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Causal relationship between athlete branding communication and social media communication process and value added of sports industry in Thailand

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Abstract

This research aimed to develop a model of the relationship between sports athlete branding communication, the social media communication process, and the value added to the sports industry in Thailand. This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative methodology was used to test the cause-and-effect relationship between sports athlete branding communication, the social media communication process, and the value added to the sports industry in Thailand. Data were collected using questionnaires from 209 Thai individuals with experience in watching sports competitions in Thailand. Qualitative methodology was conducted using phenomenological methods from in-depth interviews, and the results of these interviews were confirmed by holding focus groups with three marketing communication and branding experts and two sports communication academics. Data were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The results of the research hypotheses indicated that 1) athlete branding communication has a direct effect on the value added to the sports industry in Thailand and an indirect effect on the value added to the sports industry in Thailand through the social media communication process, 2) athlete branding communication has a direct effect on the social media communication process, and 3) the social media communication process has a direct effect on the value added to the sports industry in Thailand. The analysis found that the hypothesized model was consistent with the empirical data and met the criteria with a χ^2 value of 28.85, a p-value of 0.09, a χ^2/df value of 1.44, a GFI value of 0.95, an AGFI value of 0.90, and an RMSEA value of 0.05. The benefits of this research can explain the causal relationship between athlete branding communication, the social media communication process, and the value added to the sports industry in Thailand. The results of the study can be used to manage sports communication in Thailand, leading to sustainable performance for the sports industry.

Keywords: Athlete branding communication, Social media communication process, Value added by the sports industry.

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1. State of Problems

Grand View Research [1] has highlighted the growth of sports communication through various social media channels in the United States from 2020 to 2023. Based on statistical data and forecasts, it was found that this growth is expected to continue, with the size and influence of social media channels expanding alongside the sports industry. The phenomenon of sports social media expansion can be explained through the lens of athlete fanaticism and the use of social media as a communication channel to foster a sense of connection with athletes, ultimately leading to increased interest in the sport [2]. To enhance athlete popularity, it is crucial to create and develop communication processes that incorporate modern strategies and effectively reach the target audience. Scholars have extensively studied branding communication strategies, particularly those that involve communication through mainstream media. These strategies often position the message sender as the key player in building an athlete brand, utilizing interviews as a primary tool. Athletes engage with media outlets such as newspapers, radio, and television to disseminate news and craft their image through compelling narratives. These narratives emphasize athletes' unique traits, exceptional personalities, and values, communicated through channels appropriate to the context. It is evident that building an athlete brand increasingly relies on modern communication channels, which serve as critical mechanisms for strengthening brand identity.

Hatthakam [3] Whereas the communication mechanism through various social networks is an important tool as a driving force, it requires communication processes that foster interactions and community building through: 1) creating athlete communities, such as fan clubs or online communities, to build close relationships with fans; 2) producing diverse content, where athletes not only update their work but also create engaging content such as live broadcasts, Q&A sessions, and behind-the-scenes interviews; 3) collaborating with influencers, where athletes partner with influencers from various industries to expand their fan base; and 4) utilizing virtual reality technology to provide new experiences for fans, fostering acceptance, connection, and added value for athletes, ultimately resulting in increased income [4]. Athletes with strong brands can generate revenue through multiple channels, such as advertising sponsorships, merchandise sales, or participation in various activities. Moreover, a strong athlete brand enhances credibility, benefiting the products or services athletes endorse, while also serving as an inspiration for fans or exercise enthusiasts to strive toward their goals. Therefore, both athlete branding and the communication process on social media are key factors driving the growth of the sports industry by increasing income, building brand engagement, and reaching new target audiences in the long term.

Based on the background and significance of the problem of athlete branding communication discussed above, this research aims to investigate the impact and causal relationship between athlete branding communication and online communication processes on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand. The study reflects on the process of crafting compelling narratives about athletes, highlighting their unique qualities, outstanding personalities, and values through communication channels that align with current trends and contexts. These elements are critical variables in enhancing the long-term value of the sports industry.

2. Research Objectives

1. To study the influence of athlete branding communication, including both direct and indirect effects, on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand.
2. To study the influence of athlete branding communication that directly impacts the communication process on social media.
3. To study the influence of the communication process on social media that directly impacts the added value of the sports industry in Thailand.
4. To develop a causal relationship model between athlete branding communication, the communication process on social media, and the added value of the sports industry in Thailand.

3. Research Hypotheses

H₁: Athlete branding communication has a direct influence on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand and an indirect influence on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand through the communication process on social media.

H₂: Athlete branding communication has a direct influence on the communication process on social media.

H₃: The communication process on social media has a direct influence on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand.

4. Review of Literature

4.1. Sports Branding Communication

Meirinhos, et al. [5] presented the creation of athlete stories as the process of developing and disseminating compelling narratives about the lives, experiences, successes, failures, and values of athletes. Teresa and Pravitasari [6] stated that athlete branding communication involves the creation of athlete values, reflecting the process of establishing and communicating a set of beliefs, values Liu [7] or principles that athletes wish to convey to the public. According to Mazza [4] the goal is to give people a clear understanding of who the athlete is, what they stand for, and what they aim to promote. Peng and Jung [2] emphasized that these values help create a unique and distinctive image, fostering connection and admiration. Liu [7] further explained that, in terms of social engagement, athletes aim to build a positive image in society, which increases their likability. Peng and Jung [2] also highlighted communication characteristics that establish attitudes and relationships between athletes and the public. A strong relationship creates a long-term bond between society and

athletes, leading to psychological value and increased acceptance or popularity. Additionally, studies on the characteristics of social relationships with athletes identify these as indicators of effective athlete brand communication. [Sotiriadou, et al. \[8\]](#) discussed communication through news, portraying athletes as social representatives who contribute to the development of sports inspiration and foster a societal trend of increased interest in sports.

It can be seen that the indicators of athlete branding communication involve creating athlete stories, which is the process of developing and sharing compelling narratives about the lives, experiences, successes, failures, and values of athletes to foster a connection between athletes and their viewers or fans. This process creates a sense of connection, understanding, and admiration for athletes. Such connections lead to the development of long-term relationships, ensuring the sustainability of athlete brand communication. It also involves communicating information that resonates with the emotions of the audience, creating a sense of being part of the athlete's journey and fostering further admiration [\[8\]](#). Another indicator is creating a distinctive personality (Brand Personality), which involves crafting a unique image of an athlete that stands out from others and is easily memorable. This is achieved by emphasizing various physical, mental, and behavioral traits to leave a lasting impression and attract the target audience's interest and engagement [\[2\]](#). Additionally, creating athlete values entails the process of defining and conveying a set of beliefs, values, or principles that athletes wish to communicate to the public. This enables people to have a clear understanding of who the athlete is, what they believe in, and what they aim to promote. These values contribute to building a unique and distinctive image, fostering a sense of connection and admiration, as supported by recent research and findings.

4.2. The Process of Communication on social media

[Jalonen \[9\]](#) highlights that social media has become a crucial platform for sports communication, serving athletes, sports teams, and sports fans alike. It allows everyone to freely create and publish content, resulting in diverse and rapid interactions. The process of communication on social media is characterized by the speed at which sports-related information is communicated, published, and shared through various online platforms. This enables sports fans to access information quickly and in a timely manner. Furthermore, social media promotes engagement by allowing sports fans to actively participate in creating and sharing content, fostering a dynamic and interactive environment.

[Achen \[10\]](#) notes that social media serves as a powerful tool for building personal brands, enabling athletes to establish their own unique identities and create a loyal fan base, thereby increasing their value. Brand engagement through social media also extends to sports organizations, which use it to foster connections with sports fans. This is achieved through activities such as organizing events, giving awards, and launching campaigns to build positive relationships with various fan groups. [Abeza and Sanderson \[11\]](#) explain the process of communication on social media in terms of creating athlete communities. This involves bringing together people who share an interest in a specific sport or admiration for athletes, enabling them to exchange opinions, interact, and participate in sports-related activities. Athletes serve as the central inspiration, connecting these individuals and forming a community of sports enthusiasts driven by a shared passion. Additionally, the communication process on social media involves the creation of diverse content, including videos, images, articles, and other formats, shared across various social media channels. This allows fans to stay updated on news, events, and stories about the sports they love, while offering a range of communication channels to engage with their interests.

[Clavio \[12\]](#) explains the perspective of working with influencers as a collaborative effort between sports brands or organizations and influential sports figures (influencers) to promote products, services, and the image of athletes. By leveraging the influencer's fan base and credibility, these collaborations effectively reach target audiences and create awareness. [Clavio \[12\]](#) and [Li \[13\]](#) further highlight the use of virtual reality technology in the sports industry. This technology creates realistic simulated environments and is utilized for various purposes, including training, game analysis, and enhancing interaction with sports fans.

4.3. The Added Value of the Sports Industry in Thailand

[Chantharat and Chantharat \[14\]](#) highlight that the growth of the sports industry contributes to the development of related industries, creating economic added value in areas such as the food supplement industry, the health industry, and sports-related technology. Beyond economic value, the sports industry also generates social and cultural benefits by enhancing the country's image. Hosting international sports competitions, for example, promotes a positive national image, attracting both tourists and investors. [Butterworth \[15\]](#) emphasizes that the added value of the sports industry in Thailand lies in its ability to generate income by building confidence in investing in and consuming sports products or services, as well as fostering connections with sports brands, organizations, and athletes. The expansion of the sports industry also facilitates access to new target groups, transforming sports enthusiasts into dedicated followers or fans and fostering a growing sports-oriented society.

[Singram and Thanaiudompat \[16\]](#) examined the characteristics of value-added in the sports industry as a mechanism for generating income at both the industry and macroeconomic levels. This involves organizations or individuals creating added value for products, services, or assets in exchange for money or other valuables, with the primary goal of funding organizational operations or fulfilling personal needs. [Butterworth \[15\]](#) noted that, in addition to income generation, brand engagement plays a critical role. This involves building deep and sustainable relationships between athletes and fans by leveraging factors such as values, beliefs, emotions, and shared experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and long-term loyalty among fans. [Calvert \[17\]](#) highlighted the added value of the sports industry in terms of reaching target audiences by creating connections and communicating with groups of people who share an interest in the

same sport or admiration for specific athletes. This process helps generate awareness, spark interest, and stimulate the purchase of products or services associated with those athletes or brands.

5. Methodology

This research outlined various aspects of the methodology to ensure alignment with the research objectives. These aspects included the following: population, sample, variables studied, instruments used for data collection, construction of research instruments, testing the quality of instruments, data collection, data processing and analysis, and the statistics employed for data analysis. The details of each component are as follows:

5.1. Population

The population for this research consists of Thai individuals with experience in watching sports competitions. The study collected data without specifying the exact population size.

5.2. Population and Sample Selection

1. The sample group in quantitative research consists of individuals with experience in watching Thai sports competitions, based on the database of national and international sports competition attendance organized in Thailand [18]. This study collected data without knowing the exact population size. Individuals with experience in watching Thai sports competitions were used as the unit of analysis. The criteria for determining the sample size followed the guideline that the sample-to-observed variable ratio should be no less than 20:1 [19]. In this study, with 10 observed variables, the sample size must be no less than 200 participants.
2. Key informants in qualitative research were selected using the purposive sampling method. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and focus group discussions with key informants who possess relevant experience and can provide meaningful interpretations [19]. The key informants included three experts in marketing communication and branding, selected based on their work in creating sports brands and their experience related to sports communication, and two sports communication academics, chosen based on their expertise and experience in sports communication. The purposive sampling method ensured the collection of accurate and diverse data, which were analyzed to form the basis for research conclusions [20].

6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Results of the Quantitative Data Analysis

The results of the correlation analysis among 10 observable variables revealed that all 45 pairs of variables are interrelated, with each pair showing a relationship in the same direction. The correlation coefficients indicate a positive relationship between the variables, with the size of the correlation coefficient ranging from 0.214 to 0.471. These relationships were found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Correlation coefficients of observed variables used in the research.

	STORY	PER	BVAL	COMM	CONT	INF	REL	REV	BCOM	TAR
Mean SD	4.24	4.11	3.78	4.01	4.13	4.03	4.08	4.12	4.11	4.23
	0.77	0.69	0.61	0.67	0.61	0.62	0.62	53	0.59	0.49
Story	1									
PER	0.381**	1								
BVAL	0.321**	0.214**	1							
COMM	0.342**	0.243**	0.216**	1						
CONT	0.371**	0.360**	0.321**	0.310**	1					
INF	0.329**	0.384**	0.378**	0.401**	0.316**	1				
REL	0.321**	0.401**	0.423**	0.378**	0.324**	0.412**	1			
REV	0.345**	0.388**	0.413**	0.359**	0.331**	0.346**	0.322**	1		
BCOM	0.411**	0.321**	0.438**	0.373**	0.367**	0.386**	0.391**	0.332**	1	
TAR	0.324**	0.378**	0.312**	0.472**	0.347**	0.471**	0.333**	0.326**	0.426**	1

Bartlett's test of sphericity = 9128.347, df = 113, p = 0.000, KMO = 0.897

When examining the correlation coefficients between the observed variables, it was found that all pairs of observed variables demonstrated a positive relationship, with statistical significance at the 0.01 level. None of the variables were highly correlated ($0.6 < r < 0.8$). There were 8 pairs of moderately correlated variables ($0.4 < r < 0.6$) and 37 pairs of lowly correlated variables ($r < 0.4$). The pair of observed variables with the highest correlation was working with influencers (INF) and target audience access (TAR) ($r = 0.471$), while the pair with the lowest correlation was creating athlete stories (STORY) and creating athlete values (BVAL) ($r = 0.214$). Overall, the correlation coefficients between all pairs of observed variables did not exceed 0.80, indicating that the observed variables were not strongly correlated and did not result in multicollinearity. Furthermore, all observed variables aligned on the same component, confirming their suitability for analyzing the relationship model.

When considering the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, the Chi-Square statistic was found to be 9128.347 with $df = 113$ ($p = 0.000$), indicating that the correlation coefficient matrix is not an identity matrix, with statistical significance at the 0.01 level. This suggests that the variables are sufficiently related to proceeding with component analysis. This finding is consistent with the results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, which yielded a value of 0.956, indicating a high level of interrelation among the observed variables. This value, being close to 1, demonstrates that the observed variables are highly suitable for examining the consistency of the research model with the empirical data. Since the KMO index is 0.80 or higher, it confirms that the data is highly appropriate for factor analysis [19].

6.2. The Results of the Analysis of Causal Variables and Outcomes

The analysis of the influence of causal variables and the outcome of the relationship between athlete branding communication and online social communication processes with the added value of the sports industry in Thailand was conducted to address the research hypotheses. The results of the analysis are presented in detail in Table 2.

Table 2.
Influence values of variables based on research hypotheses.

Casual Variable	BRAND			SOC			R ²
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	
BRAND	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SOC	1.47*	-	1.47*	-	-	-	0.41
VAT	0.12*	0.72*	0.84*	0.58*	-	0.58*	0.20
Chi-Square = 28.85, $df = 20$, P-value = 0.09, RMSEA = 0.05, AGFI = 0.90, GFI=0.95							

Note: * $p < 0.05$; DE is a direct effect; IE is an indirect effect; TE is a total effect.

From Table 2, it was found that the variables comprising the causal and outcome variables of the causal relationship between athlete branding communication and online social communication processes with the added value of the sports industry in Thailand demonstrated direct influence, indirect influence, and total influence. These influences were categorized based on the research hypotheses, with details as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Athlete brand communication, comprising the components of creating athlete stories, creating distinctive personalities, and creating athlete values, has a direct influence on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand, as well as an indirect influence through social media communication. The analysis revealed that athlete branding communication (BRAND) has a direct positive influence on the added value of the sports industry (VAT), with a direct influence value of 0.12, an indirect influence value through social media communication (SOC) of 0.72, and a total influence value of 0.84. These results are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, research hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Athlete brand communication, comprising the components of creating athlete stories, creating distinctive personalities, and creating athlete values, has a direct influence on the communication process in online society. The analysis revealed that athlete branding communication (BRAND) has a direct positive influence on the communication process in online society (SOC), with a direct influence value of 1.47 and a total influence value of 1.47. These results are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, research hypothesis 2 is accepted.

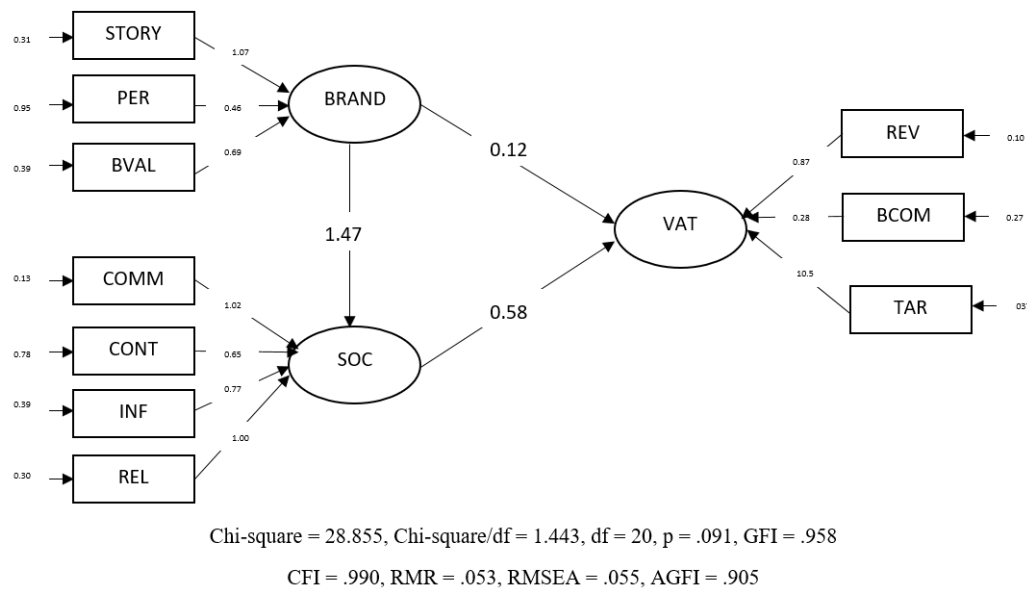
Hypothesis 3: The process of communication on social media, comprising the components of building an athlete community, creating content, working with influencers, and using virtual reality technology, has a direct influence on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand. The analysis revealed that the process of communication on social media (SOC) has a direct positive influence on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand (VAT), with a direct influence value of 0.58 and a total influence value of 0.58. These results are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, research hypothesis 3 is accepted.

The researcher summarized the results of the hypothesis testing on the relationship between athlete brand communication, online social media communication processes, and the added value of the sports industry in Thailand. These findings are illustrated in Figure 1.

6.3. Results of the Qualitative Data Analysis

6.3.1. Situation of the Value-Added Sports Industry in Thailand

The value-added sports industry in Thailand plays a crucial role in driving the country's economy, influencing both export and import values. Thailand's current account balance has shown upward growth, supported by the export of goods, with sports goods being one of the significant contributors. In addition to goods exports, the provision of sports tourism serves as another key economic factor contributing to a current account surplus. This growth is largely attributed to the increasing popularity of Thai athletes on a global scale. Considering the effective communication tools of the current era, social media emerges as a powerful platform for creating trends and fostering popularity. Consequently, this results in increased followership and the generation of economic activities that contribute to the value-added sports industry in Thailand.

**Figure 1.**

Results of the Causal relationship analysis between athlete brand communication, online social media communication processes, and the added value of the sports industry in Thailand.

6.3.2. Athlete Branding Communication in Thailand

Athletes play a vital role in driving the growth of the sports industry. Beyond the sale of sports apparel and equipment, fostering the popularity of athletes serves as a key factor in generating value exchanges between athletes and their fans. Building an athlete brand is a process of creating value for athletes, rooted in the principles of sports marketing and branding. This involves crafting compelling stories that highlight the athletes' abilities, expertise in their respective sports, and the journey that led to their success.

It also involves creating a distinctive personality by developing a unique image that sets an athlete apart from others. This process highlights various physical, mental, and behavioral qualities that leave a lasting impression and attract the target audience. By fostering interest and connection with the athlete, this approach encourages the target group to invest in the value associated with the athlete.

Creating athlete values is a key aspect of athlete brand communication. It involves a marketing process that fosters the development and communication of a set of beliefs, values, or principles that the athlete wishes to convey to the public. This process ensures that people gain a clear understanding of who the athlete is, what they stand for, and what they aim to promote. These values play a significant role in building a unique and distinctive image, fostering a sense of connection and admiration among the audience.

When explaining the characteristics of athlete brand communication, it highlights the process of crafting inspiring stories about athletes that showcase their success and resonate with the audience, fostering admiration for the athletes. This process also involves creating a distinctive personality for each athlete, emphasizing their unique traits and differences. Additionally, it focuses on developing and communicating the athlete's values, conveying a set of ideas and attributes that cultivate a strong connection and appreciation for the athlete's identity.

6.3.3. Social Media Communication Process

Social media communication is a communication channel that is considered very effective today through the process of creating a sports community, which involves bringing together a group of people who are passionate about sports and athletes to interact and participate in activities to exchange sports information, with athletes serving as the center of inspiration. It is also a process of creating content, including various materials related to sports, presented through different channels on social media for viewers to follow their favorite sports. This includes working with influencers to promote products, services, and the image of athletes, leveraging the influencer's fan base and credibility to reach the target group and raise awareness. Additionally, virtual reality technology is utilized to create a realistic simulated environment for applications in the sports industry, such as training, play analysis, and interactions with sports fans.

6.4. The Results of Athlete Branding communication and Social Media Communication Processes with Added Value in the Sports Industry of Thailand

The relationship between athlete branding communication and social media communication processes with added value in the sports industry of Thailand shows a positive correlation. Athlete branding communication demonstrates communication efficiency by fostering acceptance of athletes through the presentation of compelling stories. This is achieved by sharing engaging content that captures attention and inspires audiences, highlighting the success of athletes from a positive communication perspective, ultimately leading to admiration for the athlete. Furthermore, effective branding communication depends on creating a distinctive image for athletes, emphasizing their uniqueness compared to

others. This distinctiveness creates a lasting impression, attracting the target audience and fostering a connection that contributes to shared values associated with the athlete.

In order to drive athlete branding to add value to the sports industry, a central variable is required as a mechanism to facilitate communication through the social media communication process. This process involves building athlete communities, creating content, collaborating with influencers, and utilizing virtual technology. When examining the relationship, it becomes evident that athlete branding communication also has a direct impact on increasing the added value of the sports industry in terms of generating income, fostering brand engagement, and reaching new target groups.

6.4.1. Confirmation of the Research Results from the Focus Group Discussions

The focus group discussions, conducted with five key informants, confirmed the research results regarding the causal relationship between athlete branding communication and the communication process on social media with the added value of the sports industry in Thailand. The findings indicate that the results developed from both quantitative and qualitative data align with the research hypotheses. Additionally, the focus group discussions highlighted some new perspectives, particularly on modern communication methods that are as effective as social media, contributing further insights to the study.

7. Discussion

Sotiriadou, et al. [8] highlights that when sports organizations focus on increasing the recognition of athletes, it leads to a rise in the overall value of sports. This process requires the development of athletes' personalities to make them stand out and establish a unique identity, with the communication of this identity serving as a means to foster connections with the target audience. Marion [21] further emphasized that the transmission of athlete branding communication must involve mechanisms to drive the added value of the sports industry, particularly in terms of generating income, fostering brand engagement, and reaching new target audiences. This necessitates an effective communication process. Teresa and Pravitasari [6] noted that communication has undergone significant changes, encompassing new approaches, channels, and outcomes. Current studies on communication now focus on social media processes, which are reflected in practices such as creating athlete communities, generating engaging content, collaborating with influencers, and utilizing virtual technology.

Lee [22] examined the transmission of athlete branding communication and its impact on the added value of the sports industry, emphasizing the role of influencers as catalysts in enhancing value within the sports supply chain. Lee further explained that creating brand engagement relies on targeted communication variables, particularly through online communication channels, which are highly effective in the sports industry. This aligns with the research findings that demonstrate a relationship between athlete brand communication, online communication processes, and the added value of the sports industry in Thailand.

From the study by Abeza and Sanderson [11] it is evident that the creation of athlete values involves developing and communicating a set of beliefs, values, or principles that athletes wish to convey to the public. This process enables people to gain a clear understanding of who the athlete is, what they stand for, and what they aim to promote. These values help to establish a unique and distinctive image, fostering connection and admiration, which in turn contributes to the expansion of the athlete fan community. Consistent with this, Stadnyk, et al. [23] found that athlete branding communication influences the creation of athlete communities while also enhancing the efficiency of content creation, collaboration with influencers, and the application of virtual technology. Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that athlete brand communication—encompassing the creation of athlete stories, distinctive personalities, and athlete values—has a significant and growing impact on the communication processes within sports online communities in Thailand.

Social media communication processes foster the creation of athlete-centered communities, bringing together individuals who share an interest in a specific sport or admiration for certain athletes. These communities enable members to exchange ideas, interact, and participate in sports-related activities, with athletes serving as a source of inspiration and connection [3]. Additionally, content creation plays a critical role as a medium for producing and sharing diverse sports-related materials through various social media channels. This allows viewers to follow engaging stories about their favorite sports, which, in turn, contribute to the added value of the sports industry by generating income, fostering brand engagement, and reaching new target audiences over the long term [11].

In addition, Bonyasuwon and Thanaiudompat [24] highlight the importance of working with influencers as a key variable in fostering collaboration between sports brands or organizations and influential sports figures. This collaboration aims to promote products, services, and the image of athletes by leveraging the fan base and credibility of influencers to reach target audiences and raise awareness. Such efforts contribute to the development of deeper and more sustainable relationships between athletes and their fans. Based on the results of this research, Seepui, et al. [25] it can be concluded that the communication process on social media has a direct influence on the increased value-added of the sports industry in Thailand.

8. Limitations and Recommendations

8.1. Suggestions for Future Research

1. This research focused on athlete branding communication and online communication processes with added value in the sports industry of Thailand, with the unit of analysis being individuals who have experience in watching sports competitions, primarily Thai participants. Future studies should extend this research by focusing on participants or key stakeholders involved in sports communication and marketing policymaking. For instance, future research could

include executives or managers at various levels of sports organizations conducting interviews with these individuals and other related stakeholders to gain broader perspectives from different groups.

2. This study employed a cross-sectional research design, collecting data at a single point in time. However, the added value of the sports industry is influenced by dynamic environmental changes. Therefore, future research should consider adopting a longitudinal study design to examine the effects of athlete branding communication and online communication processes on the added value of the sports industry in Thailand over both the short and long term.
3. From the conclusions, discussions, and suggestions outlined above, it is evident that the findings of this research provide significant benefits to the sports industry as a whole. These benefits extend to sports management businesses, other businesses within the sports supply chain, and regulatory agencies responsible for sports. By leveraging athlete branding communication and social media communication processes, the sports industry can create added value, leading to broader benefits at both national and international levels.

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