

New Media Strategies of Sports Brands via Social Media: A Literature Review

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Abstract:

Against the backdrop of the digital era and the development of new quality productive forces, the marketing models of sports brands are undergoing a profound transformation. Based on a systematic review of relevant literature at home and abroad, this paper conducts a research summary on new media strategies implemented by sports brands via social media. Firstly, it analyzes the theoretical evolution of marketing paradigms from the traditional "media-centric" model to "interactive construction" in the social media era, and discusses four major driving forces: technological progress, changes in consumer demand, market competition, and globalization. Secondly, it constructs a five-dimensional core strategy system, including content strategy, KOL and community strategy, data-driven precision marketing integrated with e-commerce, cross-cultural communication strategy, and brand image and crisis public relations strategy. Research shows that successful social media marketing is essentially a process in which brands transform users into brand identifiers and co-builders through value communication, emotional interaction, and cultural empowerment. Finally, this paper summarizes the effect evaluation dimensions and practical challenges of existing strategies, and puts forward future research prospects from four directions: technological empowerment, sustainable development, brand equity accumulation, and segmented market expansion, so as to provide references for theoretical innovation and practical development in this field.

Keywords: sports brand; social media marketing; new media strategy; literature review

1. Introduction

Under the dual background of the digital wave and the rise of new quality productive forces, the market-

ing paradigm of the sports industry is experiencing a profound revolution [1]. Traditional marketing models, relying on television broadcasting and offline channels, are characterized by one-way communi-

cation and insufficient interactivity, which can no longer meet the urgent market demand for diversified and personalized consumption experiences [3]. As the core driving force of this transformation, social media has reshaped the communication path between sports brands and consumers by virtue of its instantaneity, interactivity and extensive user connection, prompting marketing strategies to shift from the "broadcast" model of wide-area coverage to the "narrowcast" and "dialogue" model featuring precise interaction and value co-creation [2, 4].

This transformation is not only reflected in practice but has also attracted extensive attention in academic research. Researchers have deconstructed the mechanism of social media in sports marketing from different perspectives. For instance, Zhang Leqian and Wang Zhaohong (2025) [5], based on social impact theory, revealed through rigorous empirical models how key opinion leaders (KOLs) drive purchase behavior by influencing consumers' brand identification and imitation intention. Xu Zuodong and Zheng Limei (2024) [6] applied framing analysis to examine cross-cultural communication barriers faced by Chinese sports organizations in the process of internationalization. In international research, Yoshida et al. (2018) [7], based on social identity theory and customer engagement theory, explained how social media user characteristics and entertainment value affect brand loyalty through online brand community identification. In addition, the systematic research on the application of network multimedia technology by He Yongming et al. (2025) [8] and the exploration of digital marketing models in the e-commerce environment by Wang Jia (2025) [9] have jointly enriched the strategic toolbox of social media marketing for sports brands.

However, despite the fruitful research achievements, the field still lacks comprehensive research that systematically integrates and reviews existing literature. Academic discussions mostly focus on a specific strategy, platform or brand case, failing to form a panoramic analytical framework integrating theory, strategy, effects and trends. Accordingly, this paper aims to systematically review and comment on relevant domestic and foreign literature on social media marketing of sports brands. The core objectives are: first, to clarify the theoretical basis and core driving factors of social media marketing for sports brands; second, to construct a systematic new media strategy system and summarize the internal logic and practical forms of various strategies; third, to objectively evaluate the implementation effects and practical challenges of various strategies; fourth, to prospect future research directions and practical trends on this basis. Through this review, this paper expects to provide a solid academic foundation for subsequent theoretical deepening and practical

innovation. Centering on the above research objectives, this paper puts forward four core research questions:

- ① What are the theoretical basis and core driving factors of social media marketing for sports brands?
- ② What are the core contents and practical forms of new media strategies implemented by sports brands through social media?
- ③ What are the effect evaluation dimensions and practical challenges of new media strategies for sports brands on social media?
- ④ What are the future research and practical directions of new media strategies for sports brands on social media?

2. Determination of the Retrieval Strategy

To comprehensively and deeply obtain research literature and support the answers to the above four research questions, this study selects China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) as the Chinese academic data source, and mainstream foreign language databases in the fields of sports management and marketing for foreign literature. The retrieval time span is set from 2000 to 2025, fully covering the whole cycle of online marketing of sports brands from germination, development to maturity, which is highly consistent with the iteration of Internet technology, industry transformation nodes and research context.

Chinese Retrieval Strategy

Taking sports brand, social media, new media and marketing as core retrieval terms, multi-dimensional combined retrieval is adopted by subject, title and keywords. The retrieval formula is: SU = sports brand OR SU = social media OR SU = new media marketing OR KY = sports brand OR KY = social media marketing.

Foreign Language Retrieval Strategy

Taking sports brand, social media, new media and marketing strategy as core retrieval terms, an advanced retrieval method combining title and subject is adopted to ensure the relevance and pertinence of foreign literature.

2.1 Literature Selection, Analysis and Evaluation

To ensure the quality of research samples and the validity of the study, and to provide solid support for subsequent literature analysis and research conclusions, this study formulates strict literature selection and exclusion standards from three dimensions: literature type, research topic and literature availability, and screens the initially retrieved literature layer by layer. In terms of literature type, peer-reviewed academic journal articles are selected to ensure academic rigor and research quality; dissertations, conference papers, books, newspapers, review

articles and editorials are excluded to avoid affecting review conclusions due to inconsistent review standards and insufficient research depth. In terms of research topic, the selected literature must closely focus on the four core research questions proposed in this paper, focusing on the theory, practice, effects or trends of new media strategies for sports brand social media; literature irrelevant to sports brand marketing or only discussing social media or new media technology in general is excluded. In terms of literature availability, only full-text accessible literature is selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research content, methods and conclusions; literature without available full text is excluded.

After strict screening according to the above standards, 54 valid research papers are finally determined (including 32 Chinese papers and 22 foreign papers), which are comprehensively analyzed by combining descriptive statistics and content analysis. Firstly, descriptive statistics are conducted on the publication time, research perspectives and research methods of the 54 papers to grasp the overall development context and research characteristics of new media strategy research for sports brand social media. Then, in-depth sorting and induction of literature content are carried out around the four research questions, focusing on the theoretical basis, driving factors, core strategy system, effect evaluation dimensions, practical challenges and future research directions in the field, refining research consensus and sorting out research deficiencies. Finally, systematic research review conclusions are formed to provide references for theoretical innovation and practical development in this field.

2.2 Literature Analysis and Evaluation

This study conducts a comprehensive analysis combining descriptive statistics and content analysis on the screened 54 valid literatures. Firstly, descriptive statistics are carried out on the publication time, research perspectives and research methods of the literatures to grasp the overall development context and research characteristics of new media strategy research for sports brand social media. Then, in-depth sorting and induction of literature content are carried out around the research questions, focusing on the theoretical basis, driving factors, core strategy system, effect evaluation dimensions, practical challenges and future research directions in the field, refining research consensus and sorting out research deficiencies. Finally, systematic research review conclusions are formed to provide references for theoretical innovation and practical development in this field.

Introduction to CNKI

China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) is a core national knowledge infrastructure project jointly initiated and developed by Tsinghua University and Tsinghua Tongfang. As the most authoritative and influential comprehensive academic resource database in China, CNKI is committed to promoting the dissemination, sharing and value-added utilization of social knowledge resources. Its core resources cover major sub-databases, including China Academic Journals (Online Edition), China Excellent Doctoral and Master's Dissertations Full-text Database, China Important Conference Papers Full-text Database, China Important Newspapers Full-text Database, and China Patent Full-text Database. These resources cover a full range of disciplines, including basic science, engineering technology, agricultural science, medical and health care, humanities and social sciences, and economic management. By 2024, CNKI had collected more than 63 million Chinese academic documents published since 1915, and integrated diverse resources such as foreign literature, national standards and yearbooks, making it a fundamental supporting platform for academic research and thesis writing.

There are three official access channels for CNKI. In this study, the author mainly conducted personal registration through the official website (<https://www.cnki.net>), retrieved literature using subject keywords, read full texts, and screened eligible documents to support the completion of this literature review. For Chinese-language literature, keywords including sports, new media, marketing were used, yielding approximately 850 initial records. Among them, 32 Chinese articles and 22 English articles were selected, resulting in a total sample of 54 valid documents.

Rationale for Document Selection

The time span from 2000 to 2025 is selected to fully cover the entire life cycle of online marketing for sports brands, from emergence to maturity. This period is highly consistent with the iteration of Internet technology, industrial transformation nodes and the evolution of relevant research, ensuring the historical integrity and practical relevance of the literature review.

3. Theoretical Basis and Driving Forces: Structural Transformation of Marketing Paradigms

The rise and development of social media marketing for sports brands constitute a structural transformation driven by the evolution of theoretical foundations and multiple realistic factors. Understanding this background is a pre-

requisite for in-depth analysis of various marketing strategies.

3.1 Evolution of Theoretical Foundations: From One-Way Transmission to Interactive Construction

Traditional sports marketing is rooted in mass communication theory, characterized by a media-centric paradigm. Gu Run (2024) [1] points out that traditional marketing relies on mass media such as television, newspapers and magazines to achieve wide coverage through event broadcasting, product placement and celebrity endorsements, which is essentially one-way information infusion. Li Han et al. (2025) [10] further confirm in their research on sports event brand management that consumers under this model are mostly passive recipients, with limited deep interaction and emotional bonds between brands and users. The emergence of social media has driven marketing theory toward a paradigm of social interaction and relationship construction. The core of this shift lies in regarding consumers as active prosumers. He Yongming et al. (2025) [8] argue that the interactivity of online multimedia enables users to communicate, comment and provide feedback via platforms, which provides a technical foundation for brands to establish two-way or multi-directional communication with consumers, and facilitates the formation of user-generated content (UGC) and brand communities [2, 11].

Against this background, Social Influence Theory provides a key framework for understanding the psychological mechanism of social media marketing. The study by Zhang Leqian and Wang Zhaohong (2025) [5] constitutes a typical application. They propose that individuals accept social influence through three processes: compliance, identification and internalization. In social media contexts, key opinion leaders (KOLs), as voluntary social influencers, can stimulate consumers' emotional identification with recommended products, internalize such perceptions into personal values and consumption desires, and ultimately drive purchase behavior. Meanwhile, Social Identity Theory, widely adopted in international studies, also provides strong support. Yoshida et al. (2018) [7] reveal that users' identification with online brand communities serves as a critical mediator linking social media engagement and behavioral loyalty. Value Co-creation Theory explains the nature of social media marketing from an alternative perspective. Based on value co-creation, Ma Nan (2024) [2] argues that online communities of sports brands are not merely marketing channels, but spaces for co-creating brand value with consumers. Popp & Woratschek (2016) [4] introduced the concept of branded communities, sug-

gesting that communities formed around specific interests (e.g., football) can enhance brand loyalty through sponsorship or operation even without direct brand-centrism, which further enriches the theoretical connotation of value co-creation.

3.2 A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Core Driving Factors

3.2.1 Disruptive Impact of Technological Progress

Technology serves as the primary driving force of transformation. Han Jihang (2025) [12] identifies technological advancement as the foremost driver of marketing strategy innovation, elaborating on the application of digital tools including search engine optimization (SEO), targeted social media advertising, and livestreaming and video marketing. From the perspective of new quality productive forces, Gu Run (2024) [1, 13] emphasizes the integrated effects of big data, artificial intelligence and other technologies, contending that big data analytics forms a decision-making support mechanism. By deeply mining user data, brands can construct consumer profiles and achieve unprecedented market insight and strategic accuracy. In international research, Breuer et al. (2021) [14] use real-time biometric data and eye-tracking to illustrate how sponsor messages can be dynamically adjusted according to competition progress, realizing personalized and contextualized marketing communication.

3.2.2 Paradigm Shift in Consumer Demand

Contemporary sports consumer demand is evolving toward personalization, experientiality and symbolism. Han Jihang (2025) [12] observes that consumers are no longer satisfied with standardized products, but pursue customization based on personal conditions, sports preferences and aesthetics, reflecting the rise of personalized and experiential consumption. In a case study of Decathlon Chengdu, Xie Di (2024) [15] finds that consumers increasingly emphasize experience and interaction during shopping. Meanwhile, Wang Yuchen (2023) [16] shows that the integration of Chinese-style elements in sporting goods satisfies young consumers' demand for cultural identity and symbolic consumption. Notably, the female sports consumption market has grown rapidly, and the fan economy has exerted remarkable influence. Zhang Leqian and Wang Zhaohong (2025) [5] cite data showing that female fitness consumers accounted for 55.41% in 2023, indicating that women have become the main force in the sports consumption market. Xiang Sijie et al. (2023) [17] conduct an in-depth investigation into the powerful driving effect of fan economy on sports consumption behavior.

3.2.3 External Pressure of Market Competition and Brand Breakthrough

In a fiercely competitive red ocean market, innovation has become essential for survival. Han Jihang (2025) [12] notes that sports brands face competition not only from within the industry but also from emerging brands and cross-border competitors. Focusing on small and medium-sized non-public sports enterprises, Zhou Xianhe and Lu Weishuai (2024) [18] emphasize that, with limited resources, precise brand image building and cultural innovation via social media are crucial for such enterprises to achieve differentiated competition. Taking Hongxing Erke as an example, Guo Haiyang (2025) [19] examines how domestic brands rapidly improve brand image through social media events. From an international perspective, Su et al. (2023) [20] investigate the rise of college athletes as new influencers, indicating that in the era of name, image and likeness (NIL), athletes' personal brands have become key resources for differentiated competition.

3.2.4 Demand for Cross-Cultural Communication in Globalization

For Chinese sports brands with global ambitions, social media represents a double-edged sword. Xu Zuodong and Zheng Limei (2024) [6] focus on this issue, pointing out that Chinese sports organizations face cultural barriers and insufficient communication adaptability in the international market. Research by Liu Shuting (2022) [21] on Li-Ning's overseas social media advertisements and by Gong Jianjun (2018) [22] on cross-cultural communication in sports brand advertising both demonstrate that enhancing cross-cultural communication competence is a core challenge and essential task for the internationalization of domestic brands. A study by Bertschy, Mühlbacher & Desbordes (2020) [23] on football clubs' expansion into esports suggests that brand extension may fail to achieve expected synergies if it is inconsistent with the interests of existing fan groups, which provides a warning for international cross-border communication of brands.

4. Core Strategy System of Social Media Marketing for Sports Brands

Based on the above theoretical foundations and driving factors, sports brands have established a multi-level and multi-dimensional marketing strategy system on social media platforms. This section systematically summarizes and analyzes five core strategies.

4.1 Content Strategy: From Information Carrier to Engine of Value Resonance

Content serves as the foundation of all marketing activities. In the social media era, the content strategy of sports brands has evolved from simple information release to a core engine that generates emotional resonance and conveys brand value.

First, content has become diversified and multimedia-oriented. He Yongming et al. (2025) [8] used detailed comparative data to demonstrate performance differences among various content types. Their study revealed that while highlight clips of sports events achieve wide dissemination on YouTube, documentary-style behind-the-scenes stories deliver longer average viewing duration and higher interaction rates through in-depth narration. Studies by Zhu Tong (2022) [24] and Liu Shuting (2022) [21] both emphasize the advantages of dynamic visual content such as short videos and livestreams in attracting and retaining user attention. Internationally, Geurin & Burch (2017) [25] analyzed Instagram accounts of six running brands and found that posts adopting differentiated positioning and highlighting products or the brand itself generate the strongest audience engagement.

Second, narration has become emotional, localized, and culturally empowered. When discussing the branding of sports events, Li Han et al. (2025) [10] stress that constructing brand culture and storytelling is central. Taking Li-Ning as an example, Wu Nan (2022) [26] explored how domestic sports brands integrated Guochao (national trend) elements into brand narratives amid the rise of online nationalism, successfully stimulating cultural identity and patriotic sentiment among young consumers. Wang Yuchen (2023) [16] systematically analyzed the application strategies and optimization paths of Chinese-style elements in sports brand marketing. Through experimental research, Ko et al. (2022) [27] found that promotion using anthropomorphized team mascots enhances psychological proximity and media consumption intention among potential fans, providing new psychological evidence for brand storytelling.

Third, value co-creation through user participation represents the highest level of content strategy. Ma Nan (2024) [2] argued from a value co-creation perspective that a sporting goods company's online community significantly improved brand loyalty and repurchase rates by encouraging users to participate in product reviews, experience sharing, and co-created activities. Based on the Douyin platform, Rong Ge (2021) [11] found that post-90s consumers show strong enthusiasm for interactive activities

initiated by brands, such as online challenges and topic discussions. Stegmann, Stroebel, & Woratschek (2024) [28] classified participatory behaviors in sports brand communities based on social practice theory, revealing how diverse forms of engagement strengthen community bonds through digital platforms.

4.2 Key Opinion Leader (KOL) and Community Strategy: Building Trust Agents and Emotional Belonging

KOL marketing and community operation have become core strategies for sports brands, especially when targeting specific segmented markets.

The study by Zhang Leqian and Wang Zhaohong (2025) [5] provides systematic empirical support. They identified five significant positive characteristics of KOLs that influence female consumers' purchase intention for sporting goods: homogeneity, visibility, timeliness, product involvement, and interactivity. Among these, homogeneity (similarity between KOLs and followers) yielded the highest standardized regression coefficient (0.882), indicating that consumers trust and identify more with "friends on the screen" who share similar lifestyles and values. The study also quantified the influence path: the mediating effect of KOL characteristics → brand identification → purchase intention was the strongest (0.251), confirming brand identification as the key psychological bridge for KOL-driven consumption decisions.

In practice, KOL strategy relies on cooperation with multi-tier influencers. Li Fupeng (2023) [29] and Qin Hao et al. (2014) [30] suggest that brands should establish a pyramidal communication matrix including top celebrity athletes, vertical fitness influencers, and ordinary users. Fu Binglin (2018) [31] revealed the importance of localized KOL operation from the perspective of brand image building for foreign sports stars in the Chinese market. Su et al. (2020) [32] examined drivers of athlete social media follower growth and found that league and team endorsement during career transitions (such as NFL drafts) significantly enhances athletes' personal brand influence on social media.

Community strategy is closely integrated with KOL strategy. Yao Yi (2025) [33] found in a study of sports dance clubs in Wuhan that member communities on platforms such as WeChat and QQ, combined with regular online and offline activities, effectively improve student stickiness and brand reputation. Xiang Sijie et al. (2023) [17] also showed that communities centered on core fans generate strong internal cohesion and external communication power. Popp & Woratschek (2016) [4] pointed out that members of branded communities exhibit higher brand

loyalty when aware of the brand's role as operator, without reducing their commitment to the community itself.

4.3 Data-Driven Precision Marketing and E-Commerce Integration Strategy

Big data and artificial intelligence have elevated social media marketing from experiential practice to scientific decision-making, enabling seamless integration with sales conversion.

Personalized recommendation and targeted advertising represent the core of this strategy. Gu Run (2024) [1, 13] argued that in the context of new quality productive forces, big data-based personalized recommendation systems are critical to improving marketing efficiency. Wang Jia (2025) [9] and Li Guanglei (2025) [34] both emphasize the fundamental role of e-commerce platform user data in enabling precision marketing and personalized recommendations for sports brands. Breuer et al. (2021) [14] demonstrated how real-time competition data and audience biometrics (heart rate, eye tracking) can dynamically adjust sponsor messages to maximize communication efficiency. Social commerce and channel integration represent a prominent contemporary trend. In her digital marketing model, Wang Jia (2025) [9] proposed an integrated marketing framework featuring online-offline integration and multi-platform convergence. She noted that the integration of social media and e-commerce allows consumers to complete purchases directly on social platforms, forming a consumption loop: discovery – interest – purchase – sharing. In a case study of Company A, Chen Danning (2023) [35] found that social commerce tools such as livestreaming sales and mini-program stores significantly shorten consumer decision paths and improve conversion rates. Cocco et al. (2023) [36] examined the NIL (name, image, and likeness) value of college athletes on social media, directly linking social media influence to commercial value; they found that posting frequency and account verification status significantly affect the commercial value of athletes' posts.

4.4 Cross-Cultural and Global Communication Strategy: Balancing Globalization and Localization

For Chinese sports brands pursuing global expansion, social media provides direct access to international users, yet also poses severe challenges of cultural adaptation.

Using framing analysis, Xu Zuodong and Zheng Limei (2024) [6] sharply identified dilemmas in the international communication of Chinese sports organizations. Strengths include moderate integration of cultural symbols (e.g., calligraphy and dragon elements at the Beijing Winter Olym-

pics enhancing visual recognition) and rapid adoption of new media technologies. However, critical weaknesses remain: weak cultural adaptability and vague brand image. The study showed that some content failed to accurately capture the cultural interests of international audiences; in European and American markets, overly formal language and narratives emphasizing traditional culture appeared disconnected from young audiences.

Liu Shuting (2022) [21] and Gong Jianjun (2018) [22] provided further evidence and solutions. Liu Shuting (2022) [21] found that the performance of Li-Ning's overseas social media advertisements closely depended on integration with local popular culture and the use of relatable individual narratives rather than grand national narratives. She recommended that Chinese brands adopt a strategy of global vision, local execution in international communication. Bertschy et al. (2020) [23] examined the esports expansion of AS Monaco Football Club and identified clear separation between football and esports fan communities, with brand extension failing to alter core brand identity, revealing deep segmentation in cross-cultural and cross-community communication.

4.5 Brand Image Building and Crisis Public Relations Strategy

Social media acts as both an amplifier of brand image and a potential catalyst for crises.

Brand image building is a long-term and systematic project. From an integrated marketing communication perspective, Xu Yinfeng (2024) [37] studied Li-Ning and emphasized that brands must maintain consistent cross-platform messaging in the social media era to shape a unified and clear brand image. Qin Zhen (2024) [38] proposed similar views in optimizing Li-Ning's brand marketing strategy. Zauner, Koller, & Fink (2012) [39] showed that in social media environments, sponsor brand image and endorser credibility jointly affect perceived brand value, with differing effects between existing and potential customers.

Crisis public relations tests a brand's responsiveness. Taking the "315 Nike Air Cushion Incident" as a case, Li Jin and Wang Zhenzhen (2017) [40] analyzed public relations strategies for sports brands under new media contexts. They found that response speed, sincerity, and information transparency on social media are critical to calming public opinion and restoring trust. Xie Chunlong (2023) [41] noted from a consumer behavior perspective that negative public opinion significantly reduces purchase intention. O'Neill et al. (2025) [42] analyzed social media comments on activism videos by Australian football teams and identified nine discursive delegitimization strategies,

providing a sophisticated framework for understanding and managing negative sentiment.

5. Effect Evaluation, Practical Challenges and Future Prospects

Following systematic implementation of social media strategies, scientific effect evaluation and clear recognition of challenges are essential for continuous optimization.

5.1 Multi-Dimensional Evaluation System of Marketing Effects

At the brand level, core indicators include exposure, engagement volume, and brand equity. Social media interaction data provided by He Yongming et al. (2025) [8] show that top sports brands achieve millions of interactions, directly reflecting brand influence. Qi Chao (2022) [43] proposed a brand value evaluation system for self-owned sports events in Shanghai under convergent media. Wakefield, Wakefield, & Keller (2020) [44] developed a consumer-centric sponsorship effect model that systematically organizes antecedents, mediators, and outcomes of sponsorship activities.

At the consumer psychological and behavioral level, quantitative evaluation of influence paths is more refined. The serial mediation model by Zhang Leqian and Wang Zhaohong (2025) [5] revealed that the total indirect effect of KOL characteristics on purchase intention through brand identification and imitation desire reached 0.454, accounting for 65.6% of the total effect. Yao Songbo (2022) [45] found that both the quantity and quality of electronic word-of-mouth positively influence consumer purchase intention. The model by Yoshida et al. (2018) [7] showed that brand-related social media engagement and team identification jointly affect behavioral loyalty.

At the commercial conversion level, ultimate metrics include sales data, customer acquisition cost, and customer lifetime value. Studies by Wang Jia (2025) [9] and Chen Danning (2023) [35] emphasize the direct contribution of social media traffic to e-commerce sales. Xian Xiaoying (2024) [46] empirically confirmed a significant positive correlation between sports brand marketing strategies and consumer engagement. Clark, Cornwell, & Pruitt (2009) [47] used event study methodology and found that title sponsorship announcements exert varying effects on shareholder wealth across different sports.

5.2 Inescapable Practical Challenges

Firstly, intense competition and scarce user attention. Li Han et al. (2025) [10] noted that information overload and scattered audience attention severely weaken communi-

cation effectiveness. Hayes et al. (2020) [48] identified distractions from positive and negative information and brand pressure in athletes' social media use, a pattern that also applies to brand content dissemination.

Secondly, deep barriers to cross-cultural communication. Studies by Xu Zuodong and Zheng Limei (2024) [6] and Liu Shuting (2022) [21] show that cultural differences and stereotypes represent major obstacles to the internationalization of Chinese sports brands. Bertschy et al. (2020) [23] revealed the risk of community segregation in brand extension.

Thirdly, brand protection and crisis management. Li Han et al. (2025) [10] warned against risks including trademark infringement and brand reputation damage caused by athlete misconduct. Studies by Li Jin and Wang Zhenzhen (2017) [40] and O'Neill et al. (2025) [42] show that crises erupt rapidly and diversely, placing high demands on emergency response capabilities.

Fourth, accurate measurement of return on investment (ROI). Despite multiple evaluation indicators, scientifically attributing social media brand voice to final sales revenue remains a practical challenge [35, 46]. Meenaghan, McLoughlin, & McCormack (2013) [49] also noted that traditional evaluation methods are challenged by increasingly integrated sponsorship and widespread social media use.

5.3 Future Research Prospects

Based on the review of existing research achievements and limitations in Section 2.2, future research can be advanced in the following directions:

Firstly, deepen research on empowerment by emerging technologies. Future studies may explore the application prospects and ethical boundaries of AIGC (Artificial Intelligence Generated Content), metaverse, virtual idols, and other technologies in content creation, consumer interaction, and virtual merchandise marketing for sports brands on social media.

Secondly, explore sustainable development and social responsibility marketing.

With the popularization of the ESG concept, an important direction will be to investigate how sports brands use the multi-functional matrix of new media to effectively communicate environmental and public welfare initiatives, and to evaluate the impact of such communication on consumer brand attitude. New media provides targeted and efficient channels for communicating corporate social responsibility through four key functions:

(1) Content matrix distribution enables multi-platform coordinated communication. Brands can deliver differentiated ESG content tailored to platform audiences, such as

in-depth articles on environmental technology on WeChat Official Accounts, short documentaries on public welfare actions on Douyin and Kuaishou, and notes on sustainable strategies on Xiaohongshu and Weibo.

(2) Interactive participation strengthens deep user connections through public welfare topics, UGC collection, and online challenges. Brands can launch hashtags such as #SportsForPublicWelfare and #GreenSportsProgram, encouraging users to share experiences and participate in step donations or environmental check-ins, turning users into secondary communicators.

(3) Data-driven precise targeting improves efficiency by reaching core audiences interested in sports, environmental protection, and public welfare based on user profiling, reducing ineffective communication and enabling real-time strategy optimization.

(4) Immersive communication enhances persuasiveness through short videos, livestreams, and VR, allowing users to experience sustainable venues and green production processes intuitively.

Research into the logic, effects, and impacts of these functions on brand attitude and loyalty carries significant theoretical and practical value.

Thirdly, strengthen research on the relationship between long-term brand equity and short-term marketing performance. Most existing studies focus on short-term conversion; future research should emphasize how social media strategies accumulate long-term brand assets and balance brand positioning with traffic-seeking behavior.

Fourth, expand research on segmented markets and diverse communities. Future studies may focus on social media marketing strategies for niche sports, the elderly sports market, disabled sports markets, and operational practices in diverse and inclusive communities such as LGBTQ+ groups.

6. Conclusion

Through a systematic review of domestic and international literature, this paper outlines the overall landscape of sports brand social media marketing, covering theoretical foundations, strategic practices, effect evaluation, and future challenges. Findings indicate that social media marketing for sports brands has evolved into a sophisticated and mature system supported by theories including social influence, social identity, and value co-creation, with five pillars: content, KOL and community, data-driven operation, cross-cultural communication, and brand image management.

Successful social media marketing is essentially a process in which brands transform ordinary users into brand identifiers, participants, and co-creators through sustained

value communication, emotional interaction, and cultural empowerment. Facing challenges such as scarce attention, cultural barriers, and frequent crises, sports brands require greater strategic resolve, cultural intelligence, and data capability.

In the future, research and practice in this field will continue to evolve alongside technological iteration and social change. This study aims to establish a phased knowledge framework for academic exploration and provide systematic references and insights for sports brand marketing in the digital era.

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