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Editors-in-Chief
Sanja Šalaj and Dario Škegro

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Dear Colleagues, Conference delegates and readers

At the beginning of this foreword, we would like to express our excitement about getting together again. Almost two years after Covid 19 restrictions moved us completely to the digital sphere, we are delighted that we can rejoin once again in the beautiful city of Opatija. It was hard to adapt to all the new rules, sometimes confusing and illogical but the scientific community has once again found and is still finding the answers. As never before, scientific community has been united to gain new knowledge, to get to know “the enemy” and to fulfill its duties and repay its debts to the society. To this end, Kinesiology is not an exception either. Hundreds of scientific projects, papers and communications were created and conducted to understand how physical activity, exercise and sports can be effective in off-court battle. At the end of the day, scientist from different fields of Kinesiology tried hard to provide all the necessary information on how to stay safe and fit at the same time.

We believe you share our excitement to meet again in person. The Conference was planned for 2020 in May, but the pandemics stopped it. First choice was postponement to May 2021, but the pandemics was tough, and here we are, September 2021, year, and a half after, still in epidemiological frames, but here. 9th edition of the International Scientific Conference on Kinesiology is rolling. Beside more or less standard tentative sections in various fields of kinesiology, this year Conference organizes two satellite symposiums on Social Aspects of Sport in Southeastern Europe and Prevention and Rehabilitation of Sport Injuries. The latter is related to presentation of postgraduate specialist study program that we are establishing at the Faculty of Kinesiology in this field. The Proceedings contains 251 papers or abstracts published by 583 authors from 23 countries all over the world. It is a great opportunity to point out the important anniversary that we are all proud of – Scientific journal Kinesiology celebrates 50 years since its first issue. Web of Science – Core Collection membership and impact factor 1,452 for the year 2020 proves that the Faculty of Kinesiology and its employees are continuously producing top-level scientific products.

Once again highly respected patronage is given by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. This patronage is appreciated and important for the Conference since it is approved by the highest scientific authority in Croatia. Focusing on great international relations with our partners and collaboration institutions we warmly thank The Beijing Sports University, China, The Faculty of Sports Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, The Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Split, Croatia, The Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, Novi Sad, Serbia for their involvement in the Conference and The Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania.

Special appreciation goes to all the authors, reviewers, section editors, members of the Organizing and Program Committees and technical support staff. Without their great effort Conference and Proceedings would not be possible. In hope that all the participants will have successful and fruitful work at the Conference we wish to see you again in 10th International Scientific Conference on Kinesiology without any restrictions. Stay healthy and good luck!

Organising Committee

TWITTER AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL MECHANISM IN PROFESSIONAL SPORT - EXAMPLE OF EUROLEAGUE PLAYERS SYNDICAL ORGANIZING

Marija Todorović¹, Branka Matijević²

¹*Faculty of Sport, University of "Union -Nikola Tesla" Belgrade, Serbia*

²*Institute of Social Sciences Belgrade, Serbia*

Abstract

With their rapid growth rates over the last few decades, Information and Communication Technology became integrated in almost every aspect of our social life. Technological and social structure of digital platforms enables gathering social capital through social networking. With no space and time limitations, Internet communication increases the development of online platforms for social networking. For users, this type of platform represents universal communication tool for keeping old contacts and getting new ones. This paper aims to understand digital communication among EuroLeague basketball players, which led to their self-organizing into the union of professional basketball players EuroLeague Players Association (ELPA). We applied qualitative content analysis on Twitter communication. Confirmed as strongest virtual organizational mechanism, in this case, Twitter also happened to be a unique virtual network for self-organizing in the sports area.

Key words: *Twitter, self-organizing, basketball players, EuroLeague, ELPA*

Introduction

Groups of interconnected persons who share particular characteristics form, what we call, a social network (Golubović, 2008). Belonging to a certain network enables support, better access to information and plays the important role for one individual in the process of accumulating the social capital (Golubović, 2008). This capital represents a social relationship within the system of exchange and refers to all goods, whether they are material or symbolic, appearing to be rare and valuable (Bourdieu, 1990b: 178). Accordingly, Bourdieu (1990b) distinguishes three interrelated forms in capital occurrence: economic, cultural, and social. In our work we focus on the **social capital of the particular group of people: basketball players**. Our standpoint is based on viewing social capital as the collection of cultural properties which create and maintain mutual trust and cooperation among members of particular social network. (Štulhofer, 2013).

Relaying on the social network capital theory, the topic of this paper is self-organizing of EuroLeague basketball players through Online Platform for Social Networking (OPSN), primarily on Twitter. The goal of this paper is to understand the Twitter role and impact of this type of network capital on self-organization of the first European basketball players union named EuroLeague Players Association (ELPA).

In the past few years the Internet becomes the channel for overcoming the space-time distance and serves to connect structurally isolated individuals with like-minded ones, thus creating a virtual social capital (Petrović, 2013). Virtual capital is seen as a type of network capital, but with the one main difference, it cannot exist without the Internet. Its character can be observed as both connecting and bridging: virtual connecting capital is rooted in relationships established on the Internet, while bridging virtual capital is rooted in virtual personal networks established thanks to the Internet (Petrović, 2013).

Among existing OPSN platforms one of the most interesting is Twitter. The main reason for that is due to digital networking mechanism of Twitter that under certain conditions establishes itself as an organizing agent (In the spirit of Latour (2005) actor-network theory where technology can be presented as actor), while communication via Twitter becomes the base for collective organizing, removing hierarchical structure, the role of professional leaders and organizations (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Bennett, 2012; Bimber, Flanagan & Stohl, 2012 acc. to Petrović & Petrović, 2017). This type of social networking is focused on exchanging information and opinions via so called tweets, which are textual messages no longer than 280 characters. Tweet is delivered with three micro-blogging options to its users: like, retweet (copy/share the tweet, mostly with a comment) or just a comment. These micro tools enable easy and efficient communication among users by emitting and exchanging information and opinions on their activities (Gardašević et al., 2018).

We distinguish three ideal-types of network organization through OPSN, according to Bennett and Segerberg: self-organizing/crowd-enabled, organizationally-enabled and organizationally-brokered (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). In

this paper, we focus on self-organizing networks, which the mentioned authors point up to represent the purest form of connective sharing. Also, these networks are primarily technology-enabled (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Consequently, we start from the point where Twitter is the basic organizing agent and coordination mechanism in the players self-organizing. In other words, we could say that this type of self-organizing was possible primarily due to the organizational potential of Twitter.

Additional reason for choosing Twitter, beside its potential, is that professional athletes mostly use this online platform, because it allows them to communicate with each other as well as to connect directly to their fans (but also to a wider public) (Pegoraro, 2010).

Methodology

Qualitative content analysis is used to analyze tweets of EuroLeague basketball players. Qualitative analysis is applied on the whole content of experiential material in order to determine the important categories of analysis, this way insuring the understanding of studied material including its origin context (Manić, 2017).

It is necessary to emphasize that the online portals contain the original published tweets of players during the period from June 12, 2017 to September 27, 2018 which referred to the studied issues. Because the content of the observing data is incomplete, the construction of categories in advance is omitted. For that reason categories are based on the material itself by reading material repeatedly (Manić, 2017).

Ordinarily, qualitative analysis doesn't insist on a representative sample (Manić, 2017), so, in this paper we used online portals as a purposeful unit sample. The samples for qualitative research are generally assumed to be selected purposefully (non-probabilistic sampling) to yield cases that are "information rich" (Patton, 2001).

Online portals were the source of basketball players twitter posts in the form of news that enabled spotting the main problems of the analyzed phenomena. Twitter as OPSN was not taken as the unit sample, because of its complexity, huge number of users, our limited resources and type of the applied analysis (Manić, 2017). Two internet portals that post basketball daily events were used as source of data: Eurohoops.net and TalkBasket.net. These two portals were chosen both for their agility in publishing basketball news from all over the world (daily) and for being EuroLeague's official partners, which make their information reliable and relevant.

The next unit sample is news published on the mentioned portals that fulfil the criteria to have content considering some type of organizing or union occurrence. Total of 18 news that met the criteria mentioned above were identified.

In this paper we use the news text as the unit of analysis to answer the following research questions:

- In which way Twitter enabled EuroLeague basketball players to organize a Union?
- Is it possible to spot the key motives for players to use Twitter?
- Do the players, after organizing a union still use a Twitter as a communication channel?

Results and Discussion

After the end of EuroLeague season 2016/17, few players announced problems bothering them during that season on Twitter, thus making them public. During this season, already present conflict between EuroLeague and FIBA exacerbated, which resulted in big changes in competitions format. The number of competing clubs decreased (from 24 to 16) and the number of matches for players in the regular part tripled. This change of competition format didn't influence the national leagues which remained unchanged, with average number of matches from 20-40 in regular part. This way, players beside their already "tight" EuroLeague schedule, where they have to travel across the Europe every two weeks, had additional match in national competition every week. Consequently, the summer has become reserved for fulfilling obligations towards representation, which includes additional matches for national teams in FIBA international competitions. For the majority of players this brought the huge problem of not being able to have a necessary vacation for the recovery after exhausting season.

Twitter can be considered a suitable channel for the self-organization of EuroLeague basketball players into a union, primarily because there was no formal institution that would enable that. In its capabilities, Twitter can be a good channel because it enables direct communication with the public, where players can freely express their personal opinion without any intermediaries from the club. We can say that this way reduces the risk of their statements being misrepresented and misinterpreted by journalists.

The question is whether the existence of a formal institution would prevent their advertising on Twitter, given the impression that there is dissatisfaction with "how far their voice is heard". That can be seen in the following tweets of players:

- *Nobody listens to players – Bobby Dixon (Fenerbahce)*
- *Nobody listens to players in the right way, whatever we say just goes in one ear and out from other – Keith Langford (Panatinaikos)*
- *Players need to have a role in making decisions and organization of competitions – Nemanja Nedović (Unicaja)*
- *It is urgent to organize Union of players – Ekpe Udoh (Fenerbahce)*
- *Basketball belongs to players and to no one else – Ekpe Udoh (Fenerbahce)*

The **key motive for players to use Twitter as a platform is because they don't have much opportunity to communicate face-to-face among themselves.** This is not surprising given the fact that the competition in EuroLeague implies clubs from different European countries. As clubs are in the constant rivalry, it is not rare to see rivalry transferring to the players. Most of the players made their first contacts on the playground, which decrease their chances for some sort of cooperation. This phenomenon particularly presents establishment of connecting character of virtual social capital that contributes to cohesion. Eurohoops.net conveyed following communication on Twitter in the observed period:

- *Some judges in Spain do not want to look at you when you speak to them politely or ask questions during sports trials – Nemanja Nedović (Unicaja)*
- *Union of players – answer from Nikola Kalinić (Fenerbahce)*
- *It seems to be the only solution – adds to the previous answer Nemanja Nedović*
- *It would be good to have the All-star competition in EuroLeague like in NBA – Gigi Datome (Fenerbahce)*
- *If we have a Union, maybe that would be possible to organize – Tornike Shengelia (Baskonia)*

However, the most frequent communication, as expected, is the one between players from the same club or between ex-teammates, considering they are mostly in everyday contact in the "offline" world. Because they have face-to-face communication they are interconnected with strong relations of social capital.

It is observable from the above that the players need to network and organize into union, to establish better communication and cooperation, as well as to let the public know about their situation. Players gathered virtual social capital through Twitter, which opened possibilities to deal not only with their local problems, but to act on the higher level- to create united goal-organize union of basketball players that will serve as their "united voice".

After intensive, mutual digital communication, 19.05.2018, on the closing Final four tournament in Belgrade, the EuroLeague players union, ELPA, was created. Although the original idea on self-organizing came from the active players, the main initiator for union creation was ex- NBA and EuroLeague player Bostjan Nachbar, who has been following players' posts and communicating with players in both online and "offline" world. Eurohoops.net conveyed that players gave him full support and agreement for union creation. Later, the Twitter account was opened and the first news on union creation was posted. Today, beside the players, the union is followed by around 5800 basketball fans.

Following are few comments from players regarding union creation:

- *If you are EuroLeague player than you should follow ELPA Union of players and everything related to it. This is the first step in the right way for our future- Mike James (Panatinsikos).*
- *It is necessary for all of you to follow (on Twitter) the first union of EuroLeague basketball players- Nikola Kalinić*
- *Huge step for basketball! I am looking forward to our cooperation and with great expectations. Great job!- Vladimir Štimac (Anadolu Efes)*
- *I am very excited. This organization will help players to unite and become as one- Alex Tyus (Maccabi)*
- *Huge step for EuroLeague, especially for players to unite!- Matt Janning (Baskonia)*

It was assumed that players would not continue with their Twitter communication, after establishing the union, and that they will communicate with the ELPA through their representatives (as each club has a representative). However, **players continue to use a Twitter as a communication channel.** Although there is a formal institution now, players continued to "tweet" posts addressing ELPA. Eurohoops.net conveyed a tweet from Nikola Kalinić, on 24.08. 2018, addressed to ELPA, FIBA and EuroLeague: *It is necessary to use the same ball for all competitions.* His post was retweeted by three players with supporting comments to this requirement:

- *I agree with you 100 percent- Jeremy Pargo*
- *Please do it for us, it is a small thing but it means a lot to us.- Michael Roll*
- *Man, I have just mentioned it on today's training. Change of the ball in the middle of the week is awful.- Mike James*

As an answer to the presented problem ELPA's vice president, Kyle Hines, posted a following tweet:

- Please, make a list of problems which need to be discussed on the next ELPA meeting.

This comment suggests that ELPA representatives don't want communication to be public as it was before creating the Union and would rather like players to address their actual problems directly to the Union. From one point this attitude it is understandable as public really doesn't have to be involved in every single problem considering players and basketball. Also, avoiding discussion on every single problem separately will save a lot of time and effort. On the other hand – could it be the sign of coming lower transparency?

Conclusion

Basketball players networking enabled by Twitter was the big step for both sports and relationships among players (especially because of rivalry presence). Presented analysis showed that this OPSN has an underlying potential not only for social networking but also for (self) organizing. Our impression is that the players recognized that potential, based on analysis of their tweets that are expressing clearly the need for using communication without any intermediaries in the form of club managers or employees. The main reasons that turned Twitter into the platform for self-organizing EuroLeague players could be the opportunity to communicate directly, to publicly express personal opinions and also to social network.

Posted tweets spread information to relevant people who engaged accordingly and succeeded to organize players in ELPA Union. Consequently, digital communication on Twitter gathered significant virtual social capital, which led to forming Union in the offline world.

The present example is one of many illustrating the way of organizing on Twitter, but unique in the sports area and, as far as we know, unique in the outcome: forming the **institution in the real world!** In our future works we plan to pay more attention to this topic, given that this is a unique example of self-organization on Twitter in the field of sports and thus require more complex research that involves the complementary use of quantitative and qualitative data.

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