



THE ROLE OF SMART SPORTS MANAGEMENT IN PROMOTING SPORTS MARKETING THROUGH VIRTUAL MEDIA IN DIWANIYAH GOVERNORATE

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Abstract.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the role of smart sports management in enhancing sports marketing through virtual media in DIwaniyah Governorate. The research focused on investing in modern technologies to improve club performance and increase audience interaction with sports content. The study relied on an integrated methodology that combined questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to include a diverse sample of administrators, athletes, fans, media professionals, and sports management experts in the research community, with a total of (200) participants. Collecting qualitative and quantitative data helped reveal the reality of digital marketing in the governorate and identify the most prominent challenges facing it

The results showed that the positive interaction of the audience with virtual media was noticeable, as 60% of the participants confirmed their continuous interaction with sports clubs on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, while 80% supported the use of virtual media as a marketing tool. It was also found that the weakness of the technical infrastructure represents a major obstacle, as 60% of athletes reported a lack of technical expertise, while the percentages indicated the small budgets allocated to digital marketing (30%) and the weak use of artificial intelligence and data analysis technologies at a rate of 2.5

The study also addressed the need to adopt innovative marketing strategies that include interactive content such as (videos and podcasts) and cooperation with sports influencers to improve the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. The study recommended investing in developing digital infrastructure and providing training programs to enhance the use of modern technologies, in addition to establishing strategic partnerships with supporting entities, with the aim of enhancing the digital presence and sustainability of the financial performance of sports clubs in DIwaniyah Governorate. These results constitute clear evidence of the urgent need to reconsider and update digital sports marketing strategies in line with the requirements of the digital age, which contributes to achieving sustainable progress for sports clubs, and enhancing competition at the local level In particular.

Keywords: (Smart Sports Management – Sports Marketing – Virtual Media)

1- Research Introduction and Importance:

Historically, modern smart sports management has been oriented toward enhancing the quality of the performance of sports institutions concerning their interaction with the public interest at looming digitalization and rapidly developing technologies. Previously, management has based its work on information and analytics support for more trustful decision-making and a more efficient marketing program with implementation of AI, big data analysis, and IoT systems.



The city of Diwaniyah, besides its cultural and sporting possibilities, points out the example of the Iraqi cities that are searching for opportunities to help modernize sports marketing by means of virtual media. However, the city has serious problems, the main of which is the weak digital infrastructure of the city. There is no well-structured system for the advanced technologies that would offer a clear marketing strategy. Besides, the market also has a deficiency of smart and expert personnel to take over the smart sports management system.

Investment in sports media is shown by a series of antecedents to be very important in marketing sporting events. Adherence to professional ethics and human resource qualifications was found by Al-Karkhi (2024) as the Iraqi league to have possible avenues in improving sports marketing. Khaled and Aswad (2024), however, pointed out a different view regarding the media on the promotion of sports marketing for Iraqi national sports federations by stressing the need for the media to be positive in that respect. Shahada et al. (2020) is another work that studied the role of sports media through social media in spreading sports culture amongst Iraqi university students, therefore, demanding the development of sports media programs as a tool of increasing sports awareness.

In all of these studies, there has been identified yet another knowledge gap about the integration that exists between the smart sports management through the use of virtual media to enhance audience engagement and, at the same time, financial sustainability within the city of Diwaniyah. This current study proposes the amalgamation of modern technologies and data analysis into an integrated model for developing marketing strategies that are contextually relevant to the sports environment of Diwaniyah.

The research leans on an integrative research methodology involving administrators, athletes, fans, media professionals, and sports management experts—other stakeholders in its use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This approach shall present quantitative and qualitative views into the actuality of digital sports marketing and the challenges that confront it. Initial results reflect that the use of virtual media, popularly known as social media such as Facebook and Instagram, has remarkable contributions towards enhancing audience engagement. The findings identify the weaknesses in strategic an integrated utilization of these platforms. Therefore, the findings implicitly point towards the need to develop technological infrastructure and specialized training programs that shall enable personnel to use modern digital tools effectively..

Theoretically, this study contributes to enriching knowledge by presenting a theoretical framework that links the concepts of smart sports management and digital sports marketing, enhancing academic understanding of the interplay between technology and sports performance development. Practically speaking, the research offers recommendations targeting decision-makers in the sports sector, calling for investment in modern technologies and establishing strategic partnerships with supporting entities to ensure sustainable financial and sports performance.

The importance of this research lies in its global and local context. Globally, the development of smart sports management methods is part of the digital transformation witnessed by many countries. At the local level, Diwaniyah is an example of a city seeking to capitalize on its sporting and cultural potential through the implementation of innovative marketing strategies. In light of this, this study hopes to contribute to a qualitative change in sports management and sports marketing practices in Diwaniyah, enhancing clubs' competitiveness and achieving positive results for the local economy and sports community.

2 - Research Problem:

With rapid technological changes, smart sports management and virtual media have emerged as tools essential in the marketing of sports. They provide strong platforms for touching fans and interacting with them, as they build the brand of clubs and sports events. However, despite having very good potential on the



sports base, Diwaniyah Governorate faces a lot of challenges if they are to adopt smart sports management and apply virtual media in support of sports marketing.

Clubs and sports bodies in Diwaniyah do not apply digital marketing strategies. It prevents the possibility of reaching a large audience and increasing their financial revenues. This emanates from technical infrastructures that are not well developed, as well as the absence of qualified personnel in the field of digital marketing sports. None of the sports is artificial smart and strategic in the management of the sports used virtual platforms. There is also an insufficient level of investment in big data analytics and AI modern technologies that have not been identified among the organizations. Moreover, most of the clubs in Diwaniyah cannot present any clear strategies for managing the digital content about fans and sponsors appearing or developing a strong digital identity. Use of local media marketing also failed to keep pace with the changes in the sports media environment. Essentially, marketing depended on traditional television and press advertising while the target audience was getting more engaged with social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Additionally, there is no digital sports marketing culture among the leadership and management of sports in the county, thus significantly stifling actual adoption of modern and effective methods. This is complemented by vague awareness in audience data collection and analysis that also determines the accuracy of targeting the right groups with marketing campaigns. Finally, low partnerships with local corporate and individual donors lower the financial support opportunities to be channeled into sports and infrastructure development..

3 - Research Objectives:

This research aims to examine the role of smart sports management in promoting sports marketing through virtual media in Diwaniyah Governorate, focusing on the challenges and opportunities available for developing this sector. Through an in-depth analysis of the current situation, the research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Analyze the reality of digital sports marketing in Diwaniyah Governorate clubs.
- Evaluate the efficiency of sports management in employing virtual media.
- Identify the challenges facing sports clubs in implementing digital marketing strategies.
- Explore the role of virtual media in building the sports identity of clubs and sporting events in the governorate.

4- Research Areas:

4-1 Human Domain: Athletes, coaches, fans, and sports experts in Diwaniyah Governorate

4-2 Time Domain: September 11, 2024–February 15, 2025

4-3 Spatial Domain: Sports clubs in Diwaniyah Governorate

5- Research Methodology and Field Procedures:

5-1 The researcher relies on an integrative approach (Mixed Methods Research), which combines a survey approach and semi-structured interviews with academic experts in sports management. This approach provides deep insights into how to enhance smart management of sports marketing.

5-2 Research Community and Sample: The research community included athletes, administrators, sports club fans, sports media professionals, and experts in the field of sports management in Diwaniyah Governorate.

6- Data Collection Tools:

6-1 The researcher used qualitative and quantitative data analysis tools through questionnaires and interviews, as well as network analysis tools by analyzing interactions between fans on virtual media platforms.



6-2 The Primary Experiment: The primary study was conducted from September 11, 2024 to February 15, 2025.

6-3 Statistical Processing: The SPSS statistical package was used to process the statistical data.

7- Presentation and Discussion of Results:

7-1 Presentation of Results:

Table (1) displays the results of the fan survey.

no	Question	Options	Number of answers	percentage	Analysis
1	What is your level of engagement with the sports club?	A- Always .A	120	% 60	The majority of fans are constantly engaged with the club.
		B- Sometimes .B	70	% 35	A good percentage of fans are occasionally engaged.
		C- Rarely .C	10	%5	A small minority of fans rarely engage with the club.
2	What is your preferred platform for following the club?	A- Facebook .D	90	% 45	Facebook is the most widely used platform for following.
		B- Instagram .E	70	% 35	Instagram is also very popular.
		C- Twitter .F	30	%15	Twitter is less widely used compared to other platforms.
		C- Other .G	10	%5	Other platforms are used at lower rates compared to those mentioned above.
	Do you support the use of virtual media in sports marketing?	A- Yes .H	160	%80	The majority of fans support the use of virtual media.



3		B- No .I	40	% 20	A small percentage do not support the use of virtual media.
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Table (1) shows that 60% of fans are always interacting with the club, indicating a high level of loyalty. Facebook (45%) and Instagram (35%) are the two most commonly used platforms. Virtual media (80%) of fans support the use of virtual media. Increased interaction across social media platforms (especially Facebook and Instagram) leads to the development of diverse, engaging content for virtual media, indicating widespread acceptance of this medium.

Table (2) Results of the Athlete Survey

no	Question	Options	Number of answers	percentage	Analysis
1	What is your assessment of the role of smart sports management in improving performance	A- .A Excellent	50	% 50	Half of athletes believe that smart management is excellent at improving performance.
		B- Good .B	30	% 30	A good percentage believe that smart management is good.
		C- .C Average	15	%15	A small percentage believe that smart management is average.
		C- Weak .D	5	% 5	A small percentage believe that smart management is weak.
2	What challenges do you face in using virtual media?	A- Lack of technical expertise .E	60	% 60	Lack of technical expertise is the biggest challenge.
		B- Low budget .F	30	% 30	Lack of budget is also a major challenge.
		C- .G Difficulty measuring impact	10	% 10	Measuring impact remains a challenge for some athletes.



3	Do you think virtual media contributes to increasing the club's popularity?	A- Yes .H	80	% 80	The majority of athletes believe that virtual media increases popularity.
		B- No .I	20	% 20	A small percentage do not believe this.

Table (2) shows that the role of smart management is significant: 50% of athletes believe that smart management is excellent at improving performance. As for virtual media challenges, a lack of technical expertise (60%) and a limited budget (30%) were the main challenges.

Table (3) Demographic data of survey participants (sports administrators)

no	Variable	Category	Number of participants	percentage
1	Gender	Male	45	% 60
		Female	10	%40
2	Age	Under 30	20	%33.3
		30-40	25	%46.7
		Over 40	15	% 20
3	Academic Qualification	Diploma	10	%13.3
		Bachelor's	50	%66.7
		Master's	10	%13.3
		Doctorate	5	%6.7
4	Scientific Experience	Less than 5 years	20	%26.7
		5-10 years	30	%40
		Over 10 years	25	%33.3

Table No. (4) The reality of smart sports management in sports clubs

no	Indicator	Average response	Rating (low - medium - high)
1	Providing smart management systems in clubs	2.5	Low
2	Using technology in sports management	2.8	Low
3	Efficiency of administrative leaders in using artificial intelligence	2.0	Low
4	Level of smart strategic planning	2.5	Low

The results showed that the availability of smart management systems in sports clubs is low, while the use of technology in sports management and smart strategic planning remains low, indicating an urgent need to develop these important aspects. Table No. (5) The role of smart sports management in sports marketing.



no	Indicator	Average response	Rating (low - medium - high)
1	The impact of smart management on audience growth.	3.5	Medium
2	Using virtual media in marketing.	3.0	Average
3	The effectiveness of marketing campaigns across digital platforms.	3.2	Average
4	Increasing clubs' financial income through smart marketing.	2.8	Low

Table No. (5) shows that the average audience engagement rate is (3.5), indicating the presence of a fan base whose engagement can be enhanced through the use of smart management. The use of virtual media received an average rating of (3.0), which means there is an opportunity to improve targeting across platforms such as (Facebook, Instagram) based on the data in Table No. (1). However, the increase in financial income is still limited, indicating the need to improve digital marketing strategies by developing smart sports management in sports clubs. Table No. (6) The use of virtual media in sports marketing.

no	Indicator	Average response	Rating (low - medium - high)
1	Extent of use of social media platforms	3.7	High
2	Effectiveness of virtual media in attracting audiences	3.4	Medium
3	Level of engagement with audiences across digital platforms	3.1	Medium
4	Use of video and podcasts in marketing	2.6	Low

Table No. (6) shows that despite the increased use of social media platforms, the effectiveness of virtual media in attracting and engaging audiences remains at an average level, with a noticeable decline in the use of video and podcasts. Table No. (7) Challenges Facing Smart Sports Management

no	Challenge	Number of responses	percentage
1	Lack of qualified personnel	50	%66.7
2	Lack of support	45	% 60
3	Weak technological infrastructure	40	% 53.3
4	Lack of a clear strategy	35	% 46.7

Table (7) The major challenges facing smart sports management include unqualified personnel and financial support. This, in turn, requires the development of training programs and enhanced investment in technological infrastructure. The low level of development of smart sports management in clubs in Diwanayah Governorate implies low levels of development. The use of new media in sports marketing is at a still pretty unexploited point, so the major challenges here are unqualified personnel and poor technological infrastructure..

Table (8) Demographic data of survey participants (sports media professionals)

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no	Variable	Category	percentage	Analysis
1	Gender	Males	% 90	The vast majority of sports media professionals in the sample are male.
		Females	% 10	The percentage of females is very small.
2	Age Group	20-30 years	% 40	The younger age group is the most active in virtual media.
		31-40 years	% 35	An active age group with experience in sports media.
		41 and older	% 25	A less active group in virtual media, but with extensive experience.
3	Education Level	Diploma	% 25	A good percentage of media professionals hold diplomas.
		Bachelor's	% 60	Most media professionals hold bachelor's degrees.
		Master's	% 15	A smaller percentage hold master's degrees.
4	Type of Platform Used	Facebook	% 70	Facebook is the most widely used platform for sports marketing.
		Instagram	% 30	Instagram is popular among sports media professionals.
5	Extent of Virtual Media Use	Daily	% 65	The majority of media professionals use virtual media daily.
		Weekly	% 25	A smaller percentage use virtual media weekly.
		Monthly	% 10	A small percentage use virtual media monthly.
6	Extent of Impact of Smart Management	High	% 60	More than half of the sample believe that smart management has a significant impact.
		Average	% 30	A percentage believe that the impact of smart management is average.
		Low	% 10	A small percentage believe that the impact of smart management is low.
7	Extent of Enhanced	High	% 60	The majority of the sample believe that virtual media



Sports Marketing			significantly enhances sports marketing.
	Average	% 30	A percentage believe that the enhancement is average.
	Low	% 10	A small percentage believe that the enhancement is low.

Table No. (9) Demographic data of the academic experts participating in the interviews

no	Variable	Category	Number of participants	percentage
1	Gender	Male	7	% 70
		Female	3	% 30
2	Age	Under 40	2	% 20
		40-50	5	% 50
		Over 50	3	% 30
3	Academic Qualification	PhD	8	% 80
		Master's	2	% 20
4	Specialization	Sports Management	4	% 40
		Marketing	3	% 30
		Information Technology	2	% 20
		Media	1	% 10
5	Scientific Experience	Less than 5 years	3	% 30
		5-10 years	4	% 40
		Over 10 years	3	% 30

Table No. (10) Practical applications of smart sports management

no	Application	Average rating (out of 5)	Rating (Low, Medium, High)	Practical examples:
1	Using Team Management Systems	2.5		Systems like Trellis and Asana are underutilized.
2	Sports Analytics	2.8	Low	Lack of use of tools like Tableau or Power BL.
3	Artificial Intelligence Applications	2.3	Low	Lack of applications like performance analysis using artificial intelligence.
4	E-Ticketing Systems	2.0	Low	Limited use of electronic ticketing systems.

Table No. (10) shows that the practical applications of smart sports management remain limited, with a lack of use of team management and data analysis tools. There is a need to enhance the use of modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and electronic ticketing systems.



Table No. (11) Sports Marketing Strategies Through Virtual Media

NO	Strategy	Average rating (out of 5)	Rating (Low, Medium, High)	Practical Examples
1	Using social media platforms	3.7	High	Facebook and Instagram are the most widely used platforms.
2	Creating interactive content (videos, podcasts)	2.6	Low	Lack of interactive content production, such as short videos or podcasts.
3	Paid media campaigns (paid ads)	2.0	Low	Lack of paid media campaigns.
4	Collaborating with sports influencers	2.8	Low	Lack of partnerships with local sports influencers.

Table No. (11) shows that despite the increased use of social media platforms, sports marketing strategies via virtual media remain limited. There is a need to enhance interactive content creation and increase the use of paid advertising campaigns.

Table No. (12) Practical Challenges Facing the Development of Smart Sports Management

ت	The Challenge	Number of signals	Percentage	Practical examples:
1	Lack of funding to purchase modern technology	9	% 90	Lack of budgets to purchase smart management systems.
2	Weak technological infrastructure	8	% 80	Lack of advanced servers and networks.
3	Lack of trained personnel in technology	7	% 70	Lack of specialized training programs.
4	Lack of supportive policies from official bodies	6	% 60	Lack of legislation supporting smart management.

Table (12) shows that the most important practical challenges are the lack of funding for the purchase of modern technology and the weakness of the technological infrastructure. The shortage of trained personnel and the absence of supportive policies also hinder development in this field of smart sports management.

7-2 Discussion of the Results:

The research results showed that smart sports management plays a pivotal role in promoting sports marketing through virtual media in Diwaniyah Governorate, contributing to improving promotional strategies and engaging with sports fans in more efficient and impactful ways. It is clear that the use of digital analytics and artificial intelligence allows clubs and sports bodies to accurately target audiences, leading to increased engagement and participation rates. Social media also represents a key channel for sports marketing, where clubs and sponsors can build direct relationships with fans, enhancing loyalty and financial returns.



Some studies indicate that the use of big data technologies in sports marketing enables a deeper understanding of consumer behavior, which helps deliver personalized content that enhances the fan experience and increases sponsorship and advertising opportunities (Smith & Stewart, 2021). Another study demonstrates that virtual media contributes to enhancing the brand of sports teams through innovative marketing strategies based on interactive content and live video (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, & Chadwick, 2020). Furthermore, a recent study confirms that smart sports management contributes to the development of new economic models based on digital interaction, increasing revenue sources for sports organizations (Ratten, 2022).

Based on these findings, it is important for sports clubs in Diwaniyah Governorate to adopt smart management strategies to enhance their digital presence and leverage modern sports marketing technologies to ensure their sustainable success in the growing sports market.

8- Recommendations:

Based on the research findings on the role of smart sports management in enhancing sports marketing through virtual media in Diwaniyah Governorate, the researcher recommends the following:

- Adopting smart management techniques: Sports clubs and entities should rely on digital analytics and artificial intelligence systems to understand fan behavior and improve digital marketing strategies.
- Enhancing the use of virtual media: Expanding the use of social media and digital platforms to build stronger relationships with sports fans and increase interaction and participation. □ Investing in digital content: Producing high-quality interactive content, such as live broadcasts, promotional clips, and podcasts, enhances sports brands' presence and increases their fan base.
- Developing partnerships with sponsors: Working to attract sponsors and advertisers through innovative digital marketing strategies based on data and accurate analysis of market needs.
- Developing human capacity: Providing training programs for sports administrators and marketers on the latest digital marketing techniques and smart management to ensure optimal use of virtual media.
- Measuring performance and analyzing data: Establishing continuous evaluation systems to measure the impact of sports marketing via virtual media and leveraging data to improve future strategies.
- Integrating with global trends: Adopting the latest trends in digital sports marketing, such as virtual reality and augmented reality technologies, to enhance the fan experience and increase investment opportunities.
- These recommendations aim to develop a more professional and sustainable sports environment in Diwaniyah Governorate, by investing in the great potential provided by virtual media in the field of sports marketing.

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