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„Sport must be the heritage of all men and of all social classes “

Pierre de Coubertin

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Article

The role of Gambling Sponsorship in Slovak and European Football

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Abstract: This comparative study examines the scale, visibility, and regulatory frameworks of gambling sponsorship in professional football, focusing on three national leagues: Slovakia's Niké Liga, England's Premier League, and Spain's La Liga. Using document analysis, content comparison, and secondary data, the research evaluates how gambling companies are integrated into league and club sponsorship structures and to what extent this presence is regulated. The findings reveal significant disparities: Slovakia exhibits the highest degree of gambling sponsorship, both in visibility and systemic integration, reaching as far as league naming rights, while also lacking meaningful legal restrictions. In contrast, Spain enforces strict regulations on gambling visibility in sports, and England is moving toward voluntary restrictions from the 2026/2027 season. The study confirms that Slovakia not only hosts a greater proportion of clubs with gambling sponsors than its counterparts but also maintains the lowest level of regulation. These results raise ethical concerns related to youth protection, responsible advertising, and the integrity of sport, particularly in contexts of financial dependence on the gambling industry.

Keywords: Gambling, Football marketing, Sports, Sponsorship, Sports commercialization

1. INTRODUCTION

Using a shared interest in sports to connect with customers or other target groups is known as sports marketing (Mailchimp, 2024). To promote team and business success, sports marketing is essential in today's digital age to enable effective communication and interaction between sports teams, organizations, and fans. Thanks to the development of the internet, multiple social media platforms, and mobile devices, fans now have instant access to a wealth of sports content, including live game broadcasts and unique behind-the-scenes footage. This interaction with fans is a fundamental component of sports marketing and brand development. Through this connection, sports organizations can build a sense of community and loyalty among their fans. However, interacting with fans can also help sports companies gather feedback from fans, which can be used to further improve their experience (Budmanazer, 2023).

When done correctly, sports marketing can lead to increased fan loyalty, which in turn increases ticket sales and fills stadiums. Fan shop sales and fan loyalty are interrelated, as consumers will be willing to buy jerseys, scarves, and other items from their favorite team. Fan enthusiasm when watching a team play is also linked to their loyalty (Mailchimp, 2024).

Modern sports, especially football, are increasingly influenced by commercialization, which requires clubs not only to generate revenue for managers and players, but also to operate as profitable businesses. A sophisticated marketing strategy is essential to increase engagement and attract fans back to stadiums. This includes diversifying soccer-related products and services, optimizing pricing strategies, and expanding communication efforts and distribution channels. Key priorities include developing a detailed profile of target consumers, increasing activity on social media platforms, implementing initiatives aimed at engaging fans, and promoting the atmosphere in the city on match days. In addition, effective communication through marketing channels, together with the adoption of fan relationship management (FRM) systems, is crucial for building stronger ties with the audience and improving the overall experience (Teletov et al., 2019).

Traditional marketing approaches that do not rely on modern technology or internet access continue to be widely used by sports organizations to engage fans, promote club merchandise, and improve the club's public image. Events, as a fundamental element of sports marketing, play a dual role by not only serving their primary purpose, such as organizing soccer matches, but also providing opportunities to strengthen the marketing efforts of participating teams, organizations such as FIFA and UEFA, and sponsoring companies. Prestigious tournaments such as the World Cup, UEFA European Championship, Copa America, and UEFA Champions League attract a global audience, while domestic leagues such as the Premier League, La Liga, Serie A, and Bundesliga cater to local enthusiasts. These events increase demand for club merchandise and generate overall space for sponsorship, but also for gambling (Zemła, 2022).

Sponsorship is when someone, an organization, or a person contributes to a sport with financial or material support that benefits both parties. In addition to offering resources that support the expansion or improvement of the sponsored entity's performance, this partnership allows sponsors to promote their goods or brand. There are all levels of sponsorship, from professional athletes who receive compensation for wearing or using branded equipment to school teams that receive sponsored uniforms (BBC, 2024).

Sponsorship has become an effective marketing tactic that allows companies to connect with a global audience in today's fast-paced world. By creating captivating experiences that enhance brand identity and audience loyalty, these collaborations go beyond traditional advertising. Sponsorship remains an essential tool for fostering closer ties with fans as the sports landscape rapidly changes (Donen, 2024).

In recent years, gambling sponsorship has become a dominant force in football marketing across Europe. From local clubs to elite leagues, betting companies have secured their place as major sponsors, often featuring prominently on jerseys, stadiums, and media platforms. This widespread involvement has sparked ongoing debates about ethical implications, especially concerning youth exposure and public health (Algamus, 2023).

This case study focuses on the financial and regulatory impact of gambling sponsorship in professional football, comparing Slovakia (Niké Liga), England (Premier League), and Spain (La Liga). The goal is to assess how deeply gambling is embedded in each league's sponsorship structure and how these countries address associated societal and ethical concerns.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a comparative case study of three professional football leagues, using a combination of descriptive analysis, content analysis and comparative methods. Case study uses a quantitative approach based on multiple sources:

I. **Document and content analysis**:

- Official league and club websites (2024/2025 season),
- Sponsorship visibility during live matches, on kits, and in promotional materials,
- Annual reports and press releases from clubs and gambling firms.

II. **Secondary data**:

- Deloitte Football Money League, UEFA financial reports, and academic literature,
- National laws and regulatory frameworks related to gambling and advertising in sport.

Based on current knowledge of the issue and the content of the case study, the following research questions and hypotheses were formulated, which frame the main analytical part of the work.

Research questions

RQ1. *What is the extent of gambling companies' involvement in sponsorship in individual leagues?*

RQ2. *What are the differences in the regulation of gambling sponsorship between Slovakia, England, and Spain?*

RQ3. *How visible is gambling brand advertising during matches and on club channels?*

RQ4. *What types of clubs are the most frequent recipients of gambling sponsorship?*

Research hypotheses

H1. *In the Slovak Niké League, there is a higher proportion of clubs with a main sponsor from the gambling sector than in the Premier League and La Liga.*

H2. *The level of regulation of gambling sponsorship is significantly lower in Slovakia than in England and Spain.*

3. RESULTS

Football is the most widespread and largest sport in Europe in terms of market and viewership. It is the sport where betting companies most often sponsor sports teams and events. In 2023, the average annual value of sponsorship contracts in Europe was USD 321.91 million. Due to stricter

gambling laws and different sporting cultures, sponsorship in North America, Oceania, and Africa is much lower than in South America, where sponsorship amounted to USD 82.66 million. These figures (see Figure 1) show that soccer is still the most popular sport for betting companies in terms of sponsorship (Statista, 2023).

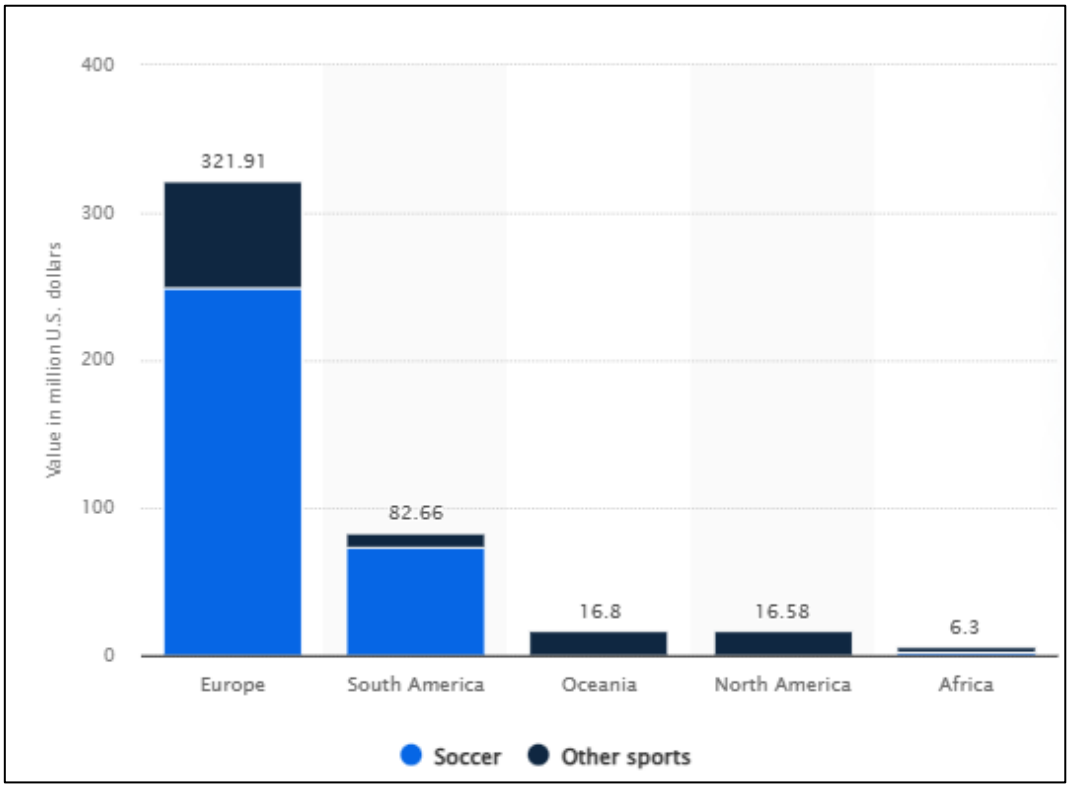

Figure 1 Average annual value of sports sponsorship agreements with companies operating in the betting industry worldwide in 2023, by continent
Source: Statista (2023)

In terms of football club marketing statistics, Deloitte's annual Football Money League study examines the financial health of the world's largest football clubs. The study examines three main sources of club revenue: commercial activities, television rights, and matchday revenue. The findings reveal significant differences between teams, particularly in terms of their revenue generation strategies. It is interesting to note that more than half of the money earned by teams such as PSG and Bayern Munich comes from commercial sources (Chanavat et al., 2017).

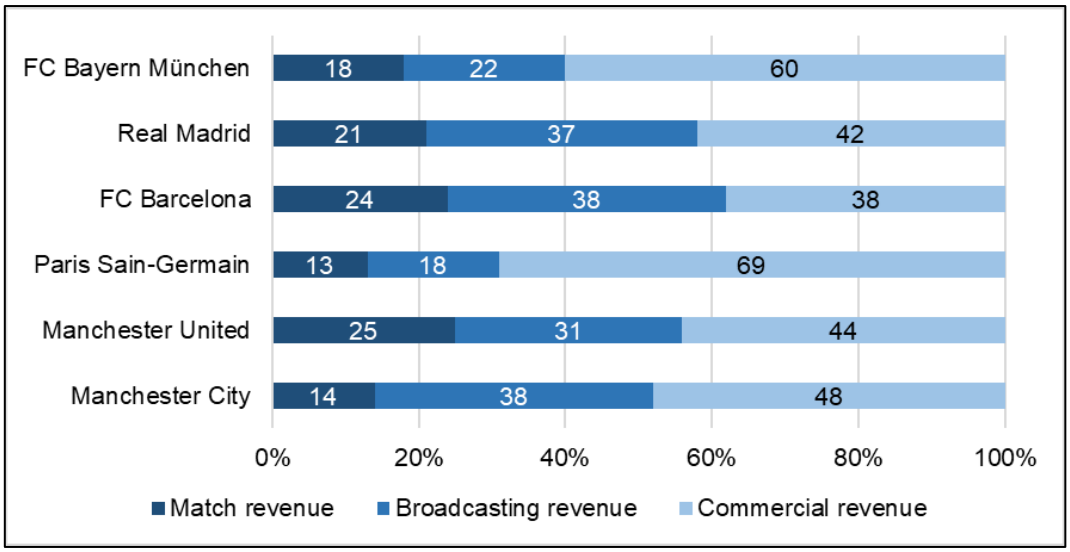

Figure 2 Economic statistics on the revenues of the six most influential professional football clubs in the world
Source: Chanavat et al. (2017)

Analysis of the English Premier League

The Premier League is currently one of the best, if not the best, football leagues in the world. Billions of euros are spent on it every year. Betting companies that sponsor clubs directly contribute significantly to this amount. As many as 11 clubs in the current 2024/2025 season have a betting company logo on their jerseys. And as many as 19 out of 20 clubs have a gambling sponsor, which may or may not be displayed on the jersey. Chelsea is the only team this season without a sponsor from this industry. Compared to last season, the number has increased again, as there were 8 betting sponsors featured on jerseys in the 2023/2024 season. This means that the number has increased by almost 50% in one season. Five clubs continued their partnerships with gambling sponsors with whom they had already collaborated last season. Meanwhile, three clubs, Aston Villa, Bournemouth, and Southampton, switched from one gambling company to another. Crystal Palace (from Cinch), Leicester City (from King Power) and Wolves (from AstroPay) switched from sponsors not related to gambling to sponsors related to betting (Score And Change, 2024).

Table 1 Sponsors on Premier League football shirts (2024/2025)

TEAM	SLEEVE SPONSOR	INDUSTRY
Arsenal	Emirates	Air transport
Aston Villa	Betano	Gambling
Bournemouth	bj88	Gambling
Brentford	Hollywoodbets	Gambling
Brighton & Hove Albion	American Express	Financial services
Chelsea	-	-
Crystal Palace	Net88	Gambling
Everton	Stake.com	Gambling
Fulham	SBOBET	Gambling
Ipswich Town	+-=x Tour	Entertainment
Leicester City	BC.Game	Gambling
Liverpool	Standard Chartered	Financial services & banking
Manchester City	Etihad Airways	Air transport
Manchester United	Snapdragon	Telecommunications equipment & semiconductors
Newcastle United	Sela	Entertainment & hospitality
Nottingham Forest	Kaiyun Sports	Gambling
Southampton	Rollbit	Gambling
Tottenham Hotspur	AIA	Life insurance & financial services
West Ham United	Betway	Gambling
Wolverhampton Wanderers	DEBET	Gambling

Source: Score and Change (2024)

Figure 3 shows the development of sponsorship in the English football league and points to a clear trend towards international investment. The last season saw a significant increase in the proportion of clubs supported by foreign brands. In the 2023/2024 season, 85% of Premier League clubs were supported by international sponsors. This figure has increased further in the current season, with 89% of sponsorship contributions now coming from foreign entities. This shift underscores the growing global appeal and commercial reach of the Premier League, as well as its ability to attract significant financial support from countries outside the United Kingdom.

Several clubs secured new, more lucrative sponsorship deals ahead of the new season. These include Aston Villa, Bournemouth, Crystal Palace, Manchester United, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Leicester City, and Southampton, which have successfully negotiated better deals compared to their previous agreements. These improved contracts reflect the growing profile of individual clubs and the overall increase in the market value of Premier League sponsorship deals.

One particularly notable contract is the new partnership between Betano and Aston Villa. After Villa qualified for the UEFA Champions League, the club's visibility and marketability increased significantly, making it an attractive asset for sponsors. According to Ampere Analysis (2024), the value of Betano's sponsorship has reportedly increased from £8 million to £20 million per season, demonstrating the financial rewards of Europe's top competition. This agreement not only signals Betano's growing interest in English football.

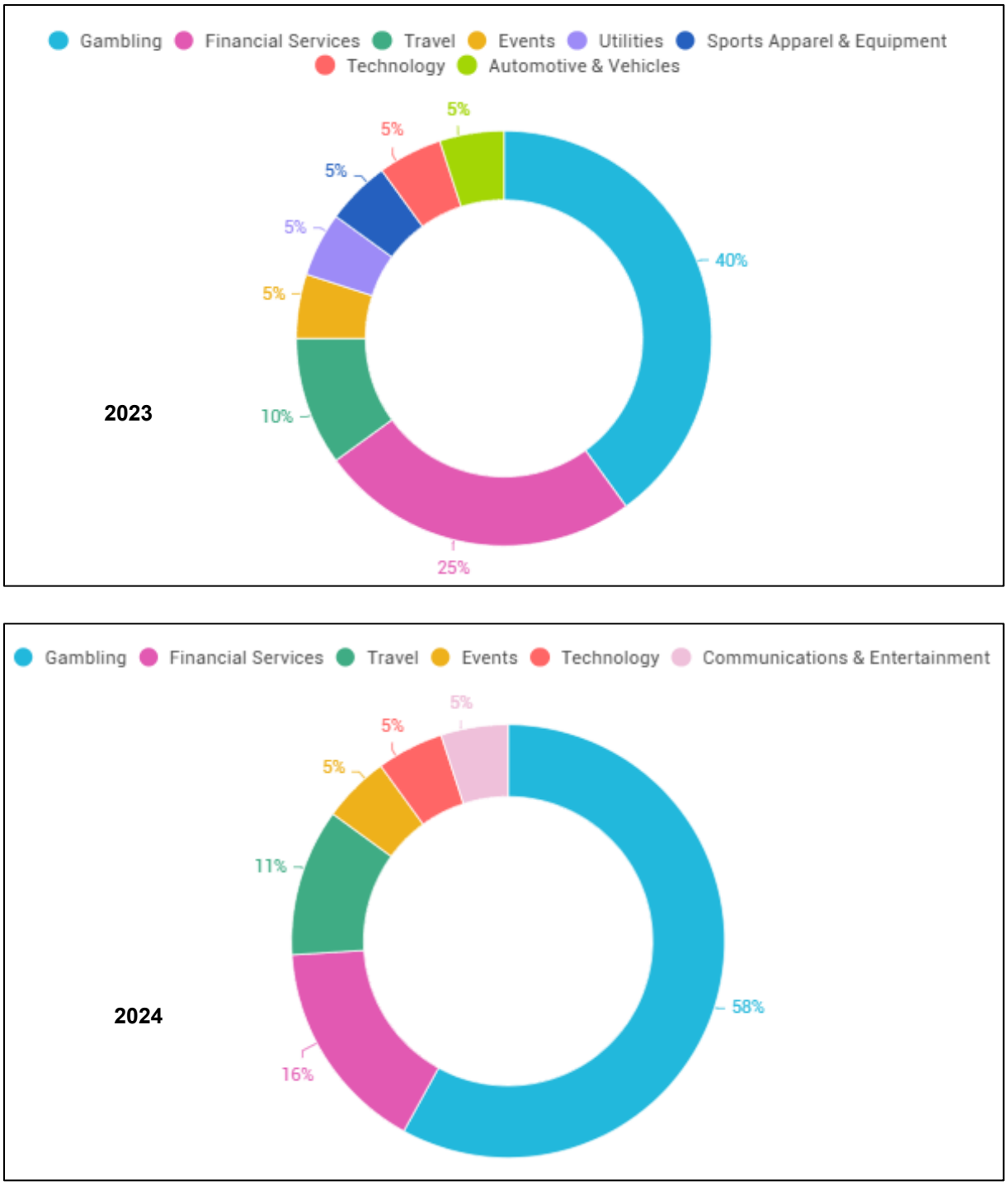

Figure 3 Graph showing the percentage development of sponsor sectors on Premier League jerseys (2023/2024) and (2024/2025)
Source: Ampere Analysis (2024)

Premier League clubs have voluntarily decided to stop displaying these sponsors' logos on the front of their jerseys starting in the 2026–2027 season. This decision is in line with growing concerns

about the moral and legal issues surrounding the impact of gambling on sport and society (Sky Sports, 2023).

Analysis of Spain's La Liga

Although teams in the Spanish league do not have betting companies displayed directly on their jerseys, Spanish football giants had official gambling partners several years ago. Barcelona collaborated with 1xBet, while Real Madrid collaborated with Codere Apuestas. Atletico Madrid was and is another club that has a sponsorship agreement with Bwin, so there are also links with the best clubs in La Liga (BeSoccer, 2020).

However, when it comes to the Spanish league as such, gambling and betting companies do not have as numerous and visible representation as in the England. Table 2 shows the sectors of which the main sponsors of the teams come. However, the difference compared to the Premier League is that gambling companies are direct official sponsors of La Liga. One such company is Luckia (Score And Change, 2024).

Table 2 Sponsors on La Liga football shirts (2024/2025)

TEAM	SLEEVE SPONSOR	INDUSTRY
Alavés	EBpay	Financial services – crypto platform
Athletic Club de Bilbao	B2BinPay	Financial services – blockchain and crypto
Atlético de Madrid	Kraken	Financial services – crypto platform
Barcelona	Ambilight TV (Philips)	Consumer electronics
Celta de Vigo	–	–
Espanyol	–	–
Getafe	ODTY News	Media
Girona	HYLO	Pharmaceutical
Las Palmas	Kalise	Food – ice cream and dessert
Leganés	Mercanza	Technology solutions
Mallorca	OK Mobility	Real estate
Osasuna	Celer Lighting	Lighting
Rayo Vallecano	GCS	Aerospace
Real Betis	REVEL	Car rental
Real Madrid	HP	Technology
Real Sociedad	Reale Seguros	Insurance
Sevilla	JD Sports	Sports retail
Valencia	Divina Seguros	Insurance
Valladolid	JD Sports	Sports retail
Villarreal	–	–

Source: Score and Change (2024)

It is also worth mentioning the cooperation with the Sportsbet.io platform. This agreement covers both LaLiga, the top division, and Segunda Division, the second division. Jorge de la Vega, LaLiga's Chief Commercial Officer, said: *"We are thrilled to announce this partnership with Sportsbet.io, a brand that shares our vision of pushing the boundaries of fan engagement and innovation in sport. "Together, we want to provide our fans with new and dynamic experiences and offer them new ways to engage with LaLiga. This collaboration represents an important step in our strategy to connect with a global audience and continue to grow our international presence."*

Founded in 2016 as part of the Yolo Group, Sportsbet.io has been active in the football market for several years, primarily as a shirt sponsor for Brazilian club Sao Paulo and English clubs Southampton and Watford. The company has also signed a deal with Premier League giants Arsenal

as their official betting partner. In terms of its current partnerships, Sportsbet.io is the shirt sponsor of English second division club Hull City (Sportcal, 2024).

In conclusion, although La Liga maintains stricter regulations regarding the visibility of gambling sponsors, particularly on club jerseys, gambling companies remain active participants through strategic partnerships. Big clubs such as Barcelona, Real Madrid, and Atlético Madrid maintain relationships with betting brands, albeit less publicly. Compared to the English Premier League, the Spanish approach is more centralized and discreet, but it still reveals the strong influence of the betting industry within professional football.

Analysis of the Slovak Niké League and the second highest MONACObet league

Unlike other leagues around the world, our league has a betting agency in its name. This applies to the first, second, and third leagues. The first league is called the Niké League because its title partner is the Niké betting agency. The second league is called the MONACObet League because its title partner is the gambling company MONACObet. The third league also has a similar name, but it is named after the national betting office TIPOS. The main page of our first league looks like this (see Figure 4), where you can see the odds for individual matches and the slogan *"Niké je tipovanie"* (Nike Liga, 2024).



Figure 4 Nike League Partners (2024/2025)
Source: Niké liga (2024)

The betting office attracts an "audience" made up of sports fans. They like to bet on their team's matches, and they can also take advantage of the Tipsport bonus code, for example. Betting offices are becoming increasingly involved in Slovak football. They have been general partners of the main competition for a decade. They support most of the first division teams and are even the main partner of the Slovak national football team. On July 1, 2014, the Fortuna betting office entered the Slovak football scene in our top league competition. The first contract with Fortuna was signed for four years. However, it ultimately lasted until 2023, meaning that our competition was called the Fortuna League for a total of eight seasons. It is now called the Niké League. The contract is valid for three years with an option to extend, and according to both parties, it is the largest contract for central marketing rights in the history of Slovak sport (Šport24, 2023).

In the Niké league, most teams have ties to one of the betting agencies. The only exception is DAC Dunajská Streda. Tipsport and Niké both work with four clubs. Doxxbet, which is the general partner of MŠK Žilina, and MonacoBet each have one representative. Although MonacoBet is an online casino and not a betting agency, its focus is similar. This company is the main sponsor of the MFK

Banská Bystrica team, and our second highest league is also named after it. Fortuna is the general partner of the Slovak national football team with the title of platinum (Šport24, 2023).

Table 3 Betting agencies as sponsors of individual teams

TEAM	BETTING OFFICE AS GENERAL PARTNER
AS Trenčín	Tipsport
MFK Skalica	Tipsport
MFK Zemplín Michalovce	Tipsport
Spartak Trnava	Tipsport
MŠK Žilina	Doxxbet
Železiarne Podbrezová	Niké
Slovan Bratislava	Niké
MFK Ružomberok	Niké
FC Košice	Niké
MFK Banská Bystrica	MONACObet
Slovak football association	Fortuna

Source: Own elaboration according to Šport24 (2023)

In the second highest competition, called the MonacoBet League, there are not as many teams with sponsors on their jerseys. This league includes the B teams of Žilina and Slovan Bratislava. Therefore, these teams are mentioned and associated with the sponsors of their A teams. Only three other clubs have betting sponsors directly on their jerseys. These teams are FC ViOn Zlaté Moravce – Vráble and MFK Tatran Liptovský Mikuláš, whose main sponsor is the betting office Tipsport. 1. FC TATRAN Prešov also has a sponsorship agreement with a betting office, but its sponsor is Niké (MonacoBet Liga, 2025). It is also interesting to note that these are the teams with the greatest ambition to advance to the top league and are currently fighting for the top spots in the second league.

Table 4 Betting agencies as sponsors of individual teams in second Slovak division

TEAM	BETTING OFFICE AS GENERAL PARTNER
FC ViOn Zlaté Moravce - Vráble	Tipsport
MFK Tatran Liptovský Mikuláš	Tipsport
MŠK Žilina B	Doxxbet
1. FC TATRAN Prešov	Niké
Slovan Bratislava B	Niké

Source: Own elaboration (2025)

From a sporting perspective, the league's website serves as an essential communication channel, providing relevant information about the league and thereby contributing to its promotion and professionalization. The availability of results, schedules, and news is key to engaging fans and strengthening the league's identity. However, the obvious dependence on sponsorship, specifically from the gambling industry, points to structural economic ties that can affect the autonomy of sports organizations.

This view is paradoxical (see Figure 5), because immediately after visiting the website, an advertisement for a casino entry bonus and free spins pops up. This referral advertisement is located directly on the official website of the second highest Slovak football league (MonacoBet Liga, 2025).

The visual displayed on the football league's website represents the complex interaction between sport and gambling, which is becoming increasingly prominent in professional sport today. The dominant element is the betting company's advertising banner, which coexists with the visual display of a football match in the background. This position illustrates the ambivalent relationship in which sport finds itself in the context of financing and promotion.

At the same time, from a gambling perspective, the website serves as an effective marketing tool for the betting company. The integration of advertising into sports content allows direct access to the target group – football fans – thereby increasing the potential for generating revenue from gambling activities. However, this symbiosis between sports and gambling raises ethical questions regarding responsible gaming, the protection of vulnerable groups, and potential conflicts of interest.



Figure 5 Gambling advertisement on the league's official website
Source: MonacoBet Liga (2025)

Ultimately, the visual appearance of the website reflects a broader socioeconomic trend in which commercial interests, including those of the gambling industry, are intertwined with sporting activities. Although sponsorship may be necessary for the financial stability of sports organizations, it is crucial to critically assess the ethical implications and implement regulatory mechanisms to ensure the integrity of sport and minimize the negative impacts of gambling.

An interesting development in the Slovak Nike League is the establishment of cooperation with Shikenso Analytics. In 2025, the Union of League Clubs (ÚLK) and Shikenso Analytics signed a partnership agreement with the aim of improving the transparency and effectiveness of sponsorship monitoring in the Nike League. Using artificial intelligence, this company offers sophisticated analytical tools that enable thorough monitoring of every visible logo or brand during live television broadcasts, associated programs, and Voyo platform channels. Technology automatically recognizes and evaluates how advertisements are displayed, determines their value, and generates thorough data outputs. As a result, the Niké league is among the first medium-sized leagues within the European Leagues Association to adopt this creative approach. The introduction of this technology helps to more accurately evaluate the return on sponsorship investments but also improves the monitoring of gambling-related advertising, which is crucial for sports marketing from an ethical and legal perspective.

Shikenso Analytics is a German company operating in the field of sports and e-sports, using cutting-edge AI technology to assess brand value in both media and online spaces. Its clients include the German Football League (DFL) and the Belgian Pro League. *"We are excited to be working with the Nike League on this progressive project and helping it develop a data-driven strategy in a modern and sustainable way. By integrating our AI-driven analytics into their operations, the league gains the right tools to evaluate brand visibility and improve its partnership strategies,"* said Arwin Fallah, co-founder and CEO of Shikenso Analytics (Nike League, 2025).

Unlike most foreign leagues, Slovak football competitions are closely linked to the gambling industry, even in their names, reflecting the sport's strong economic dependence on betting companies. While in Western Europe sponsorship tends to be more diversified and often separate from the name of the league itself, in Slovakia gambling dominates not only in visual communication but also in the structure of club revenues.

Evaluation of hypotheses and research questions

Based on the analyzed data from three selected football leagues, Slovak Niké Liga, English Premier League, and Spanish La Liga, the research questions were verified, and hypotheses were formulated, which form the core of the research part of this work.

RQ1: *What is the extent of gambling companies' involvement in sponsorship in individual leagues?*

In the 2024/2025 season, the involvement of gambling companies in individual leagues varies significantly:

Premier League (England): up to 19 out of 20 clubs have sponsorship partnerships with gambling companies, with 11 clubs having the gambling company's logo directly on their jerseys. Compared to the 2023/2024 season, this is an increase of almost 50%.

La Liga (Spain): no club has a gambling company as the main brand on its jersey. The ban on such sponsorship has been in place since 2021, but cooperation at the league and digital channel level continues (e.g., Sportsbet.io). Big clubs like FC Barcelona and Atlético Madrid have partnerships with gambling companies, but they're less visible.

Niké Liga (Slovakia): Most clubs have a gambling company as their general partner. The league itself is named after a gambling company, as are the second league (MONACObet Liga) and third league (TIPOS). Gambling advertising is directly on websites, on television, and on the clubs' social networks. The only exception is DAC Dunajská Streda.

RQ2: *What are the differences in the regulation of gambling sponsorship between Slovakia, England, and Spain?*

Spain: legislative ban on gambling advertising on jerseys, in club names, and in broadcasts. Cooperation continues, particularly at the level of digital solutions and platform advertising.

England: a voluntary ban on placing gambling company logos on the front of jerseys is set to take effect from the 2026/2027 season. This move is a response to public pressure and concerns about the impact of gambling on society.

Slovakia: No direct legislative restrictions. Gambling is a common part of football marketing, with even the official website of the second league featuring banners for sign-up bonuses and free spins (see Fig. 5). However, in 2025, an initiative to monitor advertising exposure was launched in collaboration with Shikenso Analytics, representing a technological shift towards greater transparency, but without a legal framework yet.

RQ3: *How visible is gambling brand advertising during matches and on club channels?*

In Slovakia, gambling advertising is directly integrated into websites, apps, and broadcasts; often, gambling content, including odds, bonuses, and graphic calls to register with a betting office, is displayed on the league's main page. In England and Spain, the forms are less invasive (sleeves, backs of jerseys, digital banners outside of matches). Slovakia clearly leads in the intensity of visual gambling advertising in this indicator.

RQ4: *What types of clubs are the most frequent recipients of gambling sponsorship?*

The data shows that in England and Spain, it is increasingly medium sized to weaker clubs that cannot afford large "mainstream" sponsors. In Slovakia, however, all clubs – including top teams such as Slovan Bratislava and Žilina – are significantly linked to gambling companies. Even B teams in the second league (e.g., Žilina B, Slovan B) have the same partners as their A teams.

H1: *In the Slovak Niké League, there is a higher proportion of clubs with a main sponsor from the gambling sector than in the Premier League and La Liga.*

Hypothesis H1 has been confirmed. Although the Premier League achieves high numbers, Slovakia is dominant in terms of the absolute percentage of clubs with direct gambling sponsors, with gambling companies not only sponsoring clubs but also the leagues themselves.

H2: *The level of regulation of gambling sponsorship is significantly lower in Slovakia than in England and Spain.*

Hypothesis H2 was confirmed. Slovakia has no legislative or self-regulatory barriers to gambling sponsorship, unlike England (moving towards self-regulation) and Spain (already has a ban in place).

Summary:

Based on the research, it can be concluded that both hypotheses have been confirmed, with Slovakia showing the highest degree of economic and visual dependence on gambling sponsorship. Significant differences in the approaches of different countries point to the absence of regulation in Slovakia, which poses a challenge not only in terms of public health but also the reputation of sport. The English and Spanish models point to a possible move towards a more responsible approach, while Slovakia remains in the hands of powerful commercial partnerships without control mechanisms.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this comparative study show a clear difference between the level of involvement and regulation of gambling sponsorship in the three football competitions surveyed: the Niké League (Slovakia), the Premier League (England) and La Liga (Spain). In terms of visibility and systemic integration of gambling brands, Slovakia appears to be the country with the highest level of exposure and the lowest level of regulation.

A significant difference compared to England and Spain is that in Slovakia, gambling brands are not only sponsors of individual clubs, but also title partners of the entire competition – which is unique in Europe. In both above-mentioned countries, legislative or self-regulatory shifts towards reducing the visibility of gambling brands are already underway, with Spain having enshrined this process in law since 2021. England is preparing changes at the club sponsorship level from the 2026/2027 season, indicating a shift towards a more socially responsible model.

The discussion also highlights the paradox in Slovakia. On the one hand, gambling companies are a key source of income for clubs and the national team, but at the same time, their massive visual presence creates an ethical problem, especially regarding young people and vulnerable groups. An examination of the league and club websites confirmed that gambling advertising is often the first thing viewers encounter when they visit the site. These findings are problematic not only from a consumer protection perspective, but also in the context of the integrity of sport.

Another interesting aspect is the technological innovation in the form of the Nike League's partnership with Shikenso Analytics, which monitors the value of sponsorship using AI tools. This step can be seen as the potential beginning of a more transparent approach, but it is not yet accompanied by any real control or limitation around gambling.

Beyond regulation and voluntary restrictions, the digitalization of sports management and financing emerges as a potential solution to the challenges identified in this study. By introducing unified digital systems for monitoring sponsorship contracts and financial flows, clubs and leagues could reduce their structural dependence on gambling companies while increasing transparency. Such systems would not only allow regulators to track the proportion of revenue originating from gambling sponsorships but also provide real-time data on advertising visibility across different media channels.

Standardized digital reporting could help detect excessive exposure of gambling brands and support the enforcement of advertising restrictions. In addition, aggregated data could be used to evaluate the social impact of sponsorship practices, design more targeted prevention campaigns, and assess the feasibility of alternative funding scenarios in case of stricter regulation. Importantly, this approach would give policymakers reliable evidence for balancing the financial needs of sports organizations with the ethical imperative of protecting young and vulnerable audiences.

In this sense, digital transformation does not replace legislation but rather complement it. While regulatory frameworks define what is permissible, digitalization provides the infrastructure transparency, traceability, and robust data oversight—that enables these rules to be applied consistently and effectively. For countries such as Slovakia, where gambling sponsorship is deeply embedded in the structure of football, this combination could offer a practical path toward a more responsible and sustainable model of sports financing.

In the broader European context, it appears that while the economic value of gambling sponsorship (e.g., $321.91 million per year in Europe) is a significant source of revenue for football organizations, regulatory trends are shifting toward ethical balance. Slovakia lags in this regard and remains one of the last countries where gambling is not only present but fully accepted as the main bearer of the identity of football competitions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study showed that the extent to which gambling companies are involved in football sponsorship is significantly influenced by the regulatory framework of the country concerned, its sporting culture, and the financial dependence of sports organizations on external sources.

Confirmation of the hypotheses clearly showed that Slovakia has:

- a higher proportion of clubs with a gambling main sponsor than the European leagues,
- and at the same time the lowest level of regulation in this area.

At the same time, it was confirmed that the presence of gambling in football is most intense where diversified sources of income are not available and where legislation gives sports entities complete freedom to choose their partners.

Given current trends in Europe, Slovakia is finding itself in a position where it will have to address pressure from the public, the media, and international organizations to restrict gambling advertising in sports. Future developments should therefore be directed toward:

- the introduction of clear rules for the display of gambling brands,
- a code of ethics for sponsorship in football,
- support for alternative partnerships with less reputational risk.

Preserving the integrity of sport, protecting young people and preventing addiction should be key values that balance the economic benefits of gambling sponsorship.

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Article

Youth Perceptions of Gambling Risks, Prevention, and Sports Sponsorship

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Abstract: This study focuses on the issue of gambling, its regulation, and the role of preventive measures and sponsorship in the sports environment, with a specific focus on the Slovak football context. The research relies on qualitative interviews conducted with representatives of the Slovak Football Association and the private sector, offering an in-depth understanding of institutional and corporate perspectives on gambling prevention, regulation, and sports sponsorship. The findings highlight the key dilemmas in balancing financial stability with ethical responsibility and reveal the need for stronger legislative oversight, effective prevention mechanisms, and collaboration between sports organizations, the state, and the gambling industry. The study concludes with recommendations for policy improvements and structural solutions, including the use of digital monitoring systems to enhance transparency and accountability in sports financing.

Keywords: Gambling, Prevention, Youth, Sports sponsorship, Addiction, Regulation

1. INTRODUCTION

Business strategies are increasingly influenced by changes in football sponsorship. Companies such as Nike and Adidas are beginning to change their strategy, focusing on a smaller number of elite athletes and emphasizing the uniqueness of each player. Smaller companies hoping to expand their reach and strengthen the link between their product, and the player can benefit from this trend. These changes in sponsorship are also affecting large companies in the market, forcing them to adjust their business plans (Mascia, 2024).

The influence of gambling companies and the need for restrictions on football sponsorship are topics that are increasingly being discussed. In line with this trend, several leagues, such as the Premier League, intend to restrict gambling-related jerseys to reduce the risk to viewers who are more susceptible. This change creates a problem for teams looking for other sponsors, but at the same time creates space for sponsors who share the same ideals as the community and the sport (Courtney, 2024).

Gambling involves more than just placing bets on outcomes or games, but also psychological elements related to the allure of risk and the thrill of possible victory. According to research, the essence of gambling is linked to the human need for uncertainty and the possibility of profit, which is enhanced by the chance and excitement that gambling provides. These elements contribute to the development of gambling addiction because, even though gambling is entirely dependent on chance, people often mistakenly believe that they have control over the outcome (Glimme, 2024).

In sports, it usually refers to betting on the outcome of matches, but nowadays you can bet on almost anything. Since the legalization of gambling, this business has benefited greatly economically from its increased popularity and accessibility, but there are also concerns about the influencing of match results (Algamus, 2023). In addition, gambling in modern society is not limited to physical casinos or betting shops. The rise of online platforms and mobile applications has opened the door to gambling for younger generations, who are often more vulnerable to addictive behaviors. This accessibility poses challenges in terms of regulation and addiction prevention, which is particularly important from the perspective of protecting and ensuring a safe environment for players (Glimme, 2024).

As gambling generates large sums of money through sponsorship and advertising, it has a huge impact on sport and the sports industry. The legalization of gambling, especially on websites, has helped increase attendance and growth in sports leagues. To raise their profile and attract more fans, betting companies often spend money on sponsoring teams and events. Of course, there are certain risks associated with gambling. The possibility of match-fixing is one of the main problems, as it can undermine the integrity of sport. Since it can undermine public and spectator confidence in sports results, match-fixing is a serious problem. Another significant problem is the control and prevention of

gambling addiction. Addiction can be a risk factor for some fans, which could lead to further social and health problems (Algamus, 2023; Slovak Football Association, 2024).

For this reason, governments and sports organizations must implement strict rules and monitor the openness of sports betting. Regulation should protect individuals at risk of gambling addiction while reducing the danger of match-fixing (Algamus, 2023).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted as a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with two key stakeholders: a representative of the Slovak Football Association (SFA) and a representative of a private technology company (Codium) that develops preventive gambling systems. This design allowed for an in-depth understanding of professional and organizational perspectives on the issue rather than a purely statistical overview.

Research Objectives

The main objective was to explore how institutional actors perceive the risks of gambling, the effectiveness of prevention strategies, and the ethical challenges of gambling sponsorship in Slovak football.

Hypotheses:

H1: *The implementation of preventive systems and educational initiatives within sports organizations can help reduce gambling-related risks without fully compromising the financial stability of clubs*.

H2: *Legislative and regulatory oversight are essential to ensure ethical sponsorship practices and prevent the dominance of unlicensed ("shadow") gambling operators.*

Research Questions:

RQ1: *How do representatives of sports institutions and gambling-related companies perceive their role in gambling prevention?*

RQ2: *What are the main legislative and ethical challenges associated with gambling sponsorship in Slovak sport?*

RQ3: *How can technological and educational tools complement traditional forms of regulation?*

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted in January 2025 during the SMICEE 2025 conference. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and followed a semi-structured guide focusing on prevention, regulation, and sponsorship ethics.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Codes were assigned to statements relating to prevention, regulation, ethical challenges, and institutional dependence on gambling revenues. Emerging themes were then synthesized into key findings.

3. RESULTS

As part of the research, an interview was conducted with Mr. Letko, a member of the IT department of the Slovak Football Association (SFA). During this interview, two key questions were

asked regarding the prevention of gambling and the regulation of the visibility of gambling companies in sports clubs.

Question: *"Is it possible to implement awareness programs directly from the association, or is it more up to the club to take care of this issue?"*

Answer: Mr. Letko stated that SFA is already involved in awareness programs, but if this activity is to be more intensive, it is necessary for the clubs themselves to become more involved in the process. SFA can provide materials and methodological support, but the implementation of such programs should be the responsibility of the clubs.

Question: *"Is it possible to limit the visibility of gambling company advertisements to a certain percentage in order to reduce their impact?"*

Answer: Mr. Letko replied that limiting the visibility of gambling companies to a specified percentage could probably be problematic. He emphasized that revenue from these advertisements is very important for first division clubs, so this step could have a negative impact on their financial stability. Just as the state cannot ban alcohol, the SFA cannot directly interfere with the marketing strategies of clubs. In his opinion, the most appropriate approach is through prevention and education. SFA is already beginning to place greater emphasis on prevention, while also seeking to raise awareness among smaller and non-professional clubs.



Figure 6 Interview with Ján Letko during the conference SMICEE 2025
Source: SMICEE (2025)

The SFA representative emphasized that the association already supports several awareness initiatives but noted that their effectiveness largely depends on the involvement of individual clubs. According to him, the SFA can offer methodological and educational support, but the practical implementation of preventive programs should be the responsibility of clubs themselves.

He also acknowledged the financial dependency of clubs on gambling sponsorships, explaining that limiting advertising visibility could endanger the financial sustainability of smaller or lower-division teams. Letko compared this issue to the regulation of alcohol advertising, suggesting that while outright bans are unrealistic, education and awareness are more feasible solutions.

This viewpoint highlights a pragmatic stance within sports institutions: while there is awareness of the risks, economic realities shape the limits of what can be achieved through self-regulation.

In a follow-up interview, questions were posed to Mr. Mikunda, sales manager at Codium, a company that develops a preventive system for Doxxbet. This system identifies potential gamblers based on more than 100 criteria. This system can detect risky players and temporarily suspend their accounts to prevent them from incurring potentially high losses and protect them from financial problems. This system is one of the prevention tools.

Question: *"Is it possible for educational and regulatory measures to be implemented directly by companies such as Doxxbet, or is it necessary for the state and sports organizations to implement these measures on a broader level?"*

Answer: Mr. Mikunda explained that the Codium system actively participates in the prevention of problematic gambling by monitoring player behavior and identifying at-risk players. This system helps and protects the players themselves from the risk of financial loss. In his opinion, this type of prevention is very effective, and it is up to companies to use such systems. However, he added that in the case of more intensive regulation or broader awareness campaigns, it would be necessary for sports organizations and the state, which can create legislative frameworks and regulations to ensure better protection for players, to become more involved in the process.

In the next part of the interview, Mr. Mikunda mentioned the problem of so-called "shadow" companies that operate in Slovakia but do not have official licenses to provide gambling services. These companies include, for example, Bet365, Betaway, and 1XBet. These companies do not pay taxes, which results in losses for the state budget, as they are not regulated by the Slovak legal framework. Mr. Mikunda pointed out that this problem with illegal companies needs to be solved in the future, because the state is losing money that could also partially fill the state budget.

Mr. Mikunda concluded by emphasizing that legislative changes and more rigorous monitoring of these illegal companies should be a priority to ensure fair and regulated gaming legislation that would protect not only players but also public finance. Both interviews provided a different perspective on the issue.



Figure 7 Interview with Matej Mikunda during the conference SMICEE 2025
Source: SMICEE (2025)

Codium is a technology firm developing a prevention system for Doxxbet that analyzes player behavior based on over 100 criteria to detect early signs of gambling addiction. The system can temporarily suspend risky accounts, helping prevent severe financial losses.

Mikunda emphasized that technological solutions can effectively complement legislative measures but added that broader prevention requires cooperation with both state authorities and sports

organizations. He also raised the issue of illegal gambling operators such as Bet365, Betaway, and 1XBet, which operate in Slovakia without official licenses.

This insight underscores that the private sector recognizes its responsibility in player protection but also sees the state as a necessary actor for systemic regulation.

Evaluation of hypotheses and research questions

H1: *The implementation of preventive systems and educational initiatives within sports organizations can help reduce gambling-related risks without fully compromising the financial stability of clubs.*

Evaluation: H1 was confirmed.

The interviews revealed that both the Slovak Football Association (SFA) and private actors recognize prevention as a key tool for minimizing gambling-related harm. Mr. Letko (SFA) emphasized that awareness programs and educational activities can be effective, but their implementation must be driven by individual clubs. This indicates that preventive initiatives are seen as feasible and desirable, yet their practical realization is constrained by financial priorities and limited organizational capacity.

From the SFA's perspective, gambling sponsorship revenue remains an essential funding source, particularly for first-division clubs. Consequently, while preventive education is welcomed, it cannot fully substitute for the income derived from gambling sponsorships.

This means that prevention can reduce risk and promote responsible gambling behavior, but it cannot independently ensure financial sustainability. The hypothesis is therefore confirmed in the sense that prevention is beneficial, but the financial dependency of clubs remains a limiting factor.

H2: *Legislative and regulatory oversight are essential to ensure ethical sponsorship practices and prevent the dominance of unlicensed ("shadow") gambling operators.*

Evaluation: H2 was confirmed.

The Codium representative (Mr. Mikunda) explicitly highlighted that unlicensed companies, such as Bet365, Betaway, and 1XBet, operate outside Slovak law, avoiding taxation and oversight. This unregulated activity undermines state revenues and increases risks for consumers. Both interviewees agreed that stronger state regulation is crucial, particularly in monitoring advertising visibility and enforcing compliance among gambling operators.

In addition, both respondents acknowledged that without a robust legislative framework, neither technological solutions nor internal club initiatives are sufficient to guarantee ethical practices in sports sponsorship.

Thus, the findings confirm that legislative action and institutional oversight are indispensable for maintaining transparency, ensuring responsible advertising, and eliminating the influence of illegal gambling entities.

RQ1: *How do representatives of sports institutions and gambling-related companies perceive their role in gambling prevention?*

Both actors recognize a shared responsibility for prevention. The SFA views its role as supportive and educational, providing materials and guidance to clubs, while Codium represents the private sector's proactive engagement through technological monitoring and early detection systems. However, their perspectives differ in scope: sports institutions rely on moral persuasion and education, whereas companies adopt data-driven, system-based approaches.

RQ2: *What are the main legislative and ethical challenges associated with gambling sponsorship in Slovak sport?*

The primary legislative challenge lies in the insufficient regulation of advertising and the presence of unlicensed operators. Ethically, there exists a conflict between financial dependence and social responsibility. Clubs need sponsorship revenue to survive but risk damaging their reputation and contributing indirectly to gambling normalization. This duality creates a persistent ethical dilemma for sports organizations.

RQ3: *How can technological and educational tools complement traditional forms of regulation?*

Both interviews demonstrate that technology and education can effectively reinforce formal legislation. Codium's prevention system shows how data analysis can help identify risky player behavior and intervene before addiction occurs. Meanwhile, educational campaigns from the SFA can strengthen public awareness and promote responsible gambling. Together, these tools form a hybrid model in which technological innovation enhances regulatory enforcement, and education strengthens ethical awareness among both players and fans.

4. DISCUSSION

The interviews revealed several important themes. First, both institutional and private-sector actors recognize the need for preventive action, though their approaches differ. The SFA emphasizes education and awareness, while Codium focuses on technological intervention and behavioral monitoring.

Second, there exists a clear economic-ethical dilemma: gambling sponsorship remains a vital source of income for clubs, yet it conflicts with broader public health goals. This tension limits the ability of associations to introduce strict restrictions without external support.

Third, both respondents identified regulatory insufficiencies in addressing unlicensed gambling operators. This "shadow" sector undermines both state revenues and the credibility of prevention measures.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that effective gambling prevention in sports requires a multi-layered approach, combining legislative reforms, corporate responsibility, and data-driven oversight.

The results of this study highlight not only the risks of gambling sponsorship but also the structural dependence of sports clubs on these financial sources. One possible way to reduce such dependency is through the digitalization and standardization of sports financing and management. A unified digital platform could make financial flow more transparent, improve the collection and analysis of data, and provide decision-makers with reliable tools for allocating public resources. Such a system would allow regulators to monitor the proportion of revenues coming from gambling sponsorships, ensure compliance with advertising restrictions, and support more effective prevention strategies.

Digitalized reporting and oversight could also strengthen the accountability of clubs and associations by introducing standardized interfaces for documenting income and sponsorship contracts. Linking these data to compliance modules would make it possible to detect potential risks. For example, the excessive visibility of gambling advertisements or the financial exposure of clubs to high-risk industries. In addition, aggregated digital data could be used to design more targeted prevention campaigns, evaluate their effectiveness, and model alternative funding scenarios if stricter restrictions on gambling sponsorship were introduced.

This perspective suggests that digital transformation in sports management has the potential to complement legislative measures. While respondents in this study perceived legislative restrictions as the most effective form of gambling prevention, digitalization offers the necessary infrastructure to give these restrictions practical force through transparency, traceability, and robust data-driven oversight.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provided insight into how key stakeholders in Slovak sport perceive gambling-related risks, prevention, and sponsorship ethics. The findings confirm that while there is awareness of the problem, the economic dependence on gambling revenues remains a significant barrier to change.

Both interviews point to the necessity of balanced regulations that protect players and ensure fair competition while maintaining financial sustainability for clubs. Legislative tightening, enhanced oversight of unlicensed operators, and technological prevention systems are identified as mutually reinforcing tools..

Finally, it is recommended that future policies focus on:

1. Expanding cooperation between the state, sports associations, and the gambling industry in responsible gaming initiatives.

2. Implementing digital transparency systems for sponsorship reporting.
3. Strengthening public awareness and educational programs at both professional and grassroots levels of sport.

These steps could help reconcile the ethical and economic aspects of gambling sponsorship and contribute to more sustainable and socially responsible sports governance in Slovakia.

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Case study

A Case Study of Marketing Communication in a small Slovak Tennis Club

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Abstract: The article explores the marketing communication deficiencies of small local sports clubs, illustrated through a case study of the Benet LTC Bytča tennis club. In the context of increasing digitalization and changing consumer behavior, many small clubs struggle to communicate effectively with their target groups. Through a mixed-methods approach combining a questionnaire survey (n=253), semi-structured interviews, content analysis, and benchmarking with competing clubs, the study identifies key shortcomings in the club's communication strategy. These include the absence of a formal marketing plan, inconsistent and outdated digital communication, weak branding, and minimal collaboration with schools or sponsors. Despite strong internal values such as community atmosphere and coaching quality, these assets remain underutilized in external communication. The findings reflect a broader pattern among small sports organizations in Slovakia and Central Europe. The study concludes with specific recommendations to enhance communication performance and outlines a scalable framework for similar clubs aiming to improve their visibility, engagement, and sustainability.

Keywords: Sports Marketing, Local Sports Clubs, Communication Strategy, Branding, Tennis

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, marketing communication has become one of the most important tools for managing relationships between organizations and their target groups. Sports clubs are no exception, as they are increasingly coming under pressure from modern trends such as digitalization, consumer individualization, and the need to build a brand in a competitive environment. As Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012) point out, market dynamics and rapidly changing consumer behavior are forcing organizations to constantly adapt their communication strategies, especially in environments where emotional connection and community play a key role, as is the case in sports.

The marketing of sports organizations has long gone beyond the promotion of results. According to Schwarz et al. (2022), it is a complex process that aims not only to inform, but also to build loyalty, create value for fans, and generate revenue through partnerships and sponsorship. Today, sports clubs face challenges related to engaging the younger generation, competition from other leisure activities, and growing public demands for quality communication and presentation.

In this context, understanding the specifics of a given sport also plays an important role. Tennis, as an individual sport with a rich history and global reach, has its own rules of communication that differ from team sports. According to Cross and Lindsey (2005) and Lake (2015), tennis is not only about performance, but also about tradition, image, and a strong culture of fair play which represents unique prerequisites for building a brand and marketing identity. Local tennis clubs such as Benet LTC Bytča can use these values as strong communication pillars.

From a management theory perspective, marketing communication falls under the so-called extended marketing mix (7P), where not only product, price, distribution, and promotion play a role, but also people, processes, and physical evidence (Kotler and Keller, 2016). In the case of sports clubs, this means not only how the club is presented to the outside world, but also how it communicates with its members, how it sets up internal processes, and what impression it leaves on the public.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine how these elements work in practice, especially in a local environment where marketing communication is not always systematically managed. According to Doyle and Stern (2006), small organizations often underestimate the importance of strategic communication, which prevents them from effectively reaching new target groups, increasing brand awareness, or stabilizing cash flows through sponsorship and partnerships.

The Benet LTC Bytča tennis club is a typical example of a small, local sports organization that operates steadily and has a membership base, but at the same time faces the risk of stagnation if it

does not modernize its marketing communication. The club has the potential to be a model for other similar organizations, which is why it deserves a deeper analysis.

The aim of this thesis is to identify the specific shortcomings in marketing communication that are most common in small local sports clubs, using the example of the Benet LTC Bytča tennis club. The thesis focuses on evaluating the communication tools used, the level of work with social networks, the ability to build relationships with the public and young people, as well as the absence of a comprehensive communication strategy.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Given the nature of the issue under investigation, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was chosen, which enabled triangulation of data and their more thorough interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Four main research tools were used:

1. Quantitative questionnaire survey (253 respondents)
2. Analysis of internal communication tools (website, social media, posters)
3. Interviews with club management and coaches
4. Comparative analysis of competitors and the external environment (STEEP)

1. Questionnaire survey

The research was based on a quantitative questionnaire survey, which was used to collect data on the perception of the club's marketing communication by a broad target group. The questionnaire was distributed electronically and completed by:

- active club members
- their relatives and friends
- the public in Bytča and the surrounding area
- students of the Faculty of Management and Informatics at UNIZA

The final set consisted of 253 valid responses. The questionnaire contained 27 questions focused on awareness of the club, interaction with social networks, evaluation of the website, and suggestions for improving communication outputs. The results were statistically evaluated and then interpreted in relation to the research objectives.

2. Qualitative interviews

In addition to the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with club management representatives and coaches. Their aim was to:

- identify organizational limitations in marketing
- clarify the practical reasons for low digital activity
- find out what forms of cooperation the club applies towards community partners

The interviews provided valuable context for interpreting the questionnaire results and helped to verify internal communication processes.

3. Analysis of the club's communication channels

A supplementary method was content analysis of the club's current communication outputs, specifically:

- official website
- Facebook profile
- recruitment posters and offline materials

Each channel was evaluated in terms of frequency of publication, visual consistency, degree of interactivity, and suitability for identified target groups.

4. Comparative (benchmark) analysis of competitors

To evaluate the club's position within the regional environment, a comparative analysis of two competing tennis clubs, TK Kysucké Nové Mesto and TK Vrútky, was carried out. Aspects such as:

- scope and form of digital communication

- visual identity
- frequency and quality of content on social networks
- method of working with the public

This analysis made it possible to identify specific examples of good practice that can also be applied in the Benet LTC Bytča environment..

3. RESULTS

The research focused on a thorough assessment of the current state of marketing communication at the Benet LTC Bytča tennis club. The aim was to obtain a comprehensive picture of how the club communicates with the public, members, potential tennis enthusiasts, and the community, while identifying shortcomings that are also characteristic of many other small sports clubs in Slovakia.

1. Lack of a formal marketing strategy

Of all the areas analyzed, the fact that the club has no formal, written marketing strategy resonated the most. The club's management confirmed that marketing activities are handled on an ad hoc basis, as needed, depending on free time and the personal initiative of individuals. There are no defined:

- target groups (e.g., parents of children, recreational players, sponsors)
- communication goals (e.g., raising awareness, recruiting new members)
- measurable performance indicators (e.g., number of interactions, growth in followers)
- budget, or allocated time

From a marketing perspective, this represents a fundamental shortcoming that hinders effective planning and reduces the effectiveness of individual tools.

2. Digital communication – weak, inconsistent, outdated

Website:

- It looks outdated in terms of both visuals and content
- It contains little up-to-date information – outdated price list, no current results, photos, or blog content
- It is not optimized for mobile devices
- Lacks basic UX elements: CTA buttons, training calendar, links to social networks

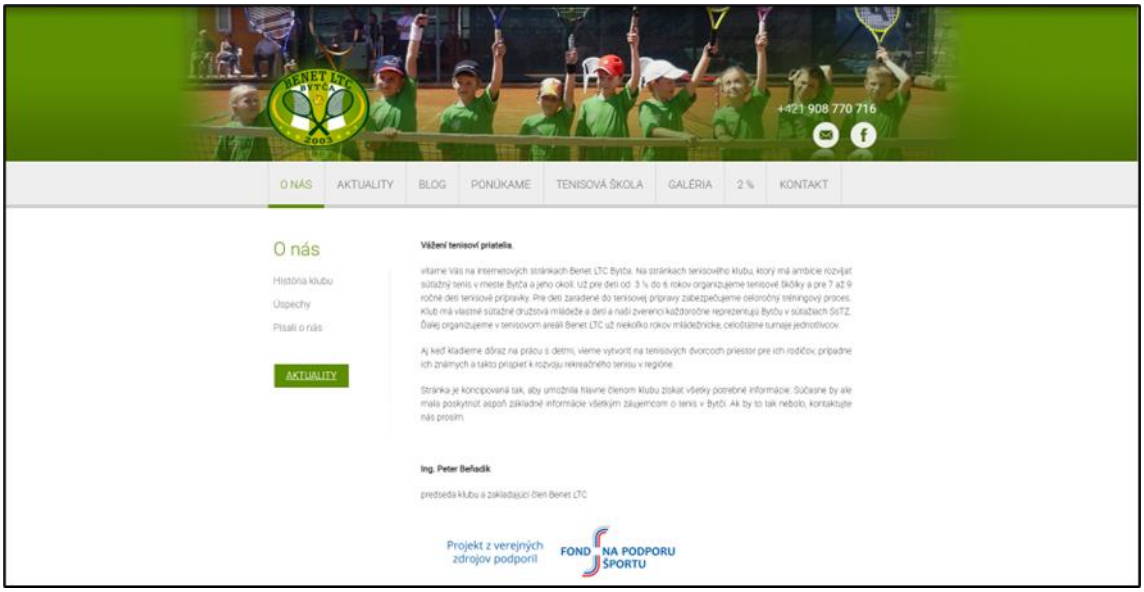

Figure 1 Website of the Benet LTC Bytča club
Source: benet.sk (2025)

Social networks:

- The club's main communication platform is Facebook, but posts are published irregularly (sometimes with two-month breaks)
- The content is mostly informational, not very visually appealing, and rarely interactive (no polls, contests, videos, or member stories)
- The club does not have an Instagram account, even though 67% of younger respondents (18-25 years old) identified Instagram as their main platform for following sports activities
- The posts do not have a consistent visual style or brand identity (logo, colors, fonts)

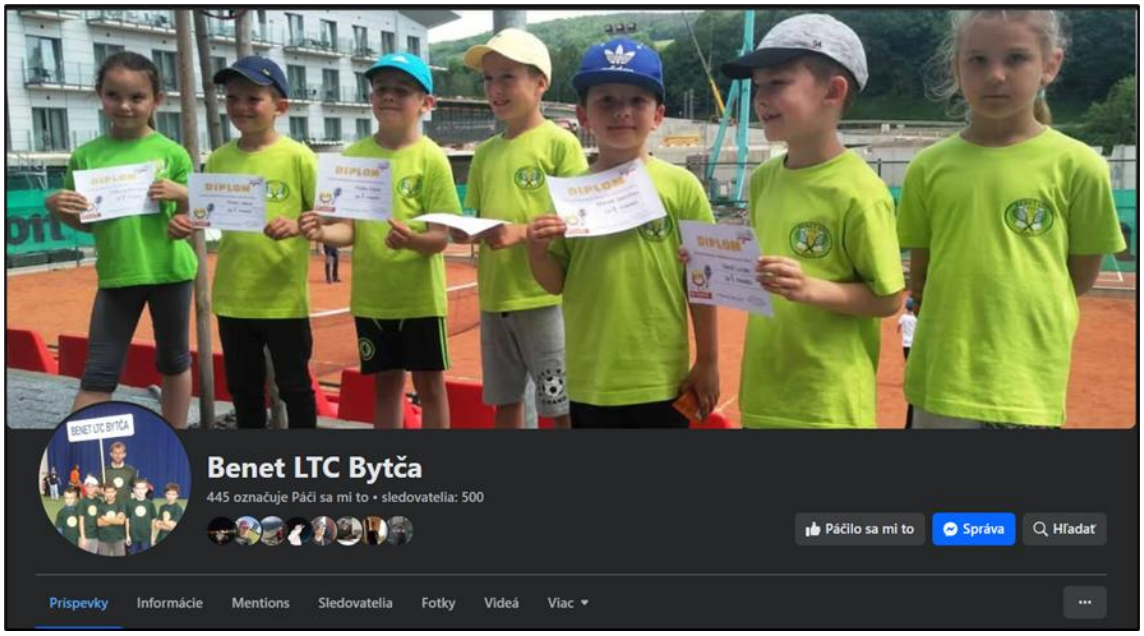

Figure 2 Cover page of Benet LTC Bytča's Facebook profile
Source: Facebook Benet LTC Bytča (2025)

These findings point to a critical digital weakness that significantly limits the club's ability to reach the younger generation, which is key to its long-term development.

3. Weak ties to the community, schools, and sponsors

Research has shown that the club has enormous untapped potential in connecting with the community. Although the club is based in a smaller town (Bytča), as many as 58% of respondents said they did not know that the town had an active tennis club. Interviews revealed that cooperation with schools in the region was only occasional (e.g., one-off recruitment drives, summer camps), but there was no long-term initiative or partnership agreement.

From a marketing perspective, connecting with schools and the community is the most effective tool for building a brand and attracting new members. This factor is also critical because children often join sports clubs on the recommendation of their school or based on visibility in the local community.

The area of sponsorship is equally weak – the club currently has no active business partnerships. Management stated that there is no structured sponsorship package that could be presented to potential partners.

4. Club brand – weak identity, low awareness

When asked if they could identify the club's logo, only 28% of the public outside the club answered correctly. More than 60% of respondents do not know how the club communicates, who runs it, or what activities it offers. The club logo does not appear consistently on posters, websites, or social networks. Branding and visual identity are as important for a sports club as sports results. They create trust, recognizability, and a professional impression. Currently, however, the club's communication is fragmented in terms of both visuals and content.

5. Strong internal strengths – atmosphere, quality of coaches, loyalty

Questionnaire survey also revealed several positive finds that the club could use much more intensively in its marketing. As many as 84% of internal respondents (club members and their families) expressed high satisfaction with the quality of training. Respondents repeatedly highlighted the friendly, community atmosphere, which they consider a competitive advantage over larger, more formal clubs.

The club has a stable core of coaches and volunteers who are strongly committed. These values, authenticity, community, quality, could be the main communication messages of the Benet LTC Bytča brand. However, they are not currently used in external marketing (e.g., in the form of videos, references, member stories).

6. Comparative analysis of competing clubs

To gain contextual anchoring and identify opportunities for improvement, two regional competing clubs were analyzed: TK Kysucké Nové Mesto and TK Vrútky. The analysis was based on publicly available data and output from their official websites, social networks, and promotional materials.

TK Kysucké Nové Mesto

The club is active on Facebook and Instagram, with regular posts (more than 3-4 times a month). The content is visually consistent, using templates, logos, and hashtags. Club organizes tournaments with media support, while also trying to reach a wider audience through livestreams and competitions. They have a simple but functional website with information about training sessions, price lists, a photo gallery, and a contact form.

TK Vrútky

Compared to Benet LTC Bytča, the club has a modern website optimized for mobile devices. Its Facebook profile is active and uses video content from training sessions, competitions, and interviews with coaches. The club also works with advertising formats (e.g., boosted posts), thereby increasing its reach. It communicates extensively about its partners, thereby building transparency and credibility with the public and sponsors.

This comparison clearly shows that Benet LTC Bytča lags in most aspects of communication. At the same time, it provides specific examples of good practice that are realistically implementable, even with limited resources. The biggest differences between the compared clubs and Benet LTC Bytča are in:

- the regularity and quality of social media posts
- the level of visual identity
- the presentation of partners, and transparency of operations

Based on this comparison, it can be clearly stated that successful marketing tools do not have to be financially demanding, but they do require a systematic approach, planning, and an understanding of the needs of the target group.

Table 1 Comparison of selected aspects of club marketing communication

Area	Benet LTC Bytča	TK Kysucké Nové Mesto	TK Vrútky
Facebook	Irregular posts	Regular posts, consistent style	Active, use of video
Instagram	No account created	Active account	Passive, but exists
Website	Outdated, little content	Simple, clear	Modern, optimized
Brand work	Minimal	Unified visual identity	Professional branding
Sponsorship	None	Published partners	Sponsor presentation
Video content and interactivity	Weak/none	Minimal	Regular videos, interviews

Source: Own elaborate (2025)

The most significant weaknesses of the club's marketing communication:

This analysis shows that most of the identified weaknesses are not unique to Benet LTC Bytča but represent a general problem for many small sports clubs. Low professionalism, underestimation of marketing, lack of systematic communication and the resulting stagnation or risk of decline. The shortcomings are summarized in the following table.

Table 2 Summary of the biggest shortcomings in the club's marketing communication

Area	Shortage
Strategy	No formal plan, goals, segmentation, budget
Digital channels	Weak Facebook presence, no Instagram, nonfunctional website
Cooperation	No systematic cooperation with schools, community, partners
Brand	Weak visual identity, low public awareness
Capacity	Marketing is handled by management "on the side"; no expert or agency

Source: Own elaborate (2025)

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the research point to several critical shortcomings in the marketing communication of small sports clubs, with the case study of the Benet LTC Bytča tennis club serving as a representative model of these problems. The findings are consistent with previous findings in the literature, which repeatedly point out that sports organizations without a formally established marketing strategy are unable to communicate effectively with target groups and achieve their long-term goals (Doyle & Stern, 2006; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012).

One of the most significant problems that has emerged is the absence of systematic planning for marketing communication. This situation is not unusual, according to Schwartz et al. (2022), smaller sports clubs are often dependent on informal management and volunteer work, which prevents them from planning and evaluating communication activities. In the case of Benet LTC Bytča, this manifests itself in random content publishing, poor use of analytical tools, and a lack of target group segmentation.

Another important area of discussion is the untapped potential of digital platforms, which today constitute the main channel of marketing communication, especially in relation to the younger generation. As Armstrong et al. (2020) point out, effective digital communication has become a prerequisite for success in sports marketing, not only for professional organizations, but also for local clubs. From a practical point of view, this means the need to introduce regular, targeted, and visually consistent content on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. However, the survey results show that these tools are used very limitedly in the case of the analyzed club, which leads to low interaction and a lost opportunity to reach new members.

Another aspect is the club's weak links with the community and schools, even though the literature repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the community dimension in sports management (Hoye & Parent, 2016; Covell & Walker, 2019). Strong ties with the community and institutions in the region increase the club's credibility and social impact, while also creating conditions for the development of future athletes. However, research at the Benet LTC Bytča club shows that cooperation with schools is limited, without systematic support and continuity. This situation can be attributed to capacity constraints, but also to the club's low focus on strategic partnerships.

Considerable attention should also be paid to the club's identity and brand. From a marketing theory perspective, a brand is not only a visual element but also a set of values, emotions, and expectations associated with the club (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The results of the research show that Benet LTC Bytča does not have a clearly defined brand identity, which leads to low recognition among the public and potential partners. This problem is also evident in other local clubs, which focus exclusively on the sporting side of their operations and perceive marketing as a secondary activity.

Paradoxically, the club's most significant strength turned out to be its internal atmosphere and the quality of the training process, factors that could be excellently used as communication content. It is precisely the so-called "storytelling" of members, videos from training sessions, references from parents, and the presentation of real experiences that can create authentic and emotional content, which is highly effective in marketing today (Lake, 2015). This suggests that the club has "soft" values but is unable to communicate them sufficiently externally.

The deficiencies identified in this case absence of a formal marketing plan, inconsistent use of social media, weak branding, and only ad-hoc cooperation with schools and partners, are typical of many small clubs and can be addressed through digitalization. Introducing even a lightweight digital system and standardized workflows can help transform limited volunteer capacity into consistent and measurable communication outcomes. A unified online platform or shared calendar can function as a single source of truth, ensuring that websites and social media channels are updated regularly with current timetables, prices, events, and recruitment opportunities. Similarly, the use of ready-made visual templates and scheduled publishing tools can replace improvised posts with consistent, professional, and frequent communication, even when resources are scarce.

Digitalization also makes it possible to evaluate communication more effectively. By tracking a small set of indicators such as website visits, post reach, engagement rates, or new trial registration clubs can adjust their communication strategy based on real data rather than intuition. In practice, this can mean monthly planning and scheduling of posts, short weekly check-ins for interaction with the audience, and simple monthly reviews of results. Such routines make communication more predictable and less dependent on the individual enthusiasm of volunteers.

Another important area where digital tools can add value is strengthening ties with schools and the local community. A structured digital outreach package for schools, supported by dedicated web pages or interactive campaigns, can help systematically attract young players. Short videos, storytelling formats, or seasonal challenges shared on social media can turn the club's internal strengths such as quality coaching and a friendly atmosphere into authentic content that resonates with young audiences and parents alike.

Finally, digitalization can also support sponsorship efforts. By creating transparent online partner pages and presenting basic audience data, even a small club can demonstrate professionalism and accountability. This makes it easier to attract and retain local sponsors, who often value visibility and evidence of impact more than large-scale media coverage.

In sum, digital transformation does not replace the need for strategic thinking; rather, it operationalizes it. For small sports clubs, the adoption of simple digital routines can help convert scarce volunteer time into reliable communication, stronger community ties, better recruitment of juniors, and a more professional platform for sponsorship. This perspective underlines that digitalization is not a luxury for large organizations, but an accessible and practical tool for ensuring the sustainability of local sports clubs.

The results of this research can be generalized to a wider group of small sports clubs in Slovakia and probably also in similarly structured countries in Central Europe. Their common denominator is a strong professional and community base, but at the same time insufficient know-how and capacity in the field of marketing communication. This is where there is room for academic institutions, students, and partners from the field who could contribute to building professional marketing support for these entities in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of the research pointed to recurring shortcomings in the marketing communication of small sports clubs, which can significantly affect their ability to survive, develop, and engage new target groups. A case study of the Benet LTC Bytča tennis club showed that despite stable internal functioning and high-quality training facilities, the club is unable to effectively communicate its value to the outside world.

Key findings suggest that the absence of a formal marketing strategy, low digital activity, weak visual identity, and limited community ties are critical obstacles that can be removed even with limited resources, provided that the club begins to view marketing as an integral part of its management, not as a supplementary activity.

Based on the data obtained, specific recommendations were proposed, focusing on:

- creating a unified communication strategy,
- intensifying and professionalizing online outputs,
- systematic cooperation with schools,
- building a club brand based on authentic values.

The contribution of this study is twofold: on the one hand, it provides specific practical guidance for the management of Benet LTC Bytča, and on the other hand, it generates generalizable insights into the marketing challenges of small sports organizations, which can serve as a basis for further research or youth sports development policy at the local level.

In conclusion, it can be said that if small sports clubs are to succeed in the digital age, they must transform their marketing mindset; from passive communication to active relationship building, branding, and long-term sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Case study

Organizational and Systemic Challenges of University Esports Development in Slovakia

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Abstract: The article will focus on examining organizational processes, current challenges and problems in the Slovak Association of University esports. It identifies key shortcomings in the areas of time management, promotion on social networks and the functioning of the organizational structure. Based on the results of primary research and theoretical knowledge, it offers suggestions for solutions that reflect the real possibilities and capacities of this organization. The findings of primary research show that the absence of planning, delegation of tasks and setting deadlines leads to project failure. The lack of use of online platforms such as TikTok or Instagram causes low awareness of esports among students. Organizational problems stem from disrespect for the formal structure, which prevents effective functioning. These factors significantly limit the development of university esports and its perception by the public.

Keywords: esport, time management, organizational structure, student organizations, sports management

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, esports have become one of the most dynamically developing segments of the global entertainment industry. Their growth is closely related to technological progress, increasing digitalization and changing consumer preferences, who increasingly prefer online gaming experiences over traditional forms of entertainment. As a result, the popularity of virtual tournaments, streaming platforms and mobile gaming is growing, opening new opportunities for the development of the esports industry across world regions. Despite this global trend and billion-dollar turnover in markets such as the USA and China, European – and especially Slovak – esports still face several challenges that hinder its development. The key factor for the success of any organization in this industry is effective organization, which ensures a clear structure, delegation of powers and coordination of activities.

The esports environment and market

With the rise of digitalization and technology, the esports market has seen a significant shift in consumer preferences towards virtual events and online gaming experiences. This trend is driven by the convenience and accessibility of digital platforms, as well as the growing popularity of competitive gaming among younger demographics. As a result, traditional tournaments and in-person events have seen a decline, with the demand for online tournaments and streaming services increasing. Furthermore, the rise of mobile gaming and cross-platform gaming has opened new opportunities for the esports market, catering to a wider audience and fuelling its growth. (Statista Market Insights, 2024).

Esports have become one of the fastest growing segments of the entertainment industry, and the US boasts the largest national market in this area. The US esports market is estimated to be worth approximately $1.07 billion, indicating a strong player and fan base, as well as significant investments in organizing tournaments and developing professional teams. In comparison, the Chinese esports market, although the second largest in the world, is worth $497.6 million. This difference in values shows that the US has a significantly stronger position in the market, which may be due to various factors such as cultural preferences and investment opportunities. The European esports market, although still on the rise, is estimated to be worth only $1.44 billion, indicating that the region still has great potential for growth and development. This difference in market valuations highlights the dynamism of the global esports industry and suggests that there is room for further investment and growth in Europe (Duarte, 2024).

The esports market is indeed experiencing a dynamic boom, which is reflected in the growth of the number of viewers and enthusiasts. The number of global esports viewers has been increasing significantly over the years. In 2020, the global audience was 435.7 million, while in 2021 it increased to 489.5 million and in 2022 to 532.1 million. Interestingly, there is a levelling off between esports enthusiasts and casual viewers. While in 2020 there were 215.2 million enthusiasts and 220.5 million

casual viewers, in 2022 enthusiasts have already reached 261.2 million and casual viewers 270.9 million. This indicates that esports are reaching not only loyal fans, but also a public interested in watching games. The projected growth of esports enthusiasts to over 318 million by 2025, along with an expected 322.7 million casual viewers, points to the industry's strong growth potential. Esports is becoming a significant part of global culture and entertainment, and its popularity continues to grow. (Clement, 2025).

Organizing

Organizing (Table 1) is a management function through which, given the available resources, the activities and mutual relations of people (individuals and collectives) are defined, determined and ensured in achieving certain goals, tasks and objectives. Organizing can be understood as the process of creating and arranging the elements of an object and the relationships between them in space and time to increase the efficiency of its functioning in relation to the set goals.

Table 3 Definitions of organizing

AUTHOR(S)	DEFINITIONS
Maheshwari (1997)	Organizing is the process of identifying and grouping the work to be done, defining and delegating responsibilities and authorities, and creating relationships to enable people to work together most effectively to achieve goals.
Sedlák (2001)	Through organizing, tasks are established and assigned, procedures and activities are defined, which are then coordinated across organizational levels.
Badenhorst-Weiss et al. (2008)	Organizing is the process of creating a business structure that will enable its people to work effectively to achieve the vision, mission, and goals.
Gupta (2023)	Organizing can be defined as arranging several complex tasks into manageable units and defining a formal relationship between the people assigned to different units of tasks.
Pramanik (2024)	Organizing is the process of defining and grouping the activities of a business and creating relationships between them.

From a process perspective, organizing is a complex of activities that start from planning activities and move in chronological order to control activities. The activities of this process are (Hittmár, 2006):

- defining and grouping tasks that lead to the achievement of objectives,
- grouping these activities in terms of available human, material and other resources so that they can be carried out effectively and efficiently,
- delegating the necessary authority to carry out activities to individuals,
- mutual horizontal and vertical relationship of these groups of activities through subordinate and superior relationships and through information flows

Organizing as a management function fulfils the task of effectively achieving goals, which depends on the systematic arrangement of resources and relationships. The smooth running of an organization and the achievement of its strategic goals are essential for proper organizing.

The introduction of a proper management system brings many advantages to the management of a business. It facilitates the management of the business and the communication between the management and the employees of the business. However, a bad organization almost certainly hinders success because it creates many weaknesses- Important steps in the organization process are (Reddy, 2010):

- Setting goals: The organizational structure is built based on the goals of the enterprise, therefore the first step in the organizing process is to determine the goals.
- Grouping activities: This step involves determining activities and grouping them into departments based on their relatedness and similarity.
- Assigning duties to people: This phase involves assigning duties to different subordinates based on their specialization to ensure job security.

- Delegation of authority: Delegation of authority is necessary to create an effective organizational structure; therefore, authority is delegated to subordinates so that they can perform the assigned tasks.
- Creating relationships between authorities: After granting authority to people, the creation of organizational relationships takes place, which includes making decisions, such as superior-subordinate relationships, who will act under whom, who will be his subordinate.

Together, these steps ensure the systematic construction of an organizational structure, which is crucial for the effective functioning of any organization.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the article is to examine organizational processes and current challenges and problems in the Slovak Association of University esports and to propose options for their solution about the capabilities of this organization.

The main research method was sociological inquiry using a structured interview technique (Petersson a kol., 2022.). The interview was conducted with a member of the organization's Executive Committee, who is also the co-founder and vice president of the organization. Thanks to his active participation in the functioning of the organization, he provided comprehensive and relevant information regarding the organizational structure, division of tasks, fulfilment of responsibilities, and the use of time management in the organization's daily activities.

The interview was conducted in February 2025 in the form of a personal meeting. Due to personal communication, all necessary information was obtained immediately within one day. The main topics of the interview were aimed at identifying problems within the organizational structure and functioning of the organization. The discussion focused on finding out how the organization is structured, whether members have clearly divided responsibilities, how internal rules are followed, whether there are set deadlines and whether they are met. The respondent's answers were key to a deeper understanding of the problem areas and served as a basis for proposals for their solution.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data (Graneheim et al., 2017). The interview was read several times and then the key findings for the analysed area were extracted. The findings were not quoted or paraphrased but directly incorporated in the text of the thesis, referring to the fact that this is information from the interview.

3. RESULTS

The Slovak Association of University esports play an important role in supporting and developing esports activities at universities. Despite its ambitious goals and visions, the organization faces various problems that may affect its effectiveness and success.

Bad time management

The problem of poor time management in the Slovak Association of University esports is manifested in several key areas that are essential for the effective functioning of the organization. One of the main aspects is the absence of a person authorized to implement the marketing strategy. This lack leads to the postponement of important tasks, which directly affects the organization's ability to effectively communicate with its target group. Ideas for regular content for social networks that could strengthen engagement and interest in esports remain without a specific implementation date, which indicates poor organization and planning.

An example is the TikTok account that has been established but is inactive and without any content. This fact shows that even though there is potential for using modern platforms to reach young players, the lack of time and discipline in the organization prevents its effective use. Poor organization and lack of established discipline led to the fact that members of the organization do not have enough time to implement these activities, and thus time management becomes a serious problem. Without clearly defined time frames and responsible persons, the organization finds itself in a situation where important tasks are ignored, which subsequently disrupts its overall development and success in the field of esports.

The persistent problem with time management means that events such as tournaments and leagues do not take place. Lack of time and poorly distributed tasks mean that members of the organization are unable to prepare and implement these events. Organizational difficulties prevent the

organization from organizing interesting and attractive competitions that could attract players and spectators, so their implementation remains only on the level of plans. Within the Czechoslovak League, some aspects are already on the right track. The premises in Žilina are secured and the competition format is designed, which indicates that the organization has a clear vision. Cooperating organizations are also involved, which can strengthen the overall structure of the event. In addition, the resolved payment gateway is an important step towards ensuring the flow of registrations and payments. On the other hand, there is still a lack of sponsors, which affects the financing and marketing of events. There are also no definitive rules, which leads to confusion and problems in organizing tournaments. These shortcomings need to be addressed for the Czechoslovak League to be successfully implemented and attract the attention of players and viewers.

The organization planned to create a series of reels on the topic of cybersecurity in the gaming world, and this project was supposed to last 10 weeks. New content was supposed to be published every week to ensure regularity and maintain the interest of viewers. Unfortunately, no deadline was set, which led to the fact that real production never started, and the entire project remained only in the planning stage without any concrete steps.

Declining awareness of college esports

The declining awareness of university esports is a serious problem, which is related to the lack of promotion on social media. This organization should support and develop esports, but it does not use the potential of these platforms to reach students and the wider public. Without an effective approach on social media, such as TikTok, Instagram or Facebook, information about activities, competitions and achievements does not reach the target audience.

One of the main reasons why they do not promote on social media is the absence of an organized strategy for social media management. Without a clear plan and regular posts, the chance to create a community around esports and engage students is reduced, which contributes to stagnation and decline in interest in esports at the university. These platforms can serve as an effective tool for increasing interest, sharing successes and building the brand of university esports. Many students are not informed about what is happening in the field of esports at the university and therefore are not motivated to get involved. Unless an organization improves its social media, presence and creates a strategic plan for utilizing it, the declining awareness of college esports will only continue to deepen.

Poor organizational structure

The Slovak Association of University esports is struggling with a serious problem of poor organizational structure, which affects its efficiency and ability to achieve its goals. Although it has a defined organizational structure, in practice it is often not adhered to, leading to situations where individual members do what they want, when they want. This lack of discipline and coordination creates chaos that makes effective cooperation and planning difficult. Moreover, the rigidity of their structure reduces the flexibility needed to adapt to the current needs and dynamics of the esports environment. Since members do not have clearly defined duties and responsibilities, there is often an overlap of tasks or, conversely, the neglect of important aspects of the association's activities. All this leads to frustration and dissatisfaction among members who expect professional and effective management.

While it is important to have an organizational structure, the mere existence of such a framework is not enough if it is not supported by compliance with the rules and a responsible approach by all members. If the association wants to move forward and effectively support eSports at the university level, it must review its organizational structure and ensure that it is sufficiently flexible and functional, while focusing on accountability and collaboration.

4. DISCUSSION

The discussion builds on the main findings of the primary research, which revealed three fundamental problems in the activities of the Slovak Association of University esports: poor time management, insufficient promotion of esports activities, and a dysfunctional organizational structure. These factors significantly affect the organization's ability to meet its goals, engage the target group of students, and effectively respond to the dynamics of the rapidly developing esports market. The discussion therefore confronts the research results with the professional literature, allowing for a deeper understanding of systemic shortcomings and pointing out specific areas where correction is needed. The aim is to identify connections between practical problems and theoretical frameworks in the areas of time management, planning, organizational structure, and digital marketing, to propose effective recommendations for the future development of the organization.

In practice, the problem of poor time management in the Slovak Association of University esports is manifested by the absence of a person authorized for specific tasks, missing deadlines for the implementation of projects (e.g. reels on cybersecurity), unused platforms (TikTok) and repeated failure to hold planned tournaments. According to Prabhu (2021) and Pacovský (2006), these are signs of ineffective planning, poor prioritization, lack of deadlines and non-use of delegation of responsibility, which are key elements of good time management. Similarly, Drucker (2001) warns that without planning tools and clearly defined goals, the performance of the organization is significantly limited.

The research results also show signs that are characteristic of the quadrants of the Eisenhower matrix, in which the organization is engaged in activities that are neither important nor urgent, or postpones them altogether, which causes stagnation (Vetráková and Seková, 2004). The lack of motivation to complete tasks and the postponement of activities can also be partially explained by the phenomenon of procrastination, which is closely linked to a lack of discipline and planning (Calicchio, 2023). This combination leads to failure in the implementation of projects, even when the vision is present, as the case of the Czechoslovak League shows.

At the same time, one can observe the lack of use of basic task management tools, such as to-do lists or the Pomodoro technique, which promote regularity, division of work into manageable sections, and increase focus (Cirillo, 2018; Weeks, Chan, 2004). Failure to apply such simple techniques within an organization reduces the ability to achieve continuity and accountability in the implementation of activities.

From a theoretical perspective, primary findings from the organizational environment confirm that poor time management is a consequence of the absence of basic elements of planning, goal setting, and task delegation. However, it is also a complex problem influenced by psychological and organizational factors that require a systematic solution. By introducing effective time management tools, retraining members, and establishing specific responsibilities.

The main finding of the primary research in terms of decreasing awareness of university esports is the insufficient promotion of activities on social networks, which results in low awareness and engagement of the target group – students. This lack of strategy and activity leads to a weakening of awareness of esports at the university level. The presence on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram or Facebook is not systematic, regular posts and sharing of achievements are missing.

This problem fundamentally diverges from the development of the global esports market, which is currently characterized by a significant growth in the number of viewers and the popularity of online platforms. According to Clement (2025), the number of esports enthusiasts is expected to exceed 318 million in 2025, with casual viewers also exceeding 322 million. This growth shows that the target group (young people and students) is ready for online content and is actively seeking it. The absence of digital marketing thus represents a major missed opportunity to reach this rapidly growing community.

In addition, the strong market orientation towards the online environment and digital consumption (Statista Market Insights, 2024) further highlights the need for organizations such as the Slovak Association of University esports to invest in online communication. Without active use of social networks and strategic content planning, university esports remain on the periphery of public interest. Duarte (2024) also points out the large differences between developed esports markets (USA, China) and Europe, where the potential is still untapped - which further emphasizes the importance of promotion at the local level and building the university esports brand "from the bottom up".

The problem of poor organizational structure, identified by primary research in the Slovak Association of University esports, shows significant agreement with theoretical knowledge about the function of organization in management. The research pointed out that despite the existence of a formal organizational structure, its consistent application in practice is lacking, which leads to disorganization, unclear division of tasks and responsibilities, as well as a loss of motivation and effectiveness of members.

According to Maheshwari (1997), organizing is the process of identifying and grouping tasks, delegating responsibilities, and creating relationships that enable effective collaboration. However, this coordination and clear definition of authority and responsibilities are lacking in the organization. The result is a situation where members do whatever they want without control and guidance, which contradicts the definition of a properly functioning organizational structure.

Hittmár (2006) emphasizes that organizing also includes defining tasks, grouping activities, delegating authority, and building relationships within the organization. The absence of these elements in the case of the Slovak Association of University esports is manifested in overlapping or neglecting

activities, which creates chaos and frustration among members. At the same time, the organization's performance and adaptability to dynamic changes in the esports environment are weakened.

Gupta (2023) adds that effective organizing requires organizing complex tasks into manageable units with a clear definition of relationships between members. This is where the organization fails. The organizational structure exists, but without clear respect for formal ties and without consistent implementation, which makes functional management impossible.

Similarly, Reddy (2010) states that setting goals, grouping activities, assigning tasks, delegating authority and setting relationships are basic steps for an effective organization. In the Slovak Association of University esports, this process is not systematically followed, which leads to a lack of coordination, lack of motivation and inability to meet goals in the field of university esports.

The primary research findings clearly show that without functional time management, systematic promotion and an effective organizational structure, the Slovak Association of University esports cannot fully utilize its potential. Addressing these shortcomings requires not only the implementation of proven management tools, but also a change in the approach to responsibility, planning and communication. Only in this way can the organization respond to current trends in esports and operate effectively in the dynamic environment of university sports.

The research results also indicate the need for systematic digitalization of internal processes and the introduction of an information system to support the management of activities. It is currently shown that the absence of a centralized tool leads to lack of clarity in planning, weaker coordination and low efficiency in delegating tasks. The use of modern digital platforms would allow not only better recording and monitoring of task performance, but also more effective communication between members and a more transparent division of responsibilities.

The information system would be able to integrate event planning, promotion on social networks and organizational management, thus eliminating the shortcomings in time that are currently caused by a manual and uncoordinated approach. In practice, this would mean, for example, automatic reminders of deadlines, simple assignment of tasks to individual team members or a single place for sharing materials and feedback. Such a tool would contribute to reducing the risk of procrastination, ensure greater continuity of projects and strengthen the responsibility of individual members.

In addition, digitalization of processes would allow the collection and analysis of data on the organization's activities, interaction with students, and the success of marketing campaigns. This data could then be used in strategic decision-making and long-term planning, which is essential in the rapidly changing e-sports market. The introduction of an information system cannot be understood only as a technical improvement, but as a strategic step towards professionalization, higher efficiency, and the ability to flexibly respond to dynamic changes that are characteristic of modern e-sports.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, this article makes an important contribution to understanding the functioning of small non-profit organizations operating in the field of university esports, while drawing attention to specific weaknesses that hinder their development. The identification of problems in time management, organizational structure and digital communication points to the need for a systematic management approach also in youth and volunteer organizations. The article is therefore of importance not only for the association itself, but also for other similar initiatives in the academic and sports environment that face similar challenges.

The limitation of this study is primarily its qualitative nature and focus on a single case – the Slovak Association of University esports. Therefore, the results cannot be fully generalized to the entire university sports sector or non-profit organizations. Another limitation is the smaller size of the research sample, as well as the absence of a perspective from the external environment (e.g. universities, students or partners).

Future research is recommended to expand the scope to include more university esports organizations, or to compare the situation in different countries or social and cultural contexts. Quantitative methods could also provide broader validation of the findings and allow for more extensive conclusions about the connections between organizational factors and performance or engagement in university esports. Another important topic for further research is the motivation of volunteers and their managerial leadership in the context of a rapidly changing digital environment.

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Case study

Effective volunteer management at sporting mega events

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Abstract: The aim of the research is to analyse and compare management approaches to volunteer management at selected major sporting events. The research focuses on the analysis of volunteer programs at selected major sporting events, namely the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the Summer Olympics Paris 2024 and UEFA EURO 2020. The results point to the key role of volunteers in ensuring the smooth running of the events and highlight differences in their organizational models, motivation, age structure and benefits provided. The findings confirm the importance of quality recruitment, training and an inclusive approach, with the model in Qatar proving to be the most comprehensive. The research also shows that volunteering at sporting events is particularly popular among young people and that its effectiveness depends on strategic management and adaptation to local conditions.

Keywords: sports events, mega events, volunteering, sports management

1. INTRODUCTION

Sporting events are a significant phenomenon not only in the field of sport, but also in the social, cultural and economic context. They are characterized by a specific dynamic that combines competition, entertainment and community involvement. Due to their nature, they have the potential to shape the identity of regions, support tourism and reflect the values of society. The organization of such events requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that includes planning, operations management and subsequent evaluation of their impact. Sporting event management is therefore an interdisciplinary field that combines elements of project management, logistics, marketing and communication.

One of the key components of the successful implementation of a sporting event is volunteers. They play an irreplaceable role in ensuring its operation, not only thanks to their willingness to contribute time and energy, but often also with their professional knowledge and positive attitude towards sport. Their participation significantly affects the quality and atmosphere of the event, while their involvement depends on various demographic and social factors. Knowledge of these characteristics is therefore an important prerequisite for effective volunteer management and at the same time contributes to the overall success of sporting events.

Sports events and their management

Sporting events represent a specific category of events that combine competition, entertainment and community involvement. Definitions emphasize the temporary nature (Getz & Page, 2016), economic and social benefits (Razaq & Tahir, 2022), and unique elements such as the uncertainty of the outcome (Yazicioglu, 2020).

In addition to athletes and spectators, these events also have a significant impact on host regions, making them a tool for developing tourism or building national or regional identity. They can also reflect societal values, from inclusion to environmental sustainability.

Event management is therefore an interdisciplinary process that combines various elements from areas such as project management, logistics, marketing or communication. Each of the above definition's points to different elements of the i.e. different perspectives on this concept. On the one hand, the organization and coordination of activities necessary to achieve goals is emphasized (Bladen et al., 2022), and on the other hand, event management can be viewed as a process involving research, design, implementation, and evaluation (Goldblatt & Nelson, 2001).

Consistent implementation of management activities will serve to ensure the smooth running of events and minimize the risks associated with their conduct. Each of the individual phases plays an important role in the overall success of a sporting event. From the perspective of these phases, these activities can be viewed as pre-event activities for planning and preparation, during the event for managing planned operations and dealing with unforeseen situations, and post-event for financial settlements and recognition of stakeholders (Greenwell et al., 2019; Masterman, 2021).

Volunteering in sports

Volunteers at sporting events contribute not only their time and effort, but also often their expertise or passion for sport, and thus significantly support the quality and success of sporting events. The International Association for Volunteering (IAVE, 2001) defines volunteering in a document entitled Universal Declaration on Volunteering as follows: The right to freely associate and engage in voluntary activities, regardless of cultural and ethnic origin, religion, age, gender, and physical, social or economic status, where everyone has the right to offer their time, talents and energy to others and their communities, through individual and collective actions, without expectation of financial reward.

Volunteers can be classified as stakeholders in sporting events, where they play a significant role. Their structure may vary depending on the region, the nature of the event or the age of the volunteers. For example, according to the study Episodic Volunteering in Sport Events: A Seven Country Analysis (Okada et al., 2021), almost 23% of sports volunteers fall into the 18-24 age group. However, volunteering accounts for a smaller proportion of those aged 45-54, at 21%. Regional differences also emerged. For example, in India, all respondents were under 34 years old, while in other countries such as Japan, Switzerland or the USA, volunteers predominated mainly within the 40-50 age group. This diversity from different perspectives allows us to point out different motivations and availability for volunteers, depending mainly on demographic and cultural factors, which are also important to consider when organizing sports events.

According to the study Influence of Social Factors and Motives on Volunteering of Sport Events (Sharififar et al., 2011), 64% of volunteers were female, with an average age between 21 and 24 years. Most of them were students of physical education, single (71.9%), unemployed (53%) and had an average of 5 years of experience in sports. Each of these factors plays an important role in individuals' decisions to participate in volunteering activities in sports. The results of this study also showed that 66% of respondents are active in sports, while 34% of them are not active athletes. This data shows that most of volunteers at sports events have some relationship with sports, which suggests a connection between their own activity and willingness to engage in volunteering in sports. These factors such as age, gender, sports activity, demographic background, and others play a significant role in an organization's decision-making strategies for recruiting, managing, and motivating volunteers. It can be concluded that knowing these characteristics has the potential to make a sporting event run more smoothly through effective volunteer management.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the research is to analyse and compare management activities at major sporting events in the context of volunteer management.

The research was conducted through a qualitative comparative analysis of case studies. A case study is an empirical research design that aims to examine and understand one or more cases in detail in their natural context (Švaříček et al., 2014). The case study is taken as the main method for a deeper analysis of specific sporting events: Qatar 2022, Paris 2024, EURO 2020. The case studies were selected based on their timeliness and the size of the event as a possible example of best practice in event management from a volunteer perspective.

3. RESULTS

At the largest sporting events, it is necessary to use all available knowledge about their work and, based on the specific conditions of each event, adapt approaches to working with volunteers so that the sporting event is brought to a successful conclusion.

UEFA EURO 2020

The EURO 2020 sporting event was a special edition of the European Football Championship, which took place from 11 June to 11 July, and the volunteering activities therefore lasted approximately one month. The European Championship is an event that is typical in that each tournament takes place in one or two host countries. However, due to the pandemic, the tournament took place in 11 different cities across Europe, which was different from previous editions. Such a large-scale organization required the most extensive volunteering program in the history of this tournament (UEFA, 2021). Volunteers were assigned various tasks and functional areas. The most represented areas were as follow:

- Accreditation – control and management of access permits,
- Mobility and spectator services – spectator assistance and navigation around the stadiums,

- Transport – logistical support and transport organisation,
- Other functions – media, logistics, commercial operations, guest management and volunteer organisation.

This event involved approximately 12,000 volunteers working in different cities. For example, in London, 1,300 volunteers were deployed at Wembley Stadium. There was a high interest in participating in the volunteer program, with UEFA recording 37,000 applications, which meant a record number of applicants. The selected volunteers came from as many as 113 countries around the world and their age range ranged between 18 and 86 years (UEFA, 2021). The volunteers were required to complete a comprehensive training process, which consisted of four main parts (THEFA.COM, 2020):

- E-learning modules – providing online basic information about the tournament,
- Digital "Kick Off" of the event – a common introductory online event for all performance venues,
- On-site training – specific training directly at the match venue for everyone,
- Role-specific training – training tailored to the specific tasks of the volunteers.

Before performing the volunteering activity, all volunteers were provided with an official Adidas uniform, accreditation was carried out, and food and drinks were also provided. One of the benefits was also free public transport within the city zones for volunteers (UEFA, 2021).

FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022

The World Cup in Qatar saw the tournament organizers partner with local volunteer centers to develop and support a diverse, talented, and well-trained volunteer team. Volunteers were trained in areas such as first aid, customer service, cultural awareness, diversity, and other specific certifications. In this way, volunteers participated in various sporting and cultural events in Qatar.

20,000 volunteers were selected for the World Cup, including 3,000 international volunteers from over 150 countries, out of a record 420,000 applications. The selected volunteers were required to undergo training in a wide range of topics prior to the event, including accessibility, discrimination, diversity, human rights, substance abuse control, and waste sorting. Thanks to these trainings, they were provided with important skills and knowledge, which only strengthened their integral part in the successful course of the event.

For international volunteers, the organization also provided accommodation as one of the main benefits. It is important to mention that most of them were young, as up to 56% of them were under 30 years old, while among the locals, up to a third were in the same age category. Therefore, it can be stated that volunteering is a trend among young people and most volunteers at the events are under 30 years old. The overall age range of the volunteers ranged from 18 to 77 years old.

FIFA, the organization for the preparation of volunteers for these championships, designed its own volunteer program, which was launched in 2018 and allowed domestic volunteers to gain experience and develop their skills during various football tournaments held in Qatar. More than 10,000 of the participating volunteers were also deployed to support events such as the 2019 Gulf Cup, the 2019 FIFA Club World Cup, the 2021 FIFA Arab Cup, etc. The feedback and lessons learned from these pilot events played a key role in shaping the volunteer program for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. In March 2022, a few months before the tournament, the World Cup volunteer program was launched, with the 420,000 individuals from around the world registered. The Volunteer Center, located in the Doha Exhibition Center, served as the volunteer headquarters, where selection interviews were also conducted by long-term volunteers who had participated in previous events.

Given the variety of roles and topics to be covered at the tournament, a comprehensive education system was required. This education and training system focused on 45 functional areas of the tournament and prepared volunteers for their official roles. More than 400 face-to-face training sessions were held before and during the event, with volunteers completing over 1,300 hours of training. Volunteers had the opportunity to attend workshops and receive training directly at the championship venue. Team leaders participated in training sessions that focused on motivation and effective communication. An e-learning system was also available for international volunteers to help them keep up with their training even remotely (FIFA, 2022). The main tasks of the volunteers included activities such as spectator and guest services, welcoming and hospitality, catering, transportation of people, workforce management, and others (YOUTHOP.COM, 2022).

Volunteers began their tasks in September and October 2022. In November 2022, training moved to teams preparing to perform their tasks directly at the assigned stadiums or event venues. The World Cup lasted until the end of December, so the volunteering of the longest-serving volunteers could have lasted up to 4 months, while the event lasted only a month (FIFA, 2022).

Summer Olympic Games Paris 2024

The 2024 Summer Olympics were held in Paris from July to August, followed a few weeks later by the Paralympic Games from August to September. During the Games, spectators and athletes participated in more than 40 competition venues across France, including Paris, Lille, Nice, Lyon, Nantes, Bordeaux and several other cities. Volunteers were 50% male and 50% female, with 20% of them being international volunteers from more than 150 different countries. The International Olympic Committee did not provide information on the age structure of volunteers, but we do know that more than a third of applicants were under 25, which indicates a high interest in sports volunteering among the younger generation. Around 5% of volunteers were people with disabilities, as the organizers strived to make the Games the most inclusive in history (IOC, 2024). The age range was very wide, from 18 to 94 years (Hillen, 2024).

The organizers launched a large-scale volunteer program, which aimed to involve 45,000 volunteers from different parts of the world. The program began in March 2023, when the registration platform opened and more than 300,000 interested parties applied. From September 2023, applicants were informed about the selection/non-selection and about their assigned tasks. Of the total number of volunteers, 30,000 were involved in the Olympic Games and 15,000 in the Paralympic Games. They played a key role in ensuring the smooth running of the games by supporting athletes, journalists and spectators (Berkeley, 2023).

Volunteers in Paris had to complete a multi-stage training process. The first step was an online training that took place a few months before the games themselves. Subsequently, in May 2024, the volunteers collected their accreditations and uniforms and from the beginning of July 2024, they moved to their assigned competition locations, where they continued with specific training according to their specific tasks. A questionnaire was used to analyze the motivation and preferences of the applicants when assigning tasks, ensuring an efficient distribution of volunteers to suitable positions. The volunteers were divided into three main areas:

- Support for participants in the Games – assisting spectators, athletes and journalists with orientation, transport and logistics,
- Support for sports performances – assistance in sports venues, including handling equipment, timing and assistance with medical care,
- Organizational tasks – working with accreditations, distributing equipment and supporting the organizational team.

To provide a legal framework for the volunteer program, a Volunteer Charter was created, which clearly defines the rights, obligations and conditions of participation of volunteers. This document was created in cooperation with the French government and the Paris Ethics Committee and ensured the protection and support of volunteers throughout the duration of the Olympic Games (Petit, 2024).

Volunteers began to fulfil their tasks from July 2024, with the Olympic Games lasting until August, and the Paralympic Games until September, so the duration of their involvement could reach two to three months. Paris 2024 only further demonstrated the high need for volunteers at this event and continued the tradition of the Olympic Games with massive volunteer involvement. The proposed volunteer program not only contributed to the smooth running of the games but also provided volunteers with new experiences and skills that are useful in many areas. Volunteers at this event were considered part of the Olympic team and wore a uniform volunteer outfit designed in collaboration with Decathlon (OLYMPICS.COM, 2022).

Comparison of the analysed events

Looking at the described events, it can be stated that volunteering plays a key role in ensuring the smooth running of tournaments and provides irreplaceable assistance to organizers, athletes and spectators. In the examples that were analysed, it is possible to observe certain common features, but also differences in the organization of volunteer programs, in their scope, focus or opportunities that they provided to volunteers. The view of inclusion and diversity is also important, where it is necessary to highlight the Summer Olympic Games in Paris, where the organizers tried to have the most inclusive

Olympic Games with up to 5% disabled volunteers, which represented more than 2,200 disabled volunteers.

When looking at the structural view of volunteers, it provides room for comparison in terms of the number of volunteers, the number of countries they came from and their age range and the length of time they worked at these events. The aspects have been summarised in Table 1 for clarity, where the most accurate data on the age of volunteers was provided by the 2022 FIFA World Cup, where 56% of international volunteers were under 30. For the 2024 Olympic Games, the organisers stated that more than a third of applicants were under 25, but the overall age structure was not analysed in detail. UEFA EURO 2020 states a range of 18–86 years, but information on age proportions is missing.

Table 4 Definitions of organizing

	KATAR 2022	**PARIS 2024**	**EURO 2020**
Number of volunteers	20 000	45 000	12 000
Duration of the event	1 month	3 months	1 month
Maximum duration of volunteering	4 months	3 months	1 month
Number of countries of origin	>150	>150	113
Age range	18 - 77	18 - 94	18 - 86
Additional information about young volunteers	>30% of volunteers under 30 years	>30% of volunteers under 25 years	Unavailable

Based on this information, it can be stated that volunteering is popular all over the world and people from all over the world come to help at the biggest events, wherever they are held. Another interesting fact is that the volunteer component at sports events is represented in relatively large numbers by young people or the fact that the length of time volunteers work may not be directly related to the length of the event. Sometimes it is necessary to involve volunteers before or after the event, sometimes only during the event.

Motivating and especially attracting volunteers for their events also plays an important role for event organizers. In terms of benefits provided for volunteers, Qatar 2022 provided the best conditions, where volunteers received accommodation, food, transport and certificates. The 2024 Olympic Games and UEFA EURO 2020 did not offer accommodation, volunteers had to arrange it themselves, but they were provided with uniforms, meals, accreditation and access to public transport. In addition, closing ceremonies were organised at all events to thank the volunteers, which contributes to their motivation to continue participating in similar events.

Once the organisers had recruited volunteers, they needed to be provided with a certain level of education and training to ensure their maximum effectiveness. The extent of training varied significantly between the individual events. The most comprehensive training system was implemented in Qatar, where volunteers received up to 1,300 hours of training, acquiring not only organisational skills but also knowledge in the areas of diversity, anti-doping measures or human rights. Paris 2024 emphasised multi-stage training, which included online training, various on-site workshops and specific training according to the specific tasks assigned. The advantage of Paris 2024 was the use of a questionnaire that helped the organizers to assign volunteers to tasks according to their experience and motivation. The European Championships 2020 also had a well-structured training process that included e-learning, an online Kick Off event or specific on-site training, but the organizers lacked data on its overall scope and effectiveness.

The final step after the successful training and education of volunteers at these events was the specific assignment and implementation of specific tasks. At the World Cup in Qatar, a large part of the volunteers was also involved in catering, workforce management or guest services. In contrast, Paris 2024 divided volunteers into three main areas. Spectator support, sports operations and organizational

tasks, with an emphasis on personalized selection of tasks based on the volunteers' preferences. UEFA EURO 2020 provided standard volunteer tasks, but without significant innovations in the function allocation system, and these included, for example, accreditation, spectator services, transport, logistics, guest management, etc. All three events therefore used volunteers for a wide range of tasks, with the most common areas at all three events being:

- Accreditations – management of entry permissions and organization of access points,
- Spectator services – fan navigation, assistance at the entrance to stadiums and information centres,
- Transport and logistics – support for the movement of athletes, organizers, media.

Each of the models described had its strengths and weaknesses, and for the future, it would be ideal to combine the broad reach and diversity of Paris, the precision of Qatar's training and the flexibility of the EURO 2020 volunteer program, creating an effective and inclusive volunteer program that would ensure the smooth running of any future event, while offering the opportunity to volunteer to people with any conditions.

4. DISCUSSION

The research findings provide valuable insights into the practical aspects of organizing and managing volunteer programs at major sporting events, while also allowing for comparison with existing theoretical frameworks. The discussion focuses on identifying the alignment between theory and practice, as well as pointing out new insights that can expand the current understanding of selected concepts in the field of sports event management and volunteering. The aim of this section is to analyse to what extent practical approaches are consistent with theoretical foundations and what differences or new trends can be identified based on the cases studied.

First, the claim that sporting events are temporary and unique in their structure, while having a significant social impact, is confirmed (Getz & Page, 2016; Razaq & Tahir, 2022). Research has shown that these events attract thousands of volunteers from all over the world and serve as a platform for identity building and inclusion. The emphasis placed on the involvement of disabled volunteers in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games reflects the values of society and fulfils the assumption that sporting events can be a tool for social inclusion.

From a management perspective, the premise that organising a sporting event is a complex interdisciplinary process was fulfilled (Bladen et al., 2022). The individual phases, from recruitment, through training, to the actual assignment of tasks, were elaborated in detail in the research, with Qatar 2022 presenting the most comprehensive model with a training system that corresponds to the phases of research, design, implementation and evaluation according to Goldblatt and Nelson (2001). Although UEFA EURO 2020 did not introduce such advanced innovative elements as other events, it still demonstrated the effective use of volunteers for key operations, confirming the importance of coordination for the smooth running of the event (Greenwell et al., 2019).

Volunteer motivation is also an important component, which is theoretically linked to their relationship to sport, demographics and the possibility of self-realization (Sharififar et al., 2011). The research confirmed that a large proportion of volunteers were younger than 30 years, which is in line with the findings of Okada et al. (2021). The diversity of the age composition and origin of volunteers also confirms the need for culturally sensitive and flexible management that can respond to the different expectations and needs of the volunteer base.

The research also complements theoretical frameworks with a practical perspective on benefits, training and tasks provided. While theory reflects the need for volunteer involvement and recognition (IAVE, 2001), concrete examples show that the provision of food, accommodation, certificates or the organization of closing ceremonies have a significant impact on volunteer satisfaction. In this context, the importance of linking theory with practice is shown, where the consistent application of management principles and respect for the human aspect leads to higher efficiency and success of the sporting event.

Another key aspect confirmed by the research is the growing importance of digitalization in the volunteer management process. Modern information systems and digital platforms enable not only centralized registration and processing of applications, but also personalized assignment of tasks according to the skills or preferences of individuals. Thanks to mobile applications, volunteers have immediate access to schedules, instructions and announcements, which significantly facilitates communication and increases flexibility in dealing with unforeseen situations.

Digitalization also brings the possibility of continuous monitoring of performance and feedback in real time, thus supporting quick decision-making by organizers. Electronic volunteer evaluation and certification systems also strengthen the motivation of participants and increase the attractiveness of the volunteer experience. Analysis of data obtained through these tools subsequently allows for the optimization of future programs and the creation of predictive models of volunteer participation or satisfaction.

The integration of digitalization is therefore not only a technical tool, but also a strategic element that changes the way volunteer activities are planned, coordinated and evaluated. This trend can be considered one of the most significant innovations in the field of sports event management, contributing to their higher efficiency, transparency, and overall professionalization.

5. CONCLUSION

The research results underline the importance of volunteering as an integral part of the successful management of major sporting events. The article contributes to the expansion of knowledge in the field of practical application of theoretical frameworks and points out the importance of planning, training, motivation and diversity in the management of volunteer programs. A unique contribution of the study is the specific comparison of volunteer systems at three major sporting events, which allows the identification of good practices as well as weak points that can serve as inspiration for future organizers.

Despite these contributions, the article also has certain limitations. The main ones include the limited number of analysed events, as well as the fact that the research was based primarily on available secondary sources and publicly published data, which do not always provide a complete picture of internal processes. There is also a lack of a deeper analysis of the subjective perceptions of the volunteers themselves, their experiences and feedback on the entire engagement process.

Based on the above, several directions for further research can be recommended. In the future, it would be beneficial to conduct qualitative studies focused directly on the experiences and motivations of the volunteers themselves. It would also be appropriate to examine the effectiveness of individual phases of volunteer management, including training or the task allocation system, from the perspective of their impact on satisfaction and performance. Another recommendation is to expand the research to events of different sizes and typologies, which would ensure greater generalizability of the findings. At the same time, it is necessary to pay increased attention to the issues of inclusion, equal opportunities and sustainability of volunteer programs in sport.

Based on the comparison of theoretical knowledge with practical examples, it can be stated that effective volunteer management plays a key role in the successful conduct of sports events. The connection between a well-adjusted organizational system, considering human needs and a sensitive approach to diversity brings not only a higher quality of the event, but also a long-term positive impact on its social impact.

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