but also that further developments in this field are needed.

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