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**Sports Communication on Social Media:
Analyzing the Facebook Content of Czech
Professional Athletes and Audience
Reactions**

Dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation is aimed at exploring social media communication of Czech athletes, with a focus on the commercialization of their content. Its purpose is to analyze the subject from the perspective of the athletes who are communicating through social networking sites as well as from the perspective of their fans who are receiving their messages with both sports and commercial character. Although studies focused on athlete's communication on social media and audience reactions to it have been conducted in other countries, similar studies have not yet been conducted in the Czech Republic. Athletes' communication via social networks and its commercial potential is a topic of current interest. Exploring it is beneficial, and this work will expand the body of knowledge of the subject. It will also help to show the regional specifics of sports-related communication via social media and the commercialization of sports-related content. The research consists of two parts: the first is a content analysis of selected athletes' Facebook pages, which encoded data over the course of one year in order to preclude distortion of the results due to seasonality. The second part is an analysis of interviews with athletes and some of their representatives. Both parts are mutually complementary and expand understanding of the subject matter.

Abstrakt

Tato disertační práce se soustředí na zkoumání komunikace českých sportovců prostřednictvím sociálních médií se zaměřením na možnou komercializaci sportu v této oblasti. Cílem diplomové práce je analyzovat tuto komunikaci jak z pohledu sportovců, kteří komunikují prostřednictvím sociálních sítí, tak z pohledu jejich fanoušků, kteří dostávají zprávy sportovního i komerčního charakteru. Přestože studie zaměřené na tyto jevy byly realizovány v jiných zemích, v České republice dosud obdobná studie provedena nebyla. Komunikace sportovců prostřednictvím sociálních sítí s ohledem na její potenciál v kontextu sportovní komunikace jako celku je tématem aktuálního zájmu. Zkoumání zmíněných fenoménů významně rozšiřuje a obohacuje obor mediálních studií, konkrétně pak výzkum sportovní komunikace. Pomáhá také detekovat regionální specifika ve sportovní komunikaci a komercializaci sportu prostřednictvím sociálních médií. Výzkum se skládá ze dvou částí: první je obsahová analýza facebookových stránek vybraných sportovců, přičemž kódování dat po dobu celého roku vylučuje možnost zkreslení výsledků v důsledku sezónnosti. Druhou částí je analýza rozhovorů se sportovci nebo jejich manažery. Obě části se vhodně doplňují a dotvářejí celistvý obraz tématu.

Keywords

Sports Communication, Athletes' Communication, Social Media, Facebook, Commercialization

Klíčová slova

Sportovní komunikace, Komunikace sportovců/sportovkyň, Sociální media, Facebook, Komercializace

Length of the work: 405,729 characters with spaces, without abstract and appendices

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this dissertation using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my dissertation has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on August 29, 2021

Kateřina Turkov

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Introduction

The relationship between sport and (social) media continues to evolve with each part offering its own contribution. Sport provides entertainment, characters and fans, while the media offer the vehicle, narratives and audience (Carvalho, 2021; O'Boyle & Free, 2020). Within the last decade, sports communication has changed dramatically from the perspectives of technology, organization, finance and promotion (Novak, 2021; Pedersen et al., 2021). As Cornwell (2020, p. 14) stated: "We have been in the middle of communication evolution for some time now, but it never seems to end. We develop new preferences, new technologies and new priorities regularly."

In a figurative sense, the thoughts above characterize the process of conceptualizing and writing my dissertation. My relationship to the dissertation topic and my knowledge of sports (social media) communication, sports marketing and related theories, and disclosing requirements and rules for commercial collaboration and advertising on social media have continued to evolve as I continue to learn. Sport has been an integral part of my life since childhood and my interest in the subject led to me to my PhD. Studies although the challenge has been considerable.

The original research concept was aimed predominantly at the commercialization of the content posted by Czech professional athletes on their social media pages and involved a quantitative content analysis. Methodologically and ideologically, I was primarily inspired by US-based studies conducted by, e.g., Guerin and Clavio (2015), Hambrick and Mahoney (2011) and Pegoraro (2010). I planned to uncover how Czech athletes use their official social media pages for promotional and commercial purposes. The motivation for doing so was obvious. Firstly, similar work focusing specifically on the commercialization of sport on social media in the Czech Republic has not yet been done. Secondly, the previous researchers concentrated on a relatively short time period (e.g., a few weeks or months); hence I planned to collect and code the data for a whole year to precluded distortion of the results due to seasonality, which has been mentioned as a limitation in previous studies (e.g., Hambrick, 2012; Peetz et al., 2004).

In the first year of my PhD studies (2016/2017), I thought I had prepared (almost) everything. I had systematically studied the relevant literature and worked on the definition of variables for my coding book. Then, analogous to foreign studies, I choose the relevant social media for the area, Facebook, as a reference platform.

Consequently, I needed to prove how it works (and if it works) in reality. Thus began the “problems”. Firstly, I discovered that the narrow focus on the commercial content would not benefit the dissertation. The general style of social media communication of each athlete significantly influences their promotional and commercial communication, so it would make no sense to focus only on the commercial content without any context. Secondly, I wanted to include the audience reactions, which play a significant role in social media communication. Then I decided to explore the communication style of selected Czech professional athletes and the fans’ reactions on the athletes’ official Facebook pages.

Two short-term pilot studies were conducted between 2017 and 2019. In August 2017, a one-month pilot study of a sample of selected athletes’ Facebook pages was conducted. The principles of the coding protocol used in this research were applied (with necessary modifications) in a paper researching the communication of female skiers on social media (Macková & Turková, 2019). Those short-term studies confirmed that the chosen methodology would be effective in achieving the aims of this project. In 2018, data collection began. I manually cut and saved every post published from July 2018 to June 2019 on the official Facebook page of selected athletes in monthly intervals (three months after the publication), including the related audience reactions and comments. Before that, the sample of the athletes chosen for the research was finalized according to the criteria discussed in the Methodology.¹

During the process of collecting materials and coding, I re-thought my original intention to focus on Facebook communication only. Although the content analysis is aimed at selected athletes’ official Facebook pages, I decided to also discuss other social media in my research to illustrate the complexity of the selected athletes’ social media communications, albeit on a smaller scale. I realized that it would be beneficial to gain the opinions and views of athletes and their managers on social media communication, so I expanded my research plan to include a qualitative component in the form of semi-structured interviews. The potential respondents were contacted after the data collection period. After the necessary corrections, I am finally able to present the final form of my dissertation.

This dissertation focuses on two integral parts of the contemporary world: sports and social media (Carvalho, 2021; Rowe, 2004; Wenner, 1998). The key ambition

¹ See Chapter 2, Methodology (p. 42).

of the research is to uncover how social media is used by well-known Czech professional athletes from various Olympic sports disciplines, and also to consider the fans' reactions to the athlete's use of it. Special emphasis is given to the promotional and commercial aspects of the athletes' communications.

The dissertation addresses three research questions, inspired by the questions posed by Hambrick and Mahoney (2011):

- **RQ1:** How do Czech athletes use their official Facebook pages?
- **RQ2:** How do Czech athletes use their official Facebook pages for promotional and commercial purposes?
- **RQ3:** How do visitors to the official Facebook pages of selected athletes react to the content posted on those pages?

Before beginning the first phase of the research — the quantitative content analysis — nine hypotheses based on previous foreign academic research were formulated:

- **H1:** The intensity of communication activity by athletes on their official Facebook pages is greater during their sport's usual season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).²
- **H2:** Popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) use their official Facebook pages more intensively than do less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011).³
- **H3:** The Facebook pages of athletes who participate in mainstream sports will contain a greater number of posts than those of athletes who participate in niche sports (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).⁴
- **H4:** The intensity of promotional activity on athletes' official Facebook pages is greater during their sport's usual season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

² In this case, intensity means the number of posts published on the official Facebook page of a specific athlete during a particular period (more posts = more intensive Facebook use, fewer posts = less intensive Facebook use).

³ See Athletes' Popularity (p. 37).

⁴ See Dimension of the Sport (p. 39).

- **H5:** Popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) post more promotional content because they have the ability to gain more sponsors and earn more money than less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011).⁵
- **H6:** Male athletes mainly focus on endorsing sports-related products, whereas female athletes promote a wider range of brands (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).⁶
- **H7:** The official Facebook pages of athletes participating in extreme sports tend to have a more promotional character than the pages of other athletes.⁷
- **H8:** The audience (fans and followers) reacts more intensively to posts published on the official Facebook pages of popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) than less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Witkemper et al., 2012).
- **H9:** Negative reactions on the official Facebook pages of sportsmen are most often aimed at poor sports performance and results, whereas sportswomen are criticized more for their appearance or for personal reasons (cf. Lumsden & Morgan, 2012; Toffoletti, 2017).

The structure of this dissertation respects the standard rules for academic theses at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University. After a brief introduction, it begins with a theoretical part, where key concepts are defined. The impact of sport in contemporary society, the relationship of sports and media communication, and the marketing aspects of sports communication are discussed. This part also describes a trend in sports marketing toward establishment of tight, continuous relationships between athletes — and the brands and companies they promote — and their fans. Separate subchapters are dedicated to athletes' motives for using social media and the disadvantages of adopting that form of communication. Factors that may influence athletes' communication are introduced as well.

The methodological part that follows defines the methodological paradigm that was used. Each step of the research and the methods that were adopted — quantitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews — are presented in the context of media

⁵ See Athletes' Popularity (p. 37).

⁶ See Athletes' Gender (p. 38).

⁷ See The Adrenaline Factor (p. 40).

studies. After that, the hypotheses and research questions are restated. Then the concept and structure of the conducted research are explained.

The results of the research follow. Each athlete is introduced, along with his or her sporting history, use of social media, and the manner of that use. In a sub-chapter, “Communication on Social Media,” each athlete’s official Facebook communication over the course of one year are presented separately, in a structured way. The data from the quantitative content analysis is enriched by information gathered from semi-structured interviews with each athlete (or a representative) and his or her statements that have been reported in the traditional media. Graphs and illustrations help to clearly present the collected data.

The results achieved are summarized and compared in a chapter entitled “Comparison,” taking into account concepts developed in the literature review.⁸ The first part of that chapter compares the factors identified in previous studies that can influence athletes’ communication on social media, including Facebook. The second part is dedicated to the promotional activity of the selected athletes and problems with disclosing of commercial collaboration and advertising on their official Facebook pages. The third part describes athletes’ individual attitudes towards the use of social media for communicating with their supporters and fans and for other purposes.

The Discussion and the Conclusion provide answers to the key research questions and indicate whether the hypotheses formed on the basis of previously published studies were verified. The last part of the thesis reveals the differences in the social media usage of Czech and foreign athletes. In accord with the goal of this dissertation, in addition to describing and explaining how well-known Czech professional athletes use social media, their audiences’ (fans’ and followers’) reactions are also presented and examined.

The dissertation is accompanied by the Appendix, which provides the complete coding book that was developed and examples of how data was categorized.

⁸ See Chapter 1, Theoretical Part (p. 9).

1. Theoretical Part

The review of the literature and related materials began in 2016 when the author started compiling her dissertation project and continued to the final submission in 2021. Throughout this process, it is possible to identify four milestones which stand out in terms of summarizing the knowledge. The first of them came in May 2016 when the dissertation project for the PhD. entrance exams was prepared. The second milestone was in December 2018, when the author consulted the very first version of the methodological chapter. Another milestone followed the preparation of the core of the theoretical part for the small defense, which was at the end of 2020. The last milestone occurred in July 2021.

The sources of the information varied. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the dissertation, the author's search was not limited to academic sources, research databases, Google Scholar or specific journals, but sought for all reliable pieces of information. Concerning academic works, the author had the ambition to cover theory and methodology related high impact studies from the fields of sports communication, sports PR and marketing and athletes' and fans' uses of social media. Notably, the author did not omit narrowly focused research, especially studies with local impact. The author worked with various non-academic sources in the dissertation, e.g., electronic and traditional media outputs or webpages (cf. Berger, 2014). Press releases and conference talks related to the dissertation topic or current Czech sports or influencer marketing issues also provided valuable information.

The theoretical part of the dissertation is divided into three main subchapters covering the core approaches towards the topic. The first provides the context and highlights the importance of the sports communication field. The development of the relationship of sport and media as well as sports fandom are documented. The last part of the first subchapter is explicitly dedicated to the ongoing commercialization of sports communication.

The second theoretical section looks at sport communication from the perspective of marketing. The basic concepts and related theories such as sports public relations and relationship marketing are defined, and the shift of sports marketing to social media is discussed. Special emphasis is given to the examination of the disclosure requirements for commercial collaboration and advertising in Czech legislation.

The third subchapter of the theoretical part focuses on the athletes and teams and their motives for (not) using social media. Finally, this section is dedicated to the factors affecting athletes' communication and fans' perception of those communications that were considered in the research.

1.1 Contextualization and Development of Sports Communication

1.1.1 The Impact of Sport in the Modern World

Sport can be defined as an institutionalized physical activity motivated by a desire increasing fitness, personal realization, result, or performance (Seippel, 2006; Sekot, 2008). It represents an integral part of life in the modern world and cannot be separated from contemporary social and cultural structures (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Jarvie, 2013; Rowe, 2004). Sport is a leisure activity as well as a competitive opportunity (Real, 1998; Sekot, 2017; Slepíčková, 2014). Sekot (2017) and Jarvie (2013) have highlighted the meaning of sport as a part of mass culture. "Social change and sports development are related each to the other and, as with industrial societies, the system of sports is following the idea of 'modernization'," (Digel, 2013, p. 9).

Sport attracts public interest and influences values that matter not only within the field of sports (Sekot, 2008). Sport shows people achieving their physical and psychical limits (Jackson, 2013), glorifies winners as heroes (Rahman & Rockwood, 2011; Whannel, 2002), and promotes the ideals of health and fair play (Rowe, 1996). As part of pop culture, sport has a socio-emotional function as well as socialization, integration, political, and social mobility functions (Holt, 1981; Stevenson & Nixon, 1972; O'Boyle & Free, 2020). Moreover, Digel (1995) talks about the "sportification" of society. He suggests that society adopts sport's values and habits in its terminology, fashions, and behaviors (Rowe, 2004). Sportification takes place also in science, e.g. in the form of science competitions such as the Science Slam and the Grand Prix in Science (Carlson, 2019).

From the sociological point of view, sport is a structured, goal-oriented, competitive, ludic, and culturally situated activity (Delaney & Madigan, 2015; Guilianotti, 2015). In recent times, the ludic, playful aspect has receded in importance

as sport is rationalized and professionalized (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). The focus on performance emphasized at the top level of sports, and transferred in terms of so-called professionalism, nowadays dominates the whole of society (Sekot, 2008).

The benefits of sport in the modern world appear in many ways. On an ideological level, sport connects people from various countries and social groups (Dunning, 1999; Jarvie, 2013). Eco (1987) viewed sport as a “deep area of collective sensibility” (Eco, 1987, p. 160). And as Watkins (2018, p. 2) adds: “Sports still help bring people together, and as globalization increases and more people leave their homes and country in search of opportunity, sports are still an important component of keeping us connected.”

Sport has often had an integrative impact on the political sphere (Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Kunz, 2018). Furthermore, sports events have substituted for war in many instances (Dunning, 1999; Levermore 2008).⁹ Jarvie (2013) argues that sport has had an impact on the protection of human rights. There is pressure for equal opportunities for all genders, despite the traditional hegemony that masculinity still maintains in certain areas of sport (cf. Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Tejkalova & Kristoufek, 2019; Seippel, 2006). Sekot (2011, p. 175) observes: “Today, however, we can see that sport in many cases contributes to the emancipation process, particularly in developing countries.” Sport can be a distraction or a healer; hence it diverts attention from tragedies, as evidenced on September 11, 2011 (Mirabito & Hardin, 2021) or during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 (Krieger et al., 2021).

Levermore (2008) has stated that sport can be an efficient tool in the process of improving physical and psychological health. Sport also contributes to economic growth (Rowe, 2004; Sekot, 2017). Bill Clinton, the former U.S. President, has suggested that “football does more for poverty in poor nations than almost any other intervention” (Jarvie, 2013, p. 17). An important sports event can improve the economic situation within the host country. Some of the benefits result from sporting event tourism. This type of tourism can be motivated by the desire to watch or attend a sports event, the chance to meet sports celebrities, and the opportunity to visit the place

⁹ An example of sports-related initiatives which contribute to the possible appeasement is the summer soccer tour of FC Barcelona called “The Peace Tour”. The purpose of this initiative is to build the conditions for peaceful dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis through one of the most popular sports in the world – soccer (Kunz, 2018).

of a famous sporting event (Roche et al., 2013). At the individual level, successful sports careers help athletes from developing countries or first-world slums to escape from a “poverty lockdown” (Jarvie, 2013).

On the other hand, the influence of sport is not always positive (Anderson & White, 2017; O’Boyle & Free, 2020). Sport also has negative effects, e.g. health problems, violence, criminality, social and economic disparities, corruption, and the breaking of ethical and other rules. Sport can be a powerful tool for enforcing dictatorship, fascism, nazism, or extreme nationalism. Still, sport can also help with solving those problems (cf. Gems, 2021; Jarvie, 2013; O’Boyle & Free, 2020; Sekot, 2008).

Society and sport are changing. Boyle and Haynes (2009) and Sekot (2008) emphasized the rise of the commercialization of sport. It is obvious that professional sport has increased in public interest while it has sought the attention of the media and commercial sponsors. (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Sekot, 2008). The mass media pay enormous amounts of money for broadcasting rights and private companies are promoted by sports teams and athletes (O’Boyle & Free, 2020; Sekot, 2008). Boyle and Haynes (2009) noted that television, sport, and sponsorship create a sort of “sporting triangle” where interconnected entities influence each other.

Digel (2013) highlighted the importance of social networks in the present era, and deemed sport itself to be one of the essential social networks. Social media has enabled sports-related information to disseminate widely in society and has influenced journalists’ routines (Bossio, 2017; Boyle & Haynes, 2002; Hutchins, 2011). The medialization of sport has led to the rise of a new, coherent social group — sports consumers and sports fans (Digel, 2013; Slepíčková, 2014). Sports fans from various cultural, economic, language and political backgrounds can each have a similar kind of experience in real time (Rowe, 2004). With their shared experiences, fans of a particular sport or athlete often become a large and extremely loyal group (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wenner, 1989b). Sport can even be viewed as a substitute for religion, where the media have the power to lift an athlete to a “godlike” level.¹⁰

¹⁰ One example of this was the glorification of the Czech ice hockey goalkeeper Dominik Hašek after the Czech ice hockey team unexpectedly triumphed at the Nagano Olympic games in 1998 (Děkanovský, 2008).

The adoration of sports celebrities takes the place of religious rituals (Beck & Bosshart, 2003; Higgs, 1995; Sekot, 2008).

Jackson (2013) notes that sport is an important form of promotional communication within society. The aforementioned commodification and commercialization of sport only increased in the twentieth century (Orlowski et al., 2017). Since the beginning of the new millennium, some contend that sport is being “corrupted” by the (over) commercialization of sport across the world (Nicholson et al., 2015; Simmon, 2004).¹¹ As sponsors took priority over fans, sports communication began to lose its authenticity (L’Etang, 2013). Besides the “classic,” mainstream sports, special events such as the Olympic Games have long had promotional potential (Barney et al., 2002; Fullerton & Mertz, 2008; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011). Beck and Bosshart (2003, p. 22) stated that “the history of the modern Olympic Games has become a history of Olympic commercialism.” The rise of commercialization has occurred not only in landscape of professional sports, but also in amateur sports, such as college leagues (cf. Kunz, 2018; Schneider, 2010; Staurowsky, 2004).

Despite all the foregoing, sport is still largely considered a marginal, even unnecessary part of the social spectrum. That opinion applies to performances by elite athletes, sports teams, and sports organizations as well (O’Boyle & Free, 2020; Slepíčková, 2014). Based on the findings in the literature, as well as on her own research, the author disagrees.

Major sporting events such as the Olympic Games attract large audiences and many sponsors, and receive pervasive, worldwide media coverage (Billings, 2008; Delaney & Madigan, 2015; O’Boyle & Free, 2020). “To ignore sport is to overlook a phenomenon that extends into a multitude of social arenas, including the arts, mass media, the economy, the community, and international diplomacy,” (Delaney & Madigan, 2015, p. 3).

1.1.2 Sport, Communication, and Media

Media and sport are mutually linked. They have a complementary relationship, influence each other and are often referred to as the “sports/media complex” (Jhally, 1989), “mediasport” (Wenner, 1998), or “media/sport production complex” (Rowe,

¹¹ Whitson et al. (2004) pointed out that the tendency to commercialize sport wholesale began to appear in America around 1980s. Europe followed later on.

2013). The increasing popularity of sport depends on the development of communication technologies, and the growth of sports communication is influenced by technological advances (Carvalho, 2021; Cornwell, 2020; McDaniel & Sullivan, 1998). New technologies have always found their way into the sports field (Bernstein & Blain, 2002; Hancherick, 2011).

As Pedersen et al. (2021, p. 84) put it: “Sport communication is a process by which people in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor share symbols as they create meaning through interaction.” The dominant media for sports communication has changed over time (Nicholson et al., 2015). In the distant past, the written press was the first medium that regularly covered sports. The sports pages both reported and promoted the results of sporting events, and were enormously popular among readers (Beck & Bosshart, 2003). Beck and Bosshart (2003) suggest that reports published periodically by sports clubs and associations followed the traditional style of sports press coverage. The position of the written press is unique in the present era; the broadcast media have to pay sports organizations for the rights to cover games. All forms of media now have a reciprocal relationship with athletes and sports entities (Pedersen et al., 2021; Wenner, 1989a).

In the so-called “Golden Age of Sport” in the 1920s, radio broadcasts of sporting events became popular and complemented the established print media in reporting on sports (Hancherick, 2011; Nicholson et al., 2015). The radio allowed fans to enjoy the drama of sporting events in real time. Besides broadcasting games live, the radio interview became a popular genre. The audience now had a chance to feel the immediate emotions of the athlete in their voices and intonation (Beck & Bosshart, 2003; Carvalho, 2021).

The range of sports media communication channels remained unchanged until the late 1950s, when the network “television boom” began (Carvalho, 2021; Pedersen et al., 2021). The advent of television broadcasting brought the audience an impressive combination of visual information and sound, which gave viewers the feeling of being “on the field” with their favorite athletes (Beck & Bosshart, 2003; Rowe, 2004). The popularity of radio broadcasts decreased (Hancherick, 2011). “The phenomenon of mass consumerism of televised sport has created a much different feel for sport than in the past,” (Rinehart, 1994, p. 25). Due to televised images of young, fit, and attractive athletes, the popularity of the sport increased in the public eye. “The ‘ménage à trois’ — i.e. sports, media, and advertising — produced a highly marketable service:

showbusiness,” (Beck & Bosshart, 2003, p. 10). Pedersen et al. (2021) pointed out the expansion of the televised sport in the 1970s and 1980s, which was a direct result of cable television and specialized sports channels.

Television dominated sports media communication until the 1990s, when the Internet entered into people’s everyday lives (cf. Hardin, 2014; Rowe, 2013). The two main advantages of the World Wide Web for the public are immediacy and content control (Hancherick, 2011; Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014; McDaniel & Sullivan, 1998). Those qualities make the Internet extremely beneficial to sports fans, athletes, and sports organizations. The turbulent rise of the Internet is continuing. Besides the classic websites, discussion forums and blogs have been set up. The public is especially eager to follow the sports news on the Internet during mega-events like the Olympic games (Beck & Bosshart, 2003; Brown et al., 2020; Burch et al., 2012; Hambrick & Pegoraro, 2014).¹²

Another form of Internet communication takes place on social media. In the broad sense, social media consists of various Web 2.0 forms — “blogs, forums, message boards, online sites to share video and pictures, wikis, user-generated sites, and podcasts” (Pegoraro, 2010, p. 502). Fuchs (2017) noted that the social media support communication, collaboration, content sharing and building virtual communities. They have greater impact and are used more in the present era. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are examples of such modern social media (Watkins, 2018).

Nowadays, sports communication is undergoing a process of metamorphosis (Cornwell, 2013; Cornwell, 2020). The nature of new technologies dismantles physical barriers and helps mediate and enrich sports fans’ experiences (Gantz; 2011; McDaniel & Sullivan, 1998; Pegoraro, 2010). Social networks allow social interaction that is lacking during the consumption of traditional media (Cornwell, 2013). “Social media have enabled new kinds of connection between new kinds of users” (Meikle, 2016, p. x). These channels combine both public and personal communication — the public media and personal communication now converge (Meikle, 2016). Almost

¹² The 2012 London Summer Olympic Games were called the “Twitter Olympics” because social media users published a record number of tweets during this event. The number was even higher during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games (Hambrick & Pegoraro, 2014).

every sports entity has at least one public social media account (McKelvey & Masteralexis, 2011).

This shift in media usage has influenced the work of sports journalists. They have access to many sources of information, and their task is to verify them and create the cross-platform media content as quickly as possible (Bossio, 2017; Pedersen et al., 2021). The daily routines of mediasport consumers have also changed (Rowe, 2004; Smith & Stewart, 2015). People rely more and more on mobile phones and other technologies that allow them to extend the time they spend on social media (Meikle, 2016; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Viewing live video feeds and following real-time information have become commonplace (Clavio et al., 2013). Pegoraro and Jinnah (2012, p. 86) say that Facebook is “the easiest tool for establishing a branding strategy” in the sports world, whereas Twitter is “the most effective at fostering the direct fan – sport relationship because of its immediacy, intimacy and interactivity.” Facebook enables sports entities to build community and share new information. Cross-posting between Facebook and Instagram is also possible (Smith & Stewart, 2015).

1.1.3 The Development of Sports Fandom

Sport and sporting events have attracted public attention since ancient times (Sekot, 2008). The current form of sports fandom (a word derived from the word kingdom, in its sense as a space where people with common interests spend time and develop empathy and camaraderie with each other) began to emerge in the late nineteenth century. The values and conditions of sports fandom evolved over time (Tarver, 2017). In the sports fandom, fans are not just spectators (cf. Allison & Knoester, 2021; Wann et al., 2001; Wenner, 1998); they both “care about” and “practice in relation” to a sport or team (Tarver, 2017, p. 21). Lopez and Lopez (2017) argue that sports fans often participate in an “oppositional fandom,” which means that their position is defined by their opposition to another group of fans supporting another sport, team or athlete. Related attributes, such as rivalry and a desire to defeat others, are also ascribed to sports fans by Mastromartino et al. (2018). Watkins (2018) noted that in order to understand sports fandom, it is necessary to reflect both – fans’ and athletes’ – perspectives.

Dixon (2016) stated that many authors who examine sports fandom distinguish between traditional and new types of fans. So-called “traditional” or “genuine” fans are defined as sports consumers who are intensely devoted to and interested in a sport or a sports-related event, whereas the “new” forms of fandom are strongly influenced by commercialism and commodification, where fans perceive sport as a kind of entertainment (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Crawford, 2004; Dixon, 2016). These “new” fans are more attracted by success than by traditional sport or team values (Dixon, 2016). The traditional form of fandom was also more determined by the fans’ geographic location, something which is less important the era of the Internet and social media (Tarver, 2017; Watkins 2018).

Sports fans consciously identify with their favorite teams and athletes, who often become their role models and even their idols (Tarver, 2017; Hayes et al., 2019; Pegoraro, 2010). Social media give athletes opportunities to reveal pieces of their personal lives, unique stories, and their happy moments in an authentic way. They help fans to experience and understand the feelings and thoughts of their idols in depth (Billings, 2011; Pedersen et al., 2021). The new media enable more personalized experiences that are the key components of contemporary sports fandom (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Dixon, 2016).

“The number of sports fans using social media continues to grow,” (Bowman & Cranmer, 2014, p. 214). It is predicted that the motivation for consumers to engage with sports content on social media will rise with the continuous development of social media, as has already happened in the case of eSport video game competitions. Sports fans are attracted by the ability to share their opinions and interact on social media with athletes and with each other before, during, and after an event (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Brown et al., 2018). The use of a second device while watching sports events on television is called second screen watching, which mainly takes place through mobile devices. Sports entities have adapted to the fans’ behavior, for example, by creating specialized hashtags or social media competitions conducted during the games (Pedersen et al., 2021).

Despite some differences, all types of sports fandom involve a degree of repetitive practice (Tarver, 2017, p. 11). The community experience, previously determined by a similar geographical location, now exists in the new, virtual form of fandom as well. Sports fans share their opinions and feelings in groups or community

chats on social media. Fans can communicate in real time with their counterparts regardless of their location and time zone (cf. Haugh & Watkins, 2016).

The results of the studies of the phenomenon that have been conducted suggest that there are gender differences in fans' behavior, in both the offline and online environments. In general, men are more likely to identify themselves as more avid sports fans than women and non-binary individuals (Allison & Knoester, 2021). Male fans tend to react sharply, aggressively, and more negatively to setbacks than women, while female fans commonly support their favorite teams or athletes even if they lose (cf. Babac & Podobnik, 2016; Wenner, 1998).

The aforementioned facts specifically reflect the case of adult fans. Children's sports fandom is usually influenced by their parents' preferences and behavior, in which the father typically plays a dominant role. Sport can be the connecting element in a family such as when the family members visit or watch a sports event together and support the same team or individual athlete (Tamir, 2020). Contrarily, the conflict in fandom between family members, most often between father and son, can even jeopardize family relationships (Tamir, 2019).

To sum up, fandom and the fans themselves are the key elements that give importance and power to the sport. Sports fandom does not disappear in the course of peoples' lives, even if the form and level can change (Tamir, 2020). The relationship between sport and sports teams or individual athletes can contribute to building relationships between the teams' or athletes' fans and the sponsors or partners (Watkins, 2018).

1.1.4 Sports Communication Goes Commercial

It is clear that the commercialization of sport via social media, along with sports communication as a whole, is a topic of current interest. Although the phenomenon of commercialization has been recognized for many years (cf. Bourdieu, 1996; Cornwell, 2020; Watkins, 2018), it is now a crucial, fundamental part of mediasport practice and an active area of academic research. Real (1998) mentioned that the technologies that enable the commercialization of modern sport leads to a conflict: the traditional ideals of sport are eclipsed by the culture of consumerism. Real (1998) talked about this in relation to TV productions, but in recent times it is also occurring in the new media, social media included (McDaniel & Sullivan, 1998; Hutchins, 2014).

Nowadays, social media are no longer used only to establish and maintain personal contacts but also for offering and selling products and services using new techniques (Watkins, 2018). Kotler et al. (2017) compare social media content to advertising messages.

The monetization of sport has also increased since the beginning of the new millennium (Cornwell, 2013; Cornwell, 2020), although sports ads had already appeared by the end of the nineteenth century in the press (Peterson, 2021). Cornwell (2020) pointed out that gate revenues are decreasing as revenue from media and marketing rights is increasing. Additionally, athletes themselves can build up a huge social media community of followers that attracts sponsors and commercial partners (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012).

These trends are not appearing only in mainstream sports. In the last two decades, commercialization has come to influence sports disciplines that have traditionally been labeled as alternative, “adrenaline,” or extreme, like BMX, rock climbing, windsurfing, and wake-, skate-, and snowboarding (Edwards & Corte, 2010; Wheaton, 2004). Wheaton (2004) commented that alternative sports athletes nowadays are less critical of sponsorship and professionalism than they had been. Athletes promote marketable brands, and they are quite willing to “sell themselves” in exchange for financial compensation (Orlowski et al., 2017). Crompton (2014) warned athletes against the risk to their reputations that arises from the promotion of controversial products, e.g., tobacco, alcohol, and gambling. The connection of professional athletes with fast-food companies is also becoming unfashionable and may even be judged to be unethical (Crompton, 2014).

As Walsh et al. (2013) have mentioned, social media such as Facebook or Twitter allow their users immediate interaction with content. Those platforms are crucial channels for sports communication and building athletes’ personal brands (cf. Fuchs, 2017). Arai et al. (2014, p. 98) have defined “the athletes’ brand” as the “public persona of an individual athlete who has established their own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market.”

Celebrity athletes’ pages and profiles are among the most followed and most “liked” accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram worldwide, as well as in the Czech context (Socialbakers, 2020; Trackanalytics, 2020). According to Socialbakers’ statistics (March 27, 2020), soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo had the largest worldwide audience in the celebrity category on Facebook, and another

soccer player, Lionel Messi, took fourth place. The Czech Facebook celebrity leader is the soccer player Petr Čech; ice hockey player Jaromír Jágř (6th) and bodybuilder Tomáš Klíč (8th) are both in the “Top 10.” Ronaldo is the fifth most followed celebrity on Twitter worldwide. Amongst the Czech audience, the first five places in the Twitter celebrity category are occupied by athletes (soccer player Petr Čech, tennis player Petra Kvitová, tennis player Tomáš Berdych, soccer player Tomáš Ujfaluši, and ice hockey player Jaromír Jágř) (Socialbakers, 2020).

1.2 Sports Communication from the Marketing Point of View

1.2.1 Sports Public Relations

Sport has gradually become one of the world’s major businesses, while it has preserved its character as entertainment (L’Etang, 2013). Increasing attention is being paid to the area of sports public relations (PR). PR involves a systemic management function as well as communication (Stoldt et al., 2012). More specifically: “Sports public relations is related to both marketing and advertising in that its goal is to generate awareness of an organization’s product,” (Pedersen et al., 2021, p. 34). The motto once proposed for the Olympics by Baron Pierre de Coubertin — “Citius, Altius, Fortius” (faster, higher, stronger) — is slowly clearing the way for a new, more updated motto: “Faster, higher, stronger, bigger (business) and especially — more PR” (Tamir et al., 2015). Generally, none sports entity nowadays can afford not to do PR (Beech & Chadwick, 2007).

Sports PR operates in what L’Etang describes as two closely interconnected areas: the “sportscape” and the “mediascape” (L’Etang, 2013). The sportscape can be defined as the environment or conditions in which sporting events take place (L’Etang, 2013; Wakefield et al., 1996). In sports, the “mediascape” refers to the presence of sports, teams, and athletes in the media, as well as in other publicly available content such as promotional and advertising materials (Gamache, 2010; L’Etang, 2013).

In the modern world, advertising is not enough by itself; PR skills are required as well (Göksel & Serarslan, 2015; L’Etang, 2013; Tamir et al., 2015). Public relations is practiced by multiple actors and institutions in the sports field (Beech & Chadwick, 2007; Tamir et al., 2015). They include: “countries, local authorities and municipalities,

political parties, politicians, owners and investors, clubs and teams, athletes, sports agents, mass media, sports advancement organizations, sponsors, advertisers, coaches, referees, sports officials, athletes unions, fan organizations, gambling companies, health product manufacturers, service providers, electronics companies (including computer and content manufacturers), stores, the police and emergency services, merchandise manufacturers, sports memorabilia collectors, artists (primarily singers), universities and colleges and various, one-time interest groups.” (Tamir et al., 2015, p. 99). Sports PR professionals focus on traditional media, website management, social media content, organization of special events, fundraising, planning of promotions, and marketing sports (Isaacson, 2010; Nicholson et al., 2015; Tamir et al., 2015). The experts in sports PR are no longer just statisticians and information providers; they also create the public image of the sports entities through their presentation directly to the audience (Pedersen et al., 2021).

Whereas sports public relations includes the various activities mentioned above, sports PR teams often employ specialists in specific areas. For example, social media PR representatives in sports organizations have to plan corporate communication, determine the language used in social media channels, and evaluate and measure social media activity on their official social media accounts, pages and profiles (Tamir et al., 2015; Watkins & Lewis, 2014). They must also monitor the fulfillment of sponsorship agreements (e.g., the number of posts athletes make that mention their sponsors). Maintaining relations with sponsors and their partners has become crucial for athletes in recent times (Göksel & Serarslan, 2015; Tamir et al., 2015). Accordingly, a clear community relations structure is necessary for most professional sports teams and organizations. The community relations managers usually prepare and monitor the PR activities plan, which the PR directors should approve (Pedersen et al., 2021).

Sports organizations and individual athletes build their public images with their sporting results and their media outputs (Brown & Isaacson, 2017). “Besides attending games in person, sports fans use a wide variety of media including print, broadcast, the Internet, and mobile phones to keep up with their favorite teams and individual players” (Phua, 2010, p. 190). Even when an athlete can find no space in the mass media or has lost trust in journalists, he or she can publish statements on social media platforms. They can control the content and form of the information they provide (cf. Bossio, 2017; L’Etang, 2013; Stoldt et al., 2012). Additionally, social media enables

sports entities to receive direct feedback from their audiences concerning their image or the products and services they promote (Göksel & Serarslan, 2015).

Sports entities must keep ethical values in mind (Simmon, 2004). Even though the money “matters” and allows sports organizations and athletes to survive and even prosper, audiences and fans should not be manipulated or cheated by promotional materials (Bjelica et al., 2016). Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015) have warned against over-commercialization in the way sports social media pages are used for promotional and commercial purposes. Commercialization places more emphasis on the secondary, “off the field” monetary aspects of sport than on its “on the field” aspects (Wagg et al., 2009). Another issue is “abusing” sport with politics. For example, some political leaders attend sports events primarily to be seen by journalists and bolster their image in the public eye (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). Jackson (2013) has argued that it is essential for researchers to continue exploring PR, promotional, and commercial sports communication, and related trends.

1.2.2 Sports Marketing and the Shift to Social Media

As mentioned above, sport nowadays is tightly connected not only with society and the media, but also with the marketing industry (Devlin, 2017; Jackson et al., 2005; Jhally, 1989). “Sport utilizes advertising to promote its product while simultaneously offering an extension for other commodities to market themselves,” (Devlin, 2017, p. 312). The contemporary sports industry derives income from commercial sources, such as advertising (Cornwell, 2020; Ferrand & McCarthy, 2008; Jackson, 2013). Fullerton and Mertz (2008) defined four strategies used in sports marketing to make money: traditional sponsoring, venue naming rights, endorsements, and licensing agreements. Obviously, it is not only sports-related products that can be and are promoted through sport. Strategies for attracting the attention of sports fans to non-sports-related products or services have long been successful (Fullerton & Mertz, 2008; Lagae, 2005; Mullin et al., 2007).

Promotions and advertising can be done directly “on the field” through traditional media (press, radio, television, stadium billboards), and now, online and in social media (Devlin, 2017). The role of the traditional media in marketing is to deliver promotional messages along with reporting of sporting events, while social media marketing builds two-way relationships with the audience (Drury, 2008). Besides

the traditional techniques, “social media offer increased interaction, communication, and collaboration between organisations and individuals,” (Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015, p. 63). Posts on social media vary in format from texts, photos, and MP3s to video (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Participation on the interactive platforms is mostly free of charge, which allows every sports entity, including individual athletes and NGOs to communicate and promote themselves and their partners and sponsors with minimal cost (Johns, 2015; Pegoraro, 2010).

Sports marketing today relies on sophisticated, intensive, and fast communication. As a result, more person-driven forms of marketing have been incorporated into sports marketing and, especially in conjunction with social media, work well. One of them is celebrity marketing; hence well-known athletes “endorse products to transfer the positive image of the celebrity to the sponsor’s brand and ultimately to heighten purchase intention, which is expected to translate into action,” (Fink et al., 2020, p. 149). Thus, the connection between the celebrity athlete and the particular brand is beneficial for both partners: the athlete can gain more fans and be in the public eye due to the sponsor, and the company can profit from the athlete’s image and promotional activity (Fink et al., 2020; Mikuláš, 2020).

In case of long-term and successful collaboration between the athlete and company, the athlete can become the brand ambassador and help the brand attain higher profits (Kitchen, 2008; Novak, 2021). Brand ambassadors are hired by companies for various purposes, such as introducing new products and services of the brand, promoting the brand itself, attracting a new target group or improving the image of the brand (Novak, 2021).

In light of the facts mentioned above, social media shifts public relations strategies to seek future fan and consumer base (cf. Ferrand & McCarthy, 2008; Hejlová, 2015). Another change in public relations can be described as a shift “from media teams to team-owned media,” (Mullin et al., 2007, p. 23). Online and social media platforms are opening new opportunities for sports marketers (Isaacson, 2010; L’Etang, 2013), thanks to which, sports marketing is firmly established as a profession in that area (Mullin et al., 2007). Among other things, fans can follow the results and detailed statistics, look behind the scenes, and communicate with their peers on social media platforms during the competition. So, sports entities and corporate brands use social media as separate promotional tools and as complements to watching the games or races (Watkins, 2018). Thus, it is possible to observe the change

from a one-way form of promotion towards building relationships and partnerships with potential consumers (Cornwell, 2020).

The key task for sports marketing (not only) on social media is to engage fans and create added value (Manoli, 2017). As already indicated, sports entities successfully use social media to increase audience interest. If the entities interact more intensely on social media, it can increase sales and create opportunities for companies (Nisar et al., 2018).

1.2.3 Relationship Marketing in the Sports Environment

Relationship marketing requires ongoing retention and maintenance of the attention of a target group (Bourke, 2007). This approach can be applied to the sports environment; hence all of sports marketing is essentially relationship marketing. With the help of the media, sport has the ability to reach people even if they do not directly attend an event (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Zillmann & Paulus, 1993). Sports organizations and athletes can focus on the long-term building of a base of fans and sponsors through social media (Bee & Kahle, 2006). Additionally, Jackson et al. (2005) pointed out that virtual platforms are commonly used in sports marketing.

In sports marketing, the quality of the sports entity's or sponsor's relationship with consumers influences the consumers' intention to attend sports events, consume sports media, and also purchase official merchandise (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008; Kim et al., 2011). Maintaining good relationships with fans is essential for the corporate sponsors of athletes and teams. Ideally, fans perceive sponsors as credible partners and integral components of the image of sports entities, which motivates them to purchase corporate sponsors' products or services (cf. Burleson Mackay, 2021; Wang et al., 2012).

Kim et al. (2011) constructed a model of a quality relationship based on four values: trust, commitment, identification, and reciprocity. Their research proved that respect for those principles strengthened the audience's relationship with the sports organization. The values also matter in the era of interactive online media. The use of social media allows reciprocity in real time and in different places (Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Williams & Chinn, 2010). The sports marketing industry reflects this new reality and is focused on building relationships with social media fan communities (Irwin et al., 2008; Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). The shift

in emphasis to social media is providing a wide range of new marketing opportunities, whilst the increase in fans' engagement has already been recorded (Watkins, 2018; Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Many sports teams reach impressive numbers of followers on various social networks, and sports celebrities have become influencers (cf. Mikuláš, 2020). Cornwell (2020, p. 122) defines influencers as “people, who possess greater than average potential to influence others, are not necessarily celebrities.” The number of fans and followers of social media profiles of these individuals can vary from one media or network to another. The industry or discipline are also important (Novak, 2021). The influencer may hold sway over others based on their motivations, activities, interests or expertise (or somewhat like the celebrity endorser, based on their popularity), and this may be made public in many ways such as through blogging, social media or video posts. The influencers' communication should be authentic (Charlton & Cornwell, 2019). Sports social media influencers then present their lifestyle and routines to their fans and followers interested in the specific, sports-related content (Watkins, 2021).

Fan identification theory undergirds relationship marketing (Devlin, 2017). The concept arose from the more generalized social identification theory (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). “According to the social identification theory, a person defines their social identity with group membership,” (Watkins, 2018, p. 9). While talking about fan-athlete relationships, the identification includes, e.g., the feeling of solidarity with the teams or athletes, “us vs. them” mentality, seeking for information about teams and athletes, or higher level of optimism related to their “own” teams' or athletes' performances and results (Phua, 2010; Watkins, 2018). The intensity with which fans identify with a team or individual athlete is a consideration for potential sponsors (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Online news outlets and social media provide a way for marketers to cluster audiences into groups with the same interest, whether they follow sports entities' official pages or those of groups of sports organizations, teams, or individual athletes (Brown et al., 2013; Phua, 2010).

Of course, sports results are inconsistent and unpredictable in many ways (Mullin et al., 2007). Branscombe and Wann (1991), as well as Fisher and Wakefield (1998) have found that fans' identification with a team or athlete depends not only on results, but also on team or athlete initiatives that support their group interests. Such initiatives are crucial in periods of failure or losing streaks. They are common

in the social media environment (Johns, 2015). Relying on interactive media can contribute to an increase in fans' loyalty and their consumption of a particular sport (Brown et al., 2013; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). "Sponsoring teams, athletes, performers, and the arts provides the story, or the content for social interaction, that is lacking in many corporate social media attempts," (Cornwell, 2013, p. 12).

Surprisingly, loyal fans unreservedly support their favorite athletes and can identify even with corrupt and controversial sports entities (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Hartley, 1995). The audience may not appreciate an athletes' behavior "off the field," but supporters can still be attracted by the sport itself and by fan group cohesion (Fink et al., 2009; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). Fans who strongly identify with their favorite athletes see themselves as competitors in the sport just like their heroes (Fink et al., 2009; Phua, 2010).

Gender differences in the way fans identify with sports and athletes have been proven by previous research. Men tend to be fans of a sports discipline as a whole, whereas women are more likely to identify themselves with particular athletes or teams (Billings, 2008; Brown et al., 2013). Men watch sporting events on television more intently than women, but an increase in women's consumption of televised sport has been reported (Wenner, 1989a). Toffoletti (2016) registered a shift in women's fandom, caused, among other things, by a change in the global sports environment. On the other hand, female fans are still often dismissed as mere "groupies" or "puck bunnies" which humiliates them and insults their identification as fans on a symbolic level (Crawford and Gosling, 2004; Toffoletti, 2016).

Parganas and Anagnostopoulos (2015) have confirmed that teams' social media channels are efficient tools for engaging fans. Sports fans desire contact with their idols and eagerly follow them on social media like Facebook and Twitter (Billings, 2011, Watkins 2018). Moreover, social media gives fans a space for expressing their opinions and feelings. By interacting with their clients' fans, sports management teams can easily promote related products and services and boost their organization's economic results (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008; Johns, 2015). Over the last ten years, sports teams, individual athletes, as well as their sponsors and partners, have taken a big step towards more effective promotion of products and services on social media, while maintaining relationships with fans and supporters. (cf. Watkins, 2018).

1.2.4 Disclosure Requirements for Commercial Collaboration and Advertising in Czech Legislation

Sports influencers have become opinion leaders and contribute to the formation of fans' values, manners, and behavior (Arai et al., 2014; Williams & Chinn, 2010). In both the foreign and the Czech environment, athletes are among the most followed celebrities on social networks.¹³ As previously mentioned, sports have considerable marketing potential. Famous athletes become celebrity marketers who help to disseminate information quickly and easily (cf. Mikuláš, 2020). Corporations use celebrity athletes for marketing purposes because they are some of the most recognizable and encouraging public personas amongst the whole society (Brison & Geurin, 2021). Commercial communication frequently appear on team's and athletes' social media profiles and pages. Athletes influence their fans and followers in their purchase intentions as well as in their favorite sports (cf. Brison et al., 2016; Fink et al., 2020).^{14, 15}

In the context of social media, a disclosure is a statement revealing that a post promoting the sale of a product or service is the result of payment to the influencer or some other advantage he or she received. Whether or not to disclose commercial ties and advertising is currently the most pressing issue in the field of influencer marketing in the Czech Republic (FSV UK, 2019; Ortová, 2020). Although disclosing is

¹³ See Chapter 1.1.4, Sports Communication Goes Commercial (p. 18).

¹⁴ See Chapter 1.2.3, Relationship Marketing in the Sports Environment (p. 24).

¹⁵ Athletes were among the "TOP 100 Czech and Slovak Influencers," a ranking prepared by the Internet magazine *flowee.cz* in 2019. The sports celebrities included were (with their rank, their nationality, and their sport) Petr Čech (no. 5., CZ, soccer), Peter Sagan (no. 11, SK, cycling), Barbora Votíková (no. 52, CZ, soccer), Petra Kvitová (no. 82, CZ, tennis), Dominika Cibulková (no. 88, SK, tennis), Makhmud Muradov (no. 92, CZ, MMA), Tomáš Berdych (no. 93, CZ, tennis), and Karolína Plíšková (no. 99, CZ, tennis) (Dočekal et al., 2019). An older Forbes and Socialbakers list, The Seventy-seven Most Influential Czechs on Social Networks, took into account pictures and videos published on social media and also Facebook and Twitter activity and mentioned the athletes Petra Kvitová (no. 1, tennis), Petr Čech (no. 3, soccer), Zuzka Light (no. 4, fitness), Jan Veselý (no. 34, basketball), Jaromír Jágr (no. 42, ice hockey), Lucie Šafářová (no. 50, tennis), Zdeněk Štybar (no. 67, cycling), and Jaroslav Kulhavý (no. 76., cycling) (Forbes & Socialbakers, 2017).

common nowadays in foreign countries,¹⁶ Czech influencers are still struggling with the issue. Nevertheless, lack of information about requirements is not the most important reason for their inaction (Kokešová, 2018; Michl, 2018). “Covert influencer marketing is more effective, but less ethical – if you still believe in a society where facts matter,” (Hejlová, 2020). On the other hand, foreign studies proved that the disclosure of commercial collaboration on social media increases the trustworthiness of the sponsored entities (Burlison Mackay, 2021; Burns, 2021).

The blame lies not only with the influencers but also with the companies placing commercial content. Only eleven percent of Czech advertisers require social media opinion leaders to disclose commercial content they post in a sponsor’s interest. Half of companies leave the form of promotion and disclosure up to the influencers. In a significant number of cases, the advertisers prefer not to be straightforwardly featured in influencers’ social media content, but prefer it to remain in a covert, subliminal form (Ortová, 2020; Polzer, 2019). A research team from the Department of Marketing Communication and Public Relations (MKPR) of the Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University has highlighted the negative impact of subliminal promotion in social media on young people, especially when the advertising is for junk food, alcohol, or plastic surgery (FSV UK, 2018).

One reason sponsors attempt to hide their commercial collaboration with influencers is the strict Czech legislation on advertising. Advertising and sponsorship are mainly governed by Act no. 40/1995 Sb. on the regulation of advertising,¹⁷ and also by Act no. 634/1992 Sb. on consumer protection.¹⁸ Act no. 40/1995 Sb. bans some types of advertising and limits others, for example, advertising for tobacco products, electronic cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, medical products for human use, food and baby food, gambling, and guns (Act no. 498/1991

¹⁶ Despite that, Brison et al. (2020) discovered that some celebrities and athletes still do not properly disclose their commercial collaboration.

¹⁷ The full title of the law in Czech is “Zákon č. 40/1995 Sb. Zákon o regulaci reklamy a o změně a doplnění zákona č. 468/1991 Sb., o provozování rozhlasového a televizního vysílání, ve znění pozdějších předpisů” (*Zákon o regulaci reklamy a o změně a doplnění zákona č. 468/1991 Sb., o provozování rozhlasového a televizního vysílání, ve znění pozdějších předpisů*, 2020).

¹⁸ The full title of the law in Czech is “Zákon č. 634/1992 Sb., o ochraně spotřebitele, ve znění pozdějších předpisů” (*Zákon č. 634/1992 Sb., o ochraně spotřebitele, ve znění pozdějších předpisů*, 2019).

on the regulation of advertising and amending Law no. 468/1991 on radio and television broadcasting, as amended).

Act no. 634/1992 Sb. proscribes unfair business practices, i.e., deceptive commercial behavior. Section 5a (1) states: “A trade practice is considered to be deceptive, if in its factual connections and with respect to all its attributes, circumstances, and restrictions of the means of communication, it fails to state substantial information that is needed by the consumer in the given connection to make the decision concerning a purchase, and thereby causes or is able to cause the consumer to make a decision concerning a purchase that they would not have made otherwise.”¹⁹ In addition, the following paragraph implements a strict rule: “It is also considered to be a deceptive omission, if a seller withholds the substantial information stated in paragraph one or provides it in an unclear, incomprehensible, or ambiguous manner, or untimely with respect to the circumstances described in paragraph one, or does not state the business intention of a business practice, unless it is evident from the context, and if, in both cases, this leads or may lead the consumer to make a decision concerning a purchase that they would not have made otherwise,”²⁰ (*Zákon č. 634/1992 Sb., o ochraně spotřebitele, ve znění pozdějších předpisů*, 2019). If content is not disclosed, it is difficult for an aggrieved party to prove there was a financial motivation for a post, so influencers and their sponsors and partners are seldom under pressure from this legislation.

The Association for Development of the Internet (SPIR) is a Czech professional association active in the field of Internet advertising. In 2018, MKPR in collaboration

¹⁹ Original Czech formulation of the Section 5a (1) is: “(1) Obchodní praktika se považuje za klamavou, pokud ve svých věcných souvislostech a s přihlédnutím ke všem jejím rysům, okolnostem a omezením sdělovacího prostředku opomene uvést podstatné informace, které v dané souvislosti spotřebitel potřebuje pro rozhodnutí ohledně koupě, čímž způsobí nebo může způsobit, že spotřebitel učiní rozhodnutí ohledně této koupě, které by jinak neučinil,” (*Zákon č. 634/1992 Sb., o ochraně spotřebitele, ve znění pozdějších předpisů*, 2019).

²⁰ The original Czech version of Section 5a (2) reads: “(2) Za klamavé opomenutí se také považuje, pokud prodávající podstatné informace uvedené v odstavci 1 zatají nebo poskytne nejasným, nesrozumitelným nebo nejednoznačným způsobem nebo v nevhodný čas vzhledem k okolnostem popsáným v odstavci 1 anebo neuvede obchodní záměr obchodní praktiky, není-li patrný ze souvislosti, a pokud to v obou případech vede nebo může vést spotřebitele k rozhodnutí ohledně koupě, které by jinak neučinil,” (*Zákon č. 634/1992 Sb., o ochraně spotřebitele, ve znění pozdějších předpisů*, 2019).

with the Association of Communication Agencies (AKA),²¹ the Public Relations Association (APRA),²² the Advertising Advisory Board (RPR),²³ and the Syndicate of Czech Journalists²⁴ initiated and prepared recommended rules for cooperation between sponsors and influencers, which was subsequently approved by the SPIR Executive Board and published on SPIR's website. According to those rules, all advertising in a post should be visibly disclosed at the beginning of the posted content. Every user of the post should be able to recognize that it results from a paid partnership. The rules provide recommended wording for appropriate disclosure: "This product was supplied for testing by the XY company. . . ; This trip was paid by the XY company. . . ; This clothing was provided to me free of charge by the XY brand, etc.,"²⁵ (Samoregulace.cz [Autoregulation.cz], 2018). Creation of the rules was motivated by allegations that sponsors and influencers were violating the law on deceptive practices. The SPIR stated that advertising is often not adequately disclosed or is not disclosed at all (Samoregulace.cz [Autoregulation.cz], 2018; *Férová reklama [Fair advertising]*, 2020).

In 2019, Czech marketing and academic professionals created a working group focused on influencer marketing, native and subliminal advertising, and the disclosure of commercial collaboration on social media. The members of the group came from the founding institutions of SPIR: the MKPR, AKA, APRA and the McCann advertising agency. The goal of the working group is to create and continuously develop an ethical codex for marketing by Czech influencers with recommendations and rules for disclosing sponsors and advertisements (Ortová, 2020; Říman & Hlavica, 2019).²⁶ In addition, basic ethical rules for Internet disclosure

²¹ The Czech name is Asociace komunikačních agentur (*aka.cz*, 2020).

²² The Czech name is Asociace public relations, z.s. (*O nás: APRA [About us: APRA]*, 2020).

²³ The Czech name is Rada pro reklamu (*rpr.cz*, 2020).

²⁴ The Czech name is Syndikát novinářů ČR, z.s. (*Syndikát novinářů ČR, z.s. [Syndicate of Czech Journalists]*, 2020).

²⁵ The original Czech formulation of this part of the document is: "Například: Tento produkt k testování dodala firma XY..., Tento výlet platila společnost XY..., Toto oblečení mi bylo poskytnuto zdarma značkou XY apod.," (Samoregulace.cz [Autoregulation.cz], 2018).

²⁶ The code of ethics, titled in Czech *Férový influencer*, was created and then introduced at a press conference on September 16, 2020 (*férfluencer*, 2020). Because it was completed after this research was completed, the code and its consequences were not taken into account in this study.

are listed on the webpage called “Férová reklama”, which can be translated to English as a “Fair advertising” (*Férová reklama [Fair advertising]*, 2020).

Two informal initiatives have been taken besides the legislation and the rules published by SPIR. In August 2018, Czech influencers organized a Transparency Month (Měsíc transparentnosti). Some of the influencers promoted the importance of disclosing commercial collaboration, including barter transactions, and tried to convince their colleagues to do so (Kokešová, 2018). Another self-regulation mechanism was an Instagram account, The Influencers’ World (Svět Influencerů), on which issues of disclosing of advertising are discussed by marketers and influencers (Ortová, 2020; Vedralová, 2020). Some well-known Czech influencers, including Tereza Salte and Jonáš Čumrik, have presented their opinions on the issue in the mass media, or given talks on the subject at conferences (Ortová, 2020; Tauchenová, 2018; Tauchenová, 2019). Tereza Salte stated: “Scandinavia is three to five years ahead in these issues. When we established Elite Bloggers,²⁷ our goal was to push the Czech blog scene up to the world level,” (Salte & Tauchenová, 2019).

How to disclose paid collaboration, and how to do it so that it receives the maximum possible audience recognition, are also questions. A study undertaken by the MKPR department of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University showed that most children and youth were not able to recognize covert advertising on social networks, even if it was accompanied by a hashtag like #ad or #sponsored, because the Czech audience still has a problem with understanding English terms (FSV UK, 2018). CEO influencer Petr Sládeček stated the following in a discussion of covert advertising on social media organized by the Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Charles University on April 2018: “The #ad disclose is a concept imported from the USA. It is a mechanism of autoregulation adopted by influencers in reaction to discussions in the media. However, the disclosing of advertising messages is directly enshrined in YouTube’s terms of use; it is also required by Instagram, which deletes unmarked advertising content. But influencers don’t want to use foreign hashtags. The English hashtag #ad is somewhat alien to them,” (Sládeček, in IKSŽ, 2018).

²⁷ Elite Bloggers is an agency that helps to connect Czech influencers with sponsor companies, and develop marketing campaigns in a reasonable, ethical way (*Elite Bloggers*, 2020).

Experts in the law of marketing recommend mentioning the commercial nature of collaboration in the text of a post, or at least translating the relevant hashtag(s) into Czech (Kokešová, 2018; Ortová, 2020; FSV UK, 2018). Although the situation has mostly been resolved, it is clear that there will remain a “gray zone”. This zone would be reduced if the code of ethics for Czech influencer marketing mentioned above were fully respected by Czech advertisers (Ortová, 2020).²⁸ Overall, the level of ethical behavior in terms of disclosing commercial collaboration and advertising will still depend mainly on the will of influencers, promoted sponsors and partners to do so (cf. Burleson Mackay, 2021).

1.3 Sports Communication from the Athletes’ and Teams’ Points of View

1.3.1 Athletes’ Motives for Their Use of Social Media

“Interactive media are rapidly replacing traditional media and modes of communication such as newspapers, magazines, old-school television, and even the traditional telephone,” (Skalski et al., 2017). Social media gives sports organizations and athletes a powerful tool for informing their audiences independently of the traditional media and defending themselves against possible attacks by it (Hutchins, 2011). The use of social media by sports entities allows them to be closely connected with their friends and fans and provide them with authentic information (Hayes et al., 2019; Pegoraro, 2010). Hayes et al. (2019) have proved that communicating with family and friends on social media during major sports events makes athletes feel relaxed and helps them cope with stress.

“Through traditional media, athletes’ identities are largely scripted and presented through the lens of the sports team and mass media,” (Sanderson, 2014, p. 208). On social media, athletes can act as they like — censorship is required only by their own conscience. Social media gives athletes a space for commenting on current issues

²⁸ If enough companies and influencers sign on to the code of ethics, its rules will become legally enforceable, as provided in Appendix 1 of Act no. 634/1992 Sb., on consumer protection (*Zákon č. 634/1992 Sb., o ochraně spotřebitele, ve znění pozdějších předpisů*, 2019).

in politics or pop culture, for example (Lavelle, 2014; Sanderson, 2014). Sanderson and Kassing (2011) highlighted that athletes are inclined to publish personal information and act spontaneously on social media. In that way, athletes can build their own “brand” and project their preferred identities in a complex form (Clavio et al., 2013; Sanderson, 2014). “Specifically, if athletes understand their own brand personality, and how to portray those items on social media, there are a number of potential positive outcomes for the athlete,” (Blaszka et al., 2017, p. 2).

Professional athletes can celebrate victories, but they also have to overcome injuries and unsuccessful periods during their careers. Geurin (2016) highlights the importance of social media marketing strategy in this context in the sports field. If fans strongly identify with their favorite sports personality, the athlete is more likely able to keep their favor in spite of any failure “on the field” (Arai, 2014; Gladden & Funk, 2001).

The ability to communicate in the athlete’s own voice matters when a scandal erupts. If the athlete’s image is consistently good before the scandal, and they sincerely apologize or provide an explanation, fans are more likely to forgive them (Blaney et al., 2012; Cornwell, 2013; Kennedy, 2010; Sanderson, 2010). Social media offer a platform for expression of ideas and feelings in the individual’s own preferred way. For that reason, not many athletes pass up the opportunity to be present on social networks (McKelvey & Masteralexis, 2011).

Promotion is an essential part of digital sports marketing (Irwin et al., 2008). Sports entities use social media to promote products, events, initiatives, organizations, corporations and other people (Sanderson, 2014). Brison et al. (2016) especially highlighted the benefit of athletes promoting unfamiliar sports brands. Athletes also commonly became entrepreneurs while they were involved in creating movies or other products (Ratten, 2020). Besides its commercial purposes, social media is a powerful tool for supporting charity and corporate social responsibility (Kunz, 2018). Many well-known sports entities are involved in charity initiatives and promote them on their social media pages (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011).

As mentioned above, sponsorship has evolved from one-sided support by sponsors of an athlete into a mutual agreement between sponsors and organizations or individual sports entities (Abratt et al., 1987; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Pedersen et al., 2021). In the sports environment, as elsewhere, organizations and athletes are obliged to fulfill the sponsors’ requirements (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). In this era

such requirements more and more often include a duty to present products and services online and on social media. Hambrick (2012) reminds us that sports entities are able to promote products on social networks like Twitter. Sports organizations, as well as individual athletes, are launching new personal and commercial partnerships using social media (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Witkemper et al., 2012).

Furthermore, social media presence enables athletes to profit from new communication technologies and adjustments. For example, sports-related video content can be streamed directly through social media pages and profiles, e.g., by over-the-top (OTT) streaming or video on demand (VOD). OTT streaming social media services are provided by various social media, such as YouTube. VOD allows the audience to select the video content and watch it immediately on the computer, tablet, or mobile device. Sports entities use these opportunities to present audiovisual content to their fans (Kunz, 2018; Pedersen et al., 2021). Additionally, the virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) tools, e.g., specific filters, help the teams and individual athletes to deepen the feeling of closeness with the supporters (Goeber & Greenhalgh, 2020; Pedersen et al., 2021).

1.3.2 The Disadvantages of Using Social Media

Social media plays an important role in sports communication, not only in a positive way but also in a negative sense (David et al., 2018; Hambrick & Pegoraro, 2014). Social media are not as “social” as they seem at first sight. Bourdieu and Richardson (1986) defined social capital as a system of social connections and interactions between “insiders.” Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are commonly used for self-promotion and branding, but also for promoting paid partnerships with others. It is important that athletes maintain strong individual principles in this new social environment (Fuchs, 2017).

The presence of sports entities on social media leads to the commodification of their sports and has negative implications, especially for alternative and lifestyle sports. Lifestyle sports have traditionally been based on freedom and non-commercial values; hence an athlete’s commercial social media activity can erode the enthusiasm of his or her idealistic fans (Edwards & Corte, 2010). “Social media in combination with sponsorship is a vast expanse of both potential and risk,” (Cornwell, 2020, p. 103). To reduce fans’ anger caused by overcommercialization of sports entities’ social media

pages, Weimar et al. (2020, p. 1) recommends “releasing sponsor-related posts as videos on game days to decrease the fraction of negative responses and simultaneously maximize the overall reactions.”

The pitfalls of communicating independently can be challenging for sports entities. The nature of social media allows athletes to publish content like photos and videos spontaneously, without deep reflection beforehand (Geurin, 2016). The risk of releasing an inappropriate statement or controversial visual material is therefore higher than with other media channels. Moreover, sports and tabloid journalists nowadays use social media as a source of information for their reporting, which may have negative repercussions on sports entities in the traditional media as well (Billings & Hardin, 2014; Hutchins & Boyle, 2017; Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008). Sports reporters monitor Facebook and Twitter, among other social media channels, to find interesting or controversial content (cf. Novak et al., 2018; Sheffer & Schultz, 2013).

Other risks are also related to the character of social media communication itself. The digital dialogic communication was developed for two-way information or opinion exchange, which can be difficult to manage (David et al., 2018; Novak, 2021). The presence on social media requires athletes to accept not only positive, but also negative feedback (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010; Cornwell, 2020). Critical comments on social media can affect an athlete’s mood, personal life, and career growth. By their nature, social media tend more to encourage fans to express feelings of hatred, anger, or frustration than to suppress those “passions” (David et al., 2018; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). Besides supportive fan communities, there exist groups of people with nihilistic attitudes who enjoy attacking sports entities online (Sanderson, 2013). Trolling is a form of cyberbullying that consists of provoking and shaming. It has frequently been directed at athletes’ social media accounts (Lumsden & Morgan, 2012). Cases where the tenor and character of comments have even required police intervention have been documented (Lietsala & Sirkkunen, 2008). The athletes may also encounter comments produced by sock puppet accounts. These accounts look like profiles of common people, but instead they are administrated by PR professionals who are paid for their social media activity (cf. Hejlová, 2015).

Amongst other drawbacks, publishing content on social media and monitoring the pages and profiles is a time-consuming activity (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010; Pedersen et al., 2021). Additionally, it requires a great deal of imagination. David et al. (2018) and Witkemper et al. (2012) argued that the popularity of Twitter usage among athletes

is based on its ability to quickly and easily inform the fans. Popular social media is also used while second screen watching (Pedersen et al., 2021). Athletes ascribe similar advantages to Instagram. Another social media platform, Facebook, “beats the competition” in the complexity of the communication it can accommodate. All of the platforms constantly demand fresh and interesting content to keep users onboard an athlete’s pages.

1.3.3 Factors Affecting Athletes’ Communication and Fans’ Perception of Them

In previous studies, several factors that could demonstrably affect the way athletes communicate and the way their communication is perceived by fans have been identified. These factors are relatively stable over time, so we can call them descriptive characteristics. For the sake of clarity, descriptive characteristics can be further divided into two subgroups: athlete-related characteristics (including the athlete’s name and his or her gender, attractiveness, and popularity)²⁹ and sports-related characteristics (including the popularity of the sport, whether it is a team or individual sport, the presence or absence of an adrenaline factor, and the particular sports discipline).

Athletes’ audiences are another factor that can have an important impact on the style and form of athletes’ self-presentation on social media (Geurin, 2017). Billings et al. (2018) argue that sports have a wide range of fan types that vary with the sport, team, and athlete.

Setting aside aspects of social media audiences that are difficult to measure or that are not measurable at all, such as the political leanings of the majority of an athlete’s audience (Bourdieu, 1988), their incomes and education (Kim & Gower, 2017), or their temperament and mood at any one time, there are still audience characteristics and actions which can be described and evaluated.

²⁹ Many authors, including Billings et al. (2018), Gems (2021), Tarver (2017) and Winslow (2014), emphasize race as an important factor in sports communication. We did not include that variable in this research, because all the athletes in this study are white Europeans.

Athlete-Related Characteristics

Name of the Athlete

Athletes use the media, including social media, to build their personal brand (Arai et al., 2014). Athletes can use various strategies, and not every athlete is successful at building a solid professional image (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). Well-branded athletes derive many benefits, not only premiums in their salaries and promotional contracts, but also in their ability to maintain fans' support even when their performance has declined (Arai et al., 2014; Gladden & Funk, 2001).

An athlete's reputation is important because it is the way his or her personal brand is perceived. Watkins (2018) argued that the athletes themselves could be classified as service-based brands. When the name of a well-known athlete is mentioned, it instantly brings to mind the athlete's performances (athletic expertise, competition style, sportsmanship, and rivalries), their appearance (physical attractiveness, body fitness, and status as a symbol of their sport or another quality) and their lifestyle (life story, status as a role model, and personal relationships) (Arai et al., 2013; Hodge & Walker, 2015).

Athletes' Popularity

Previous research (e.g. Mutz & Meier, 2016) has found that an athlete's popularity is increased by his or her success on the sports field, but that it can also be affected by other factors than superior athletic performances. Factors such as physical appearance, temperament, and the athlete's personality can play an important role (Blaszka et al., 2017; Mutz & Meier, 2016; Wenner, 1998).

The popularity of an athlete on Facebook can be evaluated by the number of fans who visit his or her official page. This value is represented by the number of people who "like" the athlete's page as a whole. This approach to measuring popularity has been used by most of the researchers who have explored sports communication through social media (i.e., Geurin & Clavio, 2015). As previously noted (Geurin & Clavio, 2015), athletes in niche sports receive on average fewer "likes" than those in mainstream sports. However, notable exceptions exist, particularly if the athlete has an interesting life story, as is the case with the retired cyclist Lance Armstrong (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011).

From a marketing point of view, an athlete's popularity, as measured by the number of likes on his or her Facebook page, is quite important. Seng and Kear

(2014) revealed that “like” votes reflect not only audience perceptions and feelings about an athlete, but also consumers’ intent to buy the products he or she promotes. On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that a high level of popularity on a personal or organizational social media page does not necessarily imply that the athlete has a great deal of influence — or the opposite — as confirmed e.g. by Cornwell (2020) and Romero et al. (2011).

Athletes’ Attractiveness

Another factor that is closely related to the success and popularity of an athlete, is whether or not the athlete can attract an audience. That ability definitely depends on the athlete’s sports performances, but other talents have also proved important, for example writing style and the range of topics that the athlete can discuss with the public through an official social media page (i.e., Clavio & Kian, 2010; Frederick et al., 2012).

Even though the definition of attractiveness is quite similar to that of popularity, the terms are not the same. While popularity can be measured by the number of people who “like” an athlete’s page, attractiveness can be measured by the number of people who “follow” the page. Facebook followers are interested in the content of the particular page, but they are not necessarily fans of the athlete to whom it belongs (cf. Hambrick et al., 2010).

According to Chicotsky and Qiao (2017), the marketing value of a professional athlete among sports fans correlates with variables such as sex appeal, charisma, and social interactivity (see L’Etang, 2013). Stone et al. (2003) revealed that well-known athletes can also attract attention to themselves and their social media content by inappropriate behavior or by any kind of scandal. Obviously however, an athlete’s image, popularity, and value of his or her endorsement can be damaged by such transgressions (cf. Fink et al., 2020; Kelly et al., 2018; Rae et al., 2017; White et al., 2009).

Athletes’ Gender

As Wenner (1998, p. 38) argues: “The media are the prime sites for reproduction of gender definitions and gender relations, and media images of men and women in sport tend to follow prevailing stereotypes,” (cf. Toffoletti, 2016). Many scholars (e.g. Billings et al., 2018; Sabo & Curry Jansen, 1998) have blamed “hegemonic

masculinity” for the dominance of sport by male athletes “from access to economics to participation rates to media coverage” (Billings et al., 2015, p. 122). The male advantage in these areas is attenuated in the “Internet era,” while the increase in the popularity of women’s sport is recorded (Cornwell, 2020). Nevertheless, previous research using data on social networks has found significant gender differences in how athletes use social media and in their reasons for doing so (Burch et al., 2012).

Smith and Sanderson (2015) found that female athletes post a significantly greater number of photographs on Instagram of themselves actually performing their sport than do their male counterparts. That finding contrasts starkly with the conclusions of previous studies, which indicated that women athletes post photos showing themselves in mainly passive poses on their social media profiles.

Analysis of the communication of tennis players on Twitter showed, male athletes focus more on sports that in their promotional posts, while female athletes are predominantly brand-oriented (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). Surprisingly, the typology of male and female athletes in Lebel’s and Danylchuk’s (2012) research, which included types such as the “conversationalist,” the “sports insider,” the “behind-the-scenes reporter,” the “super fan,” the “informer,” the “analyst,” the “publicist,” the “superintendent,” the “fan aficionado,” and the “brand manager,” showed no significant disparities between genders. Research by Mutz and Meier (2016) also defied expectations. They revealed that the physical attractiveness of male soccer players is equally as important to their popularity as it is for female soccer players (see also Mullin et al., 2007).

Sports-Related Characteristics

Dimension of the Sport

All of the sports which are featured in the Olympic Games can be considered to be well-known (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Brown et al., 2020). However, sports vary widely in terms of how well-known they are. Several studies (e.g., Eagleman et al., 2009; Gee & Leberman, 2011; Pedersen et al., 2007) have discovered that competitors in mainstream sports such as track and field, football (soccer), ice-hockey, and tennis receive greater media coverage than those who compete in “niche” sports such as biathlon and speed skating (Bernstein & Blain, 2002). Consequently, one can expect differences in the number and form of commercially oriented messages that athletes from mainstream and niche sports post (cf. Kang et al., 2019). Geurin and Clavio (2015)

found that mainstream sport professional athletes were more likely to publish posts that benefit commercial businesses than other athletes. Their research also indicated that mainstream sport athletes focused more on promoting their sports and events. Contrarily, athletes from niche disciplines more often promoted consumer products and services.

Taking the above into consideration, it is important to distinguish between representatives of mainstream sports and those of niche sports in designing research. On the other hand, it would be absolutely wrong to think that the two types of sport have no impact on each other. For example, an increase in the popularity of rollerblading has raised the profile of ice hockey, especially among children from low-income families, as have new opportunities for summer training in various mainstream sports (Milne & McDonald, 1999).

Character of the Sport

Usage of Facebook's promotional potential can be affected by whether or not an athlete participates in a team or individual sport. Pronschinske et al. (2012, p.223) highlighted the opportunity Facebook offers sports teams "to capitalize on social connections by implementing and utilizing social networking service (SNS) strategies to bolster their value to relationship marketing." Team players often feel a kind of loyalty that leads them to post a large number of posts related to team events or sponsors. Furthermore, the teams themselves and their home arenas often include at least the sponsors' abbreviations in their names, which means that the sponsors are often mentioned by the players (Kunz, 2018). On the other hand, representatives of individual sports tend to post about themselves and are often forced to look for sources of sponsorship money by themselves. They therefore strive to maintain good relationships with sponsors and seek new forms of promotion that can give their commercial posts greater authenticity (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011).

The Adrenaline Factor

"Sport differs from other kinds of entertainment through evoking high levels of entertainment and identification," (Milne & McDonald, 1999, p. 58). According to Rinehart and Snyder (2003), extreme sports allow people who participate in them to experience the feeling of an "adrenaline rush." This state of mind can be achieved not only by the athletes but in some cases by spectators as well. That is one

reason why sports disciplines that seem uncommon, alternative, or dangerous³⁰ to fans of traditional sports are attractive to a contemporary audience. According to previous research, extreme sports disciplines provide the “adrenaline rush” as well as the presence of risk. “Terms such as ‘alternative,’ ‘action,’ ‘adventure,’ and ‘lifestyle’ are sometimes used to describe extreme sport, however, none of these terms categorically encompass what extreme sport actually entails,” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 2). Elements of competitiveness and closeness to the natural environment also distinguish “extreme” sports from “common” ones (Cohen et al., 2018). Extreme sports include base jumping, rock climbing, snowboarding, and whitewater kayaking (Cohen et al., 2018; Langseth & Salvensen, 2018; L’Etang, 2013).

Athletes engaged in extreme sports differ from athletes from more common sports in the way they communicate through social media (L’Etang, 2013). For example, Rhea and Martin (2010) found that athletes competing in adrenaline or extreme sports disciplines tend to be significantly more self-sufficient and sensation-seeking than athletes engaged in common sports. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between athletes from common sports and adrenaline/extreme sports.

Sports Discipline

Each sports discipline has a particular character and specific habits of its own. Considering the diversity of the rules and the environments of different sports, a specific communication style can be identified for each, along with a special language or slang (Pedersen et al., 2007). It can be assumed that the representatives of different disciplines use the communication and marketing potential of Facebook differently, depending on the nature of their sport.³¹ Detecting variations in sports communication on social media, based on the sports discipline, is useful and necessary.

³⁰ It is crucial to distinguish between adrenaline/extreme sports and dangerous sports. For example, marathon running and polo are not usually considered to be adrenaline/extreme sports, even though they are potentially dangerous (Russell, 2012). The feeling of an “adrenaline rush” is more tightly connected with adrenaline/extreme sports than it is with other sports disciplines that can nevertheless be dangerous, like marathon running and polo.

³¹ For example, cyclists use their social media profiles to discuss racetrack conditions, their physical condition, and to give fans a behind-the-scenes look at their competitions. (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010).

2. Methodology

As is outlined in the introduction, the mixed-method approach was applied to the research, specifically, a sequential mixed method design was used (cf. Creswell, 2014). The first subchapter explains the advantages of this approach and possible modifications. The following two subchapters describe the methods which took part in this dissertation research, quantitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, examples of sports-related studies which were relevant to this work and which adopted these methods are mentioned.

The last and most important section of the methodological part introduces the concept for researching Czech athletes' communication through social media and audience reactions. The research questions and hypotheses are set, and both phases are recorded in detail. The author talks about the benefits, risks and limitations of her approach; which should be taken into consideration in the case of replication of the research or interpretation of the results.

2.1 Mixed Method Approach

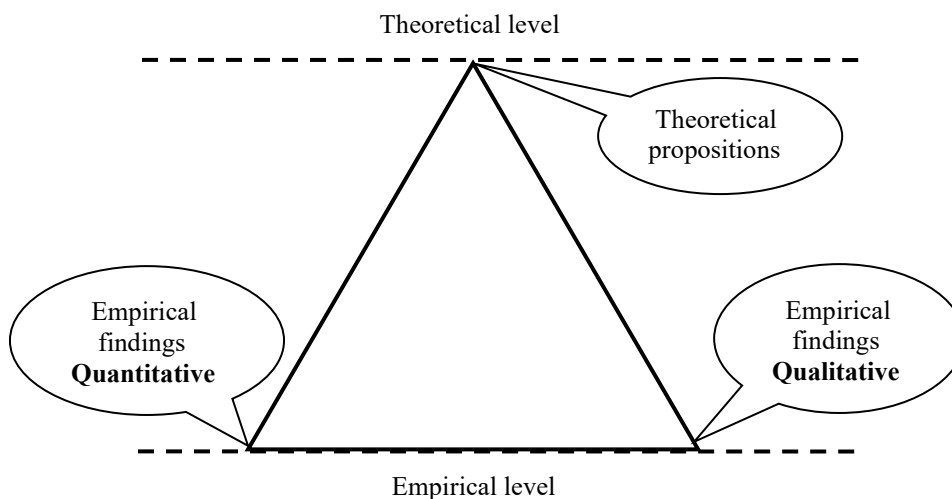
In the dissertation, the author employed a mixed method approach to the research in order to “triangulate” and ensure that information was obtained from different data sources (Creswell, 2014; Hussein, 2009; Morse, 1991). Many researchers believe that the application of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a research study is beneficial and leads to more relevant and elaborate findings (Berger, 2014; Bergman, 2008; Lund, 2012; Williams, 2000). “Mixed methods research is more able to answer certain complex research questions than qualitative or quantitative research in isolation,” (Lund, 2012, p. 157).

Previous studies have documented that there is still a limited number of papers focusing on sports communication, management and marketing that adopt the mixed method approach (Abeza et al., 2015a; Rudd & Burke Johnson, 2010). “Despite mixed methods' increasing acceptance, there is a lack of formal articulation of its state and utilization in the field of sport marketing,” (Abeza et al., 2015a, p. 40). On the other hand, the mediasport studies combining quantitative and qualitative methods were undertaken in the recent years (e.g. Solves et al., 2019; Yim et al., 2020).

The mixed method approach is an extension of the traditional single-method research that rejects the “dogma” that quantitative and qualitative methods should not be combined (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Sale et al., 2002). Combining quantitative and qualitative methods provides a more precise picture of phenomena by capitalizing on the strengths of each approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Östlund et al., 2010). Mixed methods allow validation of data obtained by one approach with the results of the other (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). On the other hand, there is a risk that contradictory findings can require revision of previous knowledge and reworking of hypotheses. Moreover, an entirely new research theory may need to be constructed (Creswell, 2014; Lund, 2012).

The key advantage of the mixed method approach is “triangulation.” Triangulation refers to comparing and improving the precision of information obtained by using two or more research paradigms (Morse, 1991; Lund, 2012; Östlund et al., 2010). Gratton and Jones (2010) defined some types of triangulation used in sports studies, i.e. triangulation of data, investigation, and theory. Erzberger and Kelle’s (2003) triangulation model (the triangulation triangle) is outlined below (see Figure 1). The sides of the triangle show the relationship between the items on the peaks.

Figure 1: Illustrating the Triangulation Triangle



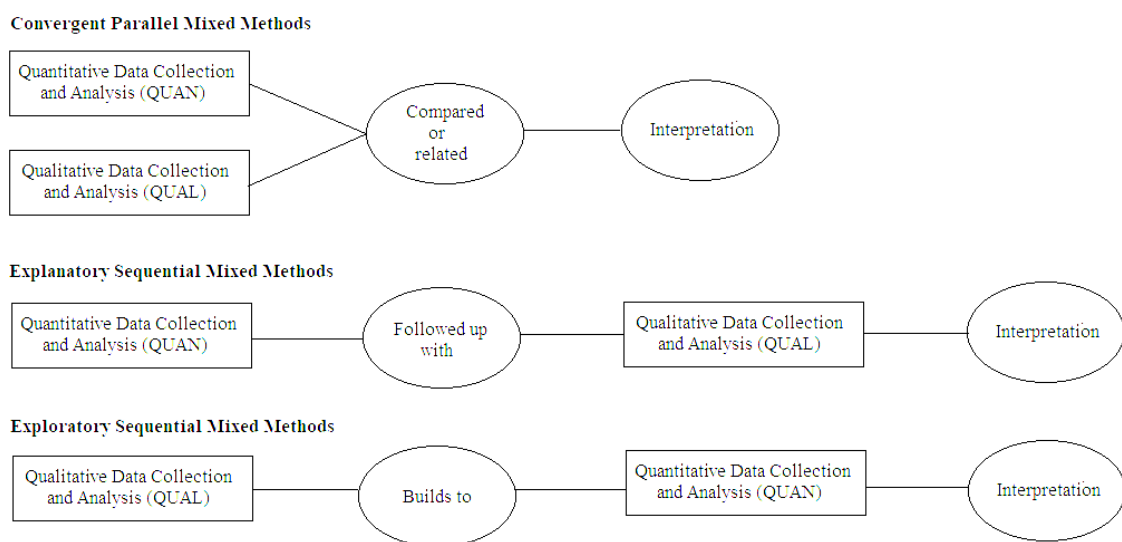
Source: Erzberger and Kelle, 2003; Author's own design

“When qualitative and quantitative methods are mixed in a single study, one method is usually given priority over the other,” (Östlund et al., 2010). Giving one method priority could mean applying one method before another. Whether to use triangulation depends

on the researcher's preference, philosophical position and, last but not least, the character of the phenomena (Abeza et al., 2015a; Hussein, 2009).

Creswell (2014) identified and discussed three basic types of mixed-method research design (see Figure 2). In Figure 2, the abbreviations QUAN or QUAL indicate which method(s) are emphasized. Arrows indicate the flow of the data collected through subsequent research stages. In the case of the convergent parallel mixed method model, qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed simultaneously (Creswell, 2014).

Figure 2: Three Basic Designs of Mixed Method Research



Source: Creswell, 2014, p. 270; Author's own design

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006) noted that when research has begun, it is not always possible to predict whether or not both quantitative and qualitative data will be needed to explain a phenomenon. The value of each approach depends on the nature of the research. Convergent parallel mixed methods are useful for comparing the perspectives provided by quantitative and qualitative data. When in-depth understanding of data derived from the quantitative method is needed, an explanatory, sequential mixed method design can help to explain the quantitative results using qualitative data. Sequential use of different methods allows better measurement of a population sample (Creswell, 2014).

2.2 Quantitative Content Analysis

Quantitative content analysis is a non-intrusive method that can be applied to various subjects and materials, including sports media communication (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Riffe et al., 2005). Media content analysis, a sub-discipline of content analysis, is a well-established research method and has been commonly used since the late 1920s (Macnamara, 2002). Riffe et al. (2005) have provided a comprehensive definition of the method: “Quantitative content analysis is the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption,” (Riffe et al., 2005, p. 25).

“Systematic and replicable” means that the step-by-step workflow of a method can be recreated, applied and replicated, and the results proven (McLeod and Tichenor, 2003). The communication to be studied can come in various forms, and in many channels. “Symbols” mean both online and offline content, visual material, and content from broadcasting, film, and sound recordings (Bell, 2001; Krippendorff, 1989; Riffe et al., 2005).

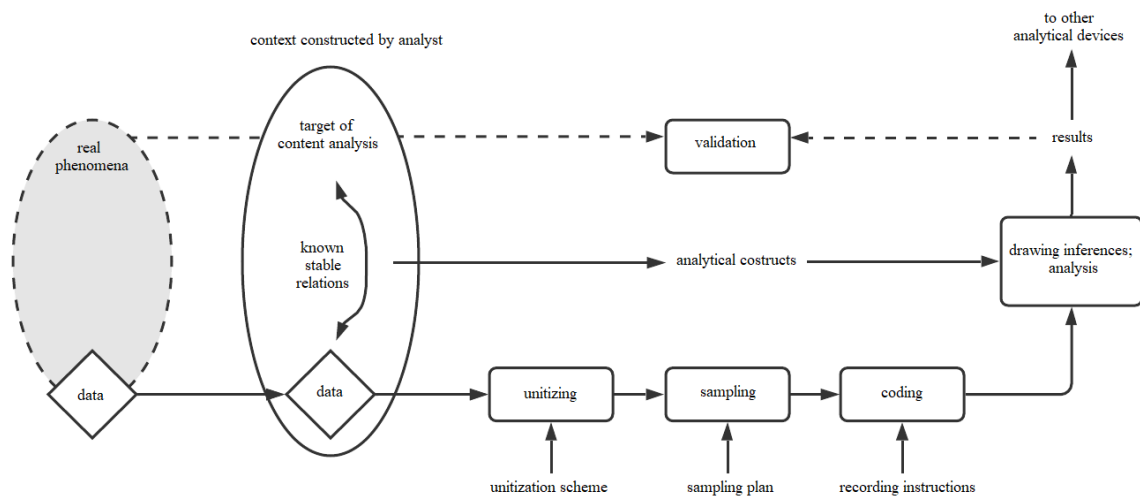
Two substantive goals of content analysis are reliability and validity. When evaluating reliability and validity, one must consider stability (intra-researcher variability) and reproducibility (inter-researcher variability). Stability means that a coder’s interpretation of a unit of data remains the same over time. Reproducibility, within a particular research project, means that two or more independent coders classify a symbol of communication in the same way (Perri 6 & Bellamy, 2012; Stemler, 2000). Reliability and validity can be controlled in project meetings or by testing (Lombard et al., 2002; Riffe et al., 2005).³² Skalski et al. (2017) argued that the ongoing transition from the use of classic “paper” coding sheets to electronic formats is helping researchers to perform their subsequent analyses and also to check for inter-researcher reliability. The set of variables chosen must

³² The commonly used tests of inter-researcher reliability are Holsti’s Method, Scott’s Pi, Cohen’s Kappa, and Krippendorff’s Alpha (Cohen, 1960; Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1989; Riffe et al., 2005; Scott, 1955).

correspond with the purpose of the study, so that the results are not misleading (Perri 6 & Bellamy, 2012). This can also be tested (Riffe et al., 2005).

Quantitative content analysis follows a set of steps that overlap each other (Berger, 2014). The scheme for the content analysis research process designed by Krippendorff (1989, p. 406) is outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Content Analysis Research Process



Source: Krippendorff, 1989, p. 406; Author's own design

First, the researcher must map out the area of research interest. A thorough review of theory and the existing knowledge about the subject matter must be developed. Specific research questions and hypotheses can then be proposed (Riffe et al., 2005).

After the orientation and data collection period, the research material is unitized, sampled, and coded. Macnamara (2002) stated that the sampling used in media content analysis can be systematic (choosing every N-th unit from the total population of media outputs), purposive (selecting all of the outcomes from media sources that are deemed important), quota-based (choosing a proportional percentage of media outcomes from each region or area included in the study), or stratified composite (units are randomly selected from particular days or weeks in the period studied). Every sampling method can be useful in its own way for achieving the objectives of a study. In many cases, purposive sampling with a focus on the most relevant media will be the best option (Macnamara, 2002).

Coding can be done by hand, by human coders, or by computers. Both techniques have their own strengths and weaknesses. Human coders are more able to detect "hidden" meanings, such as irony in speech. Computer processing eliminates reliability problems, but it cannot be applied to all fields of research. Where it can,

the consistency of the computer coding over the manual coding process is crucial (Sjøvaag & Stavelin, 2012). A clear coding protocol (code book) and a well-arranged coding sheet (or coding list) help in fulfilling this task (Macnamara, 2002; Riffe et al., 2005).

Krippendorff (1989) pointed out that drawing inferences is an essential component of proper content analysis. This step involves the summarization of research results and indicating how the findings relate to the current state of knowledge in the research field(s). The results of the whole process must be validated, and the researcher should state whether the analysis ultimately contributes to the state of knowledge about the phenomena under study (Bell, 2001; Krippendorff, 1989; Riffe et al., 2005).

Archiving the collected data is important both for the coding process itself and for reproducing the analysis as needed. There are many traditional means for archiving data, and nowadays new technologies are being used as well. New media and social media content such as posts, messages and photographs can be saved as digital “snapshots.” Close up, detailed “snapshots” have proved useful for preserving pictures that are too small to be saved using the classic “PrintScreen” command (Skalski et al., 2017).

Quantitative content analysis can be applied equally well to both traditional and online content, and offers new challenges and opportunities (Lai & To, 2015; Sjøvaag & Stavelin, 2012). Statistical tools, computer-modeling, and clustering are used in the course of data interpretation (Berger, 2014; Lai & To, 2015).

Some studies conducted abroad have focused on messages posted by athletes on social media channels and have used various methodologies. One of the most commonly applied methods is content analysis (cf. Macková & Turková, 2019).

Pegoraro’s case study (2010) had the ambition of revealing how athletes use the Twitter social network and for what purposes. Using the Twitter-athletes.com website, the author identified five of the most-followed accounts of athletes from various sports disciplines. His sample consisted of Tweets from those athletes’ Twitter accounts and was collected over a seven-day time period. The coding book Pegoraro used for his content analysis was adapted from previous research projects. His study showed that the most common format of athletes’ tweets was “direct news,” and that athletes from the U.S. National Football League were the most active athletes on Twitter. It also revealed that athletes communicate with their fans on Twitter,

but they do not often take advantage of the marketing potential of the social network to promote their sponsors or specific products.

Hambrick et al.'s (2010) research had a similar ambition to Pegoraro's study (2010). The authors tested the "use and gratification" theory. Their sample for content analysis included twenty of the most up-to-date Tweets posted on each of 101 randomly selected accounts of athletes who competed in ten different sports that are popular in the United States. Tweets were categorized into six classes based on previous research of athletes' communication on social media. The classes of tweets were defined as follows: Interactivity, diversity (whether the tweet was focused on a sports-related theme or not), information sharing, content (photos, videos, etc.), fanship, and promotional. Like Pegoraro (2010), the authors found that athletes' Twitter usage predominantly consisted of interactions and direct communication with fans, while the promotional potential of social networking remained untapped (Macková & Turková, 2019).

Frederick et al. (2014) wanted to explore relationship marketing on Twitter by professional athletes from the "Big Four" American sports, applying a parasocial interaction theory. "The authors indicated the shift in thinking about athletes' communication through social media over the past two years," (Macková & Turková, 2019, p. 100). The results of Frederick et al.'s analysis supported the findings of the studies described above. However, the authors discussed athletes' use of Twitter for commercial purposes in greater detail, and recommended that they promote products using their own style of communication. That way, the athletes' promotional messages tended to be more natural and convincing (Macková & Turková, 2019).

Hambrick and Mahoney (2011) focused on the content of the communication of two sports celebrities on Twitter, the cyclist Lance Armstrong and the tennis player Serena Williams. They used the content analysis method, and categorized the athletes' Tweets in the same way as did Frederick et al. (2014) in their study. They defined subcategories of promotional tweets: product, promotion, charity, self-promotion, competition, and family and friends. Unlike the previous literature, they recorded the number of each type of promotional message in the accounts of the two athletes. A substantial share of Armstrong's and Williams's promotional Tweets (about 1/3) promoted a product. Besides products, their social media accounts also promoted charitable contributions, the athletes' and their family members' activities, and upcoming sporting events. (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011).

Watkins and Lewis (2014) also investigated the Twitter activity of professional athletes. Their research was based on a purposive sample of 990 Tweets from eleven male and eleven female professional athletes. Using a content analysis method, they revealed that interactivity and dialogue helped to build up and maintain the relationships between the athletes and their fans (cf. Boyle & Haynes, 2002). Similar results achieved by Kang et al. (2019) concerned the usage of social media by personalities involved in a niche sport (CrossFit). Content analysis of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube content published by well-known CrossFit organizations and famous CrossFitters proved that they took full advantage of the information and interactive potential of social media.

The utility of content analysis for analyzing athletes' communication has been proven by previous research. To give one last example, Burch et al. (2014) employed content analysis to show that Olympic athletes tend to present themselves as down-to-earth, thankful, and grateful individuals, competitors, and promoters.

2.3 Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method, which can be used for collecting data on a wide range of subjects (Creswell, 2014; Jamshed, 2014; Longhurst, 2010). Semi-structured interviews can be applied as a stand-alone method or as part of a mixed-method research design. Such interviews are the most commonly used qualitative method integrated into mixed-method designs (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

According to Blandford (2013, p. 23): "Interviews are best suited for understanding people's perceptions and experiences." Alsaawi (2014, p. 151) added: "It is very common for social science researchers to conduct this type of interview." Semi-structured interviews are carried out one-to-one or with a group of subjects. Individual interviews are generally preferred in academic research while the business and commercial sector favors the group interview, mainly because of time pressures (Gaskell, 2000).

The purpose of a semi-structured interview is to talk with an interviewee in a partially structured way (Longhurst, 2010). It is a flexible method that helps the researcher to uncover causes and reasons for actions rather than counting

up numbers or amounts (Horton et al., 2004; Fylan, 2005). Basically, using semi-structured interviews provides a more in-depth look into phenomena than using quantitative methods (Adams, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Wengraf, 2001). “This form of interviewing has some degree of predetermined order but still ensures flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant,” (Dunn, 2005, p. 80). The research subjects’ answers to questions that are directed to specific areas of interest are comparable (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Before interviews are conducted, guidelines for the interviews should be composed in a way that will help the interviewer to follow a consistent question structure in each interview and cover all the chosen topics and questions (Blee & Taylor, 2002; Jamshed, 2014; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Prior to the main phase of the research, the interview guidelines should be critiqued and tested to ensure that the questions are understandable (Jamshed, 2014; Maxwell, 2005; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). However, the interview guidelines are tentative, and the questions posed can vary depending on the situation (Lichtman, 2013) — hence the term semi-structured. The researcher has freedom to provide the interviewee enough space for an original response (Hashemnezhad, 2015). However, lack of objectivity, inconsistency, low reliability, and questionable validity have been identified as possible weaknesses of semi-structured interviews (Burnard, 1991; Diefenbach, 2008; Winter, 2000). These issues can be minimized by the use of triangulation, that is, using another method or data source as part of the methodology (Flick, 2004; Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell (2005), Smith (2004) and Wengraf (2001) contended that detailed interpretation of data gathered from interviews is necessary in order to eliminate possible distortions.

“The researcher is a key element of the interview process, and his or her skills, attributes and interviewing technique are all an integral part of the success of this method in obtaining ‘rich,’ qualitative data,” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 154). Before the interview takes place, the researcher should be well prepared and familiar not only with the guidelines, but also with the topic and the respondent (Alsaawi, 2014). In face-to-face interviews, the researcher must ensure that the subject does not feel uncomfortable and that the place where the interview is conducted fulfills the subject’s expectations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The whole interview should be recorded, and therefore the researcher must obtain the subject’s permission to do so (Creswell, 2014; Fylan, 2005; Rabionet, 2011). The next step after the interview is usually

transcription of its content, which simplifies the task of interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Lichtman, 2013). The researcher should inform the subject in advance about the purpose of the interview and respect an interviewee's refusal to participate at any stage (Guthrie, 2010).

The evolution of communication is bringing up new opportunities and challenges. Nowadays there are many ways to conduct a semi-structured interview. The traditional face-to-face contact can be substituted by other means of communication, predominantly telephone or video and voice online applications (e.g. Skype), e-mail, and instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat). When adopting these alternative tools, the researcher must keep in mind that the character of online, virtual discussion differs from face-to-face talk (Berger, 2014; Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). Kazmer and Xie (2008) highlighted that the main challenges of virtual contact are technological problems, indirect and asynchronous data transmission, the absence of facial expressions and body language, and personal discomfort with the technology. Nevertheless, qualitative data can successfully be obtained from structured and semi-structured interviews using all of the aforementioned modern tools (Kazmer & Xie, 2008; Murray & Sixsmith, 1998).

Semi-structured interviews are well-suited for exploring the mediasport field, and can provide beneficial data (cf. Crawford & Gosling, 2004). Shockley (2010, p. 54) recommends that “[i]t may be useful to focus on how much athletes are coached on what to say when using new media, when to use it, as well as how to communicate with fans from a public relations perspective.” Although Smith and Sanderson (2015) used only content analysis in their study, they noted that interviews with athletes could uncover the motivations for athletes' postings and the strategy they use for publishing photos on social media.

Interviews have been recognized as one of the most commonly used methods for researching sports communication and management (Abeza et al., 2015b) and sports marketing (Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015). Several U.S.-based studies have had the ambition to uncover the motivations of student-athletes for their use of social media, mainly Twitter, and how they perceive critical feedback they receive. Browning and Sanderson (2012) did twenty face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with student-athletes recruited via “snowball sampling.” Hipke and Hachtmann (2014) used interviews to reveal the social media strategies of Big Ten Conference college athletic departments.

On the other hand, Clavio et al. (2013) identified a lack of research using interviews to explore professional athletes' social media usage. The authors conducted ten-question interviews with seven prominent IndyCar racing drivers, whom they contacted through their PR representatives. The interviews lasted between ten and thirty minutes. These semi-structured interviews proved to be a useful tool for obtaining an overview of the individuals' and teams' social media presence, as well as for detecting how they used different networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Gibbs et al., 2014). The semi-structured interview method allows the researcher to discover how much of a distraction social media are for athletes and the role of national federations and leagues in various sports (Hayes, 2019).

2.4 Concept for Researching Czech Athletes' Communication through Social Media and Audience Reactions

2.4.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

As outlined in the introduction, this dissertation addresses three research questions, inspired by those posed by Hambrick & Mahoney (2011):

- **RQ1:** How do Czech athletes use their official Facebook pages?
- **RQ2:** How do Czech athletes use their official Facebook pages for promotional and commercial purposes?
- **RQ3:** How do visitors to the official Facebook pages of selected athletes react to the content posted on these pages?

Research hypotheses were formulated with the ambition of answering the above research questions and uncovering the factors that determine the nature of an athlete's communication via Facebook, both generally and in promoting products and other things. The hypotheses were inspired by previous studies (see next page).

- **H1:** The intensity of communication activity by athletes on their official Facebook pages is greater during their sport's usual season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).³³
- **H2:** Popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) use their official Facebook pages more intensively than do less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011).³⁴
- **H3:** The Facebook pages of athletes who participate in mainstream sports will contain a greater number of posts than those of athletes who participate in niche sports (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).³⁵
- **H4:** The intensity of promotional activity on athletes' official Facebook pages is greater during their sport's usual season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).
- **H5:** Popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) post more promotional content because they have the ability to gain more sponsors and earn more money than less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011).³⁶
- **H6:** Male athletes mainly focus on endorsing sports-related products, whereas female athletes promote a wider range of brands (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).³⁷
- **H7:** The official Facebook pages of athletes participating in extreme sports tend to have a more promotional character than the pages of other athletes.³⁸
- **H8:** The audience (fans and followers) reacts more intensively to posts published on the official Facebook pages of popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) than less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Witkemper et al., 2012).³⁹

³³ In this case, intensity means the number of messages posted on the official Facebook page of a specific athlete during a particular period (more messages = more intensive use of Facebook, fewer messages = less intensive use of Facebook).

³⁴ See Athletes' Popularity (p. 37).

³⁵ See Dimension of the Sport (p. 39).

³⁶ See Athletes' Popularity (p. 37).

³⁷ See Athletes' Gender (p. 38).

³⁸ See The Adrenaline Factor (p. 40).

³⁹ In this case, intensity of reaction means the number of likes, shares and comments of the posts on the official Facebook page of a specific athlete during a particular period (more likes, shares and comments of the posts = more intense reactions, fewer reactions = less intense reaction on Facebook).

- **H9:** Negative reactions on the official Facebook pages of sportsmen are most often aimed at poor sports performance and results, whereas sportswomen are criticized more for their appearance or for personal reasons (cf. Lumsden & Morgan, 2012; Toffoletti, 2017).

To answer the aforementioned research questions and confirm or reject the hypotheses, we adopted a mixed research method. Specifically, the author used an explanatory sequential mixed-method research design (Bergman, 2008; Creswell, 2014). First, a comprehensive quantitative content analysis of selected athletes' official Facebook pages was conducted. After that, the author conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with the athletes and their managers or PR representatives. Both phases of the research, which explored the athletes' communication on social media, are hereinafter described in greater detail.^{40, 41}

2.4.2 Research Methods and Sampling – First Phase

Quantitative content analysis was used in the research of the communication of selected athletes and of the form and frequency with which they posted promotional and commercial messages on Facebook, as a representative social media in the Czech environment. At the time of the study, Facebook was definitively the most commonly used social network amongst the general population in the Czech Republic (Nielsen Admosphere, 2016), as well as worldwide (Watkins, 2018). For that reason, Facebook was used as a main social media platform for this research project.^{42, 43}

The quantitative content analysis was chosen because of the nature and complexity of the data, and also because content analysis has been used

⁴⁰ See Chapter 2.4.2, Research Methods and Sampling – First Phase (p. 54).

⁴¹ See Chapter 2.4.3, Research Methods and Sampling – Second Phase (p. 61).

⁴² Before starting the research, in August 2017 I conducted a one-month pilot study of a sample of selected athletes' Facebook pages. The principles of the coding protocol used in this research were applied (with necessary modifications) in a paper researching the communication of female skiers on social media (Macková & Turková, 2019). Those short-term studies confirmed that the chosen methodology would be effective in achieving the aims of this project.

⁴³ Contrary, the author decided to cover also other social media in my research to illustrate the complexity of selected athletes' social media communication, although on a smaller scale (see Chapter 3.17.3 Attitudes of Selected Czech Professional Athletes Toward the Use of Social Media, p. 218).

by the authors of previously published studies of athlete's communication on social media in foreign countries (i.e., outside the Czech Republic) (see Burch et al., 2014; Geurin & Clavio, 2015; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Pegoraro, 2010).

To analyze athletes' communication in the context of the commercialization of sport through social media, and on Facebook in particular, we selected athletes' profiles using the following criteria:

First, the athletes had to be professional competitors in sports that are included in the Olympic Games, today's largest mediasport event (Bruce et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2020). The most-watched broadcast event on the Czech public television sports program "ČT Sport" in 2018 was the 2018 Olympic speed skating final, which featured a Czech, Martina Sáblíková. The second most-watched event was the 2018 Olympic quarter-final match between the Czech ice hockey team and the Canadians. Both events were viewed on television by more than 1.7 million people (Bureš, 2019b). It can therefore be assumed that the Olympic athletes we selected are well-known, at least to the majority of Czechs.

According to the data provided by ČNP (Czech National Panel), the most popular sports disciplines among Czechs who practice a sport themselves are cycling, soccer, running, tennis, skating, and skiing. Sixty-seven percent of Czechs consider ice hockey as the national sport, another 23% believe it is soccer. A significant number of Czechs also mention biathlon (3%), and 7% consider some other discipline to be the "national" sport (ČNP, 2017). We took these figures into account in selecting our sample of Czech athletes.

The sports in which the selected athletes participated are popular ones in the Czech Republic: soccer, ice hockey, tennis, and track and field (athletics). The author also selected athletes who participate in sports which have experienced increased visibility and popularity because of recent successes by Czech athletes or teams at the international level. Those sports are beach volleyball, biathlon, canoeing, judo, speed skating, skiing, snowboarding, and whitewater kayaking (cf. Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2017; Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2019).

Each sport was represented by the Czech male and female athlete who has been most successful at the international level in that discipline.⁴⁴ Some sports, such

⁴⁴ Success was defined in terms of athletes' sports performances (results in competition, etc.).

as soccer and ice hockey, are predominantly male and their representatives had no female counterparts.

Other sports can count only one popular Czech athlete of either gender, as is the case for beach volleyball, speed skating, snowboarding, and whitewater kayaking. Despite these problems, the sample was gender-balanced, and any possible distortion due to gender inequality, as was discovered in a study by Frederick et al. (2014), was minimized.

Consistent with the approach used by Geurin and Clavio (2015), it was necessary to ascertain whether each athlete selected had an official Facebook page and if they routinely update the page and post new content. If the researcher's "first choice" athlete did not have an active presence on Facebook, another reasonably successful athlete in the same sport who did was chosen.

The most important condition for including an athlete in the analysis was his or her possession of an official Facebook page. Many accounts dedicated to popular athletes are created not by the athlete but by fans. The research was focused on the use of Facebook for promotional purposes by the athletes themselves. Therefore, fan-created platforms were not considered appropriate for inclusion (cf. Parmentier & Fischer, 2012).

Because of the variety of variables accounted for in the analysis, a purposive sampling method was used. Geurin and Clavio (2015) also used this method to analyze communication by athletes on their Facebook pages. They considered purposive sampling as the most appropriate method for achieving their research objectives. The purposive sampling method has also been adopted by other authors, such as Burch et al. (2014).

Our final, gender-balanced sample consisted of sixteen Czech professional athletes competing in both summer and winter Olympic sports disciplines and their official Facebook pages. The variables that hypothetically could affect the athletes' communication are also shown in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Czech Professional Athletes

Athlete's Name	Gender	Sports Discipline	Dimension of the Sport	Character of the Sport	Adrenaline Factor**	Official Facebook Page
Čech Petr	M	Soccer	Mainstream	Team	NO	https://www.facebook.com/PetrCech.official/
Dostál Josef	M	Canoe	Niche	Individual	NO	https://www.facebook.com/kajakjosefdostal/
Hejnová Zuzana	F	Athletics (T&F)	Mainstream	Individual	NO	https://www.facebook.com/hejnovaofficial/
Koubek Tomáš	M	Soccer	Mainstream	Team	NO	https://www.facebook.com/TomasKoubekofficial/
Krčmář Michal	M	Biathlon	Niche	Individual	NO	https://www.facebook.com/mkrcomar23/
Krpálek Lukáš	M	Judo	Niche	Individual	NO	https://www.facebook.com/krpaluklukas/
Kvitová Petra	F	Tennis	Mainstream	Individual	NO	https://www.facebook.com/petrakvitovaofficial/
Ledecká Ester	F	Alpine Skiing & Snowboarding	Niche*	Individual	YES	https://www.facebook.com/estreledecka.cz/
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	F	Beach Volleyball	Niche	Team	NO	https://www.facebook.com/MakisPage/
Ondra Adam	M	Climbing	Niche	Individual	YES	https://www.facebook.com/adamondraofficial/
Pastrňák David	M	Ice Hockey	Mainstream	Team	NO	https://www.facebook.com/DavidPastrnakOfficial/
Plíšková Karolína	F	Tennis	Mainstream	Individual	NO	https://www.facebook.com/pliskovakarolina/
Samková Eva	F	Snowboarding (Snowboardcross)	Niche	Individual	YES	https://www.facebook.com/Eva-Samkova-323562281003618/
Sáblíková Martina	F	Speed Skating	Niche	Individual	NO	https://www.facebook.com/Martina.Sablíkova.OFFICIAL/
Vítková Veronika	F	Biathlon	Niche	Individual	NO	https://www.facebook.com/veronikavitkovabiatlon/
Voráček Jakub	M	Ice Hockey	Mainstream	Team	NO	https://www.facebook.com/jakubvoracekofficial/

* Ester Ledecká now competes in two sports disciplines (skiing and snowboarding), although she began her international career as a snowboarder. The research sample was chosen and the observation period of research began before her potential as a skier was revealed. Therefore, we categorized her as a niche sport athlete despite her trend toward competition in the mainstream discipline of skiing.

** The “adrenaline factor” was identified as a characteristic of some extreme sports (see 1.4.3 Factors Affecting Athletes’ Communication and Fans’ Perception of Them: Adrenaline factor).

Source: Facebook.com, 2020; Author’s own work

The Coding Process

To categorize relevant Facebook posts, this research used an approach similar to that of Hambrick and Mahoney (2011), who examined the use of Twitter as a marketing tool by celebrity athletes, combined with the approach used by Geurin and Clavio (2015), who focused on the use of Facebook as a marketing tool in the field of sports. In the former study (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011) the authors used a set

of categories they derived from previous research (Clavio, 2008; Seo & Green, 2008). Geurin and Clavio (2015) modified this set to fit the nature of Facebook, tested it, and then customized it. After that repetitive process, the categories were clearly defined and could be used as a framework for executing content analysis.

The communication categories were set as follows:

- Sports-related posts: messages dedicated to the athlete's sports discipline, sports events, and athletic practices.
- Diverse posts: all non-sports-related posts, which may be thematically linked to pop culture such as music, film, etc., and matters of everyday life, such as politics and religion.

To expose the level and character of commercialization in the athletes' posts, the types of promotion were classified into six subcategories inspired by the framework created by Hambrick and Mahoney (2011):

- Posts "without promotion," which were completely "promotion-free."⁴⁵
- Product posts that directly mentioned the athlete's corporate sponsors or other organizations, including their goods and services.
- Charity posts referred to non-profit organizations or their activities and fundraising.
- Self-promotion was defined as posts that highlight an athlete's personal life or activities.⁴⁶
- Competition posts provided information about upcoming or current sporting events, e.g., matches and races.
- Family and friends-related posts were dedicated to the athlete's family members' and friends' activities or products in both non-sport and sports-related fields.

⁴⁵ For this purpose, we define promotion as the endorsement or support of a sporting event, corporate sponsor, product, or activity. Any post mentioning a sponsor was considered promotional.

⁴⁶ The author reflects that in terms of brand building, every public social media post may be considered a version of self-promotion (cf. Na et al., 2020). For the purpose of this research, the closer understanding of self-promotion by Hambrick and Mahoney (2011) was adopted.

For each social media post (cf. Diel, 2017), descriptive variables were recorded, namely the date and time of publication, the number of shares the post generated, and the language of the post.

- The date and time of publication of each post were coded in DD.MM.YYYY HH:MM format. (For example, the date of a post published one minute after midnight on the first day of the year 2018 was coded as 01.01.2018 00:01.) To be consistent, Central European Time (CET) was used because all of the athletes are from the Czech Republic (even though their competitions and training camps were often located outside of that time zone).
- Number of shares means how many times a post was shared, or in other words, how “viral” it was. This measure reflects the popularity and attractiveness of the particular athlete.⁴⁷
- The language of the post plays an important role in communication, because by using different languages athletes can speak to different audiences (cf. Brown & Billings, 2017). It was distinguished between Czech-language posts, English-language posts, posts in more than one language, posts in languages other than Czech or English, and posts without any text at all (e.g., using only emoticons).

Besides the variables above, the presence of certain content in the post, e.g., a picture, video or hashtag, and the promotional type of that content were recorded. A picture, video, or hashtag was categorized as promotional if the name of a promoted entity was clearly stated or visible. A picture was also classified as promotional if a company’s name (e.g., brands on athlete’s clothes) appeared in it, but only if the company sponsored the athlete or his or her association or team. The names of corporate sponsors were included in the analysis.







Last but not least, the reactions of the audience to each post were recorded. Although the main goal of the research was to explore the social media communication of the selected Czech professional athletes, audience reactions, which influence athletes’ communication in important ways, could not be ignored. For purposes of this research project, “the audience” is a synonym for the fans or followers who like or follow the selected athletes on Facebook (cf. Wann et al., 2001). Audience-related variables

⁴⁷ See Athletes’ Popularity (p. 37); Athletes’ Attractiveness (p. 38).

were the number of positive and negative “likes” and the prevailing tenor (positive, neutral, or negative) of comments made about the post. The presence or absence of interactive content related to each post was also considered.

In this analysis, the number of likes means the sum of all reactions that follow the first “like” of a Facebook post. In the observation period (June 2018 – July 2019), Facebook allowed its users to express their opinion about someone’s posting by selecting from six different emoticons, short explanations of which are below. Because the emoticons’ meanings vary significantly in different languages (from positive to negative – see Figure 5), and because it is impossible to detect possibly ironic “likes,” we did not record the tenor of “likes.”

Figure 5: Possible Reactions through Emoticons on Facebook and Shifts in their Meanings in English and Czech Languages

Emoticon	Explanation in English	Positivity/ Negativity	Explanation in Czech	Positivity/ Negativity
	Like	+	To se mi líbí	+
	Love	+	Super	+
	Haha	?	Haha	?
	Wow	?	Paráda	+
	Sad	-	To mě mrzí	-
	Angry	-	To mě štve	-

Source: Facebook.com, 2020; Author’s own work

The prevailing tenor of comments to a post was determined by counting the number of comments and noting the category with the largest number of comments. The categories were positive comments (clearly positive reactions, supportive messages), neutral comments (not clearly negative or positive, unidentifiable, or fuzzy reactions) and negative comments (critical, offensive, rude, or vulgar comments) (cf. Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018; Dekay, 2012).

Interactivity is represented by posts in which an athlete expressed a personal opinion or communicated with other Facebook users. Space for reactions by the athlete’s audience was also provided.

The complete coding book, with examples of categorized posts, can be found in the separate Appendix to this dissertation. Data from the selected athletes’ official Facebook pages was collected over the course of one year (June 2018 – July 2019). This

period precluded distortion of the results due to seasonality, something which has been mentioned as a problem with data collected in previous studies (i.e., Hambrick, 2012; Peetz et al., 2004). The data for this study were collected monthly, three months after the post appeared on the official social media pages of selected athletes. In that way, there was time for fans, athletes, and managers to react to posts and comments.

The data was archived in the form of virtual “snapshots.” “PrintScreens” of athletes’ homepages, as well as the posts on their walls, were also made. Each post was “snapshotted” twice — once as an overview, and again in detail including all fans’ reactions under the post (cf. Skalski et al., 2017). Each of the selected athletes’ pages was analyzed during both the in-season and the off-season periods of their sports discipline (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

The data were coded by two independent human coders. No computer software was used for the purpose, because the coder’s deep understanding of the posted content was essential (cf. Burch et al., 2014). The reliability of the encoding process (stability and reproducibility) was controlled. Reproducibility was reviewed at project meetings where the coders discussed “controversial” data input (cf. Lombard et al., 2002; Riffe et al., 2005). The stability of both coders’ work was tested (cf. Perri 6 and Bellamy, 2012; Stemler, 2000). Online electronic forms (Google Xls Sheets) were used for the coding (cf. Skalski et al., 2017). Subsequent analyses were performed using the Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics programs. The complete coding book and examples of the categorization of data can be found in the separate Appendix.

2.4.3 Research Methods and Sampling – Second Phase

After collecting the data required for content analysis, the author conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews. All sixteen selected athletes and their managers were contacted and asked for their responses to questions about their social media usage. The guidelines for the interviews (see Figure 6) were prepared in advance with the aim of confirming the reliability of the quantitative content analysis of the selected official Facebook pages of the Czech professional athletes. Additionally, the interviews provided additional information that helped to explain the findings of the content analysis (cf. Berger, 2014; Clavio et al., 2013; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). The key topics of the interviews were related to the athletes’ general social media usage, their Facebook usage, and their views on the promotional and commercial potential of social

media (cf. Clavio et al., 2013; Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014; Wengraf, 2001). The structure of the interview was modified for each respondent. The content of the basic interview guide was consulted with experienced mediasport researchers and sports journalists before the beginning of this phase (cf. Gratton & Jones, 2010; Maxwell, 2005).

Figure 6: Interview Guide for Interviews with the Athletes or their Representatives (Modified for Each Individual Athlete)

Social Media in General
1) In my research, I found that you have a personal and official Facebook and Twitter profile, as well as a public Instagram profile. Why do you have a separate personal profile and a fan profile everywhere besides Instagram?
2) When did you create profiles on each social media?
3) Do you manage these social media channels yourself?
3a) NO: Who manages your social media?
3b) YES: Did you attend any social media training? Which one(s)? Did you personally want to participate or did the agent recommend it to you?
4) Do you enjoy communicating with your fans in this way? Do you like it?
5) How much time do you spend by managing your social media?
6) How do you choose on which social media you publish each post?
Facebook Usage
7) You mainly use the official Facebook page to keep your fans informed about your sporting successes, plans, and related events. Why do not you share more information about your privacy or everyday life on the page?
8) Does your communication with your fans affect what sports results you achieve?
9) The intensity of your communication in the observation period fluctuated. Why?
10) In general, fans express you support on your official Facebook page / On your official Facebook page, there are several critical comments. You do (not) respond to the fan comments, so I wonder if you read them or let them read by someone.
11) Why do (not) you read them?
12) How do you deal with criticism on Facebook?
13) If vulgar or abusive comments appeared on your official Facebook page, would you delete it?
14) How do you choose which media outputs do you share on your official Facebook page?
15) Do you think that your charity initiative on social media could have a positive impact? How successful is the charity project which you have supported?
16) Do you follow any profiles of other athletes on social media? Which one (s) and on which social network?
Promotion and Commercialization
17) On your official Facebook page in the period from July 2018 to June 2019 do not occur strictly advertising messages, but sometimes appear hashtags or links mentioning the name of your sponsor or partner. Have you ever considered marking posts as advertising messages?
18) Do you have the promotion of companies on social media included in your sponsorship contracts? Is it different for each partner, such as club and your private partners? How is it set?
19) Does anyone provide you advise in this field? If yes, how does he/she helps you? Do you always agree with him/her?
20) Do you think about how do you mark the commercial content?
21) Why do (not) you use the paid partnership on your official social media page(s)?
22) Did you notice any negative reaction on your social media channel(s) regarding the promotional postings?

Source: Author's own work (cf. Clavio et al., 2013)

The respondents were contacted in three phases. First, the athletes' managers or PR representatives were asked to transmit the request for an interview to the selected athletes. If that did not result in a response, the author approached sports associations, clubs, or used her personal connections. These two initial steps were usually done by e-

mail and/or telephone calls. When an athlete or his or her representative did not react to these efforts, the author contacted the athletes directly via their official and personal social media channels. In some cases it was difficult to approach the athletes themselves. Therefore, the author interviewed their managers or PR representatives. This alternative provided relevant and valuable results. The managers and PR representatives we interviewed were well informed and open to sharing their knowledge of the athletes, their know-how, and even the athletes' social media statistics. All interviews were conducted in the participants' and author's native language, Czech (cf. Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Solves et al., 2019).

Because professional athletes and their managers are often busy, the author was open to conducting interviews via a wide range of electronic means, including telephone or Skype calls (cf. Solves et al., 2019). However, face-to-face interviews were highly preferred (cf. Gratton & Jones, 2010; Kazmer & Xie, 2008). The places for in-person meetings were chosen by the respondent (cf. Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). If a prospective interviewee could not find time to respond to questions orally, the author offered him or her the option of responding in writing by e-mail (cf. Clavio et al., 2013; Solves et al., 2019). As the "last resort" for obtaining the necessary information, the author reviewed publicly available sources (e.g. interviews and articles published in the media).

The aforementioned pragmatic strategy for choosing and interviewing respondents and sources was adopted because the author has the ambition to gain as much information as possible. In short, every piece of information was considered valuable in the analysis. Owing to this, the second phase of the research might be perceived by someone as not completely methodologically clean, which may be seen as a limitation. But, on the other hand, the combination of the sources and opinion plurality enabled the author to gain a greater awareness of the investigated topic.

Collection of the research material via the interviews took place from the beginning of November 2019 to the end of March 2020. In total, the author conducted nine interviews, and received three shorter written statements. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and sent to the respondents for their review and authorization. For example, they had an opportunity to expunge personal or sensitive information if it was not needed for the purpose of the dissertation. All of the interviewees agreed to forego anonymity for purposes of the research, which

was crucial for the interpretation of the results (cf. Batuev & Robinson, 2019; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Guthrie, 2010).

Josef Dostál, Zuzana Hejnová, Eva Samková and Markéta Nausch-Sluková responded for themselves. Hejnová and Nausch-Sluková were interviewed face-to-face, while Samková replied to us via WhatsApp. Dostál sent us his responses by e-mail. Managers or PR representatives spoke on behalf of the other athletes in the sample. PR executive Karel Tejkal⁴⁸ provided the information on behalf of Lukáš Krpálek and Petra Kvitová. He also shared his experiences with some current and former clients (e.g. Jakub Voráček). Michal Hrdlička, the husband and manager of Karolína Plíšková, talked to us about how the roles related to social media management and tennis player's social media strategy are divided. The Head of Communication of the sports management firm SportInvest, Pavel Pillár, described the social media management of the athletes represented by his firm, namely Petr Čech, Tomáš Koubek, Ester Ledecká, Markéta Nausch-Sluková and Martina Sáblíková. Tomáš Koubek's social media manager, Ondřej Kozlovský, also gave us information about him. In a face-to-face interview, the spokeswoman for the Czech Olympic Committee, Barbora Žehanová, shared information about media communication training (including social media) and general communication recommendations that the Committee offers to Czech athletes who are competing in Olympic sports disciplines. The date, form, and if known, the length of all interviews are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Date, Form and Length of Conducted Interviews

Respondent's Name	Date of the Interview / Response	Form of the Interview	Length of the Interview
Dostál Josef	March 10, 2020	E-mail Correspondence	Not Available
Hejnová Zuzana	February 18, 2020	Face-to-face	25 minutes
Hrdlička Michal	February 26, 2020	Face-to-face	31 minutes
Kozlovský Ondřej	March 9, 2020	Face-to-face	63 minutes
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	March 3, 2020	Face-to-face	27 minutes
Pillár Pavel	November 5, 2019	Face-to-face	72 minutes
Samková Eva	March 31, 2020	WhatsApp Voice Messages	Not Available
Tejkal Karel	November 8, 2019	Face-to-face	67 minutes
Žehanová Barbora	November 12, 2019	Face-to-face	42 minutes

Source: Author's own work

⁴⁸ PR manager Karel Tejkal is not related to my supervisor, doc. PhDr. Alice Němcová Tejkalová, Ph.D. The same last name is only a coincidence of names.

PR manager Alexandr Kliment confirmed his collaboration with Zuzana Hejnová and Eva Samková by e-mail in November 2019. The spokeswoman for the foundation, “Nadace Jakuba Voráčka,” Lenka Dominiková, responded to a private message sent to Voráček’s official Facebook page and communicated by e-mail in March 2020. Also in March 2020, Adam Ondra’s coach, Petr Klofáč, interacted via WhatsApp and referred us to useful articles in the media about Ondra.

David Pastrňák and Veronika Vítková and their PR managers were repetitively contacted, but they did not reply. Interviews with some other athletes or their managers were scheduled, but they could not be realized because the respondents lacked time or because of complications related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Results

In this chapter, the results of the research are sorted according to the dimension of the sport (mainstream or niche), the character of the sport (team or individual), and the sports discipline. Results relating to mainstream sports athletes are presented first; those for niche sports athletes are introduced afterward. Within each category (mainstream or niche sports), results for team sport athletes are presented before those of individual athletes.

Results for mainstream team sports disciplines are presented in order of their popularity within the Czech public. So, soccer players' results are presented before ice hockey players' results. Then, the analyses of communication of sampled tennis players and the track and field athlete take place. As for results relating to individual niche sports athletes, those for winter sports (speed skating, snowboarding, skiing and biathlon) are followed by summer sports (climbing, judo, canoeing), and within those categories the athletes are listed in order of popularity. Athletes competing in the same sports discipline are presented sequentially, which allows better comparison of their results. Each subchapter dedicated to a specific athlete consists of an examination of that athlete's social media communication and a description of the fans' reactions.

After reporting the results of separate analyses of each athlete in the sample, all the findings are compared from four perspectives. Firstly, the influence of selected factors, previously mentioned in the theoretical part,⁴⁹ on the communication of the Czech professional athletes in the sample is assessed. After that, the promotion of commercial interests and disclosure of content on the athletes' official social media pages are compared. Then, the similarities and differences of the sampled athletes' attitudes toward social media use are detected. The comparison ends with the summarization of fans' reactions, their amount, tenor and specific examples which appeared on the official Facebook pages of selected Czech professional athletes in the observation period.

⁴⁹ See 1.3.3 Factors Affecting Athletes' Communication and Fans' Perception of Them (p. 36).

3.1 Petr Čech

As was stated in the section on methodology, soccer is the most popular sport in the Czech Republic in terms of the size of the membership base of Czech soccer sports associations (Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2019). Petr Čech is the most followed Czech athlete on social media (Socialbakers, 2020) and is one of the best soccer goalkeepers in Czech history. Čech ended his professional career in March 2019, but he was an active player during most of the observation period.

Čech was a member of the Czech national soccer team since his early years. The biggest success of his junior career was winning the title of Under-21 European Champion, which the Czech team won at the 2002 Under-21 EURO in Switzerland (*Petr Čech: Bio*, 2020; 2002 UEFA.com, 2002). In the same year, Čech debuted on the senior Czech team, and he remained the top-rated goalkeeper until the end of his national representation career in 2016 (pj, 2016). While he was playing, the Czech soccer national team won a bronze medal at EURO 2014, however, the Czech team ended its season at the group stage at EURO 2008, EURO 2016, and the 2006 World Cup 2006 (*Petr Čech: Bio*, 2020). At EURO 2012, hosted by Poland and Ukraine, the Czech team lost in a quarter-final match (UEFA.com, 2020a; UEFA.com, 2020b; *Petr Čech: Bio*, 2020).

Additionally, Čech had an impressive club career. He played for FC Viktoria Plzeň (1989 – 1999), FC Chmel Blšany (1999 – 2001), AC Sparta Praha (2001 – 2002), Stade Rennes FC (2002 – 2004), Chelsea FC (2004 – 2015) and Arsenal FC (2015 – 2019) Among other victories, he won the Premier League title with Chelsea FC four times (2005, 2006, 2010, 2015) and the FA Cup four times (2007, 2009, 2010, 2012). He also won the Carling Cup and the Community Shield more than once. As an individual player, Čech has received many praises. He was awarded the title of the best goalkeeper in the world by the International Federation of Football History and Statistics in 2005 and by the International Press Sports Association in 2007 (Novák & Čihák, 2019; *Petr Čech: Bio*, 2020).

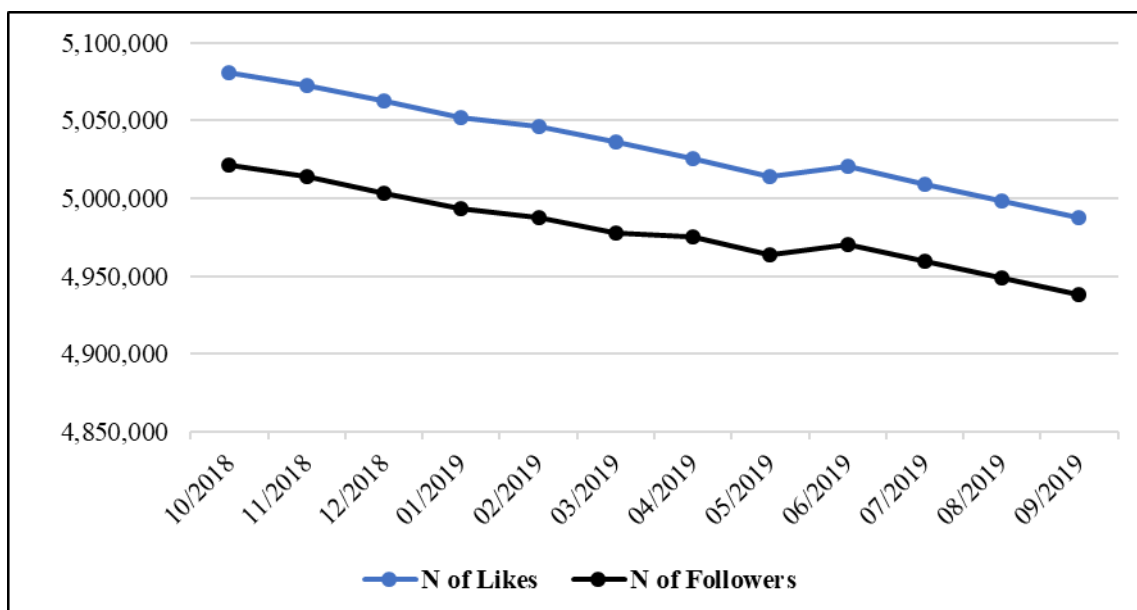
3.1.1 Communication on Social Media

Petr Čech's social media channels are managed in collaboration with the SportInvest management agency. The goalkeeper stated, "I answer the personal questions. But for example, links to articles or other Facebook pages are posted by the page

administrator,” (Čech, in Šedivý, 2013). In the observation period, Čech had an official Facebook page (Petr Čech, 2020a), a public Instagram page (petrcech, 2020), and a Twitter profile (Petr Cech, 2020). The manager of SportInvest, Pavel Pillár, explained Čech’s relationship to social media: “Petr Čech administers his Twitter and Instagram more or less on his own; our sister agency in England helps him with Instagram. . . . With regard to Facebook, we at SportInvest collaborate with him, and create the content. . . . We do not post anything without Petr’s approval,” (Pillár, 2019).

Čech’s official Facebook page is the most liked and followed page of any celebrity in the Czech environment (Socialbakers, 2020). However, from October 2018 to September 2019 the number of likes his page received decreased by 92,875 and the number of his followers decreased by 83,158 (see Figure 8). This significant loss of fans may have been caused by a lack of communication and a change in his club affiliation. “Certainly, in the last two years, when Petr played for Chelsea and Arsenal, things were not always right during the period of his contract with Arsenal. Sometimes he was not chosen to play. . . . Petr’s fans and followers are fans of Petr Čech as a person, but most of them are also Chelsea fans,” (Pillár, 2019).

Figure 8: Petr Čech’s Official Facebook Page: Number of Likes and Followers (October 2018 – September 2019)

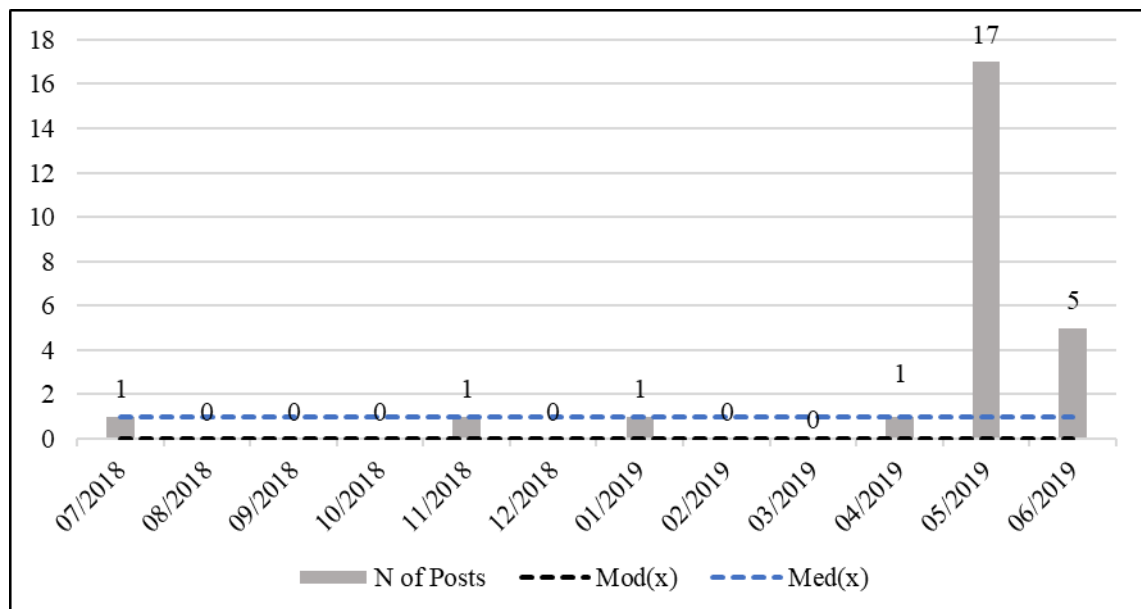


Source: Official Facebook Page of Petr Čech, Author’s own work

Social networking has never been a priority for Čech. However, he admitted that it makes communication with his supporters easier. The goalkeeper stated: “I am

on Facebook mainly because of the fans,” (Čech, in Šedivý, 2013). This statement is confirmed by Figure 9. Čech had minimal posting activity during most of the observation period. His largest number of posts was in July 2019, the last month of his active career. Čech made significantly more contributions to his Facebook page in the soccer season (19) than in the off season (7). Pillár (2019) considers the goalkeeper’s lack of social media activity to be a mistake: “In the last two years, we should have done more communication — in cooperation with Petr — and made the most of what remained of his career.”

Figure 9: Number of Posts on Petr Čech’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode (Mod(x)) and Median (Med(x)) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Petr Čech, Author’s own work

Two-thirds of the total number of Čech’s Facebook contributions were sports-related. Nine posts were categorized as “diverse.” (See Figure 10.) The latter posts included a recommendation of a movie, an invitation to a book launch, and an acknowledgment of fans’ birthday wishes (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Petr Čech’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	4	13	17
Diversity	3	6	9
Total	7	19	26

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petr Čech, Author’s own work

“Although Petr is a modern, open-minded, and intelligent person, he does not want to share anything from his private life or about the family,” said Pillár (2019). Examples of Čech’s sports-related and diverse posts are captured in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Petr Čech’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Petr Čech, Author’s own work

Čech complemented his posts with pictures, videos, and links. He most commonly added pictures, which appeared in 16 out of 26 total posts. Čech’s second most often published non-textual content was links to other websites (13 posts). Five posts contained one or more videos. No hashtags were observed in any of Čech’s posts from July 2018 to June 2019 (see Figure 12). Visual content in the posts was approved by Čech himself. “[T]he collaboration works on this basis: ‘I approve it’ or ‘I don’t like it, I will send you a better photo’,” said Pillár (2019).

Because Čech played soccer professionally in an English-speaking country, it is logical that more than half of his written Facebook content posted in the observation period was in English only. The rest of his posts were in Czech (7), and bilingual or nontextual (4) (see Figure 12). Čech’s recent Facebook activity differed from the first year when his official Facebook page was established. “In the beginning, it was not

good. Czech articles were shared there, on a page whose users and fans are 95% foreign,” (Pillár, 2019).

Figure 12: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Petr Čech’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	10
	The post contains picture(s)	16
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	21
	The post contains video(s)	5
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	13
	The post contains link(s)	13
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	26
	The post contains hashtag(s)	0
Language(s)	Czech	7
	English	15
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	4

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petr Čech, Author’s own work

Almost all of the posts on Petr Čech’s official Facebook page were classified as promotional in some way (see Figure 13). The categories of his posts differed when the soccer season was under way and when it was not. In season, he most often promoted his competitions, while he made no posts mentioning competitions in the off-season. Overall, Čech’s most frequent form of promotion was for products, which accounted for ten posts out of 26 in total. Neither of his two non-promotional posts contained any element of a promotional character.

Figure 13: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Postings on Petr Čech’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	1	1	2
Product	2	1	3
Charity	0	3	3
Self-promotion	4	6	10
Competition	0	8	8
Total	7	19	26

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petr Čech, Author’s own work

The sponsors and partners mentioned on Čech’s page from July 2018 to June 2019 were mainly sports brands such as Adidas, Nike, and Puma, or team sponsors, including Fly Emirates (Arsenal FC) and Hyundai and Yokohama Tyres (Chelsea FC). Some of the sports companies he mentioned were also team sponsors, such as Adidas in the case of Arsenal FC and Nike in the case of Chelsea FC (*Arsenal FC*:

Our Partners, 2020; Chelsea FC: Club Partners, 2020). Puma was listed on Čech’s official webpage as a personal partner (*Petr Čech, 2020b*). An overview of the sponsors mentioned by Čech is found in Figure 14 below (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

Figure 14: Mentions of Sponsors and Partners in Posts on Petr Čech’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Total
Fly Emirates	9	0	0	9
Puma	0	3	0	3
FlashScore.com	2	0	0	2
Yokohama Tyres	0	2	0	2
Adidas	1	0	0	1
Hyundai	0	0	1	1
Nike	1	0	0	1
Total	13	5	0	18

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petr Čech, Author’s own work

3.1.2 Fans’ Reactions

The large number of Petr Čech’s fans and followers was reflected by the numbers of likes, comments, and shares his posts received. On average, Čech’s posts received 18,533 likes, 598 comments, and were shared 465 times. The post published after Čech’s last Premier League match, in which the goalkeeper recounted the history of his participation in the League, garnered the most likes (73,001) of all his posts. Čech’s most commented-upon post (2,000 times) in the observation period was his announcement of his future collaboration with Chelsea FC. In January 2019, Čech announced in a post that he planned to end his career after the 2018/2019 season; that statement was his most-often shared (2,500 times). All of these posts are displayed below in Figure 15. Pillár also highlighted that Čech receives many personal message requests. “When we are talking about Petr Čech, the number of these requests is enormous. If we had to respond to all of them, we could do nothing else,” (Pillár, 2019).

Figure 15: Posts with Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Petr Čech's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Petr Čech, Author's own work

In general, Čech's fans were encouraging and supportive. The coders classified all the posts in the observation period as receiving mostly positive comments. On the other hand, there were some negative and critical voices raised, especially at the end of Čech's career when Arsenal faced Chelsea, Čech's former (and future) employer, in the 2019 Europa League Final (cf. Benson, 2019; Simpson, 2019). "At the end of his career there was the story that Petr was playing for Arsenal against his previous club, and it was already rumored in the media that he would probably go back to Chelsea. That story was very specific to the social networks," Pillár (2019) concluded.

3.2 Tomáš Koubek

Another soccer goalkeeper in the sample was Tomáš Koubek. Koubek is a member of the younger generation of athletes, which frequently uses social media. Like Petr Čech, Koubek started his international club career with the French soccer club Stade Rennes. That helped make Koubek a favorite of French fans, especially because Rennes was very successful when Petr Čech was its goalkeeper (Kozlovský, 2020). Koubek's popularity in France is evidenced by the frequent French-language comments posted by fans on Koubek's social media pages. Koubek has not yet achieved as great success in the sport as Čech. He has more than 200 times fewer fans and followers than Čech, and placed thirteenth in our sample in terms of number of fans and followers.

Koubek was a member of the Czech national Under-19 team, which won a silver medal at the 2011 UEFA U19 Championship in Romania (Vrábel, 2011; Worldfootball.net, 2020). His professional career began with FC Hradec Králové in the Czech Republic, where he debuted at the age of eighteen. After the 2015 UEFA U21 Championship, he was taken on by AC Sparta Praha. In his first year, he was seconded by Sparta to FC Slovan Liberec, and in the following year was ranked third in the Czech Republic when playing as goalkeeper for Sparta (CSFOTBAL, 2020; iDnes.cz, 2020). In 2017, Koubek signed a contract with Stade Rennes, where he played till 2019. Koubek has played for the German club FC Augsburg since 2019 (iDnes.cz, 2020). He has played nine matches with the senior Czech national team and turned in eight saves, five victories and five shutouts (Tomáš Koubek, 2020d).

3.2.1 Communication on Social Media

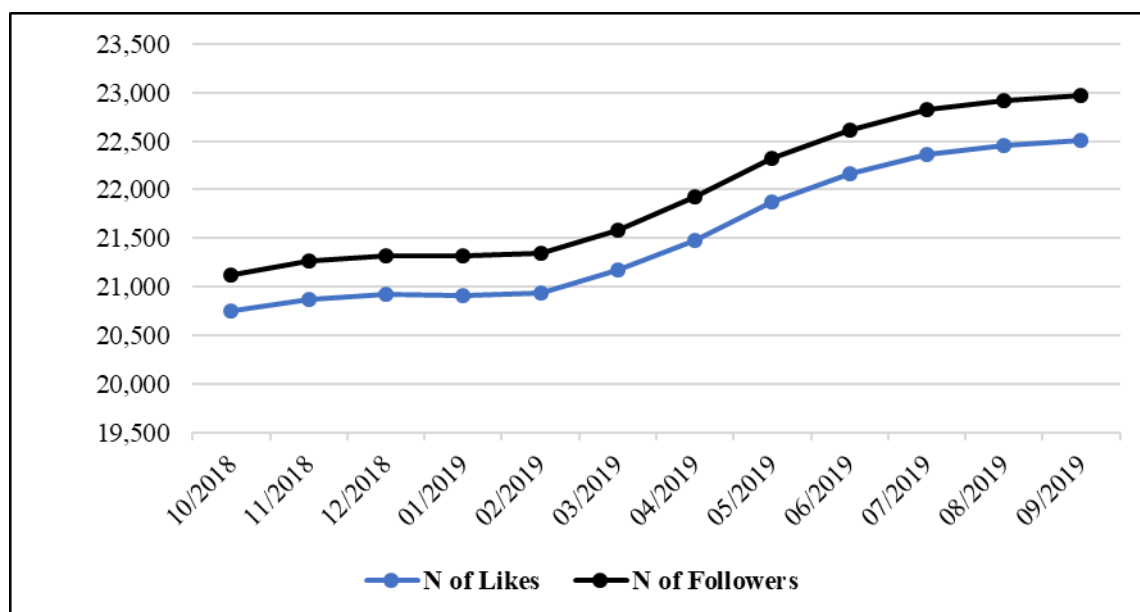
Koubek is active on social media and has his own official Facebook page (Tomáš Koubek, 2020a), Twitter account (Tomáš Koubek, 2020b), and Instagram profile (tomaskoubek, 2020). He has established his own YouTube channel, but he has not added any content to it since July 2018 (Tomáš Koubek, 2020c). Koubek realized the impact of having a social media presence, especially after moving away from the Czech Republic (Kozlovský, 2020). Therefore, he collaborates with the J&K ProSports marketing agency (Kozlovský, 2020; Pillár, 2019).⁵⁰ Ondřej Kozlovský, the marketing director for J&K ProSports, described the agency's management of Koubek's social media presence as follows: "We are the 'last mile' of the process. We publish the posts, but we never publish anything without Tomáš's permission and approval. The posts contain his thoughts and words, even if it does not look that way at first sight. Basically, we just ensure support, which means that Tomáš

⁵⁰ The fact that Koubek has personal connections with some of the members of the agency may contribute to the professional connection. Kozlovský (2020) stated: "Some colleagues of Koubek played with him for FC Hradec Králové, so they were friends and teammates. It happened that Tomas moved from Sparta [in the Czech league] to Rennes [in the French league], and communication with the Czech Republic was difficult. It was a huge problem for Czech journalists to obtain any information from France, firstly, because fans and journalists in the Czech Republic are not much interested in the French league, and secondly, because all the information from the team and the league was in French. French people do not like to use English that much. All the information about Tomáš at that time was in French, so it did not reach the Czech fans."

does not have to deal with the exact wording, translations into English, French and German, or upload photos,” (Kozlovský, 2020).

The number of likes received by Tomáš Koubek’s official Facebook page increased from 20,747 to 22,503 in the observation period. As Figure 16 shows, the number of his followers was greater than his “likes,” although the upward trend was similar. The number of Koubek’s followers increased by 1,853 from October 2018 to September 2019.

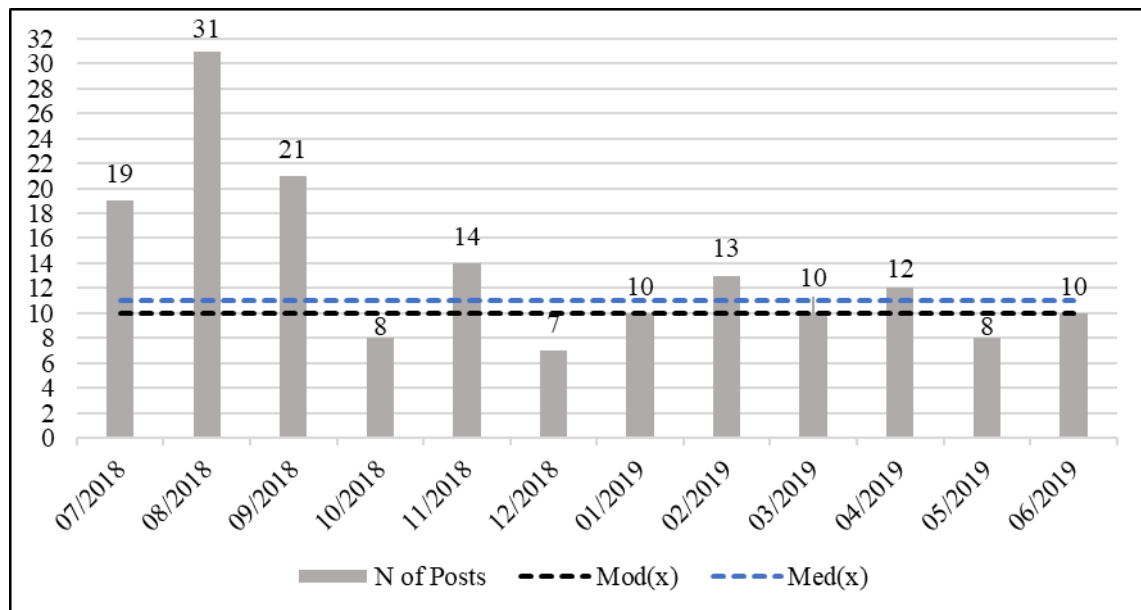
Figure 16: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Tomáš Koubek’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author’s own work

The number of Facebook posts that Koubek published monthly from July 2018 to June 2019 fluctuated. The median number of his monthly posts was eleven (see Figure 17). The largest number of posts, thirty-one, appeared on Koubek’s Facebook wall in August 2018, at the start of the French soccer season. That same month, Koubek launched his new personal website (Kozlovský, 2020; Tomáš Koubek, 2018a), and entered into a new commercial partnership with Reusch, a manufacturer of gloves for soccer goalkeepers (Tomáš Koubek, 2018c). Kozlovský (2020) commented on the fluctuation in the number of monthly posts: “We do not monitor the frequency of posting; it is not important for us. We rely more on the quality of communication. We want to give the fans important and interesting information.”

Figure 17: Number of Posts on Tomáš Koubek’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode ($Mod(x)$) and Median ($Med(x)$) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author’s own work

The language in which Koubek’s Facebook postings appear depends on the Facebook user’s language setting for the social media channel. “For you, it’s in Czech, because you have Facebook switched into the Czech language. German speakers see the content in German. We currently prepare the texts in three versions — English, German and Czech. In the previous period, there was French instead of German. The translation on Facebook is not automatic; we really do translate all the text to ensure a good language level. The default language is English – if a person does not set Czech or German language, then he or she sees the content in English,” (Kozlovský, 2020).

Kozlovský’s statement is confirmed by the results of our analysis. Most of his posts (149 of 162 in total) from July 2018 to June 2019 were originally published in Czech and the rest of the content was written in English (4 posts) or contained no text (9 posts) (see Figure 40). Koubek’s and Kozlovský’s motivation for posting in multiple languages is to create and maintain a close connection with different groups of fans — Czech, local, and international. Kozlovský (2020) stated: “That was the first step we took when we started to collaborate with Tomáš. We made an analysis, in which we tried to reveal the possible limits of communication. When we started to post in French, Tomáš’s French fans liked him even more.”

Koubek’s Facebook communication focused on sports-related topics, which predominated in his posts over the whole observation period (see Figure 18). Sports-related items accounted for more than 90 percent of the goalkeepers’ postings.

The remaining posts had diverse themes. Kozlovský said that he made a conscious effort to reveal other sides of goalkeeper’s personality: “We tried to introduce Tomáš as he is — the father of a family who is married. He has two little daughters whom he loves, and the family is an essential part of his life. Talking both about Tomáš’s current family and about his mom and dad, who allowed him to play soccer, is important to him. We wanted to introduce this part of his personality as well. We tried to show people what kind of person he is; that he is not just a man standing in goal and catching a ball,” Kozlovský (2020). As visualized in Figure 18, most of Koubek’s content was posted in season. Only four posts were made in the off-season, one of which was on a diverse topic (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

Figure 18: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Postings on Tomáš Koubek’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	3	143	146
Diversity	1	15	16
Total	4	158	162

Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author’s own work

Koubek routinely posted visual and interactive content on his official Facebook page. Most posts (123) were accompanied by one or more pictures, which were often set into a pre-defined graphic frame. Kozlovský (2020) said that J&K ProSport employs a graphic specialist just for that purpose. Around two-thirds of Koubek’s posts contained one or more links, and more than one-fourth of his content included a video or videos. In contrast, he added hashtags to only five items of 162 items (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages Used in Posts on Tomáš Koubek's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	39
	The post contains picture(s)	123
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	125
	The post contains video(s)	37
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	57
	The post contains link(s)	105
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	157
	The post contains hashtag(s)	5
Language(s)	Czech ("default" language)	149
	English	4
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	9

Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author's own work

Koubek's typical sports-related and diverse posts are illustrated in Figure 20. The sports-related post announces an important match against soccer rivals FC Nantes. The diverse post is dedicated to the goalkeeper's family, something that is important to Koubek.

Figure 20: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Tomáš Koubek's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author's own work

Promotional content prevailed in Tomáš Koubek’s posts in the observation period. We classified only eight posts as non-promotional. Moreover, three of the eight contained pictures with a promotional character. Almost 90 posts announced upcoming competitions and 49 posts amount promoted goalkeeper himself. Eight posts were categorized as charity promotions; seven posts promoted specific products (see Figure 21). The remaining one promotional post related to Koubek’s family and friends. Because of the low number of posts Koubek published in the off season (four), the difference in the content of in-season and off-season promotional posts could not be evaluated. (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

Figure 21: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Postings on Tomáš Koubek’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	0	8	8
Product	0	7	7
Charity	1	7	8
Self-promotion	3	46	49
Competition	0	89	89
Family and friends product	0	1	1
Total	4	158	162

Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author’s own work

Promotional content was largely created by Koubek himself: “A significant part of the posts comes from Tomáš, who has his own ideas, duties and contracts — for example with Reusch — about the content to be published. Sponsors also need to take pictures. Of course, creating Facebook posts is another ‘discipline’ when it comes to product promotion. The content arises spontaneously; we have to react to the current situation. It is not like selling football boots — in that case, we can create a strategy half a year in advance. That would not work with Facebook posts. In our case, we can follow a plan only until the next match, and then we have to react to the outcome. Our agency and Tomáš usually communicate with each other; we call him and agree on the next step,” (Kozlovský, 2020). New contracts with sponsors were announced on the goalkeeper’s official Facebook page, and the sponsors’ names were highlighted with links or hashtags (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: Example of the Announcement and Disclosing of the Sponsors on Tomáš Koubek's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author's own work

The intensity with which Koubek mentioned corporate sponsors is displayed in Figure 23. Among others, Koubek promoted several sports brands, such as Puma, Nike or Reusch, and also team sponsors, i.e., a cleaning company called Samsic (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

Figure 23: Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on Tomáš Koubek’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (4th mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (5th mentioned)	Total
Puma	7	3	1	0	1	12
Samsic	8	3	0	0	0	11
Nike	5	1	0	1	0	7
Reusch	3	0	1	0	0	4
T-Mobile	2	2	0	0	0	4
11teamsports	0	0	0	0	1	1
Allianz	1	0	0	0	0	1
Hyundai	1	0	0	0	0	1
IGOL	1	0	0	0	0	1
Just Keepers	0	0	0	1	0	1
KEEPERsport	0	1	0	0	0	1
Pro:Direct Soccer	0	0	1	0	0	1
RedBull	1	0		0	0	1
Tape-Design Socks	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	29	11	3	2	2	47

Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author’s own work

3.2.2 Fans’ Reactions

Fans reacted intensively to the goalkeepers’ official Facebook postings in the observation period. On average, his posts were liked 918 times, shared by 26 people, and commented upon 36 times. The posts with the most likes, comments, and shares on Koubek’s official Facebook page from July 2018 to June 2019 are shown in Figure 24. The most-liked post (7,600 times) consisted of a photo of Koubek holding a trophy, published the day after FC Rennes’ triumph in the 2018 Coupe de France final match. The largest number of comments (1,100) appeared under the announcement of a contest, with game tickets as the top prize, published in November 2018. In most cases, including this one, Koubek encouraged the participation of both Czech and international participants, which increased the interest and involvement of his fans.⁵¹ In the end, however, the majority of those who entered Koubek’s contest were Czechs (Kozlovský, 2020). “When we conducted the contest for the jersey or the football boots, all of the participating fans were Czechs. That was very

⁵¹ In this particular contest, the winners could choose between receiving a ticket to a soccer match played in the Czech Republic or a ticket to one played in France (Tomáš Koubek, 2019).

interesting,” added Kozlovský (2020). The announcement of national team matches with England and Brazil, complemented by a photo taken in an airplane in March 2019, received the most shares (2000).

Figure 24: Posts with the Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Tomáš Koubek’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author’s own work

Koubek’s posts from July 2018 to June 2019 were mostly greeted positively by his followers. Only one post, which announced that a French soccer league match would be broadcast by the Czech television channel *Nova Sport* received mostly negative feedback (see Figure 25). Fans criticized the form of the broadcast (Tomáš Koubek, 2018b).

Figure 25: Type of Comments under the Posts on Tomáš Koubek’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral comments	10	6,2	6,2	6,2
Mostly positive comments	151	93,2	93,2	99,4
Mostly negative comments	1	0,6	0,6	100
Total	162	100,0	100,0	

Source: Official Facebook Page of Tomáš Koubek, Author’s own work

Kozlovský (2020) stated that negative reactions on Koubek's official Facebook page were not deleted. "Vulgar comments do not appear very often, and criticism is mostly related to Tomáš's performance on the field. It's peoples' opinion, and they have a right to express it," (Kozlovský, 2020). Although Koubek publicly states that he does not read the comments, the truth is different: "Tomáš always tells me that he does not read the peoples' reactions, but if we discuss them, he says: 'But this fan wrote that, etc.'" If Tomáš were telling the truth and really does not read the comments, he would do best. Of course, if someone writes him something interesting through social media, I forward the message to him," (Kozlovský, 2020).

3.3 David Pastrňák

Ice hockey is the second most popular sport among the Czech population (Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2019). In the long term, the most liked and followed Facebook page of all Czech ice hockey players belongs to Jaromír Jágr. Jágr's page 719,593 likes and attracted 710,542 followers in the half of the observation period (in March 2019). On the other hand, Jágr published only four posts on his official Facebook page in the year before the observation period (from September 2017 to August 2018), and it was not clear whether he would continue his active sports career at that time (Jaromír Jágr, 2020).

We selected two successful members of the Czech national ice hockey team from the younger generation, David Pastrňák and Jakub Voráček to represent ice hockey in our sample. Both of them play in the world's most prestigious ice hockey league, the National Hockey League (NHL). They each have active official Facebook pages with more than 20,000 fans and followers (David Pastrňák, 2020; Jakub Voráček, 2020).

David Pastrňák, the youngest athlete in our sample, currently plays a forward position as a right wing for the Boston Bruins of the NHL (NHL.com, 2020a; Osdbsports.com, 2020). He started to play ice hockey in the Czech town of Havířov; then moved to Sweden when he won a professional contract with Södertälje SK as a junior (Elite Prospects Hockey, 2020). He was drafted into the NHL in 2014 by the Boston Bruins and has played for that team since the beginning of his NHL career (ESPN, 2020; Osdbsports.com, 2020). He debuted with the Czech national senior ice

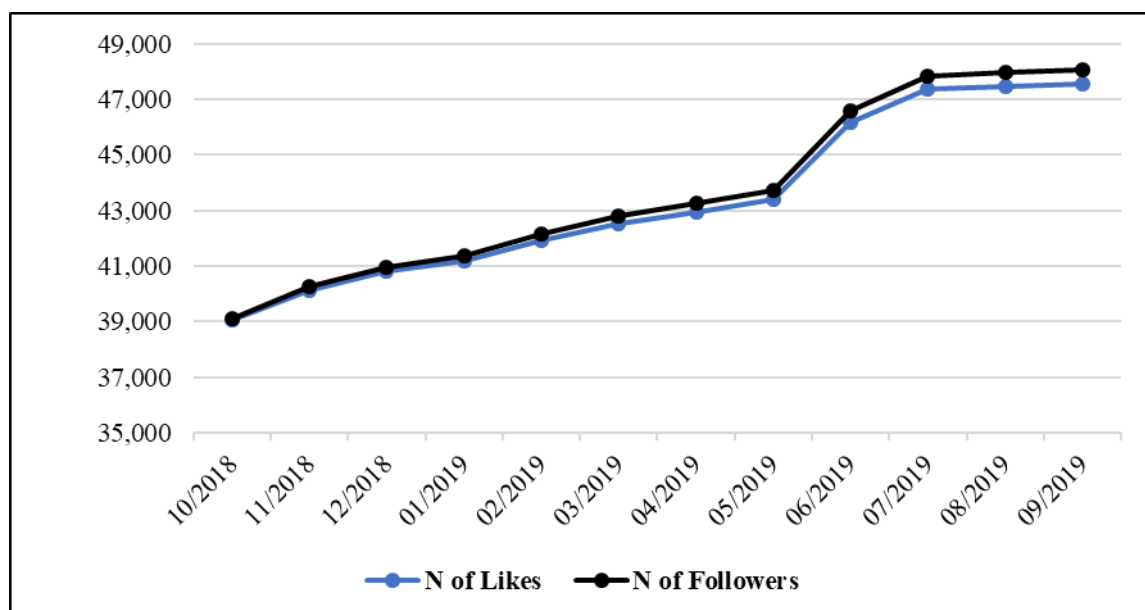
hockey “A” team in 2016, and has played with the national team at top tournaments ever since then if his NHL duties allowed (hokej.cz, 2020a; Sára, 2016).

3.3.1 Communication on Social Media

Pastrňák has official accounts on Facebook (David Pastrňák, 2020), Twitter (davidpastrnak, 2020b) and Instagram (davidpastrnak, 2020a). He joined Twitter in January 2013 and had more than 103 thousand followers by July 2020 (davidpastrnak, 2020b). Pastrňák’s official Facebook page was created the following month, in February 2013 (Osdbsports.com, 2020). According to Součková (2019), Pastrňák was the leading figure among Czech ice hockey players in terms of the number of his followers on Instagram in 2019.

During the observation period, the number of fans of Pastrňák’s official Facebook page increased from 39,050 to 47,559, while the number of followers increased from 39,122 to 48,050. As shown in Figure 26, the biggest increase in both indicators was recorded in May 2019. The growth in Pastrňák’s popularity in that month, as well as the virality of his page, may be attributable to the success of the Boston Bruins in the 2018/2019 season, when they placed second in the NHL (Daněk, 2019; Šlapáček, 2019; Hockey-reference.com, 2020c).

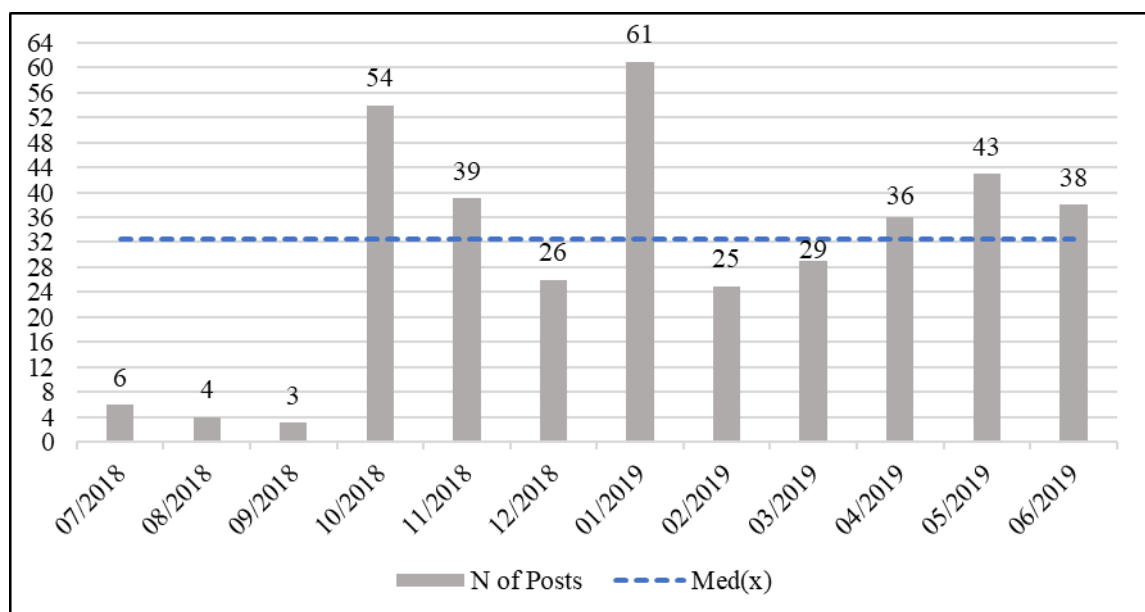
Figure 26: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of David Pastrňák’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author’s own work

From July 2018 to June 2019, Pastrňák put up 33 posts a month on average. The largest number of posts (61) were published in January 2019, a month in the middle of the 2018/2019 NHL season. The next largest number was in November 2018, when the season started (Hockey-reference.com, 2020b; see Figure 27). During the off-season period, Pastrňák published only thirteen posts on his official Facebook page compared to 355 items which he added during the ice hockey season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

Figure 27: Number of Posts on David Pastrňák’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode ($Mod(x)$) and Median ($Med(x)$) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author’s own work

Martin Tomaidēs, the NHL expert for the Czech sports daily *Sport*, appreciated the improvement in Pastrňák’s use of the media and public relations in general (Tomaidēs, in Vait et al., 2019). Tomaidēs wrote: “David Pastrňák is very successful. In addition to developing into an excellent hockey player, he is also a ‘media type.’ And in America, they rely a lot on it [the media]. He became one of the ‘faces’ of the whole league,” (Tomaidēs, in Vait et al., 2019). Pastrňák’s official Facebook page was predominantly sports-oriented. More than ninety percent of its content reflected sports themes. The remaining 30 posts of the 364 he posted during the observation period in total were categorized as diverse. Figure 28 reveals the differences in the distribution of his posts on sports-related and diverse topics, but the result was not statistically relevant because Pastrňák published hardly any diverse posts at all.

Figure 28: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Postings on David Pastrňák’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	8	326	334
Diversity	5	25	30
Total	13	351	364

Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author’s own work

Sports-related posts on David Pastrňák’s Facebook page all took the same form. The text was usually very brief, and included emoticons that supported the meaning of the message. Visual items, pictures, or infographics were contained in 241 posts of the 364 in total, while 42 posts contained one or more videos. Links that appeared in more than half of Pastrňák’s content referred to the Boston Bruins’ social media profiles and the team’s website. Hashtags accompanied only about four percent of posts in the observation period (see Figure 29).

Figure 29: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posting on David Pastrňák’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

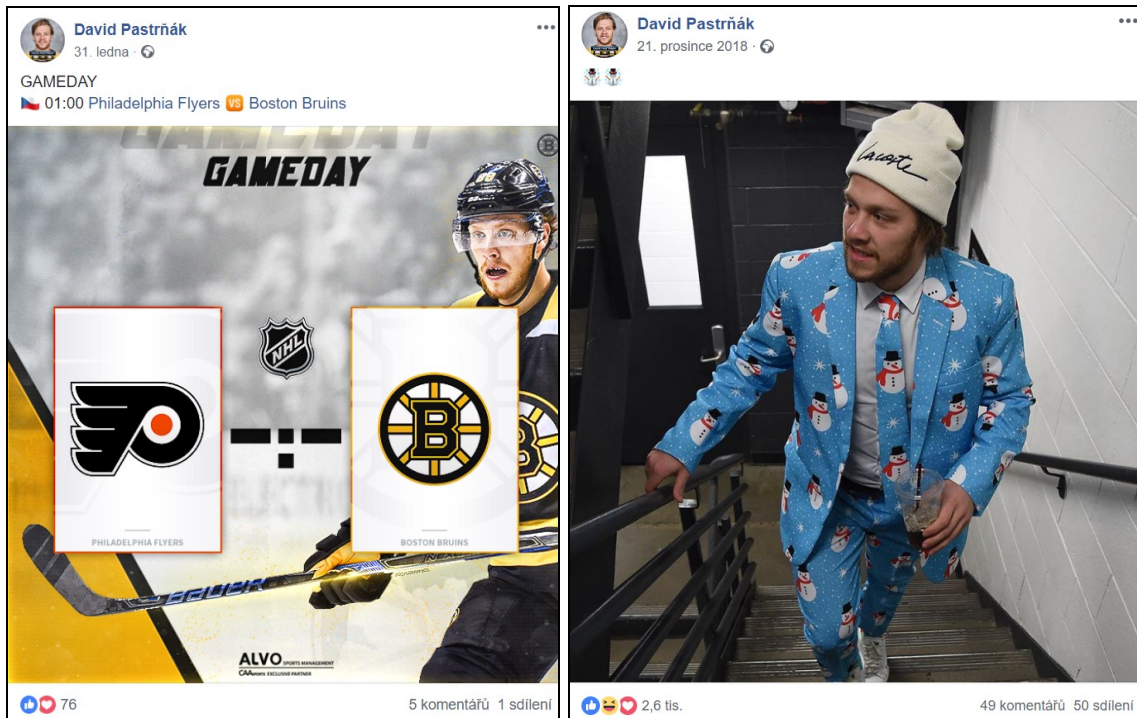
Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	123
	The post contains picture(s)	241
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	332
	The post contains video(s)	42
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	168
	The post contains link(s)	196
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	351
	The post contains hashtag(s)	13
Language(s)	Czech	55
	English	117
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	192

Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author’s own work

More than half of the content Pastrňák published was written in both English and Czech or used only emoticons with no text at all. The usual language of Pastrňák’s posts was English, which he used in 117 posts. In comparison, only 55 posts used the Czech language alone (see Figure 29). Figure 30 examines the typical sports-related and diverse posts Pastrňák published on his Facebook page between July 2018 and June 2019. As is visible from the screen shots, the sports-related items were intended to inform fans as well as encourage their loyalty. On the other hand, in most cases Pastrňák’s diverse posts included uncaptioned photos, and discussion of serious themes

was intentionally avoided. Among others, Pastrňák claimed that he would never talk about politics in any kind of media (Pastrňák, in Fight Club News, 2020).

Figure 30: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on David Pastrňák's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author's own work

Except for two posts, all of Pastrňák's contributions to Facebook had a promotional character. As can be seen in Figure 31, the type of promotion differed from the off-season to in-season periods. The off-season posts contained product advertising, self-promotion, and support for charity. Pastrňák's promotional activity during the ice hockey season concentrated mainly on competition announcements and self-promotion. Other sub-categories appeared rarely or never. Our content analysis found that Pastrňák frequently added pictures and links to support his promotion of ice hockey matches. Posts promoting competitions contained pictures 151 times, while one or more links were added to 104 posts. Other types of interactive content were used less often.

Figure 31: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Postings on David Pastrňák’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	1	1	2
Product	5	0	5
Charity	1	0	1
Self-promotion	6	166	172
Competition	0	184	184
Total	13	351	364

Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author’s own work

Pastrňák directly stated the names of three companies in his posts that promoted brands (cf. Lebel and Danylchuk, 2012). The largest number of his posts (78) mentioned the ice hockey equipment brand Bauer, which hired Pastrňák for its advertising campaign (tad, 2020). Pasternak also mentioned Under Armour (a sports brand) and Chance (a betting company) but each only one time (see Figure 32).

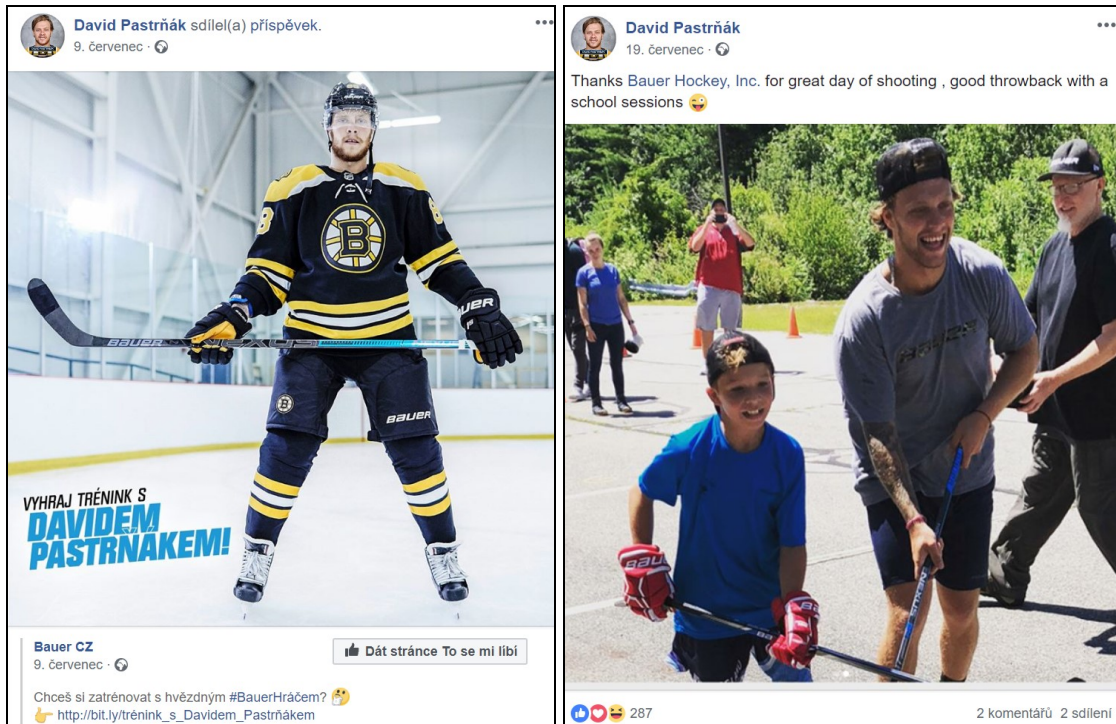
Figure 32: Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on David Pastrňák’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Total
Bauer	78	0	78
Chance	1	0	1
Under Armour	0	1	1
Total	79	1	80

Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author’s own work

Figure 33 contains examples of posts promoting sponsors and partners. Pastrňák shared content from his sponsors’ pages or provided a link to the sponsors’ pages or profiles.

Figure 33: Example of Promotion of Sponsors (Including a Contest) on David Pastrňák's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

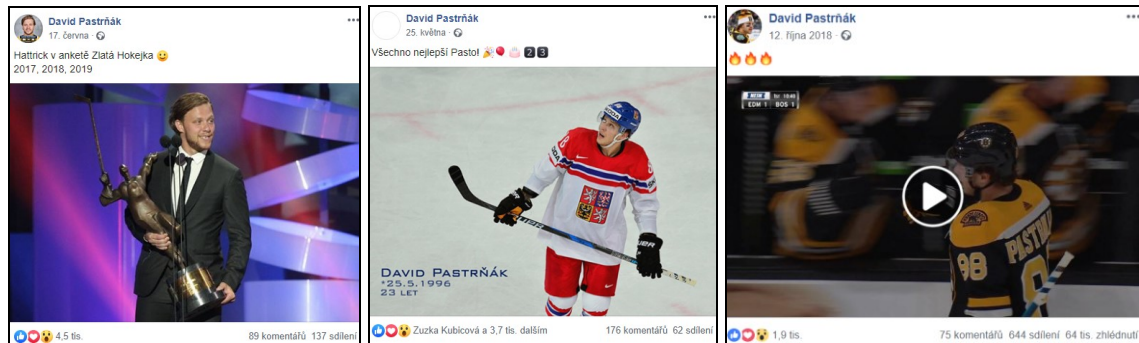


Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author's own work

3.3.2 Fans' Reactions

Visitors to Pastrňák's official Facebook page reacted to his posts. On average, each post was liked 561 times, shared by 18 entities, and commented upon 14 times. The most-liked post (4,500 times) was written in the Czech language. It focused on Pastrňák's success in being voted the best Czech ice hockey player of the year. That trophy is the "Zlatá Hokejka" (the "Golden Hockey Stick") and Pastrňák won it for the third time in 2019. The player's most commented-upon post was also published only in Czech, and celebrated the player's birthday. The most shares (644) were achieved by a post published on October 12, 2018, which contained a video of Pastrňák's goal against the Edmonton Oilers (see Figure 34).

Figure 34: Posts with Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on David Pastrňák's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of David Pastrňák, Author's own work

Fans' comments on the posted content were mostly positive. Encouraging and supportive comments dominated over more negative ones in 295 posts. The ratio of positive to negative comments was balanced for 62 posts. Only seven of Pastrňák's posts, all of which were sports-oriented, were evaluated mostly negatively. Fans' criticisms were targeted at Pastrňák's and his team's performance on the ice. Negative comments under Pastrňák's posts can be divided into two main categories — abusive comments and constructive criticism. The abusive comments, e.g. those that contained swear words, were predominantly written in Czech. On the other hand, the reactions published in English were more constructive — many of those fans reflected upon the contribution of individual players to the team (David Pastrňák, 2018).

3.4 Jakub Voráček

Jakub Voráček, a captain of the Czech team during the 2015 and 2019 Ice Hockey World Championships, is the second ice hockey player in our sample (hokej.cz, 2020b; *Jakub Voráček: About*, 2020). Voráček, a right wing from Kladno, currently plays in the National Hockey League. Voráček's NHL career began in 2008 with the Columbus Blue Jackets, where he spent four seasons before being traded to the Philadelphia Flyers. In 2015, Voráček was selected to play in the NHL All-Star Game (Hockey-reference.com, 2020a; NHL.com, 2020b). As for his career with the Czech national team, Voráček has played for the "A" team since the 2009/2010 season when the Czech team won the World Championship in Germany (Sport.cz, 2010).

Besides sport, Voráček actively supports charity. His sister was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2013. Two years later, Voráček established a foundation

that supports multiple sclerosis treatment, the Nadace Jakuba Voráčka (Bureš & Kuna, 2015; *Nadace Jakuba Voráčka: O Nadaci [Jakub Voracek Foundation: About foundation]*, 2020). Voráček provides financial support to the foundation and donates 1,000 USD to it for each point he scores in an NHL game. He engages in other NHL charitable activities as well, e.g. supporting children with cancer (*Nadace Jakuba Voráčka: O Nadaci [Jakub Voracek Foundation: About foundation]*, 2020).

3.4.1 Communication on Social Media

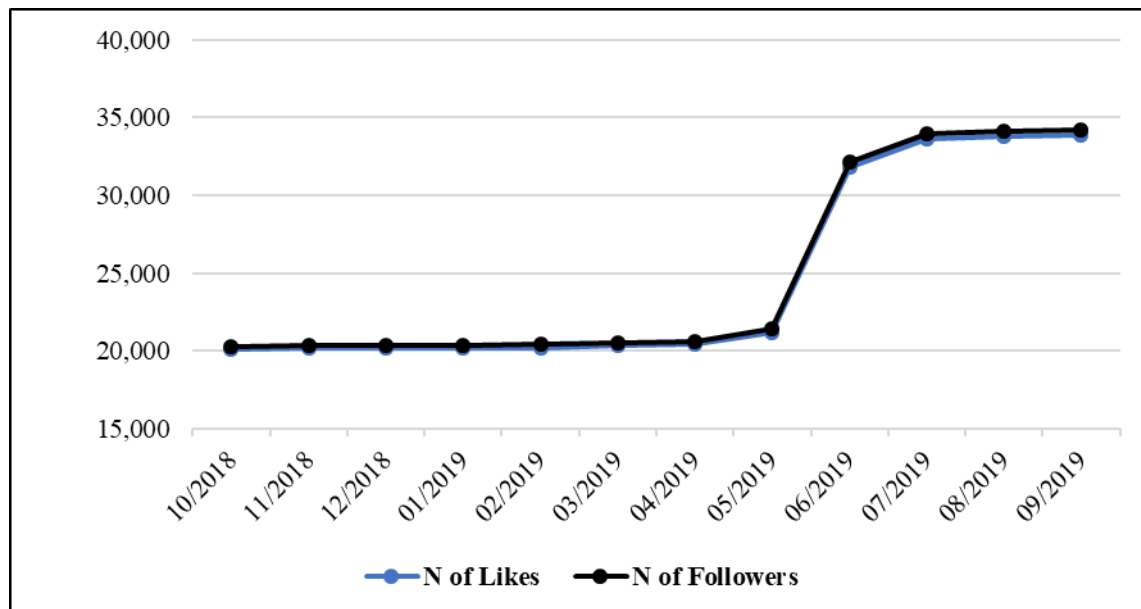
Although Voráček does not contribute to his profiles on a daily basis, he is very popular on social media. He has been called the “hockey king of the social networks” in the Czech Republic (Janko, 2019). He most commonly uses the social media channel Twitter, on which he established a presence in 2011 (Jakub Voracek, 2020a). He uses Twitter mainly for attracting American fans to his NHL career (Janko, 2019). At the end of 2015, Voráček created an official Facebook page (Jakub Voráček, 2020). Besides his official social media presence, some of the posts on his Instagram page (jakubvoracek_93, 2020) and his personal Facebook page (Jakub Voracek, 2020b) are visible to the general public.

For the first two-thirds of the observation period, the number of likes and followers of Jakub Voráček’s official Facebook page remained about the same (from 20,136 to 21,218 likes and from 20,306 and 21,393 followers). But in the month of May, 2019 the number of Voráček’s supporters increased by more than 10,000 fans and followers. That may be attributable to greater publishing activity on his Facebook page (see Figure 148), interest in the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Championship held in Slovakia in May 2019 (IIHF, 2020), and the birth of Voráček’s son (Bagar, 2019; Sára, 2019).

Although the Czech ice hockey team did not win a medal in the 2019 championship and placed fourth, fans, former players, and hockey experts appreciated the quality of the effort that the players on the national team put into the games (Bureš, 2019a; Kadeřábek, 2019a; Kadeřábek, 2019b). After the tournament, thousands of fans thronged the Prague airport to thank the members of the Czech national team for their performance (Rokyta, 2019). Voráček’s life partner also gave birth to their second son, Matěj, during the championship (Bagar, 2019; Sára, 2019). Such a personal event can

affect not only the popularity of an ice hockey player’s official Facebook page, but also his social media publication activity (see Figure 36).

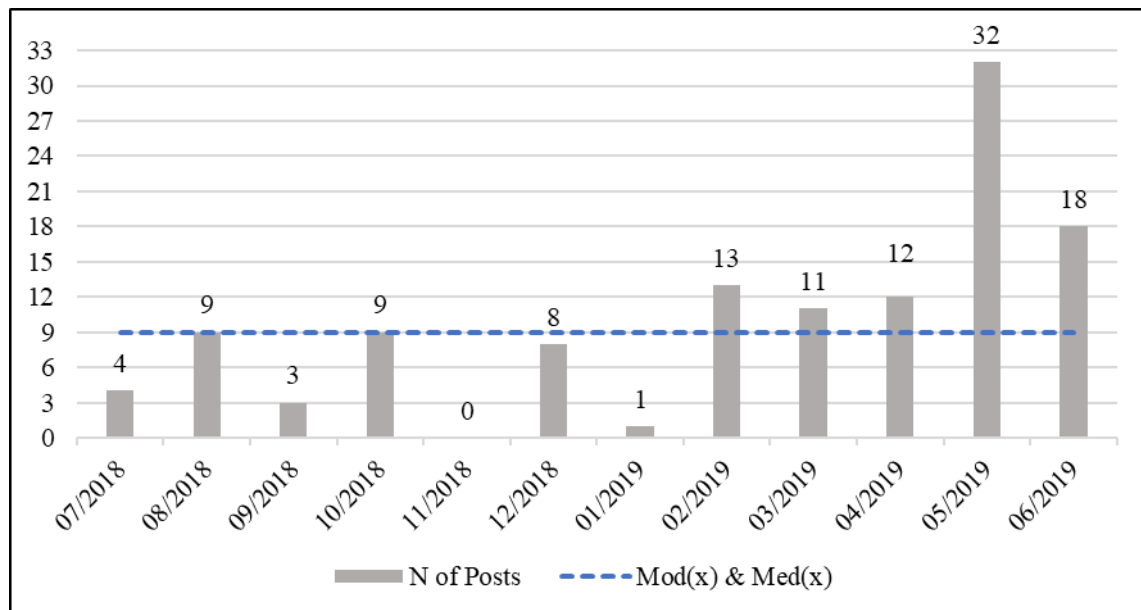
Figure 35: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Jakub Voráček’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author’s own work

The number of posts on Voráček’s official Facebook page each month between July 2018 and June 2019 fluctuated (see Figure 36). Although the mode (9) and median (9) number of posts was relatively high, some months saw low publication activity. Moreover, in November 2018 nothing at all was posted on Voráček’s official page. On the other hand, the greatest number of items (32) was published in May 2019, at which time the World Championship took place as mentioned above. Over two-thirds of Voráček’s content (82 posts of 120 in total) appeared on Voráček’s Facebook page during the ice hockey season (cf. Geurin and Clavio, 2015; see Figure 38)

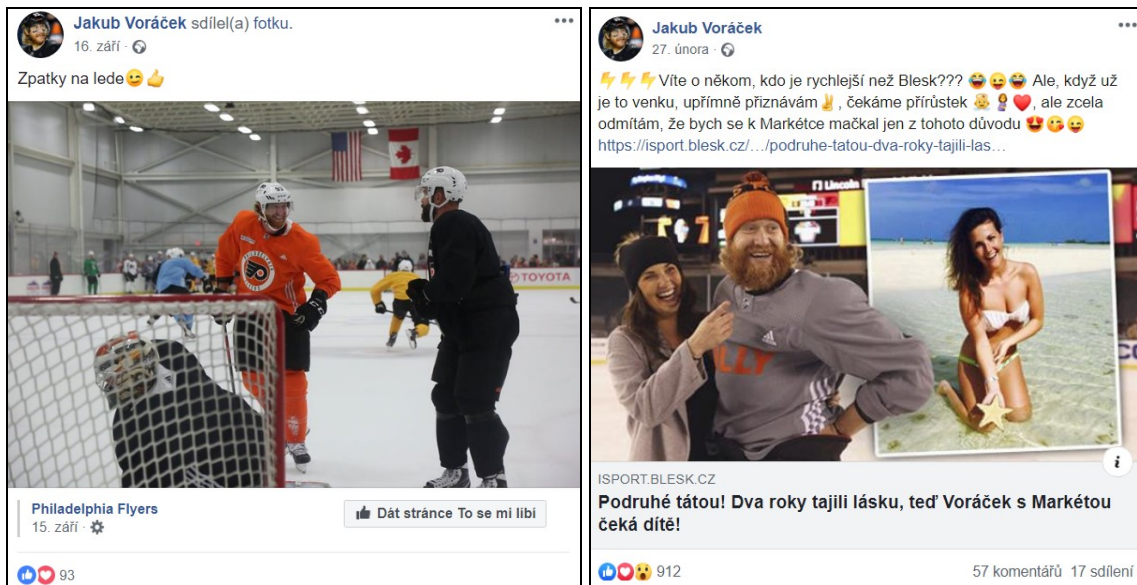
Figure 36: Number of Posts on Jakub Voráček's Official Facebook Page, with Mode ($Mod(x)$) and Median ($Med(x)$) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author's own work

To sum up, Voráček published 120 posts on his official Facebook page during the observation period; 88 of them were sports-related. His posts often depicted the training process or referred to upcoming or past matches. In his sports-related content, Voráček frequently mentioned his foundation, the Nadace Jakuba Voráčka, which supports multiple sclerosis treatment (*Nadace Jakuba Voráčka: O Nadaci [Jakub Voracek Foundation: About foundation]*, 2020). Voráček rarely shared private information, whether through the traditional media or social networks. One exception was post that announced his partner's pregnancy and the birth of his second son (Jakub Voráček, 2019). The birth announcement was not published on his social media page until after a report had appeared in the Czech tabloid Blesk (see Figure 37). Examples of Voráček's sports-related and diverse content are found in Figure 37.

Figure 37: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Jakub Voráček's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author's own work

The ratio of sports-related and diverse posts differed in-season and out of season. While these categories were represented by an almost equal number of posts off-season, the sports-related content distinctly predominated during the ice hockey season (see Figure 38).

Figure 38: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Postings on Jakub Voráček's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	20	68	88
Diversity	18	14	32
Total	38	82	120

Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author's own work

Figure 39 shows that most of Voráček's posts contained visual or interactive content. Around 82% of his posts were accompanied by a link to Voráček's foundation's Facebook page, the Philadelphia Flyers' channel, and other content. Significantly fewer posts contained videos or pictures; they appeared in 23 and 22 posts, respectively. The content analysis we conducted revealed that Voráček rarely used hashtags, which were added to only one post in the entire sample of his social media activity.

Regarding language, Voráček mainly used Czech on his official Facebook page. He published only one post in English. Six of his posts used both languages or contained emoticons only (see Figure 39).

Figure 39: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Jakub Voráček's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	98
	The post contains picture(s)	22
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	97
	The post contains video(s)	23
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	21
	The post contains link(s)	99
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	119
	The post contains hashtag(s)	1
Language(s)	Czech	113
	English	1
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	6

Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author's own work

The activity on Voráček's official Facebook page had a strong promotional character. Figure 40 shows that only six of 120 posts published in the observation period were classified as non-promotional (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015). Moreover, four of the non-promotional posts included one or more promotional links. Besides the links, Voráček's posts contained videos (22 posts) or pictures (19 posts). One post, which announced a national team match, contained a promotional hashtag.

Figure 40: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Postings on Jakub Voráček's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	2	4	6
Product	1	1	2
Charity	21	16	37
Self-promotion	10	20	30
Competition	3	41	44
Family and friends product	1	0	1
Total	38	82	120

Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author's own work

As shown in Figure 40, posts about competitions dominated Voráček's promotional content published from July 2018 to June 2019. This type of post mainly appeared on his official page during the hockey season, when 41 of a total of 44 posts in that category were published. Aside from competition announcements, another highly represented category on Voráček's official Facebook page during the observation period was charity. Posts dedicated to his foundation were the biggest part of Voráček's off-season promotional posts. Marketing and PR manager Lenka Dominiková assisted

Voráček with social media management. For example, she answered private messages sent to his official Facebook page (*Nadace Jakuba Voráčka: Pro media [Jakub Voracek Foundation: For media]*, 2020).

Voráček did not give much space to product promotion in the observation period (see Figure 40). He rarely mentioned the names of sponsors or commercial partners; they appeared in seven posts of 120 in total. Voráček most often acknowledged companies that supported his Nadace Jakuba Voráčka. Figure 41 shows that the range of the brands Voráček mentioned was relatively wide. The brands included media companies (Krokodýl, Óčko), sports companies (Bauer, CCM, Střída), a toy store (WIKI), and a brewery (Starobrno) (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

Figure 41: Mentions of Sponsors in the Posts on Jakub Voráček's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corp. Spons. (1st m.)	Corp. Spons. (2nd m.)	Corp. Spons. (3rd m.)	Corp. Spons. (4th m.)	Corp. Spons. (5th m.)	Corp. Spons. (6th m.)	Corp. Spons. (7th m.)	Corp. Spons. (8th m.)	Corp. Spons. (9th m.)	Corp. Spons. (10th m.)	Corp. Spons. (11th m.)	Corp. Spons. (12th m.)	Total
Bauer	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
GolfDigest	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Auto Esa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
CCM	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
City Tools	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Česká Spořitelna	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Krokodýl	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Óčko	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
RailReklam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Reagl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
RH Centrum	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Starobrno	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Střída sport	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tipsport	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Vinofol	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
WIKI	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18

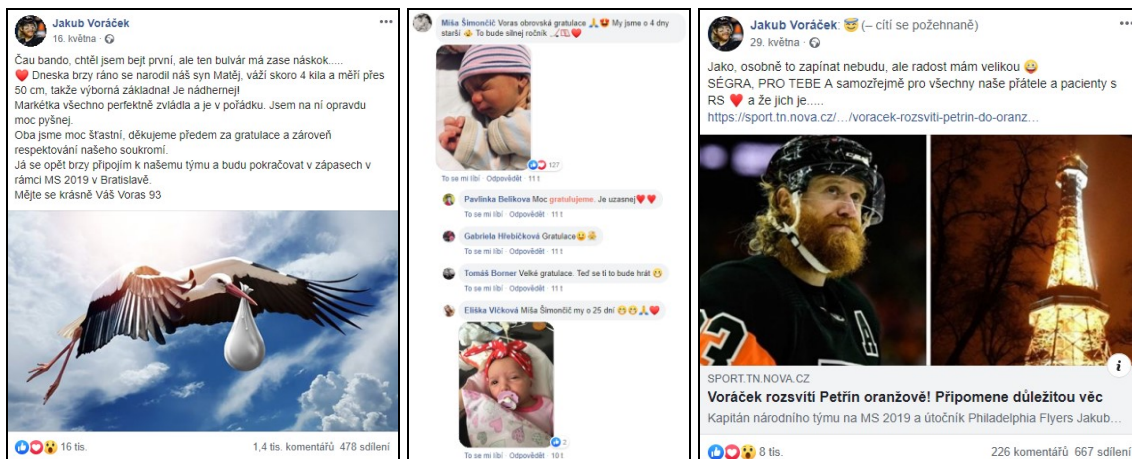
Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author's own work

3.4.2 Fans' Reactions

Fans and visitors to Voráček's official Facebook page reacted to his posted content. The most common form of interaction was likes, followed by comments and shares. Voráček's posts received an average of 716 likes and 45 comments, and were shared on average by 32 visitors to his page. Figure 42 shows the posts with most likes, comments and shares on Voráček's official Facebook page. A report of an event organized by his foundation — the lighting of Prague's Petřín lookout tower

with orange light on the occasion of World Multiple Sclerosis Day, May 29, 2019 — was the one most shared by his fans. The post announcing the birth of his second son was the most commented upon and liked post. It was liked by 16,000 supporters and commented upon 1,400 times. Positive reactions significantly prevailed as Voráček’s fans commented with photos of their own newborn babies. A piece of the conversation is captured in Figure 42.

Figure 42: Posts with Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Jakub Voráček’s Official Facebook Page and Sample of Fans’ Reactions (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author’s own work

The comments under Voráček’s Facebook posts were generally positive. Visitors to the page reacted positively to 99 posts and neutrally (a nearly equal number of positive and negative comments under the posts) to the rest of them. However, some negative comments appeared on Voráček’s official Facebook page. Jakub Voráček replied to some of those and deleted others, as evidenced by Figure 43. Below the picture on the left, one fan, Jiri Havlik, recommended that Voráček shave off his beard, writing that the “homeless guy’s beard is disgusting.” Voráček argued that his profession is playing ice hockey, so he does not need to look like a male model. Fans also complained that some of their comments were deleted. Voráček replied to all of them at once: “Sorry guys, but no one will comment vulgarly on the news about a baby on the way.” The screenshot on the right documents that Voráček provided his fans with information about how to buy tickets to a charity match.

Figure 43: Jakub Voráček's Responses to the Fans' Comments on his Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Jakub Voráček, Author's own work

Regarding critical voices on social media, Voráček stated that negative comments appeared more often during unsuccessful periods in an athlete's sports career. "The athlete has two options: don't read the reactions or read them and reply. That's it, it is freedom of speech. Social media leads the world nowadays and we have to adapt," (Voráček, in Pokorný, 2019). Voráček admitted that he reads and responds to fans' comments in online discussions and social media: "At every meeting, NHL players are told that they should not read social media and should not respond to people's comments, but I, after age thirty and after nearly a thousand ice hockey matches, just do it my way. Our PR managers in Philadelphia know me. They know that they can't change me, and that I commonly read and respond to online discussions," (Voráček, in Bez frází [Without phrases], 2021).

Contrary to some of the other athletes in our sample, like Josef Dostál and Karolína Plíšková, Voráček talks openly about politics on his social media channels. He argued: "It is important for us to be able to express our own opinion. It matters not only for athletes, actors and celebrities, but also for 'ordinary' people,"

(Voráček, in Pokorný, 2019). Despite critical reactions to Voráček's statements on politics, he does not plan to change the way he communicates. "It is my right," he said (Voráček, in Pokorný, 2019).

3.5 Petra Kvitová

As mentioned before, tennis is very popular in the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2019). While female Czech ice hockey players are not as successful as their male counterparts, Czech female tennis players actually achieve better results than male tennis players these days (Burian, 2019; Novotný, 2020). Their success is reflected in their popularity. We included two female tennis players, Petra Kvitová and Karolína Plíšková, in our research sample. Petra Kvitová's senior international career began in 2006, when she first appeared on the International Tennis Federation (ITF) circuit and won two titles. From that time, she has built up a huge fan base. Her official Facebook page has approximately six times more fans and followers than the other tennis player in our sample, Karolína Plíšková (Karolína Plíšková, 2020; Petra Kvitová, 2020a).

Kvitová has been ranked among the World Tennis Association (WTA) Top 100 since 2008; later on, she became a constant presence in the WTA Top 10 (Petra Kvitová, 2020). She has won Wimbledon twice (in 2011 and 2014). In 2016, she won a bronze medal in the summer Olympics held in Rio de Janeiro (Olympic.cz, 2018d). That same year, Kvitová was attacked in her flat by an assailant with a knife, after which her left (playing) hand needed surgery. It took her two years to return to the WTA Top 10 (Daněk et al., 2016; WTA, 2020b).

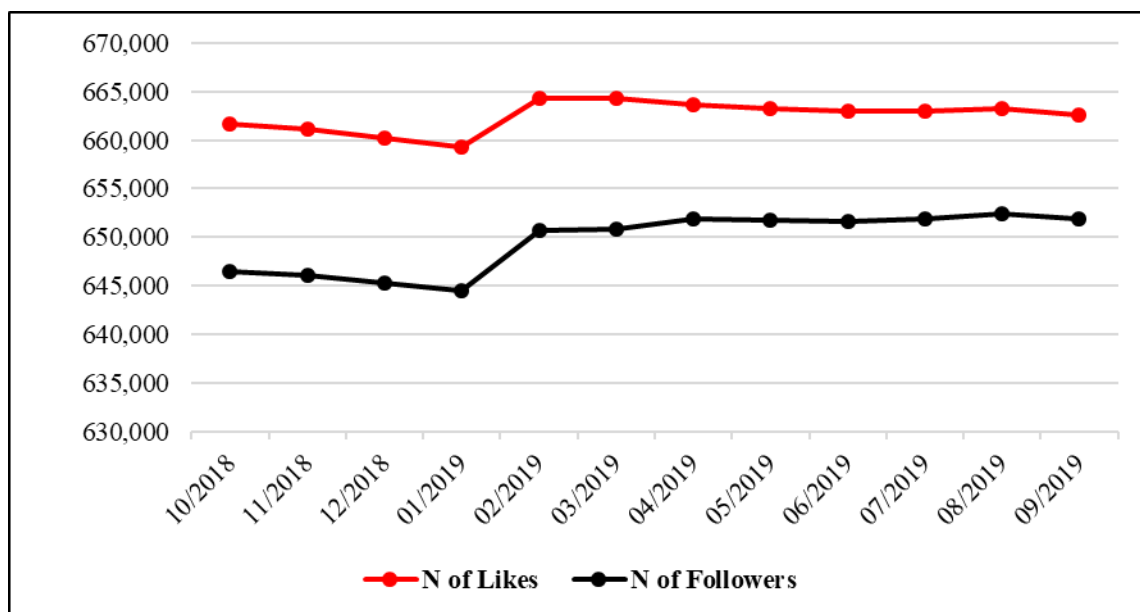
3.5.1 Communication on Social Media

Petra Kvitová's social media presence is highly followed. She placed first in the Forbes and Socialbakers chart of the "77 Most Influential Czechs on Social Networks" in 2017 (Forbes & Socialbakers, 2017). She is present with official channels on Facebook (Petra Kvitová, 2020a), Instagram (petra.kvitova, 2020), and Twitter (Petra Kvitová, 2020). Moreover, she also has a private Facebook page. The content of that page is not visible to every visitor, apart from the profile pictures and cover photos (Petra Kvitová, 2020b). Petra Kvitová manages her social media profiles in collaboration with her spokesperson,

Karel Tejkal. Her PR manager, Katie Spellmann, helped her to establish her official Twitter account. She consults with Spellmann on English translations of her posts (Tejkal, 2019; Novotný, 2014).

Between October 2018 and September 2019, Kvitová had the most Facebook fans and followers of all the female athletes in our sample. She could count around 650,000 followers and 662,000 likes. At the end of 2018, the number of likes and followers slightly decreased, but from January to February 2019, she recorded a significant increase in both indicators. The upward trend may have been the result of Kvitová’s tennis success; she won the WTA Sydney International (WTA, 2020), and placed second in the Australian Open (WTA, 2020e). After that, her number of likes and followers stayed at about the same level (see Figure 44).

Figure 44: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Petra Kvitová’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)

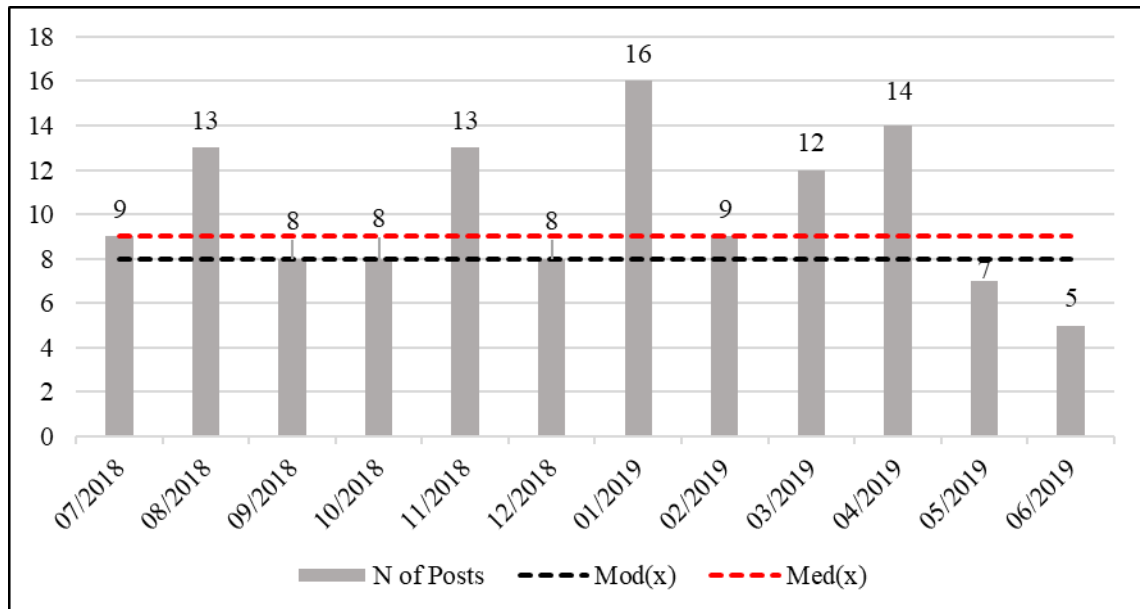


Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Author’s own work

The increase in the number of likes and followers in January 2019 took place in the month when she published her greatest number of posts (16) on Facebook. Kvitová’s spokesperson Karel Tejkal stated: “This confirms a quote from Ivan Lendl, that victory is the best PR. You can invent anything you want, but when you win something, that generates the biggest numbers,” (Tejkal, 2019). Overall, Kvitová’s publication activity remained fairly steady. The modal value was eight, and the median was nine (see Figure 45). Most of Kvitová’s posts (114 of 122 in total) were posted in-

season (see Figure 46). It must be noted that the tennis off-season period is very short (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

Figure 45: Number of Posts on Petra Kvitová’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode (Mod(x)) and Median (Med(x)) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Author’s own work

As Tejkal mentioned, the purpose of Kvitová’s official Facebook page was still evolving: “It is not yet settled whether it is a service for reporting results, providing information or a personal service, or a tool for sharing the athlete’s feelings and training impressions with her fans, or if it is all of the things I mentioned,” (Tejkal, 2019). The topics of Kvitová’s posts varied from sports-related to diverse. While the sports-related content slightly prevailed during the competition season, Kvitová slightly more often promoted diverse themes out of season. It is important to keep in mind that the dataset covering the off-season period is limited due to the tennis off season’s short duration (see Figure 46).

Figure 46: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Petra Kvitová’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	3	63	66
Diversity	5	51	56
Total	8	114	122

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Author’s own work

Most of the content on Kvitová’s official Facebook page (103 posts) was posted in the English language. Ten other posts were in both Czech and English or consisted of emoticons only. Seven posts were written in Czech only, and the two remaining texts used other foreign languages than English (see Figure 47). Most of Kvitová’s posts were short and were accompanied by pictures. Tejkal explained: “The communication relies on the photos. The popularity of Instagram, which has begun to overtake Facebook, shows the trend. It turns out that people do not want to read messages. They do not want to read long texts,” (Tejkal, 2019). Kvitová’s preference for the English language on her Facebook page can be explained by the fact that tennis is watched internationally. “Many fans are from countries where no tournaments are played, so they cannot see Petra play live,” (Spellman, in Novotný, 2014, p. 80). English content can also be easily controlled and monitored by the IMG [sports management] agency (Tejkal, 2019).

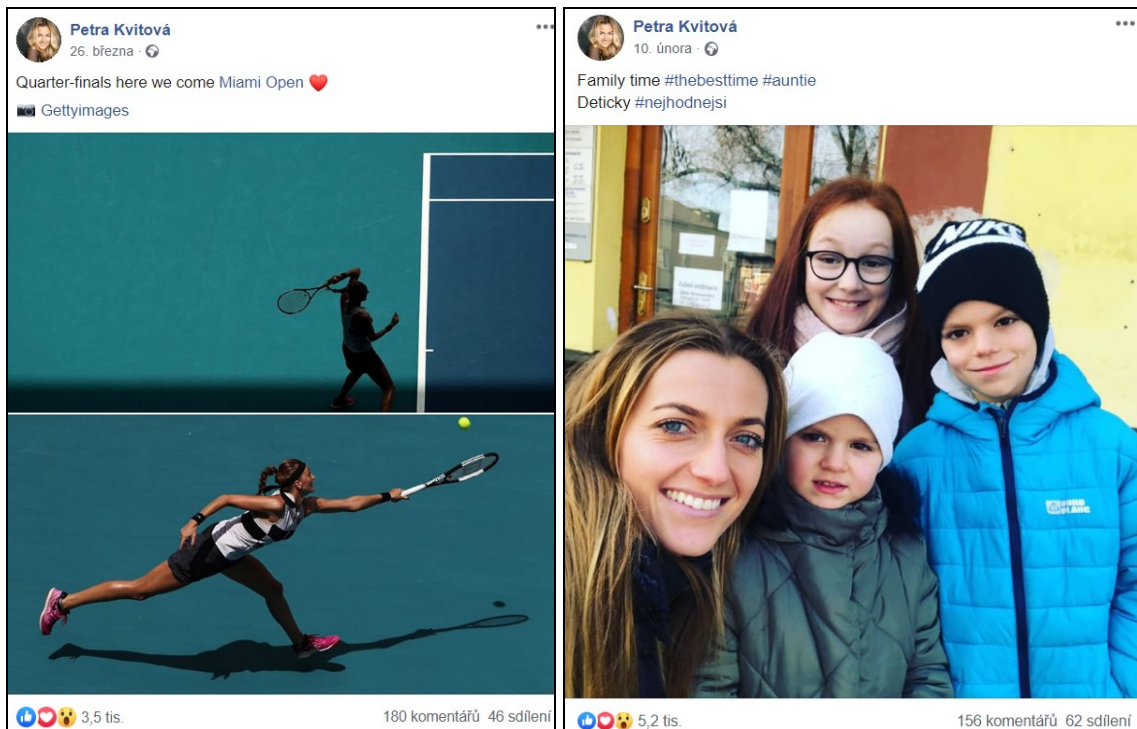
Figure 47: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Petra Kvitová’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	23
	The post contains picture(s)	99
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	102
	The post contains video(s)	20
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	57
	The post contains link(s)	65
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	110
	The post contains hashtag(s)	12
Language(s)	Czech	7
	English	103
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	10
	Other	2

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Author’s own work

Besides the aforementioned preference for pictures, more than half of Kvitová’s posts contained one or more links. Videos appeared in twenty posts and hashtags in twelve (see Figure 47). Figure 48 presents typical sports-related and diverse posts on Kvitová’s Facebook page during the observation period. Diverse posts often related to traveling, sponsors, or family. “Petra does not want to share her private matters. She sometimes publishes photos of her nephews. Time spent with her nephews is a kind of catharsis for her, so she occasionally publishes it,” said Tejkal (Tejkal, 2019).

Figure 48: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Petra Kvitová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Author's own work

Petra Kvitová, like other sports celebrities, used her official Facebook page for promotion. The most common form of promotion was an announcement of a competition, followed by promotions of self and products. The distribution of the content in her posts was similar in season and off season, as can be seen from Figure 49. Nine of her 122 posts were judged to be without promotion, but some posts contained one or more items with a promotional character (picture(s), link(s), and/or hashtag(s)), which can be viewed as a form of subliminal advertising. None of the posts classified as non-promotional contained a promo video.

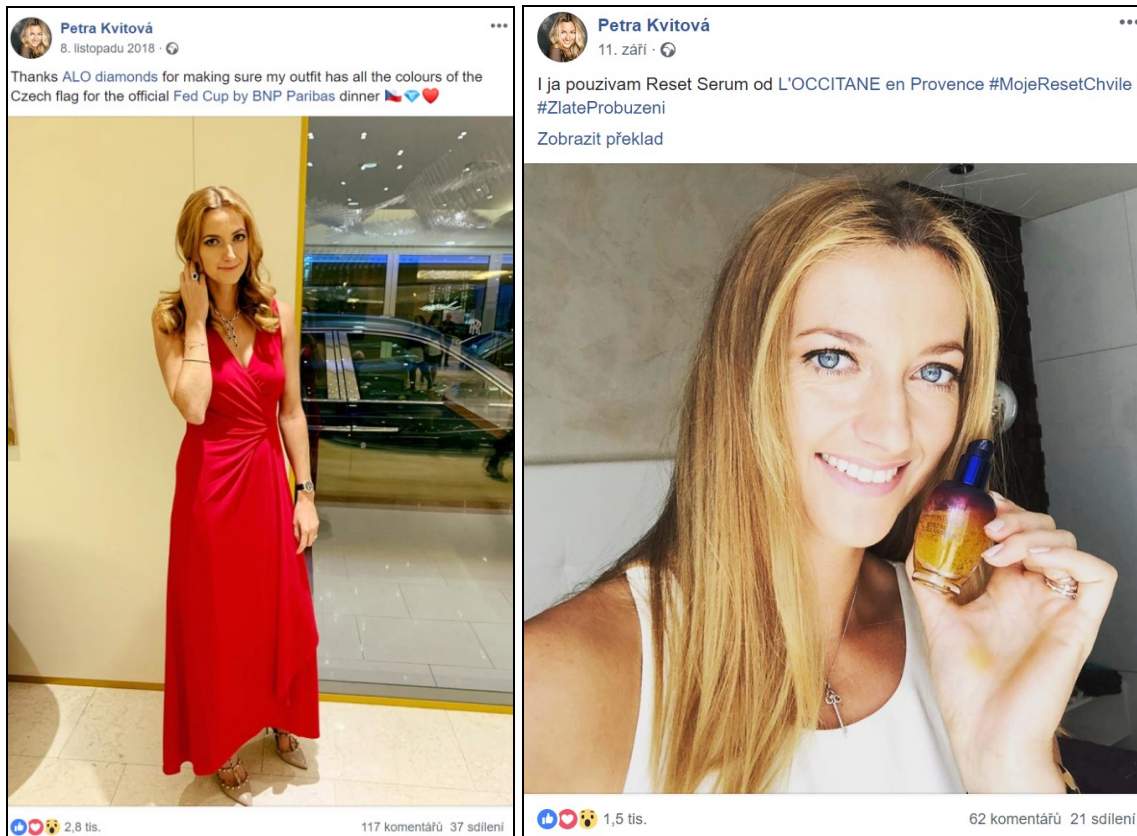
Figure 49: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Posts on Petra Kvitová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	1	8	9
Product	2	19	21
Self-promotion	3	35	38
Competition	2	49	51
Family and friends product	0	3	3
Total	8	114	122

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Author's own work

In the observation period, Petra Kvitová had not signed any contract with a partner who paid her to post on social media (Tejkal, 2019). Despite that, fourteen sponsors or partners appeared in Petra Kvitová’s postings (see Figure 51). The most-often mentioned was Nike, followed by the Czech jewelry company ALO Diamonds (see Figure 50).

Figure 50: Examples of Mentions of Sponsors on Petra Kvitová’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Author’s own work

Tejkal commented on the collaboration with Nike: “In this case, the rules are strict — and they were also strict before the ‘Facebook era.’ Her contract with Nike is so good, Nike has done it for so long, and the contracts are so precise that even if you go through all the newspaper clippings and TV footage for the last twenty years, you won’t see Petra in any other clothes than Nike...There are quite large financial penalties for breach of contract. If she wears another brand, it would be very expensive for her,” (Tejkal, 2019). Figure 51 shows that Kvitová promoted a wide range of brands including companies from the banking, electronics, automobile, and cosmetics sectors (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

Figure 51: Mentions of Sponsors in the Posts on Petra Kvitová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Total
Nike	8	0	0	8
ALO Diamonds	6	0	0	6
L'OCCITANE en Provence	3	1	0	4
TAG Heuer	2	1	0	3
Wilson	3	0	0	3
Banque Nationale	2	0	0	2
BNW CarTec Group	2	0	0	2
Club 21	0	0	1	1
Česká mincovna	1	0	0	1
Dongfeng Motor	1	0	0	1
Hotel Lesná Vysoké Tatry	1	0	0	1
Ladurée	1	0	0	1
Porsche	1	0	0	1
Tesla batteries	1	0	0	1
Total	32	2	1	35

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Author's own work

3.5.2 Fans' Reactions

Kvitová's posts received 3,803 likes, 189 comments, and were shared by 68 people on average. The post with the largest number of likes (20,000), shares (729), and comments (1,300) was published after Kvitová's second place showing in the 2019 Australian Open. The post consisted of a text acknowledging thanks to her whole team, a photo of Kvitová holding the trophy and accompanied by the members of her team, and the hashtag #ausopen. This post and selected fans' reactions are displayed in Figure 52.

Figure 52: Post with the Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Petra Kvitová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019) and Selected Fans' Reactions

Petra Kvitová
26. ledna · 🌐

Thank you to my team for being with me every step of the way. It hurts right now but we have been through much tougher things together...and look at this beautiful trophy ❤️ #ausopen

20 tis. · 1,3 tis. komentářů · 729 sdílení

Šárka Bencová Petro, moc Ti doma fandíme. Jste skvělá bojovnice. Gratulujeme ke krásné trofeji a děkujeme.
To se mi líbí · Odpovědět · 9 t

Les Franz Champion or Runner-up you're still a winner. Ranked 2nd best player in the world. Not bad! Great fight back to take the second set and she just had the edge in the third. What a fantastic start to the year for you and I'm so pleased all your hard work is paying off and getting the results you deserve. Good luck for the next tournament. #POJD
To se mi líbí · Odpovědět · 9 t

Tracey Leet Petra, you are a dead set legend and an inspiration. I was so invested in your journey this summer that after the final I felt your pain and cried uncontrollably. However your strength and humility assures me that next time there will be happy tears.
To se mi líbí · Odpovědět · 9 t

Stuart Steel There is disappointment of course, Petra, however, in whatever way you look at the result, it is an incredible achievement. Your recovery these last two years, and the fact that you did not know if you would ever be able to play at the top level of the Grand Slam events again. An excellent beginning to 2019, with your win in Sydney, and now the Australian Open final. The first Grand Slam of the year, and the result that it is, compared with your results in the Grand Slams in 2018, (or even the last few years). I hope that you can have a very enjoyable break, and continue to absorb what you have achieved. Heartfelt **congratulations** for you and your team. I am sure there will be more excellent results in the Grand Slams, in this second part of your career. I believe that you can reach more Grand Slam finals, and go all the way.
To se mi líbí · Odpovědět · 9 t · Upraveno

Source: Official Facebook Page of Petra Kvitová, Own Processing

Positive reactions prevailed under all of the posts on Kvitová's official Facebook page from July 2018 to June 2019, even where the posts' content was straightforwardly commercial. On the other hand, a significant number of hateful comments came from people who had placed bets on her tennis matches. "Whoever wants to learn vulgar English words, just has to go to Petra's profile after she loses a match that seemed to be an easy win," commented Tejkal sardonically. The only critical voices, other than those of bettors, commented on Kvitová's physical appearance. Tejkal noted: "Yes, she is either too fat or too skinny. When the only thing that can be criticized about her is her physique, it is not that bad," (Tejkal, 2019)

Members of Kvitová's team confessed that they deleted vulgar and aggressive fans' reactions (Spellman, in Novotný, 2014; Tejkal, 2019). Furthermore, Tejkal recommends to his all clients⁵² that they not read comments on social media: "I strongly recommend to them not to read the discussions on iDnes and Sport.cz, as well as those on social media. . . . When talking about tennis players, there is a problem in that they

⁵² One other athlete in our sample, the judoka Lukáš Krpálek, was also Tejkal's client in the observation period (Tejkal, 2019).

sit on a plane, or are often waiting for something. So they tend to look at that,” (Tejkal, 2019).

3.6 Karolína Plíšková

Karolína Plíšková is also a Czech tennis player. She was born in March 1992, so she is two years younger than Petra Kvitová (*karolina-pliskova.com*, 2020). Plíšková made it into the WTA singles Top 100 in 2013. That same year, she and her twin sister Kristýna won their first WTA doubles championship in Linz, becoming the first set of twins to win the WTA womens’ double title. Since 2016, she has continuously been ranked in the WTA Top 10. She was the first Czech woman tennis player to be ranked number one in the world by the WTA (*karolina-pliskova.com*, 2020; WTA, 2020c). In April 2020, she was third in the WTA Singles Ranking (WTA, 2020d).

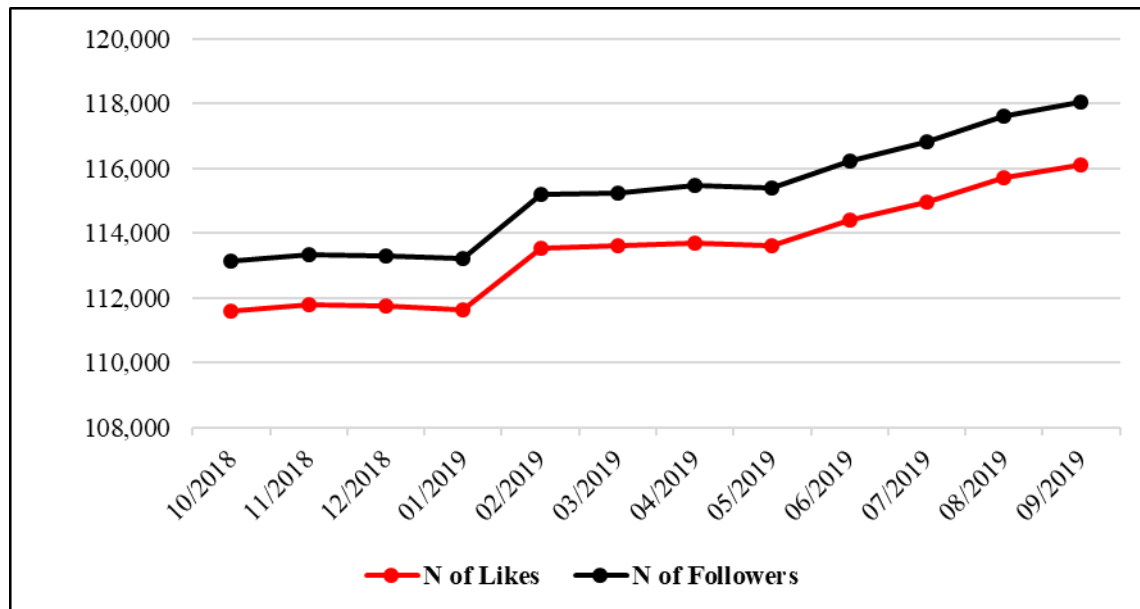
3.6.1 Communication on Social Media

In April 2019, Karolína Plíšková had official social media channels on Facebook (Karolína Plíšková, 2020), Instagram (*karolinapliskova*, 2020), and Twitter (Karolina Pliskova; 2020). All of her profiles were active, although she did not manage all of them herself. Her manager, who is also her husband, commented on the situation as follows: “When I talk about the platforms we use most often, which are Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, Instagram has been running the longest because it is fun for her, and so she spends her time there. She often publishes what she wants to publish there. She consults about it with me, but it is really ‘her.’ She reacts to the comments, and I do not fully agree with her on that. . . . Karolína never liked Facebook much. Since 2016 I have managed her Facebook more or less by myself — I would say without her knowledge, but I put posts there that are similar to the ones on Instagram. . . . Twitter is more for foreign users than for Czechs, so it is all but English-only, just from time to time in Czech,” (Hrdlička, 2020).

Plíšková created her official Facebook page (Karolína Plíšková, 2020) in 2015. Michal Hrdlička has administered it since 2016 (Hrdlička, 2020; Karolína Plíšková, 2020). It had between 111,612 and 118,054 fans and followers over the observation period. The number of Plíšková’s followers was consistently greater than the number of her fans (Karolína Plíšková, 2020). Her page grew in popularity and virality

in the observation period, even though its growth stagnated between October 2018 and January 2019, and again between February 2019 and May 2019 (see Figure 53).

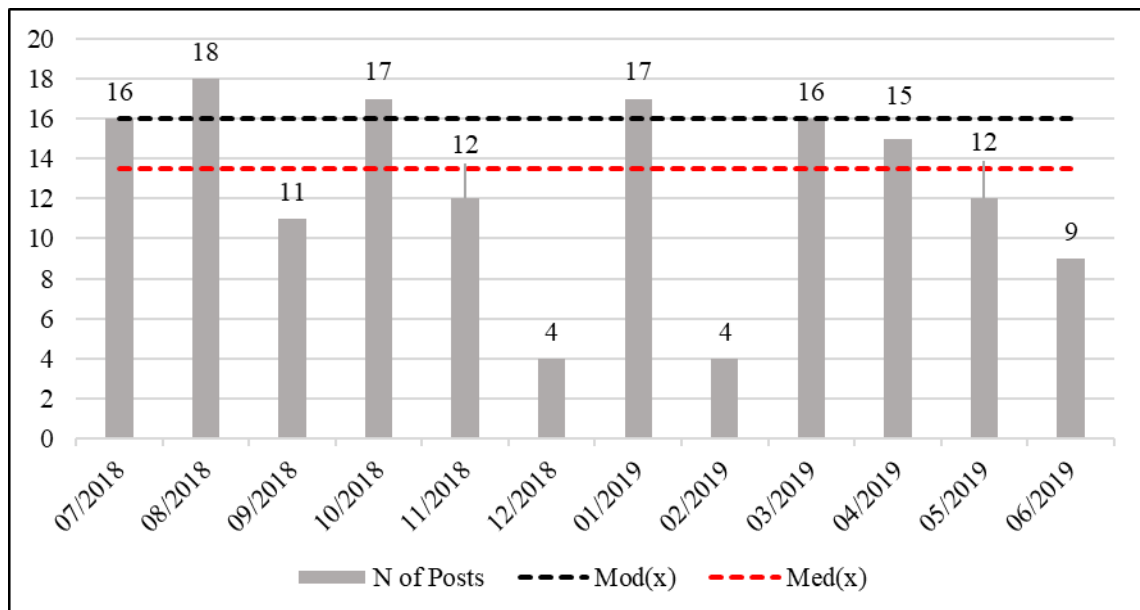
Figure 53: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Karolína Plíšková’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author’s own work

The average monthly number of posts on Karolína Plíšková’s official Facebook page from July 2018 to June 2019 was fourteen. The median number was even greater, fifteen posts a month. The least publication activity (just four posts in the month) was observed in December 2018, which was the only off-season month in the observation period. Another month in which a minimal number of posts was published was February 2019 (see Figure 54). That was the month when the Czech Republic’s national team lost to the Romanian team in the quarterfinals of the Fed Cup. After that loss, Plíšková was criticized for her absence from the last match of the weekend. Her Facebook followers felt that she had not supported her teammates. Under the Facebook post summarizing the event, a fan, Petra Durajová, complained: “Where were you yesterday, when the girls played doubles??!! . . . What about team spirit? It means nothing to you,” (Karolína Plíšková, 2019a). Plíšková’s absence may have been the reason why there were many fewer posts in that month compared to others.

Figure 54: Number of Posts on Karolína Plíšková’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode ($Mod(x)$) and Median ($Med(x)$) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author’s own work

Karolína Plíšková’s Facebook content was mainly sports-related, while diverse posts comprised just under one-third of the total number (45 of 150 posts). Her diverse posts included mainly promotional activities, such as photos from photo shoots, and posts about her daily life. Because the tennis season lasts almost all year, the difference between Plíšková’s in-season and off-season Facebook activity could not be assessed (see Figure 55).

Figure 55: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Karolína Plíšková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	3	102	105
Diversity	1	44	45
Total	4	146	150

Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author’s own work

Plíšková was often photographed with her twin sister Kristýna or her husband, Michal Hrdlička. Hrdlička, speaking as Plíšková’s manager, agreed that he and Karolína intentionally avoided some topics. “Yes, typically politics. We have an agreement that we never comment on that theme,” (Hrdlička, 2020). Nevertheless, he perceived social media as a tool with which Plíšková could express her opinion: “It certainly is a chance to comment on some things. At least for the people who follow her. . . . Once we had an extreme situation, when one journalist wrote a derogatory article

and entitled it ‘The Unpopular Plíšková’ There were many lies and untruths in it, so we had to comment on it. . . . It is good to have the opportunity to tell your version of things. I do not want to say what is the truth, because the truth usually lies somewhere in between, but for us, we posted the true version,”⁵³ (Hrdlička, 2020).

Over two-thirds of Plíšková’s posts were accompanied by one or more pictures, and 59 posts contained at least one link. Hashtags and video-content appeared in less than one-quarter of her posts (see Figure 56). Michal Hrdlička (2020) said that Plíšková’s team includes a personal photographer, who sends them photos from every day of a tournament. “Karolína then usually chooses the photos on her own,” (Hrdlička, 2020).

Figure 56: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Karolína Plíšková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

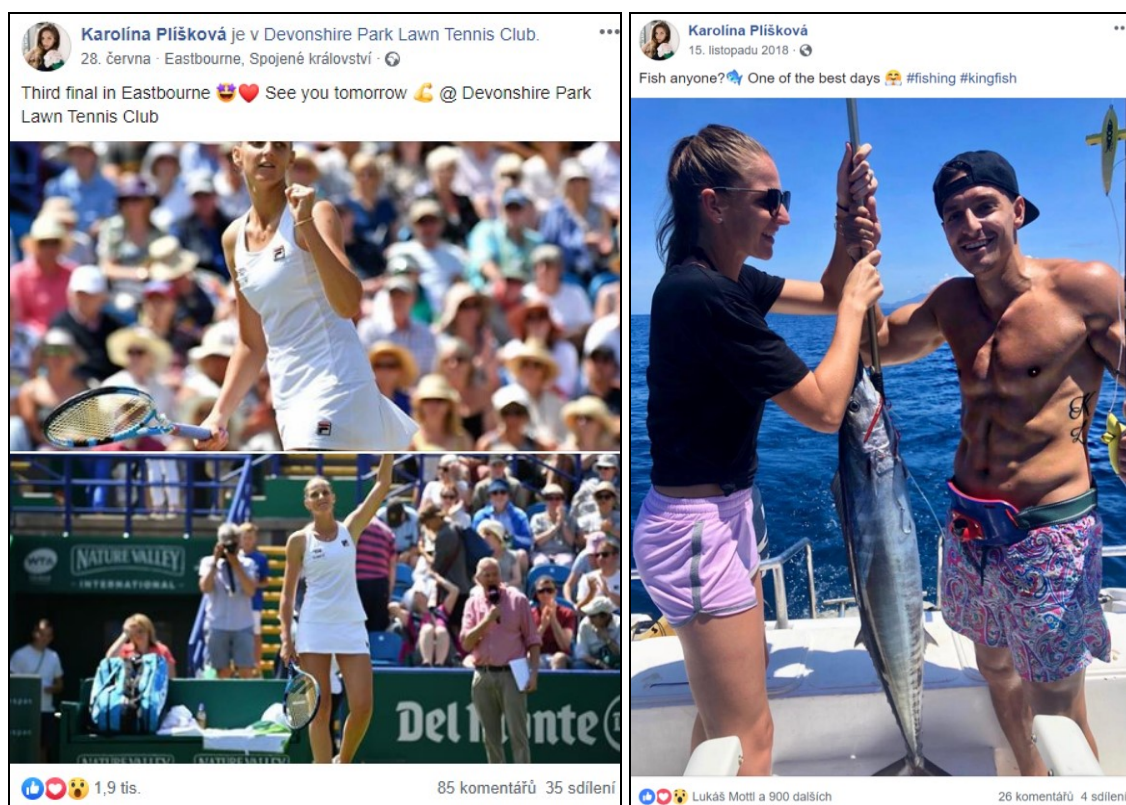
Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	41
	The post contains picture(s)	109
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	126
	The post contains video(s)	24
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	91
	The post contains link(s)	59
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	114
	The post contains hashtag(s)	36
Language(s)	Czech	23
	English	98
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	27
	Other	2

Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author’s own work

Examples of Plíšková’s sports-related and diverse posts are shown in Figure 57. The tennis player has said: “Sometimes it is good to leave the ‘tennis world.’ For example, I like to fish,” (Plíšková, in Cápová & Šimůnek, p. 47).

⁵³ The article, entitled in Czech “POHLED: Neoblíbená Plíšková. Další šance získat si české fanoušky je pryč” [OPINION: The Unpopular Plíšková: Another Chance to Gain the Support of Czech Fans Is Gone] was published on the server *iDnes.cz* after the 2019 Prague Open, after Plíšková did not play due to a health problem (Knap, 2019). The author of the article, Karel Knap, talked about how unpopular the Czech tennis star was among local fans and recommended that she think about how she presents herself. Plíšková reacted on her Facebook page (Karolína Plíšková, 2019c) and on her personal website (karolina-pliskova.com, 2019).

Figure 57: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Karolína Plíšková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author's own work

The prevalence of the postings (98 posts from 150 in total) was published in English. Another 27 posts were emoticon-based or translated into both Czech and English. The Czech language was used in 23 posts. In the remaining two posts appear other languages than Czech and English (see Figure 56). Although tennis is a worldwide popular sport, Plíšková and her team considered more frequent posting in the Czech language: “If it is something downright simple, I find the bilingual postings useless. On the other hand, if it is a long text, I would prefer to publish it in both Czech and English,” stated Plíšková’s manager and husband (Hrdlička, 2020).

Various forms of promotion appeared on Plíšková’s official Facebook page. The most common ones were announcements of sporting competitions (71 times). Additionally, competition-related posts often promoted Plíšková’s sponsors with a picture (47 posts) or a link (29 posts). Almost one-third of her posts were “self-promotion,” and nineteen posts promoted products. Both charity and family and friends’ product categories are represented by two posts (see Figure 58).

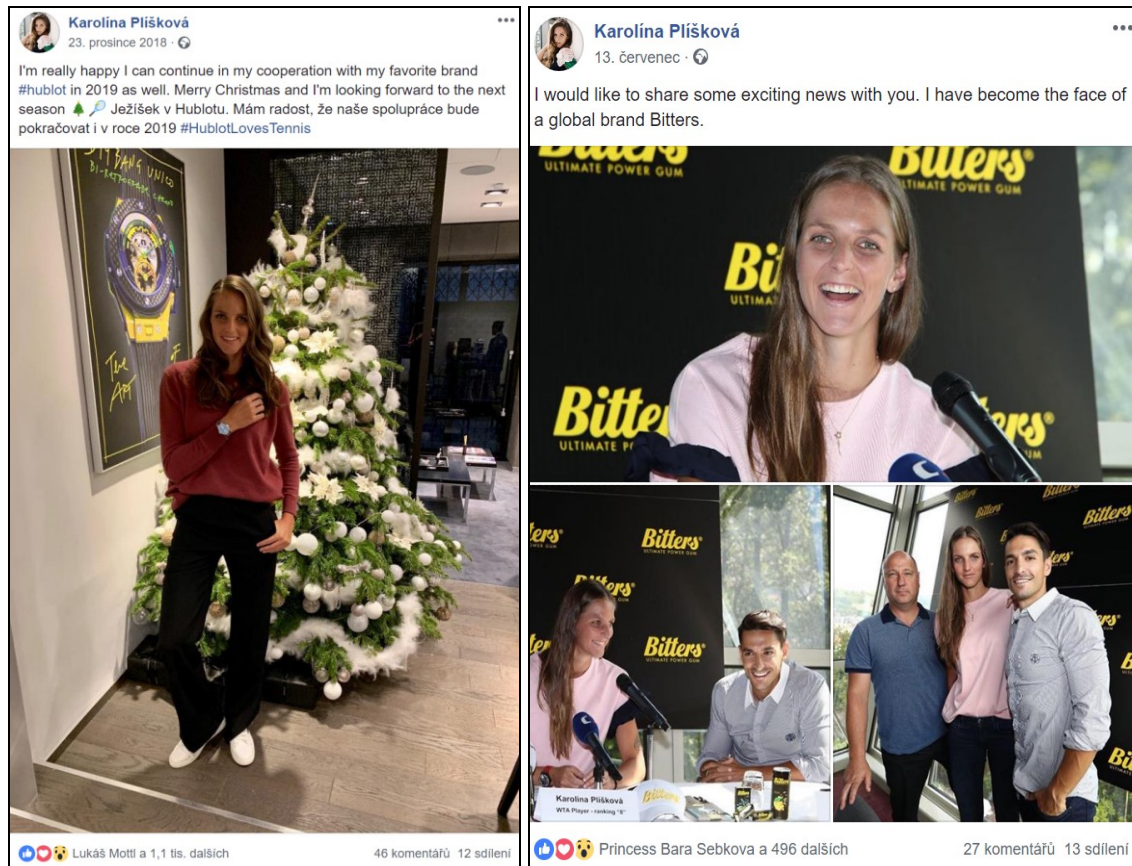
Figure 58: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Postings on Karolína Plíšková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	0	8	8
Product	1	18	19
Charity	0	2	2
Self-promotion	2	46	48
Competition	1	70	71
Family and friends product	0	2	2
Total	4	146	150

Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author’s own work

Only five posts in the observation period had a completely non-promotional character. Contracts with sponsors and partners (see Figure 59), as well as a desire to promote her own “brand,” influenced Plíšková’s communication. “We have the merchandising e-shop, so we also try to promote it a bit. And at the same time, it is necessary to maintain a ‘balance’, it [social media posts] should not be just a catalogue of sponsors and products for sale. We have to provide people an opportunity to look behind the scenes” (Hrdlička, 2020).

Figure 59: Examples of Announcements of Commercial Collaborations on Karolína Plíšková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author's own work

Plíšková had sponsorship contracts with the sports clothing brand Fila, the luxury watch brand Hublot, MOL gasoline stations, and the automobile dealer Mototechna, among others (Cáповá & Šimůnek, 2020). As shown in Figure 60, Plíšková mentioned a wide range of brands on her official Facebook page (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). Besides the companies mentioned above, Avene, a cosmetics company and the Porsche automobile company appeared on Plíšková's Facebook page.

Figure 60: Sponsors Mentioned in Posts on Karolína Plíšková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Total
FILA	38	9	0	47
Pražská plynárenská, a.s.	14	2	1	17
Merkur die Versicherung	5	1	2	8
CZECH FUND	2	4	0	6
Bitters	3	0	0	3
Hublot	2	0	0	2
Porsche	1	0	1	2
Avene	1	0	0	1
EKO MB, s.r.o.	0	0	1	1
IVAR CS	0	1	0	1
Mototechna	1	0	0	1
Sulice Health Club	1	0	0	1
Total	68	17	5	90

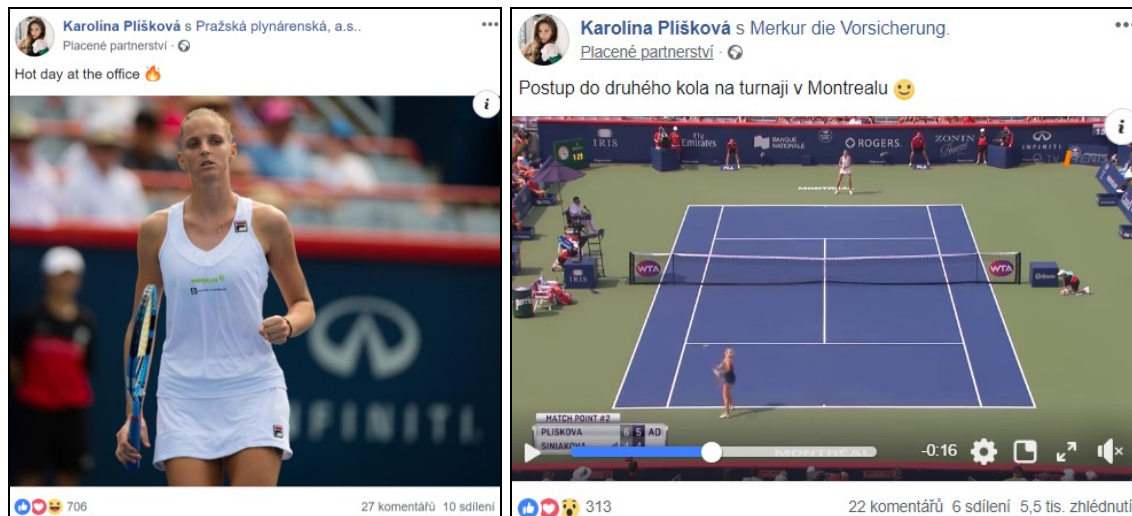
Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author's own work

Hrdlička admitted that the way Plíšková promoted products and sponsors had changed over the years: “In the past, we explicitly posted the product, direct link, and text, but nowadays it is better to do it a bit subliminally. Our general partner is MOL gasoline.⁵⁴ With this sponsor, we agreed that promotion could take the form of a photo from a tennis match, so we put the hashtags #molcesko or #FreshCorner in the post. Alternatively, they want to get people a little more united. So when she is in Prague and goes to visit her parents, she takes a picture with coffee as if she is traveling and adds a hashtag,” (Hrdlička, 2020). Plíšková also had signed paid social media partnership contracts with the Czech energy and gas supplier Pražská plynárenská, a.s. and the Austrian insurance company Merkur die Versicherung. Hrdlička (2020) said that the sponsors had sought out Plíšková: “The partners want it. They want to see statistics, interaction, reach, how many people have responded to the post, etc.” Plíšková usually connected the “paid partnership”⁵⁵ disclose to announcements of her tennis success (see Figure 61).

⁵⁴ This partnership was announced on December 28, 2019, which was after the observation period ended (Karolína Plíšková, 2019b).

⁵⁵ Placené partnerství in Czech translates to “Paid partnership” in English. The disclosure is usually located at the top of the post.

Figure 61: Examples of Paid Partnership Posts on Karolína Plíšková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author's own work

3.6.2 Fans' Reactions

Plíšková's posts received 1,282 likes, 52 comments, and were shared 22 times on average. The fans' reactions under the posts were mostly positive in 119 of 150 posts in total. The ratio of positive to negative comments was equal for 24 posts. This resulted from the fact that the fans' comments were not visible under the posts published in May 2019.⁵⁶ Negative comments appeared under posts as well. Seven posts were received mostly negatively by Plíšková's followers. Some of the negative comments even had to be removed by Plíšková's manager: "I delete some of the comments for one simple reason, for which I have clear criteria. I do it after matches she loses. I remove comments that are written by punters that insult Karolína. People are sometimes vulgar or write on the page that Karolína should die or that she is a whore, etc. I delete these reactions; they have no place there. I think it is Karolína's right. It is Karolína's social media page, her space," (Hrdlička, 2020). The criticism that Plíšková allowed to remain on her official Facebook page was aimed at her appearance, the concentration and effort

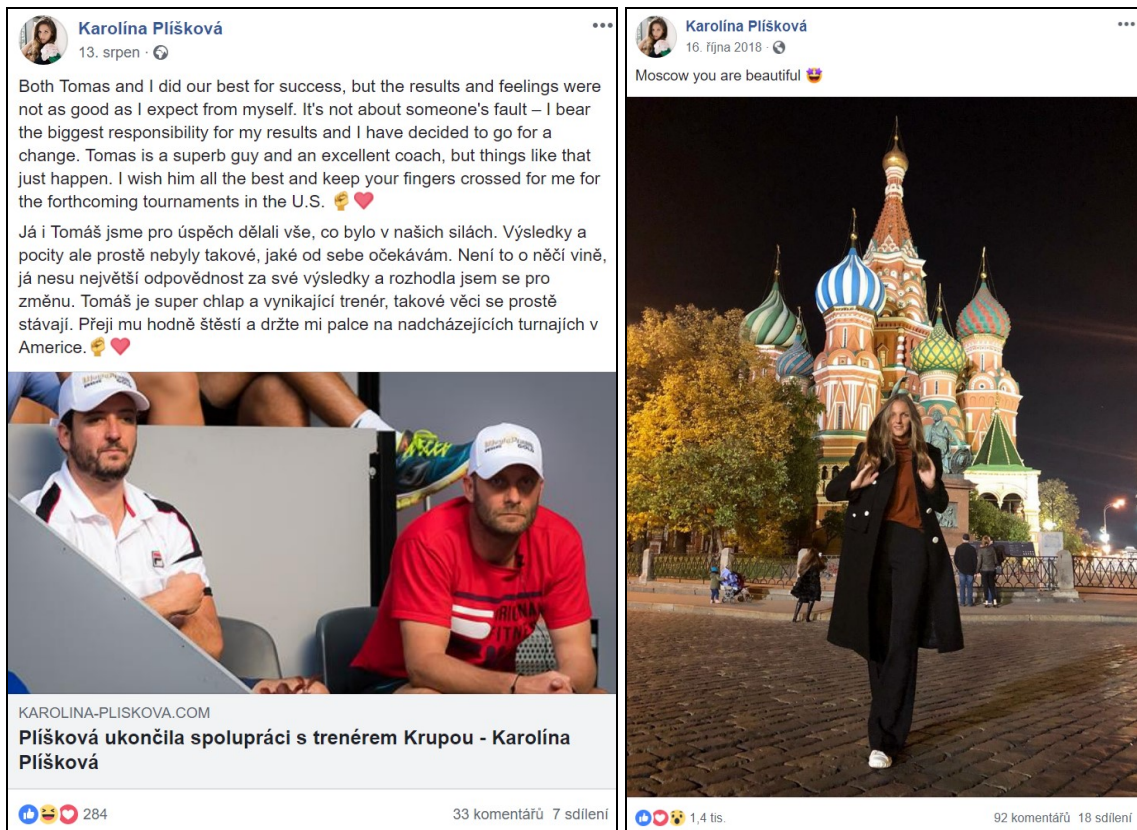
⁵⁶ As mentioned in the chapter on Methodology (p. 42), the posts were coded three months after they were published in order to give time for fans to react. In this case, the number of comments was visible, but it was impossible to read them.

she put into her games, the language she used in her post,⁵⁷ and her relationship with her manager and husband, Michal Hrdlička.

Examples of posts receiving a large number of negative comments are shown in Figure 62. One of them is an announcement that Plíšková was breaking up with her coach, Tomáš Krupa (a former coach of Tomáš Berdych's), after a collaboration that lasted less than a year (iRozhlas.cz, 2018; Knap, 2018). Fans blamed Plíšková for her alleged emotional instability and for putting her relationship with her husband ahead of her tennis career (Karolína Plíšková, 2018a). The second post is a lifestyle photo from the streets of Moscow. It received negative comments mainly because of the results of the competition in Moscow. Karolína Plíšková lost that match to Vera Zvonareva in the round of 16 in the WTA championship (WTA, 2018). Fans on social media criticized Plíšková for an alleged lack of effort she put into the game. For example, a fan, Stonescu Lavinia, sniped: "Yeah, you better keep making pictures. . . . Playing tennis is difficult, especially when you opponent doesn't give up. I think when you expect to be number one, you can't play like shit against number 161!" (Karolína Plíšková, 2018b).

⁵⁷ Czech fans strongly prefer her posts to be Czech language, not in English.

Figure 62: Examples of Posts Attracting Negative Comments on Karolína Plíšková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Karolína Plíšková, Author's own work

Plíšková's team believed that it could have a negative impact on her performance if she read the critical reactions: "At one time in the past, she didn't have access to any of her social networks. For example, during her tournaments, I read and managed them myself. We chose the photos and put them together, but she had no access to the comments. I worried that they may negatively affect her. Nowadays, she wants to be fully involved in the process, so she deals with the comments, but I don't think it is good for her psychologically. One way or another, it influences you even if you say to yourself that the comments are just written by envious people. I still think she should not read them," (Hrdlička, 2020).

3.7 Zuzana Hejnová

The last representative of a mainstream sport in our sample was Zuzana Hejnová. Hejnová is a Czech track and field athlete and one of the most successful female athletes in Czech history. Her specialty is the 400m hurdles. She is a former world

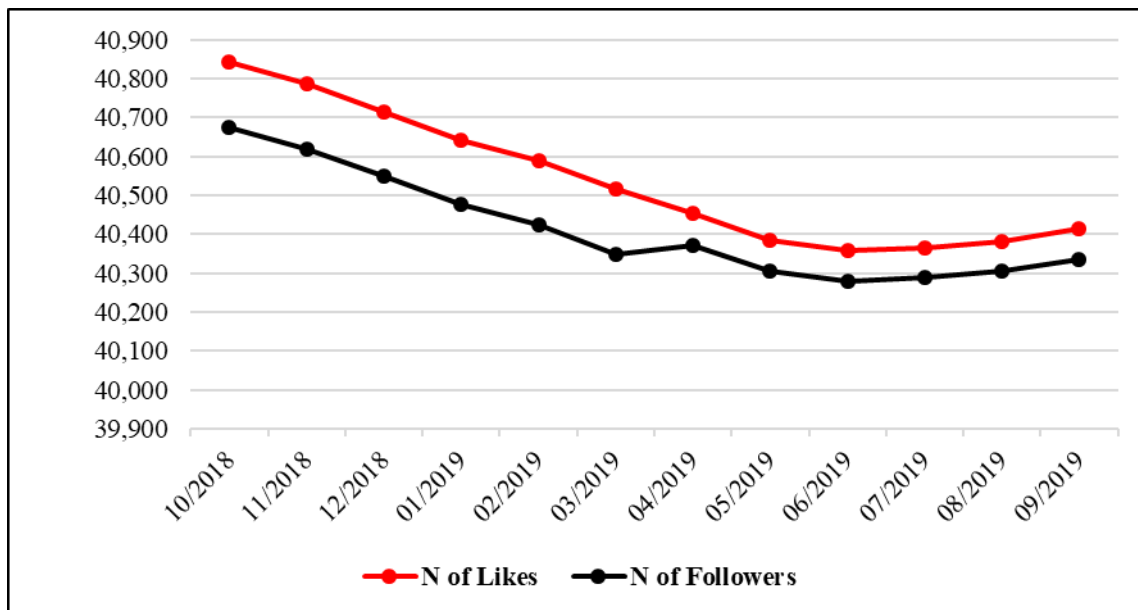
champion (14th IAAF World Championships, Moscow 2013; 15th IAAF World Championships, Beijing 2015), a two-time Diamond League champion (2013, 2015), an Olympic medalist (2012 Summer Olympics, London, bronze), and a national record holder (*Zuzana Hejnová: O mně [Zuzana Hejnová: About me]*, 2020).

3.7.1 Communication on Social Media

Zuzana Hejnová presents herself in official social media accounts on Instagram (*zhejnova*, 2020) and Facebook (*Zuzana Hejnová – Official*, 2020). She also has a private profile on Facebook (*Zuzana Hejnová*, 2020), for which she accepts friend requests only from people she knows well in real life (*Hejnová*, 2020). She wants to maintain good relationships with journalists, so her manager administers a closed group, “Zuzana Hejnová & Press” (*Zuzana Hejnová & Press*, 2020). There she posts information about press conferences and statements, and photos and videos in advance of competitions. (*Hejnová*, 2020).

In the observation period, Hejnová’s official Facebook page had between 40,000 and 41,000 likes and followers. A significant decline was evidenced from October 2018 to March 2019, as can be seen in Figure 63. This downward movement may have been the result of Hejnová’s unsuccessful 2018 season, when she had to deal with an injury (*ČTK*, 2018; *Macek & Tomíček*, 2018). At that difficult time, she tried to be honest with her fans on social media: “It is best not to look for mistakes around you. People rather accept that something may have failed completely, went bad, or hurt me,” (*Hejnová*, 2020; cf. *Geurin*, 2016). She definitely overcame her health problems and “came back” in the 2019 summer season. Her popularity slowly started to increase (see Figure 63).

Figure 63: Number of Likes and Followers of Zuzana Hejnová's Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author's own work

For the most part, Hejnová manages her public Instagram and official Facebook accounts by herself. She prefers Instagram over Facebook, but recognizes benefits and disadvantages of each platform: “I post connected content [with Facebook] via my Instagram account.⁵⁸ I think that Facebook is not as popular nowadays as it used to be. It is strange that my Instagram content has much greater reach than the same content on Facebook. On the other hand, people communicate and react more intensively on the Facebook page,” (Hejnová, 2020). Social networking is not her hobby. “I am not so much into it. I am not the kind of person who likes to share everything on Instagram. . . . I don't know, I just don't like it. Yes, occasionally I do post something interesting for fans, but mostly when someone else forces me to do so,” (Hejnová, 2020). Hejnová appreciates her manager's help, especially with promotional and commercial posts. “Saša⁵⁹ publishes the commercial posts. I usually check them to see if they are OK. Sometimes I edit one or two words to ‘make it better for my mouth,’ sometimes not. Other than the commercial posts, I create the content on my own,” (Hejnová, 2020).

Hejnová's activity on her official Facebook page fluctuated in the observation period (see Figure 64). She published an average of six posts per month, with a minimum of two posts in September 2018. Her Facebook posts in that month

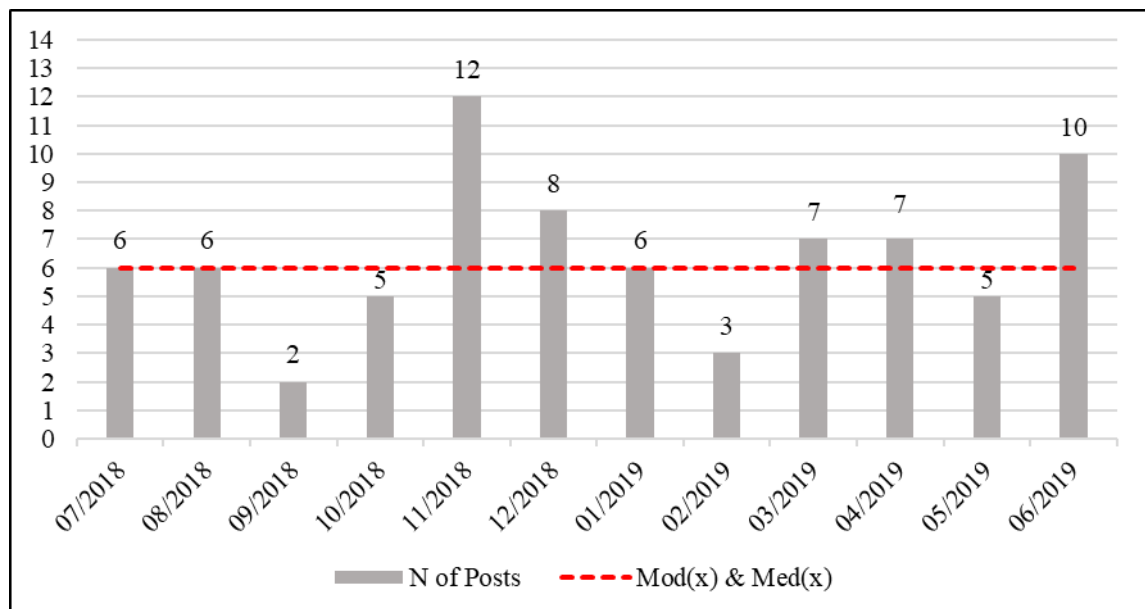
⁵⁸ Instagram and Facebook allow users to cross-post content on the two platforms simultaneously.

⁵⁹ Saša is Zuzana Hejnová's manager, Alexandr Kliment.

promoted and evaluated an athletic competition she organized with her HESU sports academy. The posts contained a link to the HESU Facebook page, which is administrated by an external editor (Hejnová, 2020).

Hejnová published the most posts on her official Facebook page in November 2018, which was during the track and field off-season preparation period (see Figure 64). During the whole year from July 2018 to June 2019, she published 56 of her 77 posts in the off season. That fact contradicted the finding of Geurin and Clavio (2015), who found that athletes communicate more actively during their sport’s season. Hejnová explained that this was her manager’s strategy for attracting media attention: “In season, the media covers competitions and sports results, and I am more often ‘in the public eye.’ Autumn is a period when nothing much happens, so it is a good time to publish some interesting information to keep people's attention. Furthermore, in autumn we have to think about arranging interviews — with whom, for what magazine, etc. In season, those things come naturally, when you run races and you are successful,” (Hejnová, 2020).

Figure 64: Number of Posts on Zuzana Hejnová’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode (Mod(x)) and Median (Med(x)) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author’s own work

Zuzana Hejnová (2020) said that she deliberately restricts herself from social networking before and during the major athletics events. “I have deleted the social media apps from my mobile phone many times. I usually do that before big events. I do not want to spend time there; it is not useful for me. Basically, it doesn’t give me

anything at those times, and it really drains me. So, I cut myself off from the social media space,” (Hejnová, 2020; cf. Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). She added that social media activities exhaust her, especially when the track and field season is approaching (Hejnová, 2020). On the other hand, during the 2019 summer season, when she successfully came back from an injury, she communicated more with her fans and shared her feelings on social media (cf. Frederick et al., 2012).

Hejnová’s Facebook posts contained more sports-related content (46 posts) than diverse content (31 posts). It is evident from Figure 65, that her Facebook page was more sports-oriented during the season. In the off-season, the ratio of sports-related posts to diverse posts was nearly even.

Figure 65: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Zuzana Hejnová’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	30	16	46
Diversity	26	5	31
Total	56	21	77

Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author’s own work

Figure 66 shows two of Hejnová’s typical sports-related and diverse posts on her official Facebook page in the observation period.

Figure 66: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Zuzana Hejnová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author's own work

Most of Hejnová's Facebook posts were accompanied by one or more pictures; approximately half of the items contained a link or hashtag (see Figure 67). Figure 67 also shows that the language in which Hejnová published her posts varied. More than half of her posts in the observation period were in Czech, while about a third were in English. From time to time, she used both Czech and English in a single post. Hejnová commented in her interview: "Most of my followers are Czech, so when I use English, they write to me and ask why I do not post in Czech. When I publish something in Czech only, my foreign fans contact me to say that they do not understand and that they expect a translation from me. I tend to use the language that first comes to my mind," (Hejnová, 2020).

Figure 67: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Zuzana Hejnová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	8
	The post contains picture(s)	69
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	72
	The post contains video(s)	5
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	40
	The post contains link(s)	37
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	38
	The post contains hashtag(s)	39
Language(s)	Czech	42
	English	21
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	14

Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author's own work

Hejnová used her official Facebook page for promotional and commercial purposes (Sanderson, 2014; Pegoraro, 2010). She confirmed that besides their usefulness for self-promotion, social media are an effective tool for ensuring the visibility of sponsors and partners, as well as charity initiatives (Hejnová, 2020; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011). However, she said, her sponsors still prefer the traditional forms of marketing: “The sponsors leave the level of activity up to me. I have to respect some guidelines, including the number of posts I have to make, and posting the promotional content at least to the Stories [Facebook feature] — but they really do not care about that too much. It doesn't matter to my partners if I publish four or five posts, even if eight are specified in our contract. The sponsors do prefer to see their logos on the backdrop banner during my press conferences,” (Hejnová, 2020).

As seen in Figure 68, only five of Hejnová's posts were classified as non-promotional. Two of the five posts contained promotional at least one hashtag, which means that only two of Hejnová's posts in the observation period were entirely “promotion-free.” The character of promotional posts was different in season and off season. In preparation and “holiday” periods, the types of promotion varied. The most common was self-promotion, followed by product promotion. During the season, the promotional mix dramatically changed. Zuzana Hejnová mainly endorsed her upcoming sporting events, and did some self-promotion as well. See Figure 68 (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

Figure 68: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Postings on Zuzana Hejnová’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	3	2	5
Product	14	3	17
Self-promotion	33	5	38
Competition	5	11	16
Family and friends product	1	0	1
Total	56	21	77

Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author’s own work

Hejnová mostly promoted products by using links, hashtags, and pictures. Most of the hashtags she used were promotional in character. Figure 69 shows the distribution of the hashtags.

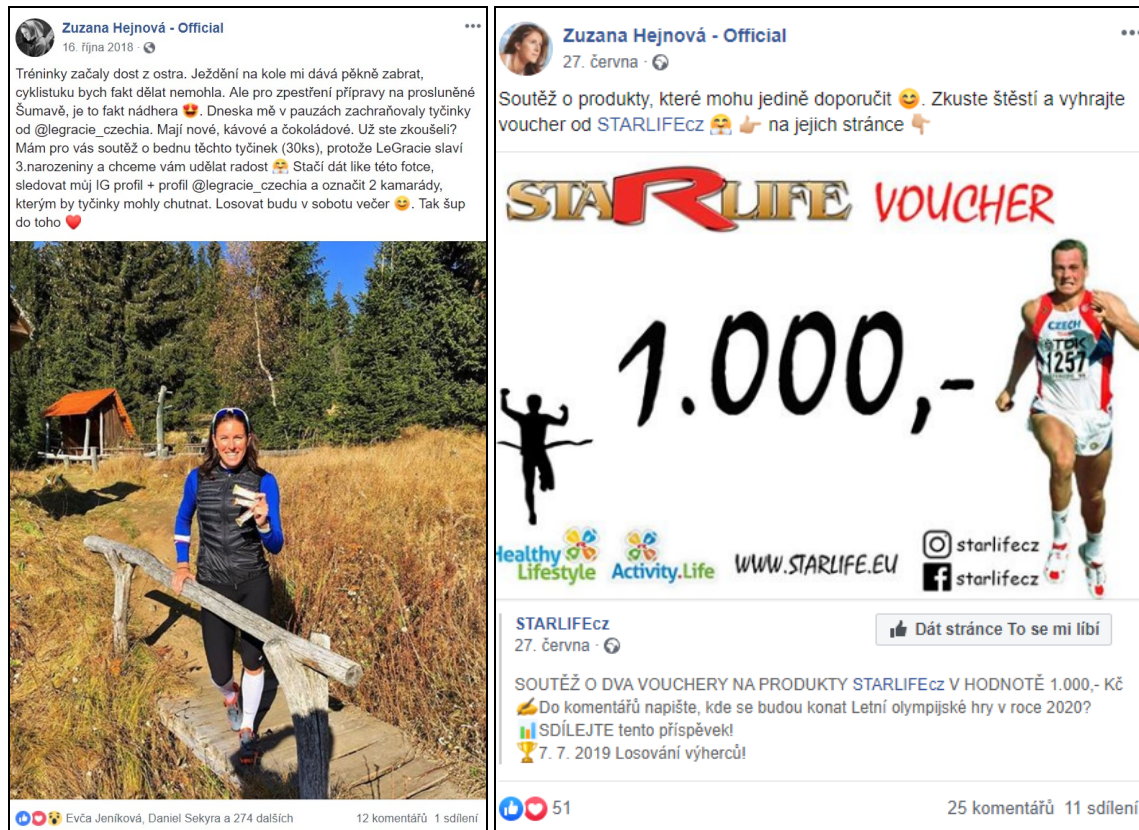
Figure 69: Crosstabulation – Promotional Category of Postings vs. Promotional Hashtag(s) on Zuzana Hejnová’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Promotional Category/ Promotional Hashtags(s)	Promotional hashtag(s)		Total
	The post does not contain hashtag(s) with promotional content	The post contains hashtag(s) with promotional content	
Without promotion	3	2	5
Product	14	3	17
Self-promotion	29	9	38
Competition	12	4	16
Family and friends product	0	1	1
Total	58	19	77

Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author’s own work

A form of promotion that is popular with Hejnová’s fans is contests run by her sponsors. Hejnová stated: “I have thought about conducting a private contest, because people like the opportunity to get something for free. But my partners, like Rio Mare, come up with ideas for contests themselves,” (Hejnová, 2020; see Figure 70).

Figure 70: Examples of Sponsors' Contests on Zuzana Hejnová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author's own work

Hejnová mentioned seventeen sponsors in her posts during the observation period. About one-third of those posts contained some form of promotion for the Nike brand. She advertised other brands, such as Auto Jarov (a car dealer and service), Pharma Future (nature cosmetics), and Zdravé Stravování (healthy food products) only seldomly (see Figure 71).

Figure 71: Mentions of Sponsors in the Posts on Zuzana Hejnová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

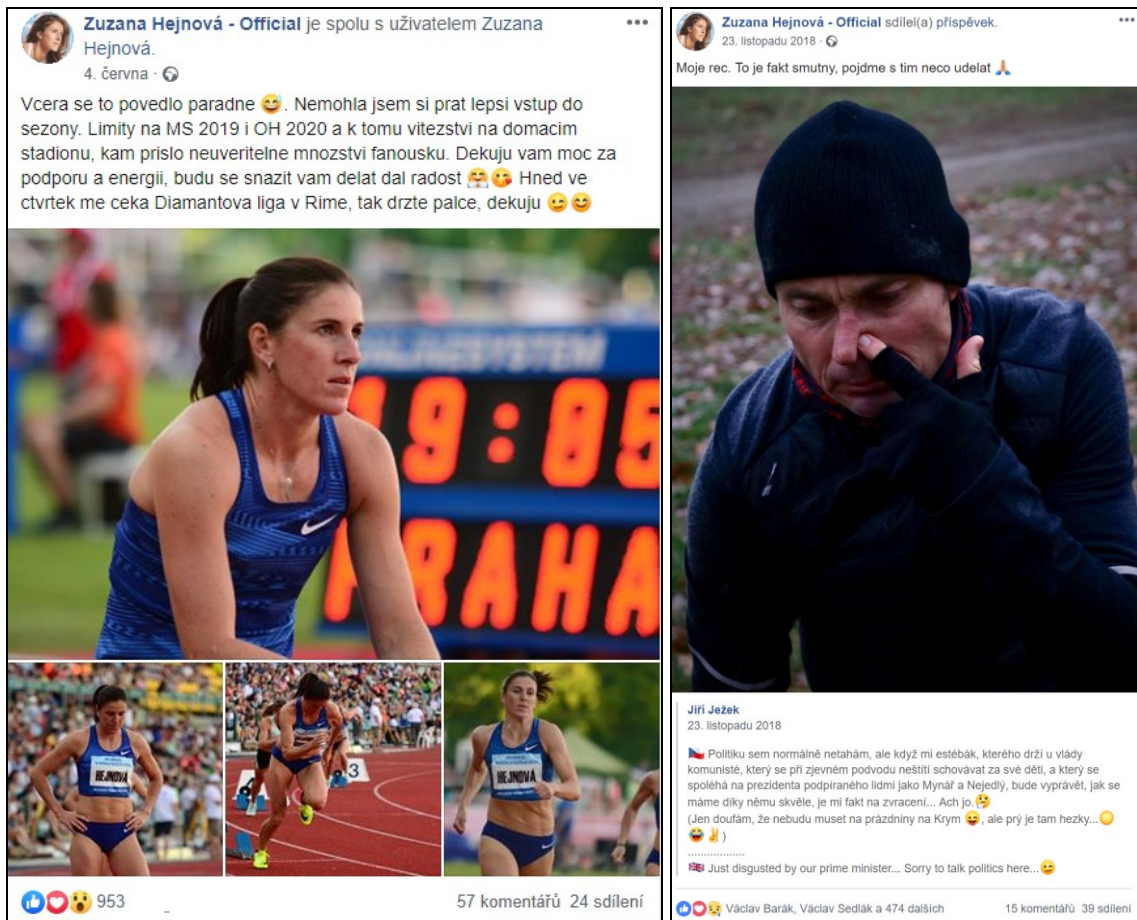
	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (4th mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (5th mentioned)	Total
Nike	12	3	0	0	0	15
Superlife CZ	2	2	0	0	0	4
Zdravé stravování	4	0	0	0	0	4
Deník Sport	2	1	0	0	0	3
Le Gracie	2	0	0	1	0	3
Runjinak	1	1	0	0	0	2
STARLIFE.cz	2	0	0	0	0	2
Auto Jarov	0	0	0	0	1	1
Breyers delights	1	0	0	0	0	1
GLOBAL SPORTS	0	0	1	0	0	1
Pharma Future	1	0	0	0	0	1
Pražčka	1	0	0	0	0	1
Rio Mare	1	0	0	0	0	1
Scott	1	0	0	0	0	1
SD Group (ČEZ)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Seat	0	1	0	0	0	1
Toro	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	31	9	1	1	1	43

Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author's own work

3.7.2 Fans' Reactions

Hejnová's posts received an average of 309 likes and 16 comments, and were shared four times on average. A post published after the Josef Odložil memorial games in 2019 collected the largest number of likes (953) and comments (57). The politically oriented post shown below was her most-shared (Zuzana Hejnová - Official, 2018). Both posts are displayed in Figure 72.

Figure 72: Posts with Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Zuzana Hejnová's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author's own work

The reactions of Hejnová's fans to these posts on her official Facebook page were mostly positive and supportive, although negative opinions were sometimes voiced (see Figure 73).

Figure 73: Distribution of Posts That Received Mostly Positive, Negative, or Neutral Comments on Zuzana Hejnová's Official Facebook page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral comments	4	5,2	5,2	5,2
Mostly positive comments	72	93,5	93,5	98,7
Mostly negative comments	1	1,3	1,3	100
Total	77	100,0	100,0	

Source: Official Facebook Page of Zuzana Hejnová, Author's own work

Hejnová's followers most frequently criticized her posts for commercialization and for expressing political views. However, the only post that received a majority of negative comments was one in which she shared a criticism of the Czech government, President, and Prime Minister that was originally posted by a famous Czech para-cyclist, Jiří Ježek (Zuzana Hejnová - Official, 2018; cf. Macková & Trunečka, 2015). One example of a negative comment was by a fan, Šárka Králová, who wrote: "Hey, you should just run! Don't worry about a country where you hardly spend any time." Pavla Nečesaná added: "Oh my God, don't talk about politics anymore."

Hejnová claimed in her interview that she reads all comments. She also reflected on the critical comments mentioned above: "In general, I do not comment on social issues. I have expressed my opinion on political issues a few times when it was really important to me — for example, during the Presidential elections. I do not do it often because then people attack me, and it is no use." She also considered the need to disclose paid partnerships and commercial content: "I don't have any social media paid partnerships yet, but when there is commercial content, I mention that." She recognizes her fans' sensitivity to overcommercialization: "Social media are full of partnerships and barter, and people are fed up with that. They don't like seeing promotional content all the time," (Hejnová, 2020).

3.8 Markéta Nausch-Sluková

Beach volleyball player Markéta Nausch-Sluková is the only representative of a niche sport that is also a team sport athlete in the research sample. Female volleyball, including beach volleyball, has a large, stable fan base (Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2017; Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2019). Nausch-Sluková's international senior career began in 2010, when she and a teammate, Kristýna Kolocová, won the U23 world title and started to compete on the International Volley Ball Federation (FIVB) World Tour (RedBull.com, 2020c). Along with Kolocová, Nausch-Sluková built and marketed a successful sports brand known as "Kiki and Maki."

After the long partnership between Nausch-Sluková and Kolocová broke up in 2015, Nausch-Sluková formed a team with the blocker Barbora Hermannová

(Veselovský, 2015; Bez frází [Without phrases], 2020a). Nausch-Sluková and Hermannová began to play together in 2015, and qualified for the 2016 Olympics (RedBull.com, 2020). Nausch-Sluková has participated in two Olympic Games. Playing alongside Kristýna Kolocová, she placed fifth at the London Games in 2012, and seventeenth in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 (with Barbora Hermannová) (Olympic.cz, 2018e). She plans to end her career after the postponed Tokyo Olympics are held in 2021 (Czech Volleyball Federation [Český volejbal], 2020).

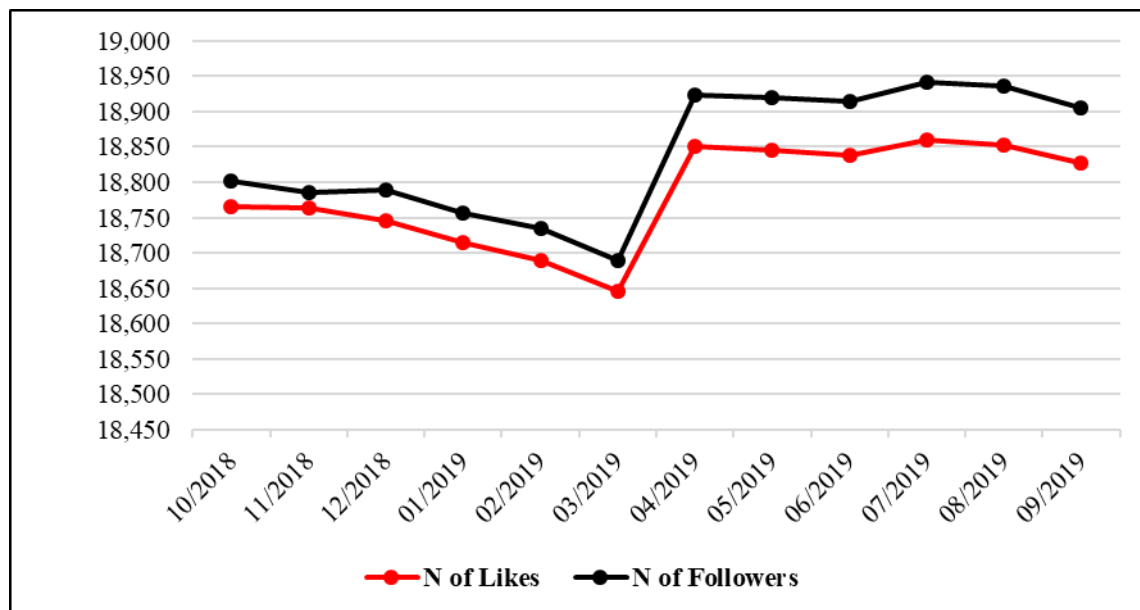
3.8.1 Communication on Social Media

Nausch-Sluková uses various online and social media platforms. Her official Facebook page (Markéta Sluková - Nausch, Czech Beachvolleyball Player, 2020) evolved from her personal, private profile: “In 2015, I decided to make my private profile my official one because many fans had sent me friend requests. It naturally turned into a public profile, so I started to use it as a fan page. At the same time I created a new private profile, where I have now have around fifty friends, who are people with whom I want to maintain contact privately,” (Nausch-Sluková, 2020). Nausch-Sluková’s Instagram profile (beach_maki, 2020) developed the same way: “I started to use Instagram in 2014 or 2015 when it started to boom. My profile also evolved from a private profile. Since then, Instagram has grown, as well as the interest of the sports audience. There are a lot of people who follow it mainly because of sport. So I aim my content at sports topics,” (Nausch-Sluková, 2020).

Unlike most of the athletes in our sample, Nausch-Sluková actively posts on Twitter (Markéta Sluková~Maki, 2020). However, she says that it is not her favorite social media platform (Nausch-Sluková, 2020). Nausch-Sluková also manages social media accounts for her team on Facebook (Nausch-Sluková and Hermannová - Czech Beachvolleyball Team, 2020), Instagram (bara.maki.beach, 2020), and Twitter (Bara & Maki Beach, 2020). She stated that she regards having a presence on social media both for herself and for her team as essential. Nausch-Sluková has learned from previous experience. “In a year Bára and I could break up, and then Bára could be playing with anyone else. Or, I could be pregnant and suddenly what? The [team’s] Facebook profile would be canceled, and I would have to start over with sixteen fans again. I care more about building up my own brand because I have learned from the past that I have to think of myself as an individual athlete” (Nausch-Sluková 2020)

During the observation period, the number of Nausch-Sluková’s supporters ranged from 18,600 to nearly 19,000 followers and likes per month. Figure 74 illustrates a decline in the number of likes and followers in the 2018–2019 off-season period. When the season started up again, the popularity and attractiveness of Nausch-Sluková’s official Facebook page increased.

Figure 74: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Markéta Nausch-Sluková’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)

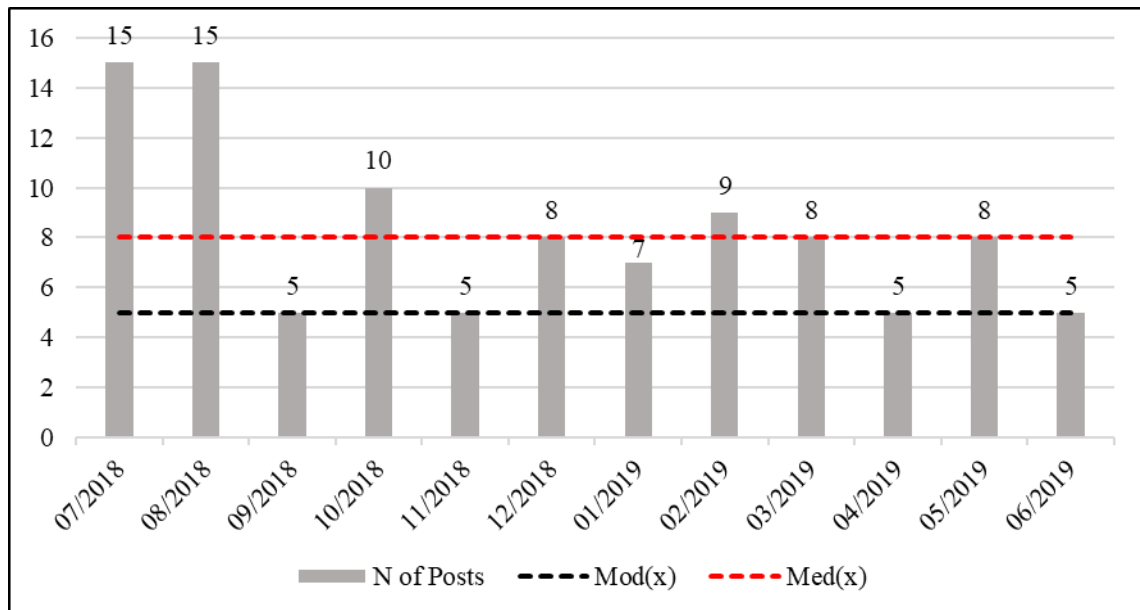


Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author’s own work

Although Nausch-Sluková manages her social media profiles on her own, it is not time-consuming for her. She answered the question about how much time social media management requires of her as follows: “Probably not so much, because nothing and nobody pushes me. There are days when we can sit in an airport for two hours, and I am bored anyway, so I prepare some posts that I know I want to put on social media. And when it comes ime to publish them, I just click, and it goes out into the world,“ (Nausch-Sluková, 2020).

Nausch-Sluková published eight posts a month on average (see Figure 75). Her greatest intensity of communication was in the summer of 2018, in the course of a successful beach volleyball season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

Figure 75: Number of Posts on Markéta Nausch-Sluková’s Official Facebook, with Mode ($Mod(x)$) and Median ($Med(x)$) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author’s own work

Nausch-Sluková’s activity on Facebook supported the hypothesis that good sports results and the in-season period played important roles in her Facebook page’s popularity: “Our season is mainly in summer, so most of the events happen then. We play a different tournament every week. My content is more interesting than simply writing, ‘Well, we are going to practice at Vítkov for 14 days now.’ Vítkov is always the same, so there is not much about it you can give the fans of the sport. It is different in the season, especially in August. There are different destinations and different tournaments every week. Additionally, we had our best season in 2018. I think this was the period when we were ranked first in the world, we won a major tournament⁶⁰, and we were second in the World Cup, so this was the most intense time that I shared with people,” (Nausch-Sluková, 2020).

That was evident from the statistics. Although the beach volleyball season is relatively short, the number of posts Nausch-Sluková published in-season was slightly larger than during the off-season (see Figure 76).

⁶⁰ Nausch-Sluková and Hermannová won the Vienna Major in Austria (July 31 – August 4, 2018) (Sluková – Hermannová: *Výsledky [Sluková – Hermannová: Results]*, 2020).

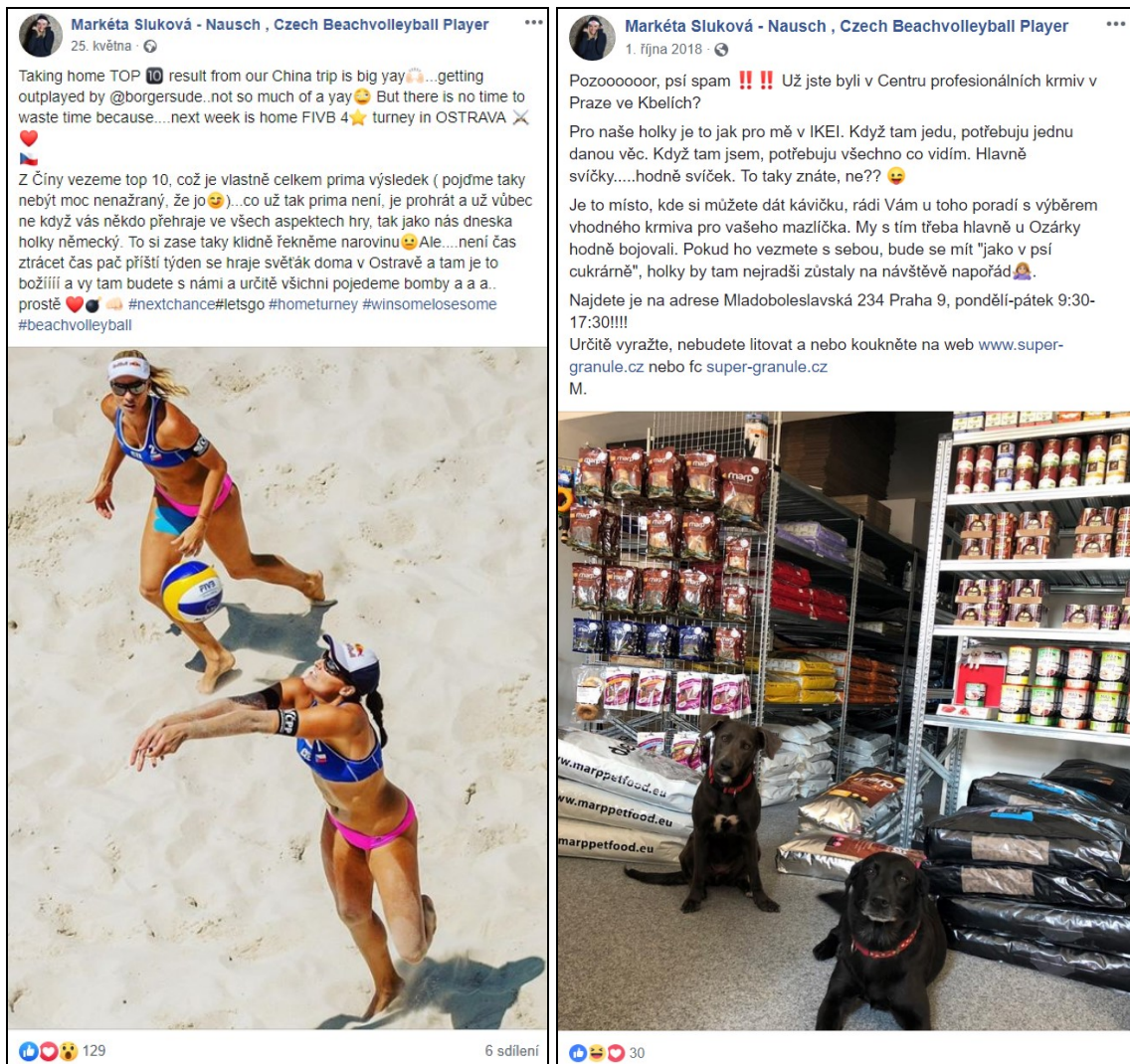
Figure 76: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Postings on Markéta Nausch-Sluková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	26	46	72
Diversity	22	6	28
Total	48	52	100

Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author’s own work

Figure 77 also shows that the character of Nausch-Sluková’s posts in the season differed from the content she published during the off-season period. While sports-related posts dominated in season, in the off-season period she posted communication in both sports-related and diverse areas almost in equal measure. Examples of typical sports-related and diverse posts on Nausch-Sluková’s official Facebook page appear in Figure 77. The diverse post pictured on the right side of Figure 77 promoted a pet-food store in the Prague suburb of Kbely.

Figure 77: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Markéta Nausch-Sluková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author's own work

The preponderance of Nausch-Sluková posts (86 of 100 in the observation period) contained one or more pictures, while more than half of the posts were accompanied by links or hashtags. Nausch-Sluková did not include videos on her Facebook page very often (see Figure 78).

Figure 78: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages Used in Posts on Markéta Nausch-Sluková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	14
	The post contains picture(s)	86
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	89
	The post contains video(s)	11
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	44
	The post contains link(s)	56
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	38
	The post contains hashtag(s)	62
Language(s)	Czech	10
	English	54
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	35
	Other	1

Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author’s own work

As is evident from Figure 78, more than half of Nausch-Sluková’s posts were written in English. She used both Czech and English in another third of her posts. Czech-only contributions seldom appeared on her official profile. Nausch-Sluková gave these reasons for choosing that strategy: “I post in English most of the time because I want to make my profile international. I have many followers in various countries. The ‘language thing’ was one of the issues that I discussed with RedBull management. They recommended that I publish the profile in English if I want to have international reach and overlap,” (Nausch-Sluková 2020).

In the season, Sluková’s promotional posts focused on her competitions. In contrast, self-promotion played a more important role during beach volleyball’s off-season period (see Figure 79).

Figure 79: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Posts on Markéta Nausch-Sluková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	5	1	6
Product	9	1	10
Self-promotion	30	12	42
Competition	3	37	40
Family and friends product	1	1	2
Total	48	52	100

Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author’s own work

Only four of Nausch-Sluková’s one hundred posts in the sample were completely non-promotional. The rest contained at least a promotional picture, video, link, or hashtag.

Nausch-Sluková was sponsored by some huge international brands, such as RedBull and Adidas (*Sluková – Hermannová, 2020*). She mentioned them in her posts in text, links, and hashtags, and their logos were also sometimes visible in her photos. The name of a sponsor or partner could be identified in nearly one-third of her posts (see Figure 80).

Figure 80: Mentions of Sponsors in the Posts on Markéta Nausch-Sluková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (4th mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (5th mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (6th mentioned)	Total
RedBull	16	3	1	0	0	0	20
STRABAG	2	3	1	0	0	0	6
Tipsport	4	1	0	0	0	0	5
Vodafone	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Beach Well	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
UNIQA	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Adidas	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Lifefood.cz	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	29	10	2	1	1	1	44

Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author’s own work

Nausch-Sluková’s thoughts about disclosing her commercial partnerships are as follows: “I think I did add a disclose once somewhere – and maybe I should do more of that. To be honest, I am not sure what exactly constitutes a paid partnership. What is collaboration, and what is not? For example, Toyota doesn’t sponsor me. They gave me a car, but I am not sure if I have to add a disclose every time I use the car in a post, even if the theme of the post is completely different,” (Nausch-Sluková, 2020).⁶¹

3.8.2 Fans’ Reactions

Nausch-Sluková’s fans express their opinions under the athlete’s posts mainly with “likes.” Comments appeared under two-thirds of her posts. Seventy posts out of the one hundred in the sample were shared at least once. A post published on April 27, 2019 achieved the most likes (432). It was posted after Nausch-Sluková’s team advanced to the semifinal of a four-star beach volleyball tournament in Xiamen in China, where the pair won silver medals. Nausch-Slukova’s most commented-upon post (32 comments) was the announcement of an injury she suffered in June 2019,

⁶¹ See Chapter 1.2.4, Disclosure Requirements for Commercial Collaboration and Advertising in Czech Legislation (p. 27).

which drew support on Facebook from her fans. Most of the reactions to her post were similar to Max Meier's: "I wish you a quick recovery and I hope to see you in Gstaad!" (Markéta Sluková - Nausch, Czech Beachvolleyball Player, 2019). Video content posted on July 20, 2018, after Nausch-Sluková's successful European Beach Volleyball Championships, in which her team reached the final eight, garnered the greatest number of shares (see Figure 81).

Figure 81: Posts with Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Markéta Nausch-Sluková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author's own work

The bulk of the reactions under Nausch Sluková's posts was overwhelmingly positive. In the observation period, not one of the athlete's posts was shadowed primarily by negative comments (see Figure 82).

Figure 82: Type of Comments under Posts on Markéta Nausch-Sluková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral comments	38	38,0	38,0	38,0
Mostly positive comments	62	62,0	62,0	100,0
Total	100	100,0	100,0	

Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author's own work

Nausch-Sluková claimed that she usually does not delete negative comments. "I am not a fan of deleting reactions if they are not downright offensive and vulgar. Not at all.

I have never deleted any constructive critical comment. I respect it if someone doesn't like the way I present myself. That's all right. On the other hand, I follow the rule, 'if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all,'" (Nausch-Sluková, 2020).

Nausch-Sluková believes that her Czech fans appreciate contests and an opportunity to get something for free: "Another thing that people like is contests, at least Czechs. When there is something they can win for free, they are ecstatic. Which is sweet, but. . . . I have never experienced a negative reaction," (Nausch-Sluková, 2020). An example of a contest is illustrated in Figure 83. The fans had an opportunity to win a package of health food from Nausch-Sluková's sponsor. The fans' task was to compose an original poem inspired by the Nausch-Sluková's beach volleyball team.

Figure 83: Example of Sponsors' Contest Announced on Markéta Nausch-Sluková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Author's own work

3.9 Martina Sáblíková

The part of our study that is dedicated to the individual representatives of niche sports begins with the speed skater Martina Sáblíková. Although Sáblíková competes in a sport that is not traditional in the Czech Republic, she is very popular. She was the third most popular athlete in our sample according to Facebook's popularity ranking (Socialbakers, 2020).

Sáblíková specializes in the long distances, 3,000 and 5,000 meters, and she also competes at a high level in the 1,500 meter races. She has competed in four Olympic Games and won six Olympic medals. She achieved victories in the 3,000 and 5,000 meter races at the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010, and also in the 5,000 meters at the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games. Moreover, she won two Olympic silver medals (in the 3,000 meters at the Sochi Winter Olympics and in the 5,000 meters at the PyeongChang Olympic Games in 2018), and one bronze medal (in the 1500 meters at the 2010 Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games). She placed fourth in the 3,000 meter race at the PyeongChang Olympics in 2018 and in 5,000 meters at the 2006 Torino Games, and seventh in the 3,000 meters in Torino. Besides her Olympic successes, she is also a multiple World and European medalist⁶² and the top speed skater in the World Cup standings (NUTREND, 2020; Olympic.cz, 2018c).

3.9.1 Communication on Social Media

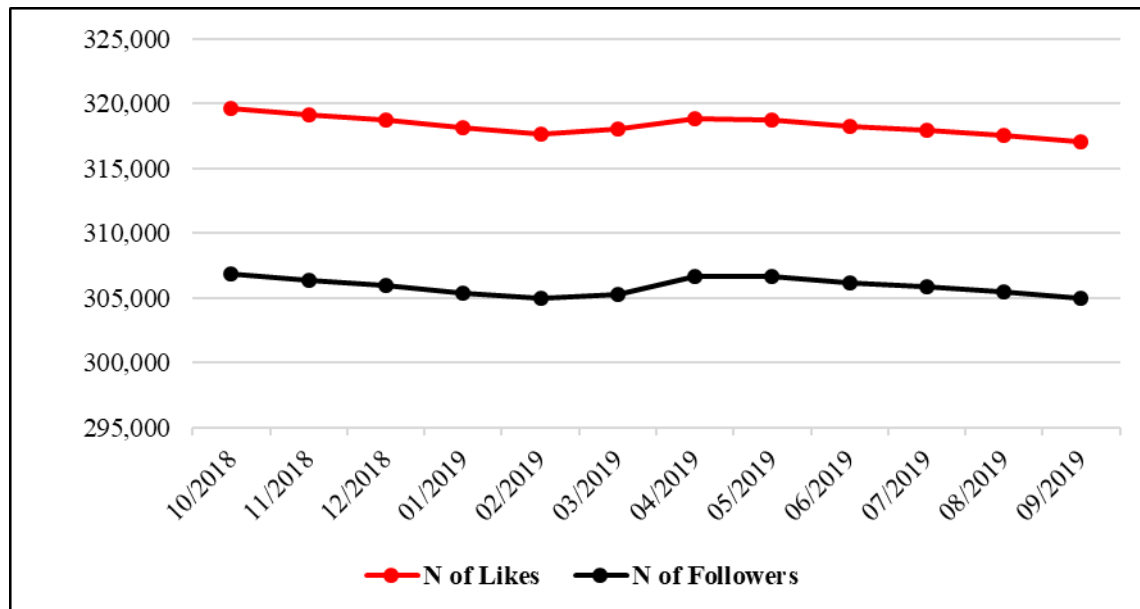
Martina Sáblíková has an official Facebook page (Martina Sáblíková, 2020a) and a public Instagram page (sablíkova_martina, 2020). The information on her private Facebook profile is hidden, except for her current and past profile pictures and her cover photos (Martina Sáblíková, 2020b). She has also established a YouTube account, but it contains only six videos of her training in the gym that were added in 2011 (MARTINASABLIKOVAful, 2020). Her communication manager is Pavel Pillár. In 2019 Pillár noted that Sáblíková is one of the athletes who use the help of the SportInvest agency with their social media management: “[S]he does not like social media so much. I do not want to say that she is strictly opposed to social networking — we have other ‘experts’ who do it for her. She is not able to do it the way we prefer: ‘Send us two photos a day, and we will somehow deal with it.’ On the other hand, Martina can publish three posts in two days when she wants to,” (Pillár, 2019)

Sáblíková’s official Facebook page had relatively stable numbers of followers and likes during the observation period. As evidenced in Figure 84, her page received between 317,075 and 319,602 likes. The number of her followers fluctuated between

⁶² Martina Sáblíková has won 21 gold medals, five silvers, and one bronze in World Speed Skating Championships and five gold, one silver and three bronze medals in European Speed Skating Championships (NUTREND, 2020).

304,952 and 306,846. Both indicators were lower at the end of the observation period than they were at the beginning.

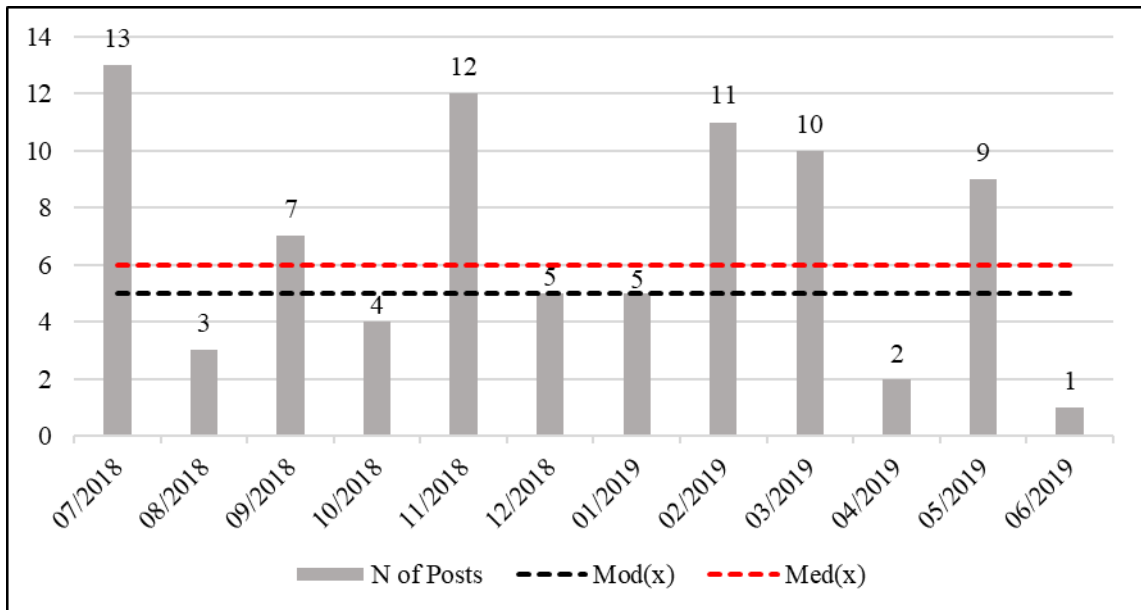
Figure 84: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Martina Sáblíková’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Martina Sáblíková, Author’s own work

Sáblíková’s coach, Petr Novák, restricted her use of electronic devices and her mobile phone early in her career, but he is more liberal nowadays (Novák, in Pokorný & Švarcová, 2019). Pillár said that it is crucial that a Czech athlete has financial support, “so that the athlete has a budget at their back, can train abroad, and able to pay for their whole team. Social media are essential for individual athletes for that reason,” (Pillár, 2019). During the observation period, Sáblíková administered her social media channels in collaboration with the SportInvest agency: “We manage her profile, help her with it, and we are able to add posts there, but it is always in close collaboration with Martina. We would never publish a post that she does not approve of,” (Pillár, 2019). Figure 85 shows that months when Sáblíková published a relatively large number of posts alternated with months of lesser activity. Four of her six monthly results were above the mode and median, and were recorded in the speed skating off-season. Sáblíková added the largest number of posts were to her Facebook page in March 2018, which was a month outside of the speed skating season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

Figure 85: Number of Posts on Martina Sáblíková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Martina Sáblíková, Author’s own work

The speed skater claimed that she limits the time she spends on social media: “Of course, when someone is on the Internet or social networks, he or she unconsciously spends a lot of time there. So I understand that my coach doesn’t like it. But unfortunately, one has to be in contact with the world. Additionally, I can find out what our sports rivals are doing, which is good, but it is also stressful on the other hand,” (Sáblíková, in Český rozhlas Radiožurnál [Czech Radio Radiožurnál], 2017).

From July 2018 to June 2019, Sáblíková published 80 posts in total, of which 66 related to her sport. The posts included promotions of forthcoming races, reports from sports events, and information about Sáblíková’s training (see Figure 86).

Figure 86: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Martina Sáblíková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

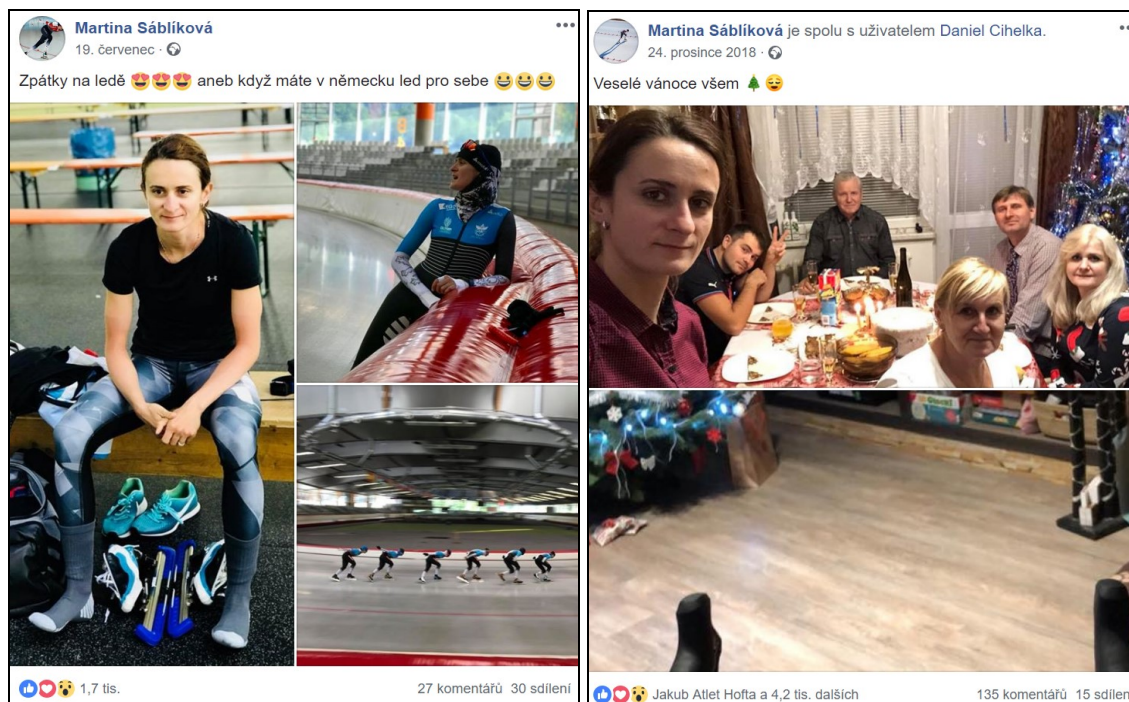
Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	32	34	66
Diversity	11	3	14
Total	43	37	80

Source: Official Facebook Page of Martina Sáblíková, Author’s own work

In the spring and summer, Sáblíková published photos from her bike training, which is an important part of her off-the-ice drill. She stated: “I often post information about my training,” (Sáblíková, in Český rozhlas Radiožurnál [Czech Radio Radiožurnál], 2017).

She published diverse posts mainly in the off-season period (see Figure 86). Examples of Sábliková’s typical sports-related and diverse posts appear in Figure 87.

Figure 87: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Martina Sábliková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Martina Sábliková, Author’s own work

Pictures were included in 66 of Sábliková’s posts in the sample. Pillár said that Sábliková approved most of them: “We always collaborate with Martina. She is relatively strict in terms of being satisfied with her appearance, which photos she likes, etc.” (Pillár, 2019) Sábliková did not often use other types of content, e.g. videos, links and hashtags, in her official Facebook communication. Most of her posts (65) were written in Czech, but thirteen of them were published both in Czech and English or without text. The remaining two posts used only English.

Promotional and commercial content was an important part of Sábliková’s posts. Figure 88 shows that all of the posts she published in season were classified as promotional. Off-season content included six posts that were not primarily promotional. Those posts were not accompanied by any other commercial or promotional pictures, links, or hashtags.

Figure 88: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Posts on Martina Sáblíková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	6	0	6
Product	10	2	12
Charity	1	0	1
Self-promotion	21	21	42
Competition	3	14	17
Family and friends product	2	0	2
Total	43	37	80

Source: Official Facebook Page of Martina Sáblíková, Author’s own work

Self-promotion predominated in both the in-season and off-season periods. In season, the emphasis was on announcements and recapitulations of competitions. Outside of the speed skating season, approximately one-fourth of Sáblíková’s posts advertised products or services (see Figure 88). As seen in Figure 89, the company Sáblíková most often mentioned was Under Armour (a sports fashion company), even though Sáblíková’s partnership with the company was not announced until September 2018, two months after the beginning of our observation period (Aust, 2018).

Figure 89: Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on Martina Sáblíková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (4th mentioned)	Total
Under Armour	11	2	1	0	14
Čeps	3	3	0	0	6
STRABAG	2	0	0	1	3
EGON	1	0	1	0	2
GHC Genetics	2	0	0	0	2
Epson	0	1	0	0	1
Julius Meinl	1	0	0	0	1
lawi	0	0	0	1	1
ŠKODA	1	0	0	0	1
Total	21	6	2	2	31

Source: Official Facebook Page of Martina Sáblíková, Author’s own work

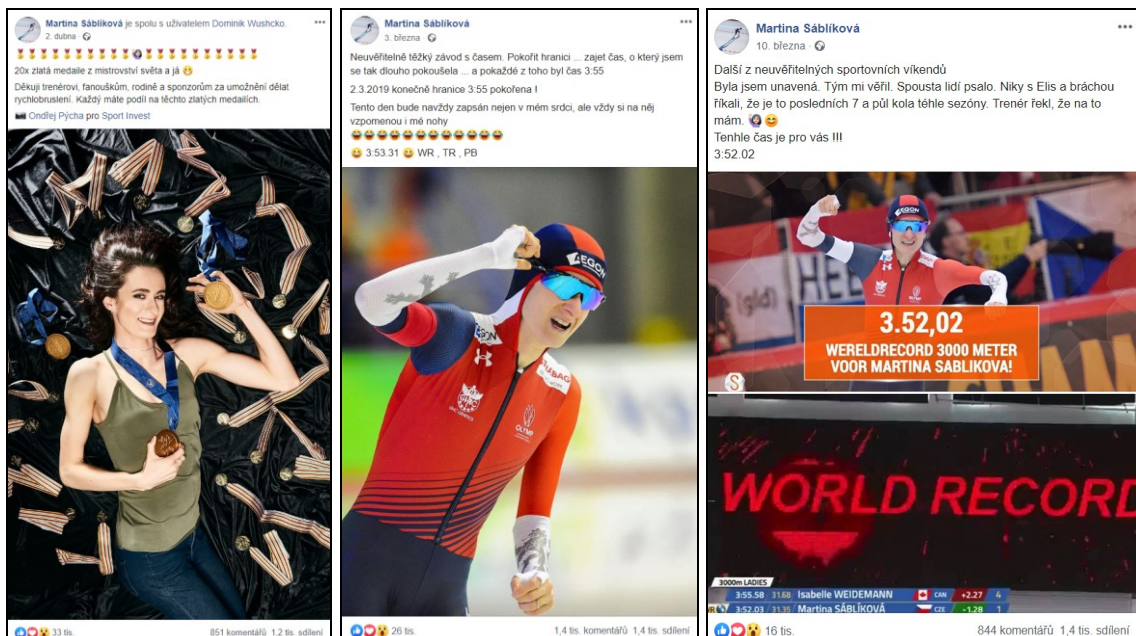
Pillár stated that the SportInvest agency has internal rules for promoting sponsored content and takes responsibility for the manner in which they are published: “Honestly, it is up to the agency. If some company wants to use Martina in its advertising campaign and agrees to put a large amount of money on the table, we still would never publish posts that make no sense. We would arrange a meeting with the company and tell them: ‘We really appreciate it, Martina likes your products, but let’s talk and do truly

meaningful things.’ Of course, the advertising would be obvious and visible, just not in the style that some companies are used to. . . . Basically, that is our job, and we do it in the way that we can sign our names to it. A promotion should not damage the athlete’s reputation,” (Pillár, 2019).

3.9.2 Fans’ Reactions

Sáblíková’s posts were quite frequently shared, liked and commented upon. The average number of shares per post was 143, while the average number of likes was around 3,683. Each post received 142 reactions on average. Figure 90 shows the posts with most likes, comments, and shares that appeared on Sáblíková’s official Facebook page. A visually attractive photo from a photoshoot was accompanied by an acknowledgment of the athlete’s sponsors, fans, family, and coach. It attracted the largest number of likes (33,000). Sáblíková’s most shared posts were published on March 3 and March 10, 2019. These posts documented Sáblíková’s breaking of the world record in the 3,000 meters twice. The March 3, 2019 post also received the most comments of any of Sáblíková’s posts in our sample.

Figure 90: Posts with the Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Martina Sáblíková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Martina Sáblíková, Author’s own work

Sáblíková’s Facebook fan community is important to her. “The fans are extremely important to me because I am the kind of person who needs their psychic support.

And it was unbelievable what happened on Facebook after I won medals at Inzell and Calgary. It meant a lot to me,” (Sáblíková, in Český rozhlas Radiožurnál [Czech Radio Radiožurnál], 2019). During the observation period, Sáblíková’s fans reacted positively to all but two of her 80 posts during the observation period. The ratio of positive to negative comments was balanced under those two posts. Additionally, Pillár mentioned that supporters messaged Sáblíková directly on her official Facebook profile. “We had to turn off the messages on Martina’s fan page because of the large number of them. We have only a three-member customer department – and it would not have been able to respond to all the messages,” (Pillár, 2019).

The most negative comments appeared under Sáblíková’s comments about her former teammate Karolína Erbanová ending her career. Sáblíková defended her coach, Petr Novák, who had been criticized by Erbanová in the media. Some of Sáblíková’s fans thought she had been coerced into publishing the kind of statement she did. For example, Milan Šmolík wrote: “Miss Martina, it is embarrassing for you to lie as you do. You know very well how it all happened. Mr. Novák just threw sticks under Karolína’s feet, instead of helping her (he is the coach of the whole national team, not just you). You also know how he destroyed the male part of the national team (a lot of work, no stars). I am sick of you.” Other followers held the opinion that her post was too diplomatic and not honest. On the other hand, the criticism was offset by an equal number of positive and supportive reactions, so we considered the overall tenor of the comments under this post to be neutral.

3.10 Eva Samková

The second most popular official Facebook page among the representatives of winter sports in our sample belonged to Czech snowboardcross (SBX) rider Eva Samková. She started her SBX career in 2008. After winning Junior World Championship titles in 2010, 2011 and 2013, she also succeeded as an adult (RedBull.com, 2020a; RedBull.com, 2020b). She became the first Czech athlete who won the SBX World Cup race (2013, Blue Mountain, Canada), while in 2017 and 2019 she achieved victories in the World Cup series (RedBull.com, 2020a; *evasamkova.cz: English*, 2014; *Aktuálně.cz*, 2019). She won gold in the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games and placed third at 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics in her discipline (Olympic.cz, 2018a;

evasamkova.cz: English, 2014). Last but not least, she twice won a silver medal at the Winter X Games as an SBX rider (RedBull.com, 2020b).

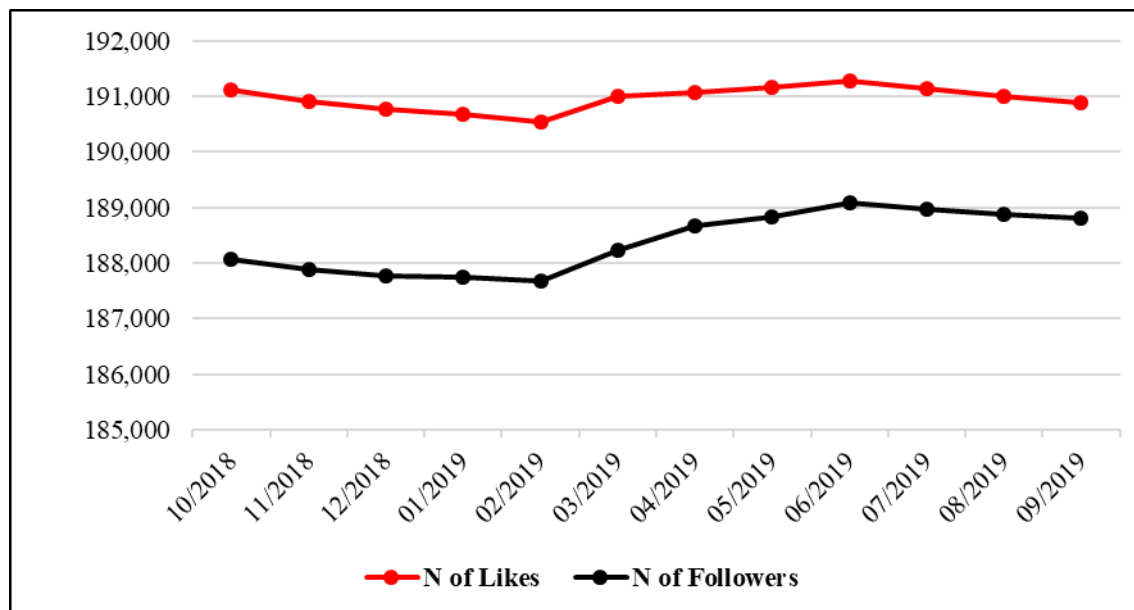
Besides her great sports results, she became famous because she paints a mustache on her face before competitions to bring her good luck (Eva Samková, 2020b). She began this “tradition” at the 2011 World Championship in La Molina, Italy. She did it on a dare from a Polish rider, and because of her good result in that race, she kept it up. (Samková, in Šafránek, 2019). From that time forward, Samková wears a mustache in every final race she enters. Furthermore, it has become her personal logo (*evasamkova.cz*, 2014; Šafránek, 2019).

3.10.1 Communication on Social Media

Samková has an official Facebook page (Eva Samkova, 2020a), as well as a public Instagram (eva_samkova, 2020). She created both social media accounts relatively early in her career, during the 2012/2013 season. Samková has connected her Facebook and Instagram accounts, so she can simultaneously publish posts on both social media platforms (Samková, 2020). She has created a Twitter account, but she has not been active on it since 2017 (Eva Samkova, 2020b). “I don’t use my Twitter profile, because it was originally begun by my previous manager. The tweets on it were mostly published by him, or were content shared from Instagram or Facebook. I have never personally liked it. I have never used Twitter myself and I do not miss it,” (Samková, 2020). Besides her official social media channels, Samková confirmed that she has a private, “secret” Facebook profile: “Sure, I have my private profile, but I keep it a bit encrypted, and I do not add random people to it, it is just for friends,” (Samková, 2020).

Samková manages her Facebook and Instagram accounts by herself. Although she has had some social media training, she relies on her own feelings in composing her posts (Samková, 2020). Samková’s official Facebook page received between 190,542 and 191,280 likes and was followed by more than 187,600 people in the observation period. As Figure 91 shows, both of those indicators followed a similar trend. Paradoxically, the lowest number of likes and follows were observed in February 2019, which was the in-season month when Samková won the SBX World Cup Crystal Globe (Aktuálně.cz, 2019).

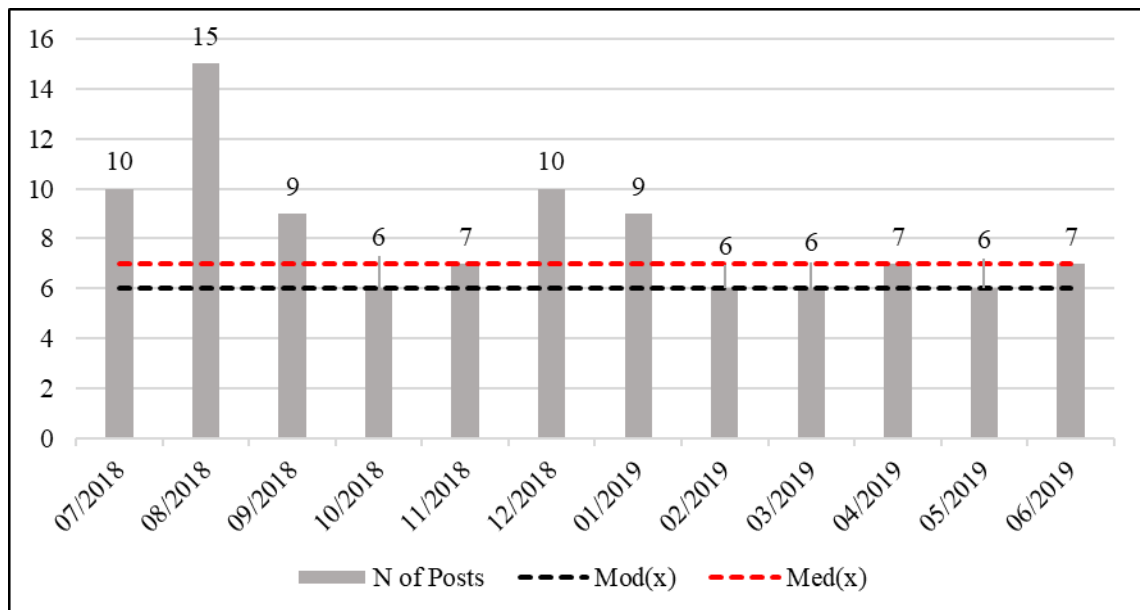
Figure 91: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Eva Samková’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author’s own work

Samková admitted that social media have become an important part of her daily routine. “I think I spend more time on social networks than I should,” (Samková, 2020). That concern corresponds with her regular publication activity, as is illustrated in Figure 92. From July 2018 to June 2019, Samková posted seven posts a month on average. The mode of the number of her posts was six, which was also the lowest number of posts she published in any one month. She published her highest number of posts in the off-season month of August 2018. More than 70% of her posts were published in the off-season period (see Figure 93). Samková said that time plays a role in terms of intensity of her posting activity: “There are a lot of things I can do during the summer. That is when I have more time. In summer, I train, I travel a lot, and I have time to contribute to social media. During the season, I sometimes feel like I do not want to publish any posts, or that I am tired of it. There is not that much time then. I go from a race to training and so on. I usually publish information about races and what happens during and after events. But I do not have many activities besides racing, so maybe that is the reason,” (Samková, 2020; cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015).

Figure 92: Number of Posts on Eva Samková’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode (Mod(x)) and Median (Med(x)) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author’s own work

Samková’s posts published from July 2018 to June 2019 differed from those of the other female athletes in our sample. Diverse content significantly prevailed over sports-related posts. From a total number of 99 posts, 68 were about diverse topics and 31 concerned her sport. As Figure 93 demonstrates, Samková’s diverse content appeared on her Facebook page more often than her sports-related posts, both in the season and during the off season.

Figure 93: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Eva Samková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	21	10	31
Diversity	53	15	68
Total	74	25	99

Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author’s own work

Samková argued that she is not just a sportswoman; she also wants to promote her approach to life: “I think I present the topics that interest me — and that’s primarily ecology. I like taking care of nature, collecting rubbish, and promoting a responsible approach to nature and to the environment in general,” (Samková, 2020). Examples of Samková’s typical sports-related and diverse posts on her official Facebook page are shown in Figure 94.

Figure 94: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Eva Samková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author's own work

Most of Samková's posts of both types contained at least one picture. Approximately two-thirds of her posts were accompanied by links and hashtags, but videos appeared only rarely (see Figure 95). Regarding hashtags, Samková said she used personal ones: "The hashtag #spokosamicz reflects how I live and the kind of friends I have. Sometimes I have a message for a group of friends, and that's why I started using it. . . . I created #samiczcestovic for travel photos," (Samková, 2020).

Figure 95: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Eva Samková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	12
	The post contains picture(s)	87
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	88
	The post contains video(s)	11
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	37
	The post contains link(s)	62
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	35
	The post contains hashtag(s)	64
Language(s)	Czech	65
	English	17
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	17

Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author's own work

Samková confirmed that the language used in the content on her social media is a sensitive issue for Czech people. "If I write a post only in English, I often receive

negative comments from Czech fans — saying that I am Czech and asking me why I do not write in Czech. So I try to use both languages, Czech and English, or only Czech,” (Samková, 2020). In the observation period, Samková published 65 posts in the Czech language only, while seventeen were in Czech and English or had no text. Another seventeen posts were written only in English (see Figure 95).

Samková also used her official Facebook page for promotional purposes (Sanderson, 2014; Pegoraro, 2010). She stated that she consciously tries to fulfill her sponsors’ requirements: “From time to time, I look at the statistics and see how many commercial posts I have made. But of course, I have requirements in my contracts. I do it in a way that is acceptable for me, my sponsors, and my fans. I want to achieve a ‘golden mean.’ I think most of my partners can be promoted quite unobtrusively. Sometimes I look at how other people do it, and I feel like I may care about it too much,” (Samková, 2020).

In season, all of Samková’s posts had some promotional or commercial character . Each of the three categories — product promotion, self-promotion, and competition promotion — was represented by eight posts during the observation period. The one remaining post featured family and friends. Out of season, the promotional posts were primarily self-promoting (27 posts) and product-oriented (25 posts). Family and friends’ products were featured six times. Two posts related to charity initiatives and two others to competitions. In the off-season period, twelve of Samková’s 75 posts were classified as non-promotional. On the other hand, only four of them contained no pictures, videos, links, or hashtags at all (see Figure 96).

Figure 96: Promotional Posts and Type of Promotional Content on Eva Samková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Promotional Category	Total N of Posts	N of Posts Containing Promotional Picture(s)	N of Posts Containing Promotional Video(s)	N of Posts Containing Promotional Link(s)	N of Posts Containing Promotional Hashtag(s)
Without promotion	12	1	0	4	8
Product	33	26	6	21	22
Charity	2	1	0	2	0
Self-promotion	35	20	3	19	20
Competition	10	9	1	7	8
Family and friends product	7	5	1	6	3
Total	99	62	11	59	61

Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author’s own work

The names and logos of Samková’s sponsors appeared on her official page both directly and indirectly. Samková stated: “Some of the photos show my sponsors or partners, but I do not put the photos on social media primarily for promotional purposes. For example, if I wear Kari Traa’s clothes, the brand is visible, but the main goal of the post is not promotional,” (Samková 2020). Figure 97 lists the sponsors and partners that appeared on Samková’s official Facebook page in the observation period. More than half of her posts included a sponsor’s name. The most frequently mentioned companies on Samková’s page were RedBull (energy drinks), Honor (a smartphone brand), and Kari Traa (sport clothes for women). Other brands, such as Toyota (automobiles), GoPro (versatile action cameras), and ČEPS (an energy distribution company) were advertised less often. Samková confirmed that the intensity with which she promotes brands varies. “That is private, internal information, but I can say that it [the intensity of promotion] is stated in the contracts, and it changes with the sponsor. It depends on the level of cooperation,” (Samková, 2020).

Figure 97: Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on Eva Samková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (4th mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (5th mentioned)	Total
RedBull	14	5	0	0	0	19
Honor	13	2	2	0	0	17
Kari Traa	10	4	1	2	0	17
Toyota	4	2	0	1	0	7
GoPro	6	0	0	0	0	6
Čeps	1	2	0	0	1	4
AEG	1	2	0	0	0	3
NEV-DAMA	2	0	1	0	0	3
Electrolux	2	0	0	0	0	2
Snow Nomads	2	0	0	0	0	2
Voss	2	0	0	0	0	2
FotoKlinika	1	0	0	0	0	1
Nike	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	59	17	4	3	1	84

Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author’s own work

Occasionally, Samková’s sponsors and partners ran contests in their social media advertising. Some of the contests also appeared on her Facebook page. Samková mentioned contests conducted by KariTraa and Toyota. She believes that this form of promotion can be effective: “I think it can work well if it is well-prepared and well-promoted by both sides — myself and the company. Those posts can be supported

by paid advertising. Thanks to that, a contest can succeed. If the general idea is good, it is shared with other people, and they share it in turn,” (Samková, 2020). Samková expressed her opinion on disclosing posts that result from commercial collaboration: “I have already consulted with experts on this issue. I think that in cases where a sponsor appears prominently in a picture, e.g., on Instagram, the athlete has to identify it as a ‘paid partnership with [the company].’ I do that on some of my channels, some other places not. I don’t care about it much yet. I think it is going to be regulated, but it is hard to say. Of course, a disclose may not look so good to the partners, but if the content is commercial and the connection between the athlete and the brand is important, then it should be disclosed,” (Samková 2020).

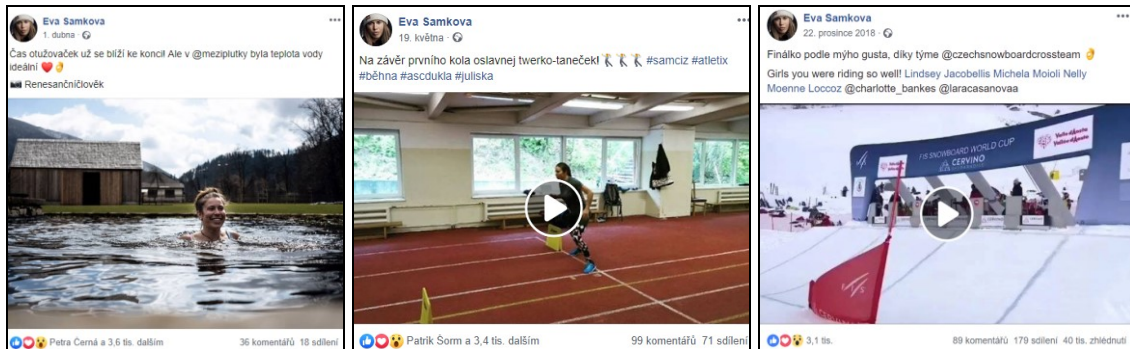
It is obvious that Samková intuitively conforms her posts to the legal and ethical rules and recommendations for influencer marketing.⁶³

3.10.2 Fans’ Reactions

On average, Eva Samková’s posts in the observation period were liked by 644 people and shared nine times. A typical post on Samková’s official Facebook page received around nine comments. Her most-liked post was dated April 1, 2019 and contained Samková’s photo from a wintertime swim. A post from her summer training that included a video received the greatest number of comments. Most of the reaction to this post was positive, but critical and negative voices also appeared. For example, a fan, Daniel Lombardo, wrote, “I run to the toilet like that when I need to poop 😞😂.” Samková’s most-shared content was a video from the 2018 World Cup race in Cervinia, Italy, which Samková won (FIS, 2018). All these posts are displayed in Figure 98.

⁶³ See Chapter 1.2.4, Disclosure Requirements for Commercial Collaboration and Advertising in Czech Legislation (p. 27).

Figure 98: Posts with Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Eva Samková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author’s own work

Samková had this to say about critical responses from her fans: “My fans are great; I think they are mainly positive. If they are negative, and [my position] can be constructively explained or I know for sure that they are not right, I try to react, if that is possible. But I usually do not read all of the comments,” (Samková, 2020). There was no post in the observation period where negative reactions predominated (see Figure 99).

Figure 99: Type of Comments under the Posts on Eva Samková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral comments	10	10,1	10,1	10,1
Mostly positive comments	89	89,9	89,9	100,0
Total	99	100,0	100,0	

Source: Official Facebook Page of Eva Samková, Author’s own work

Samková said that she deletes vulgar comments under her posts: “If a comment is not constructive, i.e., if someone just writes that I am a ‘cow,’ I delete it if I notice it. If I don’t see it, it stays there. Somehow I don’t usually browse through the comments, trying to delete the vulgar ones. I don’t want to put extra effort into such things. If a comment makes no sense or if it is spam, like a link to something irrelevant, I delete it. To me, it is not necessary to have it there. Otherwise, I think my censorship activity is minimal,” (Samková, 2020). Criticism that her content is overcommercialized does not faze her. “People often criticize me for being commercial. But I couldn’t exist

without it; I couldn't do the sport without sponsors. I stand by my sponsors, and our cooperation is set up well," (Samková, 2020).

3.11 Ester Ledecká

The second female representative of an extreme sport in our sample, Ester Ledecká, is also the youngest woman in it (*Ester Ledecká: About*, 2020). Ledecká competes in snowboarding as well as alpine skiing. She is unique in that she competes in both winter sports disciplines at the top level. She made history during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games when she became the first athlete to compete in those two sports at the same Olympics (Clarey, 2017). Moreover, she won two gold medals in skiing and snowboarding, one in the skiing Super Giant Slalom and another in the snowboarding Super Giant Slalom (*Ester Ledecká: About*, 2020). Ledecká's snowboard coach Justin Reiter has stated: "I firmly believe she is one of the greatest living athletes," (Reiter, in Clarey, 2017).

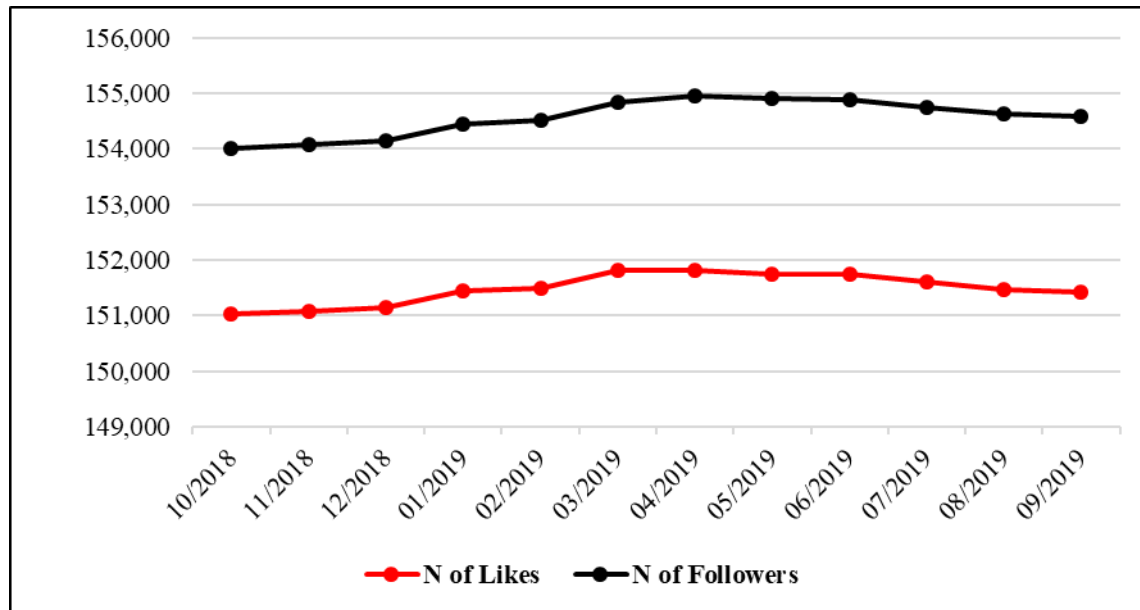
3.11.1 Communication on Social Media

Ledecká has established official Facebook (Ester Ledecká, 2020), Instagram (esterledecka, 2020), and Twitter accounts (EsterLedecka, 2020). However, she claimed that she does not like social media at all: "I am not a fan of Facebook because I do not like to write anything, and I hate photo shoots and interviews about anything," (Ester Ledecká, 2014). In the past, Ledecká's social media were administered by her management agency, Sport Invest (jaz, 2014; Ester Ledecká, 2017). Sport Invest's Head of Communication, Pavel Pillár, described the current situation: "Ester's team consisted of her mother, who always had the decisive say in terms of what she posted on social media. . . . Nowadays, specifically in the last six months, Ester's team administers her social media — I can't tell you if it is by Ester herself, her mom, or her physiotherapist. But the content is created and posted by Ester's team," (Pillár, 2019).

Ledecká's official Facebook page achieved high levels of popularity (in terms of the number of likes of her page) and virality (based on the number of followers of her page). Her page received over 151,000 likes and 154,000 followers from October 2018 to September 2019. The number of likes and the number of followers of Ledecká's account increased during the pre-season period, and continued to do so in the 2018/2019

season. After the season, the numbers declined slightly. These trends may have resulted from a “post-Olympic boom” in Ledecká’s popularity, followed by a “calming down” (Mařanová, 2018; mis, 2018). Overall, the number of likes and followers was higher at the end of the period than it was at the beginning (see Figure 100).

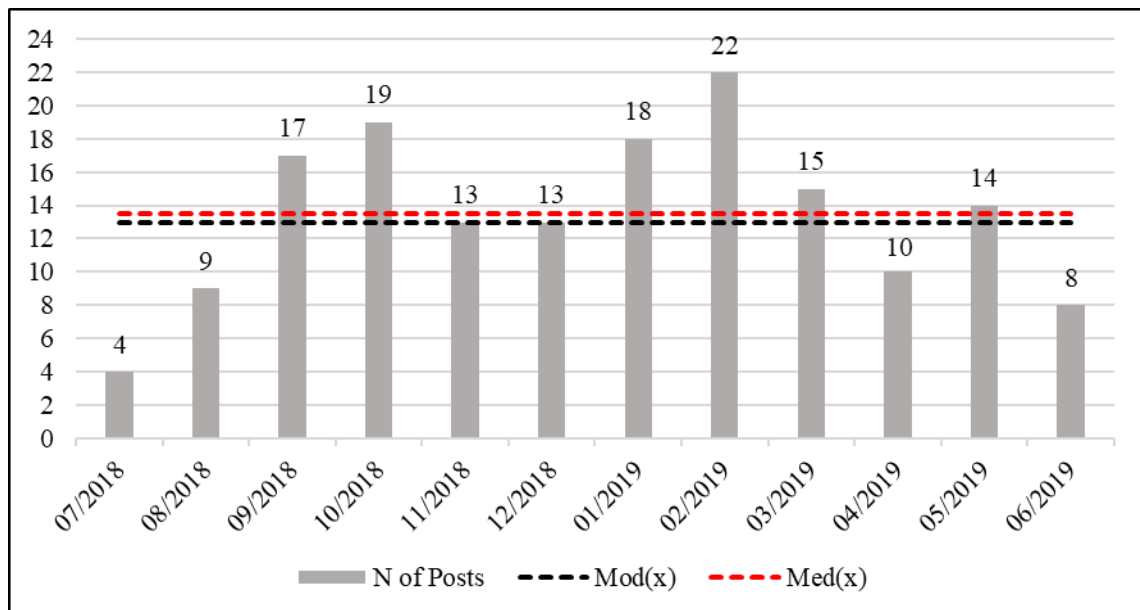
Figure 100: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Ester Ledecká’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author’s own work

Figure 101 shows that Ledecká’s Facebook publication activity in the observation period was relatively high. Her team posted around thirteen posts each month. Lower activity was evidenced mainly in the summer off-season period (July 2018, August 2018, April 2019, June 2019).

Figure 101: Number of Posts on Ester Ledecká’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode (Mod(x)) and Median (Med(x)) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author’s own work

Ledecká published more content during the season than in the off-season (see Figure 102), which supports the findings of Geurin and Clavio (2015). The fluctuation in the number of her monthly posts shown in Figure 101 could result from Ledecká’s personality and attitudes. “Of course, it is not ideal, but all of us respect what Ester says. She is like a robot who lives and dies from skiing and snowboarding. Other connected side-duties are annoying for her,” (Pillár, 2019).

Figure 102: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Ester Ledecká’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

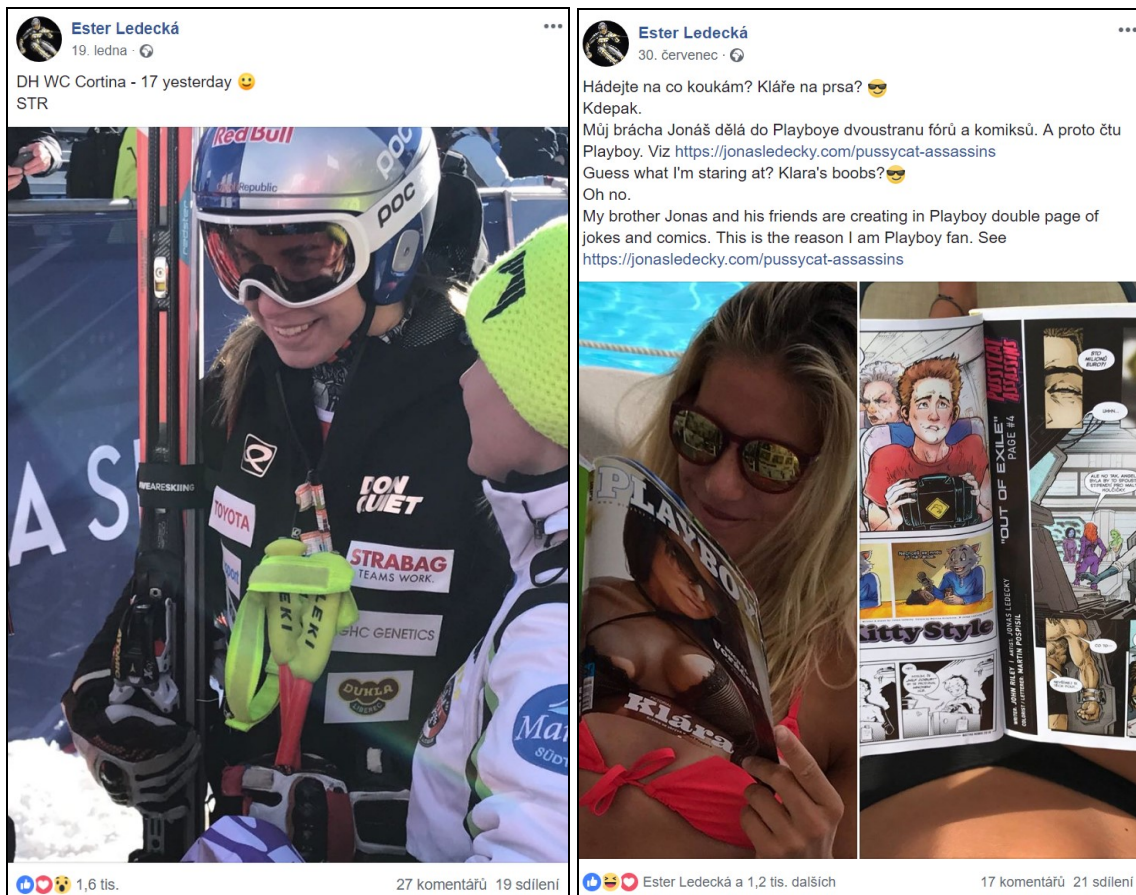
Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	27	50	77
Diversity	43	41	84
Total	70	91	161

Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author’s own work

After her two Olympic gold medals in PyeongChang in 2018, Ester Ledecká became a global superbrand (Novotný, 2018). Because of her sporting results and her personal authenticity, global public interest in her rapidly increased. It is thus not surprising that Ledecká’s social media communication in the observation period were more than just sports-oriented. More than half of her posts (84 of 161 in the observation period) related to diverse topics such as travel, social events, and pop culture. Ledecká’s father, Janek Ledecký, is a famous Czech singer and her brother Jonáš Ledecký is

a well-known illustrator, so she is well-connected to Czech pop culture (jaz, 2014). In season, sports-related information slightly prevailed in her posts. On the other hand, more posts in the off season, as well as in her total number of posts, related to diverse themes (see Figure 102). Pavel Pillár commented on Ledecká’s social media content: “Ester and her team find interesting things to publish in different posts than we do, in other photos. But I have to say that all of her posts are really authentic,” (Pillár, 2019) Examples of Ledecká’s sports-related and non-sports-related posts are illustrated in Figure 103. The post on the left is dedicated to a World Cup race where Ledecká placed seventeenth. The post on the right contains promotion of Ledecká’s brother’s artwork, which was published in Playboy magazine.

Figure 103: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Ester Ledecká’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author’s own work

The character of Ledecká’s posts in the observation period was not uniform. Most of her posts were accompanied by one or more pictures, and one-third of them contained a link. Videos also appeared on her official Facebook page. Although she posted similar

content on Instagram and Facebook, she used hashtags in only three Facebook posts during the whole period (see Figure 104). Ledecká’s personal signature is “STR,” which she used in most of her posts. This signature — an abbreviation of Ester Ledecká’s first name — helps her to build her own brand (cf. Arai et al., 2013; Arai et al., 2014).

Figure 104: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Ester Ledecká’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	39
	The post contains picture(s)	122
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	130
	The post contains video(s)	31
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	109
	The post contains link(s)	52
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	158
	The post contains hashtag(s)	3
Language(s)	Czech	104
	English	18
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	31
	Other	8

Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author’s own work

The length of the messages on Ledecká’s official Facebook page varied. More than half of her posts contained visual content (picture or video) accompanied by a short sentence. Her longer text blocks were mostly dedicated to non-sport themes or thank-yous to fans or sponsors. Almost two-thirds of Ledecká’s posts (104 of 161) were written in Czech and eighteen posts were in English only. The rest of her posts (8) did not contain any text, were posted in both languages (Czech and English), or were in neither Czech nor English (see Figure 104).

Ledecká used her Facebook page extensively for commercial and promotional purposes. Only 11 of her 161 posts in the observation period were entirely without promotional content. Her most common form of promotion was self-promotion, which prevailed in the off-season. Her second-most frequent category, product promotion, appeared in a similar number of posts both in-season and out of season. Ledecká promoted her competitions only during the season. During the observation period, Ledecká promoted charities and the activities of her family members (see Figure 105). As a sports celebrity, Ledecká is required by her sponsors to promote herself on social media. Pillár explained: “Of course, there are guidelines that companies create, but on the other hand, in the case of top athletes, the sponsors respect it

if the athletes do things in their own style. That means that the athlete may not take photos that follow the sponsors’ guidelines, but he or she does it the way he or she wants and feels good about it. Ester does it that way. She ‘adjusts’ the guidelines, but she always ensures that her commercial partner is visible,” (Pillár, 2019).

Figure 105: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Posts on Ester Ledecká’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	8	3	11
Product	16	24	40
Charity	0	2	2
Self-promotion	42	38	80
Competition	0	18	18
Family and friends product	4	6	10
Total	70	91	161

Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author’s own work

After the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics, companies and sponsors eagerly sought contracts with Ester. Viktor Valta, Sport Invest’s Athlete Manager, confirmed: “There was a huge increase in interest that no one could imagine,” (Valta, in Novotný, 2018). As Figure 106 shows, Ledecká promoted a wide range of brands from different industries (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

Figure 106: Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on Ester Ledecká's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corp. Spons. (1st m.)	Corp. Spons. (2nd m.)	Corp. Spons. (3rd m.)	Corp. Spons. (4th m.)	Corp. Spons. (5th m.)	Corp. Spons. (6th m.)	Corp. Spons. (7th m.)	Corp. Spons. (8th m.)	Corp. Spons. (9th m.)	Corp. Spons. (10th m.)	Corp. Spons. (11th m.)	Corp. Spons. (12th m.)	Total
RedBull	18	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
ATOMIC Skiing	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
Milka	6	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Tipsport	2	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Richard Mille	4	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Audi	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Coca Cola	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
POC	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5
STRABAG	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Adidas	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Don Quiet	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
ROBE Lighting	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Barbie	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Deeluxe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
GHG Genetics	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
VISA	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Burton	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
EUROMEDIA	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Kaunertaler Gletscher	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Mattel	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Leki	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
PONER	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Samsung	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
SG Snowboards	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
SSWSC Snowboard Race Team	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Toyota	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
UPZ	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
W Fitness & Spa	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Yamaha Motors	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	58	18	10	5	4	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	104

Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author's own work

Ledeká's promotional posts were not disclosed as advertising. In some cases, the names of the companies were mentioned in posts in a hashtag or a link. Otherwise, promotional intent was obvious from a photo or video that captured the logo of a company. The commercial content on Ledeká's official Facebook page was noticed by her fans. Visitors to her page criticized not only the commercialization of her content, but also some of her sponsors actual products (cf. Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015). For example, Roman Švarc reacted to one of Ledeká's posts that advertised Milka chocolates (see Figure 107, on the left). "Ester, do not eat this. You will be so fat that your snowboard won't carry you. This is pure sugar.

Disgusting.” Jana Movačiková agreed with him: “This is stupid advertising – you are just eating fat. It [Milka] has nothing to do with chocolate,” (Ester Ledecká, 2019).

Figure 107: Examples of Promotional Content on Ledecká’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



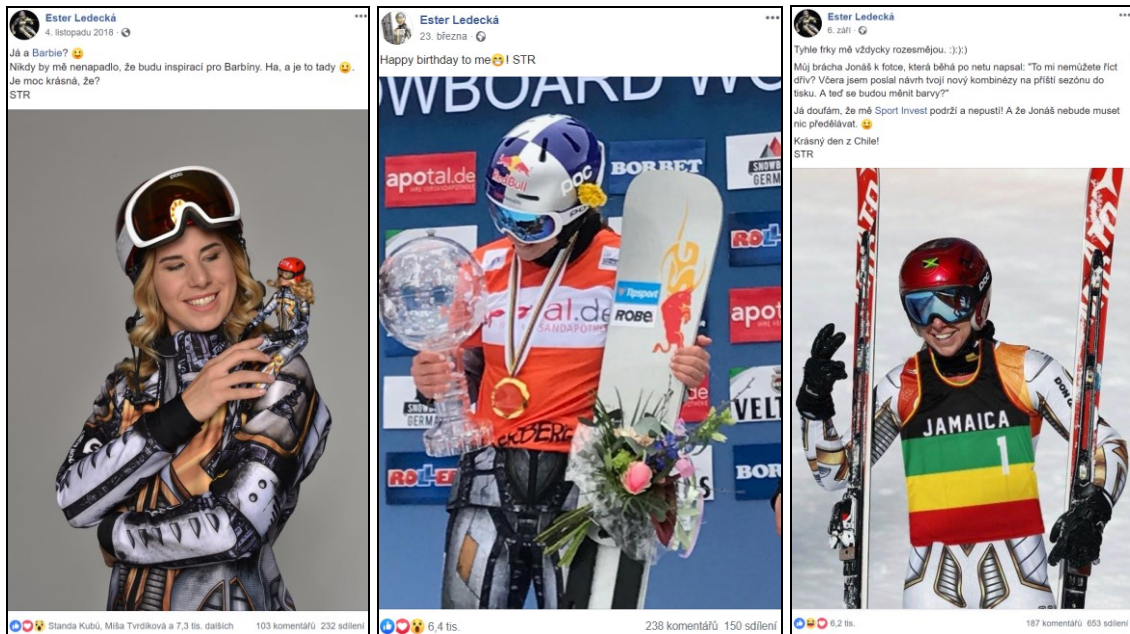
Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author’s own work

3.11.2 Fans’ Reactions

Due to Ester Ledecká’s global popularity, her social media posts were frequently liked, shared, and commented upon by her fans. On average, posts on Ledecká’s official Facebook page from July 2018 to June 2019 were shared by 31 people, commented upon 37 times, and received 1,605 likes. Figure 108 shows the posts that received the largest number of likes, comments, and shares from July 2018 to June 2019. A promotion for a Barbie doll that represented Ester herself collected the largest number of likes (7,302). The most-shared post (653 times) was a funny photo collage related

to dispute between Ledecká and the Czech Skiing Association, inspired by the famous movie about Jamaican bobsledders, Cool Runnings (IMDb, 2021).⁶⁴

Figure 108: Posts with the Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Ester Ledecká's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author's own work

Fans' reactions to Ester's posts were mostly positive. Optimistic and supportive comments prevailed under 141 posts. The fans' reactions were considered neutral in ten cases (the number of positive and negative reactions was balanced). Only two posts received mostly comments with a negative tenor (see Figure 109).

⁶⁴ Ledecká had a dispute with the Czech Skiing Association before the 2018/2019 season. The conflict began because of restrictive conditions the Association imposed on the selection of athletes' personal sponsors. Ledecká's father escalated the issue and criticized the Czech Skiing Association during a press conference. He suggested that Ledecká might represent another country than the Czech Republic. After complicated negotiations, both sides agreed on a resolution and Ledecká continues to represent the Czech Republic in competitions (Hrdličková, 2018; Osoba, 2018).

Figure 109: Type of Comments under Posts on Ester Ledecká's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral comments	10	6,2	6,2	6,2
Mostly positive comments	149	92,5	92,5	98,8
Mostly negative comments	2	1,2	1,2	100
Total	161	100,0	100,0	

Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author's own work

Both of the negatively evaluated posts, seen in Figure 110, were published in October 2018, the month in which state honors are awarded by the President of the Czech Republic. Fans criticized Ledecká for not refusing the award, because they disliked the Czech head of state. The actual topic of Ledecká's posts was not important — the fans' criticism was aimed at her political position (cf. Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008).

Figure 110: Posts on Ester Ledecká's Official Facebook Page that Received Mostly Negative Comments (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Ester Ledecká, Author's own work

3.12 Veronika Vítková

The last female athlete selected for analysis in our sample is the Czech biathlon competitor (“biathlete”) Veronika Vítková. In the season that preceded the observation period, Vítková was the most successful Czech female biathlete in international competition (Halberštádt & Hermann, 2020; Macek, 2020). We selected her for our sample because of her international profile and her long-term active use of her official Facebook page.

Vítková officially ended her sports career in April 2020 (Halberštádt, 2020; Macek, 2020; Pospíšil, 2020). During her career, she achieved excellent results as a junior, but had to deal with health problems after undergoing an attack of meningitis in 2009 (Macek, 2020; Ježek, 2020). Despite that setback, Vítková was a stable part of the Czech national biathlon team. As such, she participated in three Olympic Games and nine World Championships. Overall, she won thirteen individual and seventeen team medals (Halberštádt & Hermann, 2020; Ježek, 2020).

The head of the Czech Biathlon Association, Jiří Hamza, summed up Vítková’s career as follows: “Veronika is one of those people who co-created a boom in Czech biathlon. She is an integral part of our ‘golden generation.’ Her gold medal in the mixed relay at the World championship in Kontiolahti, her bronze medal from the World championship in Nové Město na Moravě, her Olympic medals from Sochi and Pyongyang and her successes in the World Cup prove that,” (Hamza, in Pospíšil, 2020). Although Vítková says she does not plan to return to racing, Hamza said: “[I] am convinced that her recent announcement is not ‘goodbye.’ . . . [I] can imagine Veronika back at the start of the race,” (Hamza, in Pospíšil, 2020).

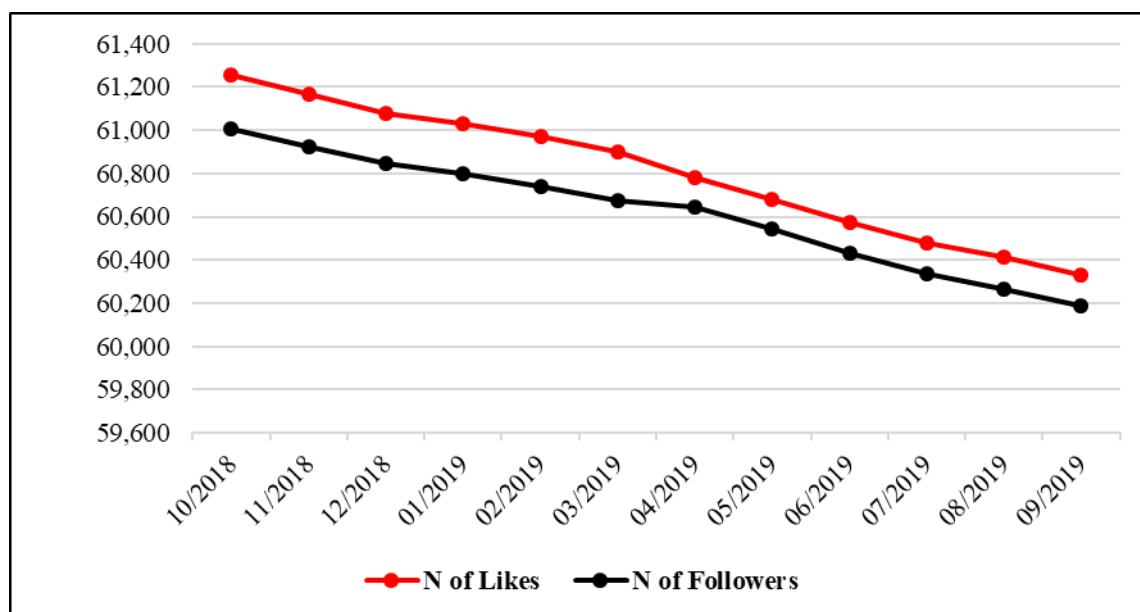
3.12.1 Communication on Social Media

In the observation period, Veronika Vítková maintained official Instagram (verca.vitkova, 2020) and Facebook (Veronika Vítková, 2020a) pages. In June 2019, Vítková’s official Facebook page was the most liked of all the pages of active Czech female biathlon representatives (Halberštádt, 2019a). Besides her official pages, Vítková used a private Facebook page (Veronika Vítková, 2020b), where she posted both sports-related content and promoted of a biathlon project called “BIA Camp,” organized by Vítková and her partner Marek Lejsek (BIA Camp, 2020). Vítková

also had a public (Veronika Vítková, 2020c) and a private (Veronika Vitkova, 2020) Twitter account, but she has not published any tweets since 2016.

Although Vítková competes in a niche sports discipline and she published the lowest number of published posts (17) in the observation period of all the athletes in our sample, her official page was relatively popular and viral compared to the rest of our sample. On the other hand, Figure 111 shows that the number of Vítková’s fans and followers on her Facebook page decreased between October 2018 and September 2019. The number of her followers declined from 61,009 to 60,187, while the number of likes her page received fell from 61,256 to 60,332. This downward trend may have been due to her poor sports results in the 2018/2019 season, when she placed thirtieth in the overall 2018/2019 Biathlon World Cup rankings, her worst result since the 2010/2011 season (Biatlonmag, 2019).

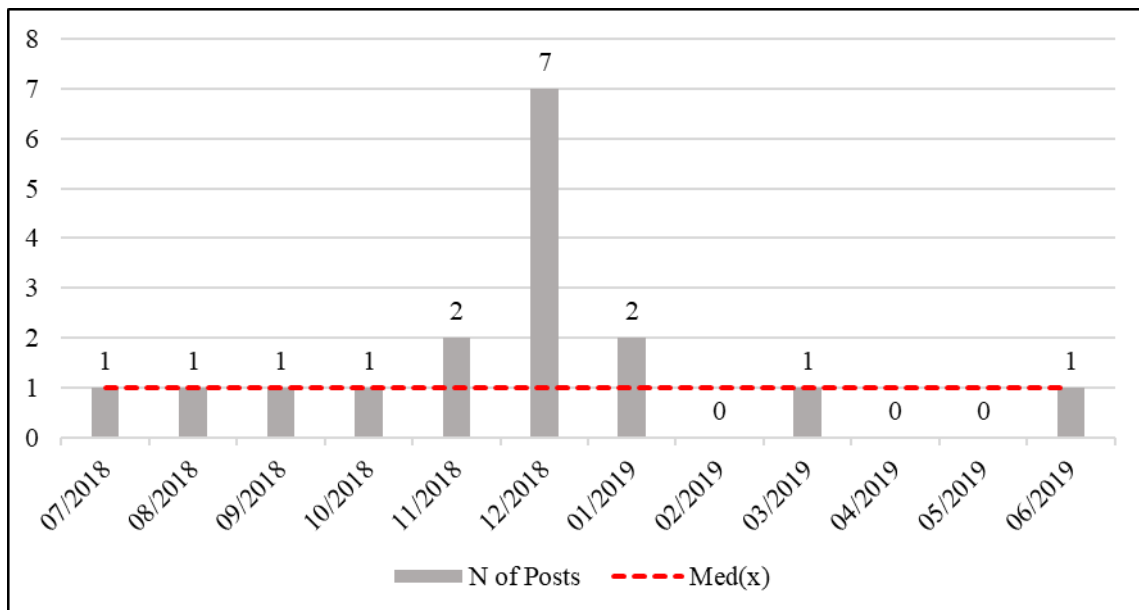
Figure 111: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Veronika Vítková’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Veronika Vítková, Author’s own work

Vítková’s official Facebook page showed minimal activity in the preseason period. She published only one post a month on average. She published the most posts (seven) in December 2018, when the 2018/2019 biathlon season began (see Figure 112). With that peak in her activity, she published more posts on her Facebook page in the biathlon season than she did out of season.

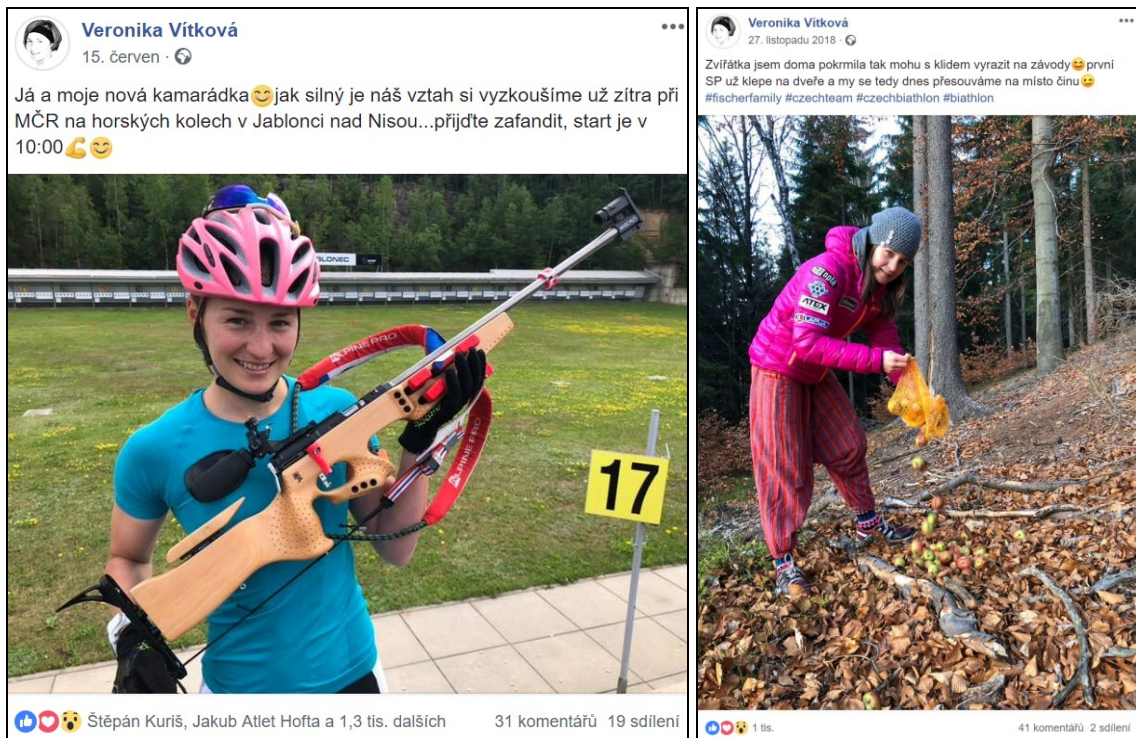
Figure 112: Number of Posts on Veronika Vítková’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode ($Mod(x)$) and Median ($Med(x)$) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Veronika Vítková, Author’s own work

According to the head of the Czech Biathlon Association, Jiří Hamza, Vítková dedicated almost all of her time to training for the biathlon: “She tried to do it more than 100 percent; it meant everything for Verča,” (Macek, 2020). It is not surprising then that Vítková’s official Facebook page contained primarily sporting content. Specifically, thirteen of her seventeen posts contained sports-related topics, while four posts were dedicated to diverse topics. Vítková’s sports-related posts concentrated mainly on her training regime and on competitions. Her diverse posts focused on her leisure activities, but still often mentioned upcoming sporting events. For example, the diverse post in Figure 113 showed Vítková feeding wild animals and also announced the beginning of the biathlon season.

Figure 113: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Veronika Vítková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Veronika Vítková, Author's own work

The topics of her posts differed in season and during the off season. During the biathlon season, nine of her ten published posts were sports-oriented. On the other hand, the numbers of her posts aimed at sports-related and diverse topics was almost equal in the off season: the ratio of sports-related to diverse topics was 4:3. The texts in fifteen of Vítková's 17 posts were accompanied by one or more pictures. Links and hashtags appeared in seven posts and nine posts, respectively. None of the posts on Vítková's official Facebook page contained a video in the observation period.

All of Vítková's posts in the observation period were classified as promotional. Whereas product promotions and announcements of competitions predominated during the season, four of the seven posts she published in the off season concentrated on self-promotion (see Figure 114).

Figure 114: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Postings on Veronika Vítková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Product	2	5	7
Self-promotion	4	1	5
Competition	1	4	5
Total	7	10	17

Source: Official Facebook Page of Veronika Vítková, Author’s own work

Although none of Vítková’s posts were entirely focused on charity, some philanthropic tendencies were observable in them. Vítková financially supported donations of bone marrow for needy patients. All of her interactive and visual content, i.e., pictures, links and hashtags, had a promotional character. The names of her sponsors appeared only occasionally on Vítková’s Facebook page, but when they did, sponsors of the Czech biathlon association, like Hamé and Atex, were prominent (see Figure 115). Vítková’s sponsors and partners were named in links and hashtags, but she did not highlight the commercial connection and did not disclose the content as commercial collaboration.

Figure 115: Mentions of Sponsors in the Posts on Veronika Vítková’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Total
Atex	1	0	1
Česká pojišťovna	1	0	1
Hamé	0	1	1
Fischer	1	0	1
GoPro	1	0	1
Total	4	1	5

Source: Official Facebook Page of Veronika Vítková, Author’s own work

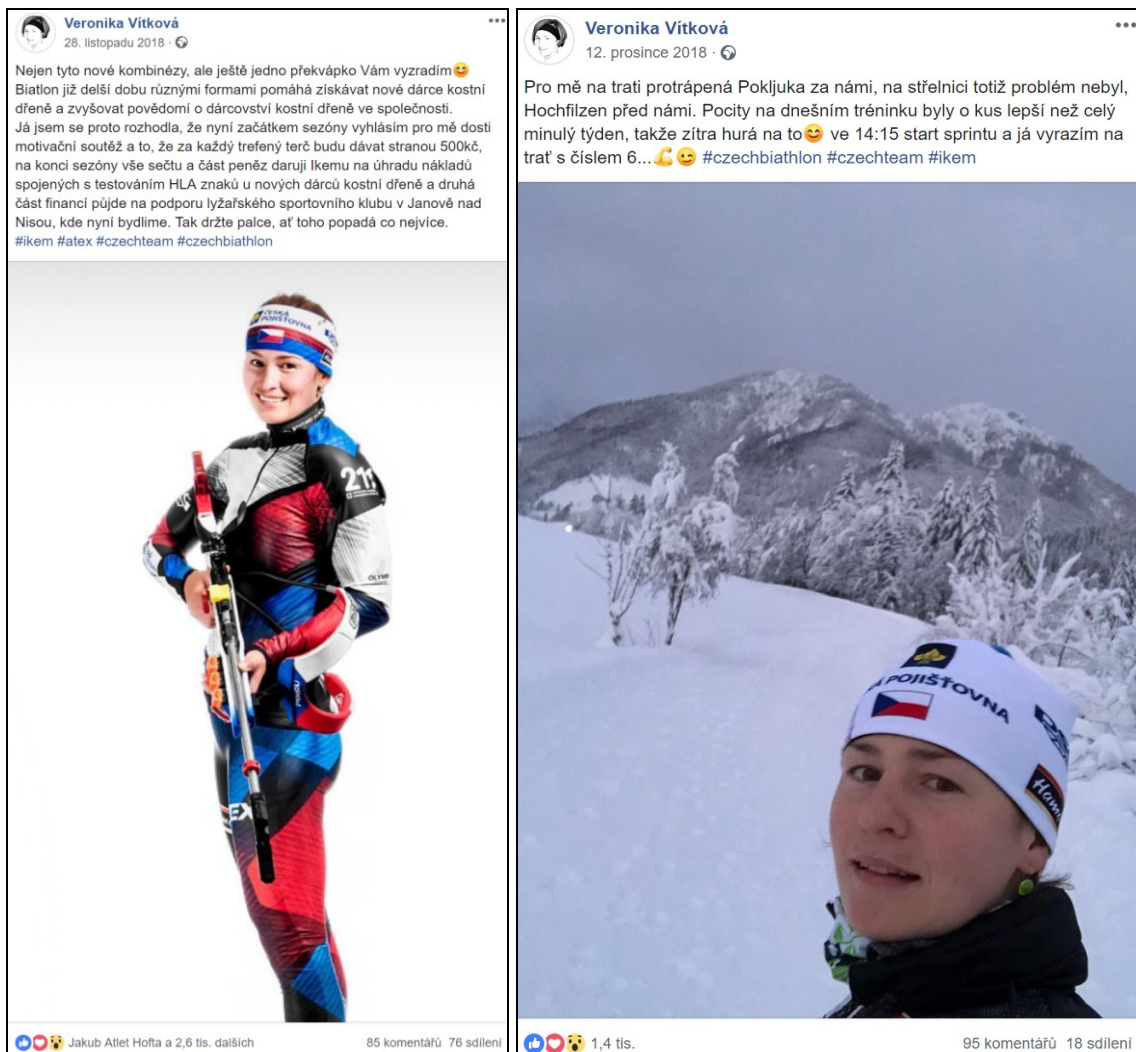
As for the language of her posts, Vítková commonly used Czech on her official Facebook page. From July 2018 to June 2019, thirteen posts used Vítková’s native language, Czech, only. The remaining four posts combined Czech and English or were non-textual.

3.12.2 Fans’ Reactions

Vítková’s Facebook posts evoked reactions from visitors to her page. On average, each post was shared by 10 people, liked 818 times, and received 35 comments. The most-

shared post (76 times) and the most-liked (2,601 times) one combined a pre-season presentation of her new racing and charity activities. All were accompanied by Vítková's photo. The largest number of comments appeared under a competition announcement in the first half of December. Although Vítková did not win the race she announced, her fans supported her and wished her luck. Both of these posts are displayed in Figure 116.

Figure 116: Posts with the Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Veronika Vítková's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Veronika Vítková, Author's own work

Almost all of Vítková's contributions were commented upon positively by her fans and followers. Sixteen of her seventeen posts received mostly positive comments. The only post that was greeted neutrally was an invitation to her BIA Camp Weekend, which received no comments at all (Veronika Vítková, 2019).

3.13 Michal Krčmář

Vítková's former colleague, Michal Krčmář (nicknamed "Bimbo"), is one of the male athletes on the Czech national biathlon team (Czech Biathlon Union [Český biatlon], 2020). Like Vítková, we selected him for the research sample because of his sports success and his popularity with his fan base.

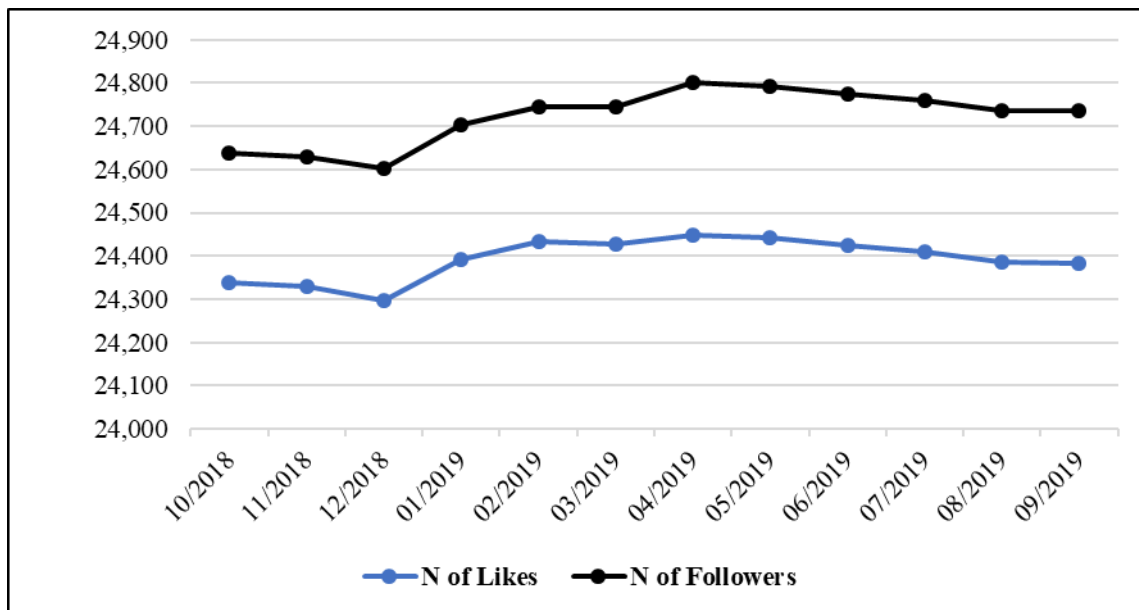
Krčmář began competing in biathlon in his eighth year of elementary school, after competing in cross-country skiing in his hometown of Letohrad (Bednář, 2018; Slavík, 2020). He followed in the footsteps of his father, Daniel Krčmář, who also was a biathlete (Biathlonworld.com, 2020b). Michal Krčmář has represented the Czech Republic in the Biathlon World Cup since the 2009/2010 season (BOTENA, 2020). He made it to the World Cup podium for the first time in 2017, when he placed third in the competition at Ruhpolding. The following year, Krčmář won a silver medal in the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics. Nowadays he is an established member of the Czech national biathlon "A" team (Czech Biathlon Union [Český biatlon], 2020; Patheon, 2020).

3.13.1 Communication on Social Media

Michal Krčmář has official accounts on Facebook (Michal Krčmář, 2020a) and Instagram (mkrcmar23, 2020a). The content he posted to those two platforms in the observation period slightly differed. He posts some sports-related content to his private Facebook account that is visible to the general public (Michal Krčmář, 2020b). In September 2020, Krčmář joined Twitter (mkrcmar23, 2020b).

From October 2018 to September 2019, Krčmář's official Facebook page was liked by approximately 24,400 people. The number of his followers in the same period reached a higher level, counting 24,722 people. Figure 117 captures the trend in the number of fans and followers of Krčmář's page. A decline in their numbers was evidenced before the beginning of the 2018/2019 biathlon season, and again after the season. The decline did not seem to have any connection to the number of posts Krčmář published (see Figure 117).

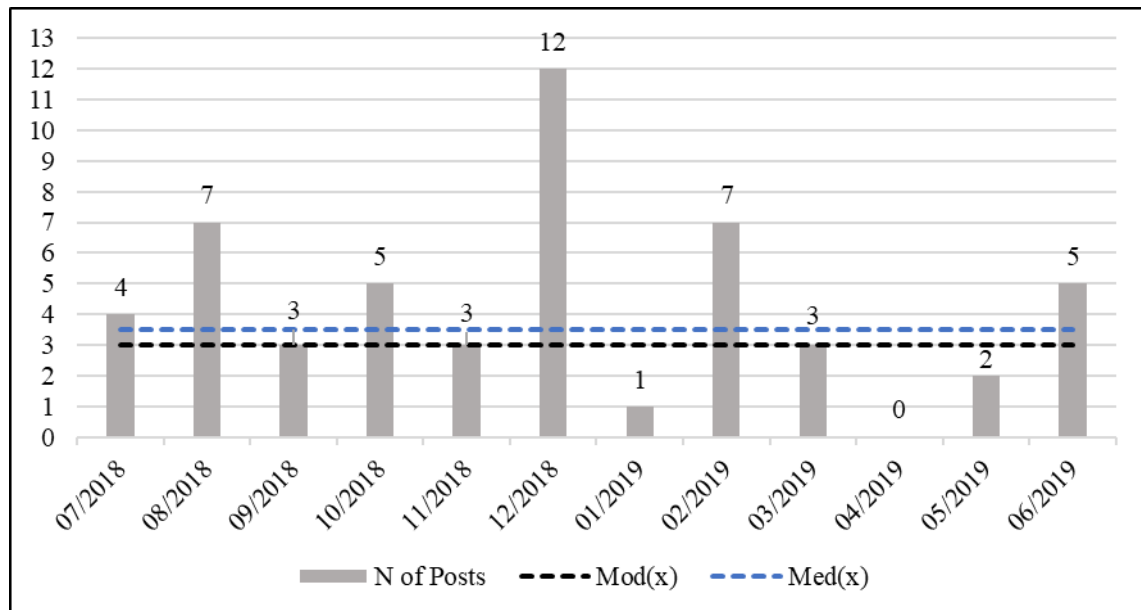
Figure 117: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

Fifty-two posts appeared on Michal Krčmář's official Facebook page during the observation period. He averaged four posts a month. He published the largest number of posts in December 2018, the month in which the 2018/2019 International Biathlon Union (IBU) World Cup season started and in which the Czech World Cup event in Nové Město was held (Biathlonworld.com, 2020a). In April 2019, an off-season month, he posted no items at all (see Figure 118).

Figure 118: Number of Posts on Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page, with Mode (Mod(x)) and Median (Med(x)) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

Krčmář published more posts out of season (29) than he did in season (23) (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015). The content of his posts was predominantly sports-oriented. He covered diverse topics in only ten of his 52 posts in the observation period. Figure 119 shows that he dealt with diverse topics more frequently in the off-season than in season. The ratio of his sports-related posts to diverse posts in the off season was 21:8, compared to 21:2 in season. Sports-related content prevailed in both seasons.

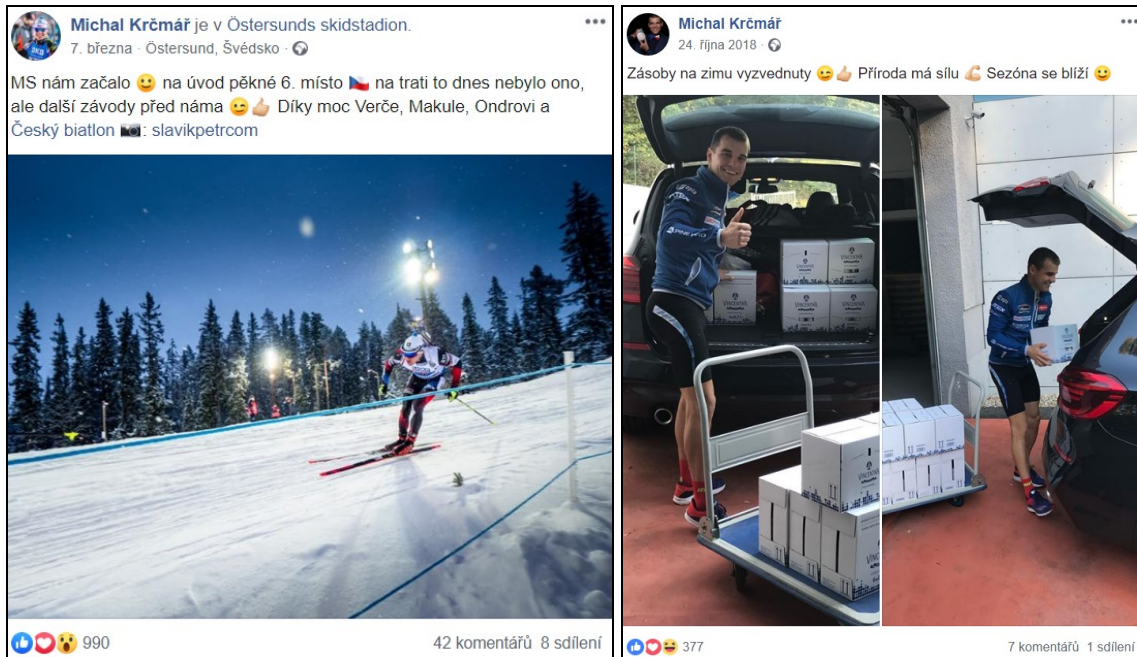
Figure 119: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	21	21	42
Diversity	8	2	10
Total	29	23	52

Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

Krčmář's diverse posts often had a promotional character. Figure 120 presents examples of sports-related and diverse posts published on Krčmář's Facebook page.

Figure 120: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

Over 70% of Krčmář's posts (37 of 52 posts in total) were accompanied by at least one picture, and the photographer was usually given credit for the pictures. Half of Krčmář's posts contained one or more links, most of which directed to the Facebook page of the Czech Biathlon Union or sponsors' and partners' pages. Hashtags and videos were added to six and seven posts, respectively. Krčmář's official Facebook page was administered in the Czech language (see Figure 121).

Figure 121: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	15
	The post contains picture(s)	37
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	45
	The post contains video(s)	7
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	26
	The post contains link(s)	26
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	46
	The post contains hashtag(s)	6
Language(s)	Czech	51
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	1

Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

There was a promotional angle to 48 posts out of Krčmář's total of 52. One non-promotional post included a promotional picture, and two were accompanied by promotional links. Videos and hashtags were most often used to accompany announcements of Krčmář's competitions. Figure 122 highlights the difference in the type of promotion in the off season and in the biathlon season. In season, the emphasis was on competition-related posts. Contrarily, the distribution of posts over the subcategories of promotion was more balanced out of season, when Krčmář provided space to self-promotion, product promotion, and charity announcements.

Figure 122: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Posts on Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	4	0	4
Product	6	0	6
Charity	5	0	5
Self-promotion	9	4	13
Competition	4	19	23
Family and friends product	1	0	1
Total	29	23	52

Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

Krčmář only occasionally mentioned the names of his sponsors directly. Figure 123 provides a list of his sponsors, which included sponsors of the Czech biathlon team (e.g., Hamé, Atex, Viessmann), sports brands (i.e., Alpine Pro, Montana Sport, CEP), and food and beverage companies (Vincentka). None of the companies were displayed on the athlete's page more than twice in the observation period.

Figure 123: Mentions of Sponsors in the Posts on Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Total
Vincentka	1	1	2
Alpine Pro	1	0	1
Atex	1	0	1
CEP	1	0	1
Foxart.cz	1	0	1
Hamé	1	0	1
Montana Sport	1	0	1
Rossi	1	0	1
Viessmann	0	1	1
Total	8	2	10

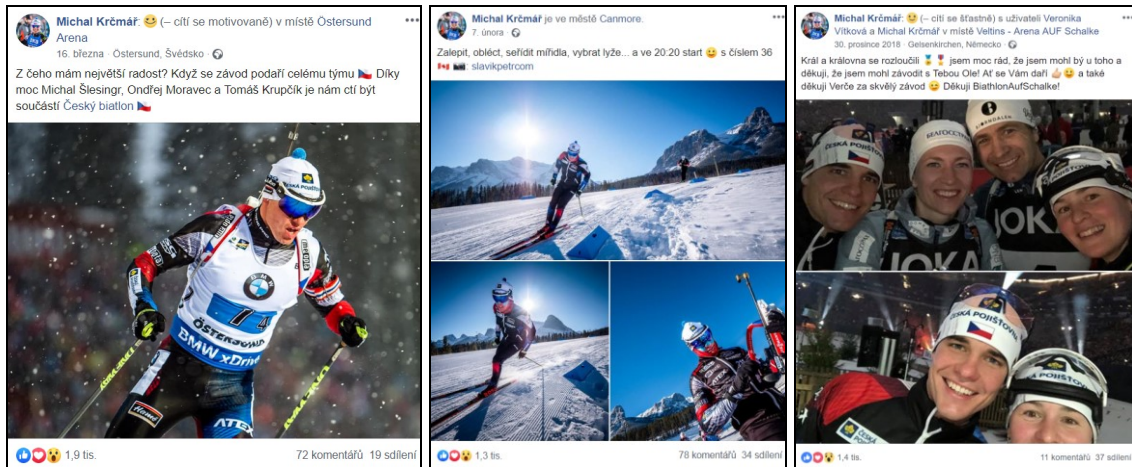
Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

In the post from Krčmář's official Facebook page that is displayed on the right-hand side of Figure 120, the promotional nature of the post is not obvious. In the picture, Krčmář is unpacking a delivery from his sponsor, the beverage company Vincentka, but the company is not mentioned in the post or even with a hashtag.

3.13.2 Fans' Reactions

On average, Krčmář's fans and followers gave his posts 631 likes, 17 comments, and shared them nine times. His most-liked post (with 1,900 likes) in the observation period was published on March 16, 2019, after the Czech biathlon team's success in the men's relay at the 2019 Biathlon World Championships in Östersund, Sweden. The Czech team placed fourth, which was its best result ever in the Biathlon World Championships (Halberštádt, 2019b). The largest number of comments (72) appeared under Krčmář's announcement of the World Cup race in Canmore in February 2019. His most-shared post (37 times) was published after the World Team Challenge exhibition, where Krčmář joined Ole Einar Björndalen and Darya Domracheva as they ended their successful careers (IBU, 2018). These posts can be seen in Figure 124.

Figure 124: Posts with Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

Fans' and visitors' responses to Krčmář's content were generally positive. Positive reactions prevailed for 46 posts and the tone of the comments under the remaining six posts was neutral (see Figure 125).

Figure 125: Type of Comments under Posts on Michal Krčmář's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral comments	6	11,5	11,5	11,5
Mostly positive comments	46	88,5	88,5	100,0
Total	52	100,0	100,0	

Source: Official Facebook Page of Michal Krčmář, Author's own work

Krčmář replied to some of his fans' comments. For example, he debated with a supporter, Ladislava Prokešová, under a post announcing that he had changed his profile picture on February 16, 2019. The fan suggested that Krčmář had not enjoyed a race, which was reflected in the result. Krčmář admitted that he had said that in a TV interview, but he argued that his words were said in the heat of the moment and that in fact he looks forward to every opportunity to compete. Prokešová thanked Krčmář for his response, and the conversation ended there (Michal Krčmář, 2019).

3.14 Adam Ondra

Rock climber Adam Ondra completes the group of extreme-sport athletes in the research sample. This Czech professional climber is one of the best in the world (Bártová, 2017), which played an important role in selecting him for the research.

Ondra grew up in a climbing family and started to participate in the sport at an early age. He says with only some exaggeration that he began “at about the same time he learned to walk” (Montura, 2020b). According to the Czech Climbing Federation, he has conquered “the largest number of difficult rocky routes, over 100 9a routes, and climbed all of the most difficult routes classified as 9b+, most of which he pioneered” (Czech Climbing Federation [Český horolezecký svaz], 2015). Ondra was the first in the world to climb a route of the highest difficulty, a 9c known as Silence, which is located in Flatanger, Norway (pn, 2019).

Although Ondra considers himself primarily a rock climber, he has also succeeded in other types of climbing competitions. Among others, he won the World Championship three times and achieved numerous International Federation of Sport Climbing World Cup victories (Kuchyňová, 2019; pn, 2019). In November 2019, he qualified for the postponed Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2021 (ČTK & iSport.cz, 2019).

3.14.1 Communication on Social Media

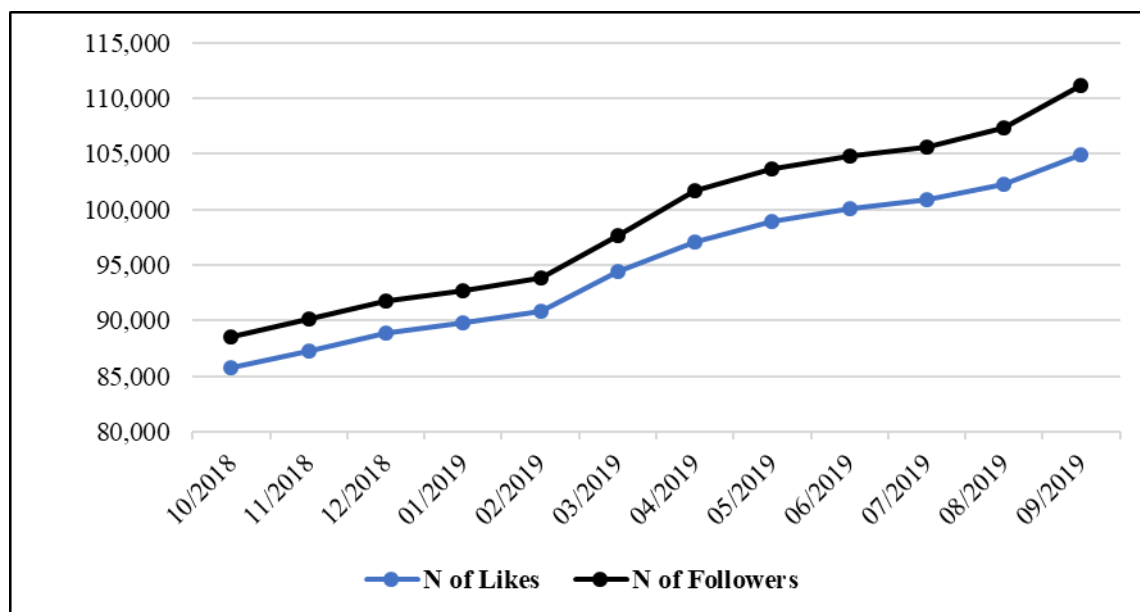
Ondra has a small team that helps him with PR and managing his social media (Bártová, 2017). The climber explains: “It changed after [I climbed] the Dawn Wall in Yosemite Park. I did it all on my own before that. But it took me so much time” (Ondra, in Bártová, 2017). Ondra has an official Facebook page (Adam Ondra, 2020a) and Instagram page (adam.ondra, 2020), as well as Twitter (Adam Ondra, 2020b) and YouTube channels (Adam Ondra, 2020c).

Ondra says that his official Facebook page was originally created as a fanpage by Ondřej Synčák. (Ondra, in Mitáč, 2019). In 2018, Ondra made a deal with Synčák, converted his personal Facebook page to an official one, and made Synčák a member of his team. Ondra commented on the management of his official Facebook page as follows: “I have my own fan page and my assistant Zuzka takes care of that. She mostly copies my Instagram posts over to Facebook. I make the Instagram posts predominantly on my own. . . . [A] lot of people write to me on Facebook and Zuzka filters out the messages and information that are relevant to me and forwards

them to me from time to time. Then I answer in the way I think is appropriate,” (Ondra, in Mitáč, 2019).

As Figure 126 shows, the popularity (measured in the number of likes) and virality (measured in number of followers) of Ondra’s official Facebook page grew continuously from October 2018 to September 2019. The total number of likes his page received increased from 5,757 to 104,884. The virality of the page was greater than its popularity during the whole observation period, and the number of his followers increased from 88,532 to 111,196. The increasing social media interest reflected the fact that Adam Ondra was becoming a well-known athlete, which the climber himself confirmed. “In the last two years, people on the street have recognized me more and more often. I am no longer anonymous, but it is such a small price to pay to have the opportunity to live my dream,” (Ondra, in Havlová, 2019).

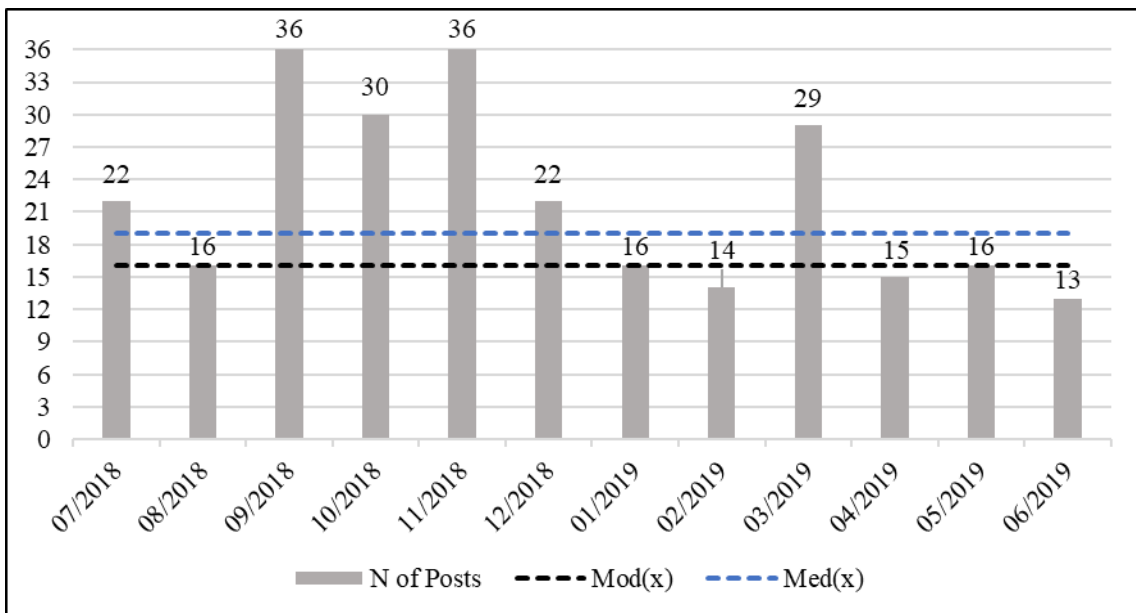
Figure 126: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Adam Ondra’s Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author’s own work

The number of posts Ondra published between July 2018 and June 2019 ranged between thirteen and 36 per month, and reached a maximum of 36 twice, in September and November 2018. The modal value of posts per month was sixteen, while the median was eighteen (see Figure 127). Ondra commented as follows on the number of posts he published on his official Facebook page: “Personally — I do not look at my Facebook. There is probably everything there that I put on Instagram, plus something extra” (Ondra, in Mitáč, 2019).

Figure 127: Number of Posts on Adam Ondra’s Official Facebook Page with Mode (Mod(x)) and Median (Med(x)) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author’s own work

Ondra is quite different from the other athletes in our research sample in terms of the seasonality of his posts. Because he attended climbing competitions and also dedicated his time to his own climbing projects, his “season” lasted all year. During the observation period, Ondra published a total of 265 posts. As Figure 128 shows, the majority of Ondra’s posts (220) were sports-related. His remaining 45 posts covered diverse topics.

Figure 128: Topic of Posts on Adam Ondra’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Sport	220	83,0	83,0	83,0
Diversity	45	17,0	17,0	100,0
Total	265	100,0	100,0	

Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author’s own work

A typical sports-related post on Ondra’s official Facebook page consisted of text accompanied by a photo of Ondra climbing and one or more hashtags or links to his sponsors. His diverse posts related to various subjects, such as travel or movies. Examples of posts from both categories are shown in Figure 129.

Figure 129: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Adam Ondra's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author's own work

Ondra's posts were often accompanied by links. More than 78% of his posts contained one or more links. More than half of his posts (155 of a total of 225) contained at least one picture. A video or hashtag, or both, appeared in 31 and 20 of his posts, respectively (see Figure 130).

Figure 130: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Adam Ondra's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	110
	The post contains picture(s)	155
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	234
	The post contains video(s)	31
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	58
	The post contains link(s)	207
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	245
	The post contains hashtag(s)	20
Language(s)	Czech	37
	English	201
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	27

Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author's own work

In light of the increasing popularity of climbing worldwide (Daoust, 2018), it makes sense that Ondra published most of his information on his official Facebook page

in English. He published more than two hundred posts in English. Another 27 combined both Czech and English or did not contain any text. Thirty-seven of his posts used only the Czech language (see Figure 130).

As already mentioned, Ondra’s official Facebook posts had a strong promotional character in the observation period. Ondra himself highlighted the importance of his sponsors’ support for his participation in his sport: “It depends not only on sports performance but also on how you ‘sell’ yourself. There are climbers around me who cannot afford to climb, even though they are really good athletes. On the other hand, I know climbers who are not as capable in terms of sports performance, but they can ‘sell’ themselves pretty well,” (Ondra, in Bártová, 2017).

Only seven posts out of Ondra’s total of 265 posts were not promotional and unaccompanied by a promotional picture or hashtag. One of his non-promotional posts included a promotional picture, and 206 posts of all kinds contained a promotional link (see Figure 131).

Figure 131: Promotional Posts and Type of Promotional Content on Adam Ondra’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Promotional Category	Total N of Posts	N of Posts Containing Promotional Picture(s)	N of Posts Containing Promotional Video(s)	N of Posts Containing Promotional Link(s)	N of Posts Containing Promotional Hashtag(s)
Without promotion	8	1	0	7	0
Product	33	19	7	31	7
Charity	2	0	2	2	0
Self-promotion	150	59	7	118	2
Competition	67	43	15	43	4
Family and friends product	5	2	0	5	0
Total	265	124	31	206	13

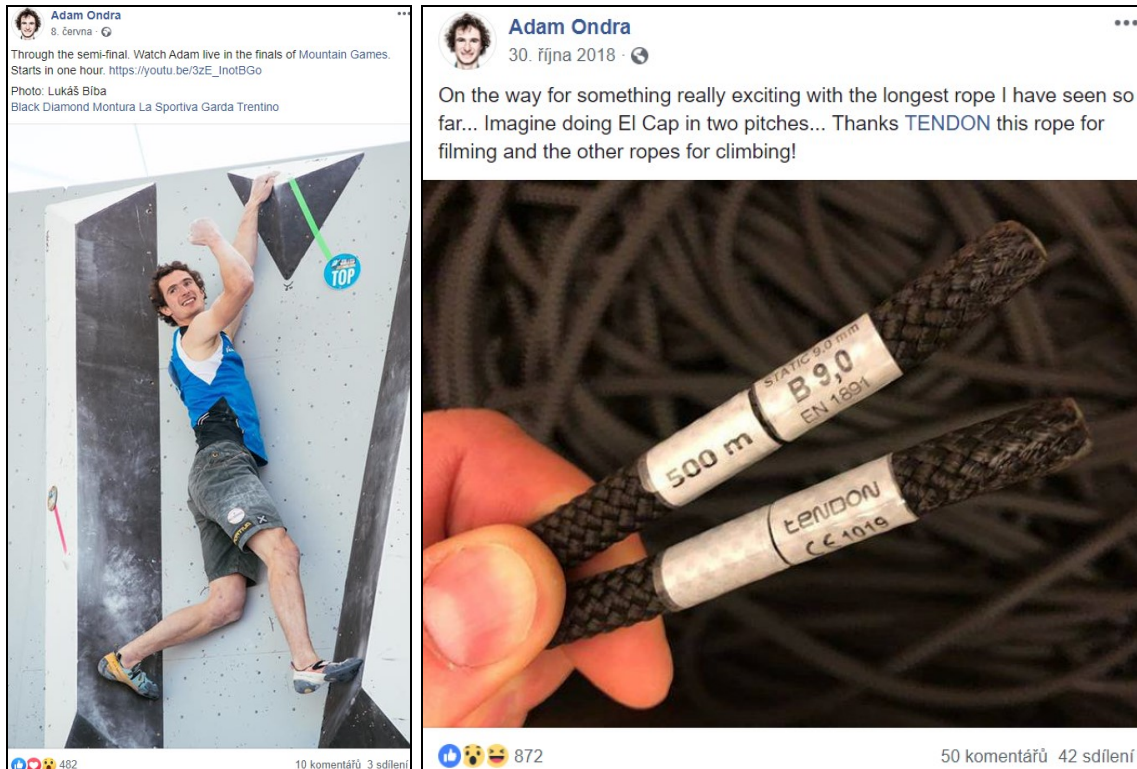
Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author’s own work

Ondra concentrated on self-promotion in his posts. Self-promotion was an essential part of 150 posts he published from July 2018 to June 2019. Other types of promotion that often appeared on Ondra’s Facebook page were announcements and reports of his competitions and product promotion (see Figure 131).

Figure 132 provides examples of these types of Ondra’s posts. The screenshots show that Ondra commonly added links to his events and to sponsors’ social media websites and channels to his posts. On the other hand, he did not add any discloses

or hashtags revealing the existence of a commercial collaboration, which amounts to covert promotion or advertising (cf. Kokešová, 2018; Ortová, 2020).

Figure 132: Examples of Competition and Product Promotion on Adam Ondra's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author's own work

Ondra promoted over twenty sponsors and partners on his Facebook page in the observation period, although the frequency with which they were mentioned varied. As Figure 133 shows, he frequently promoted companies producing climbing clothes and equipment like Black Diamond (Black Diamond, 2020), La Sportiva (La Sportiva, 2020), Montura (Montura, 2020b), and Tendon (Tendon, 2020). Outdoor equipment companies also prevailed within the range of brands that he mentioned in his posts (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

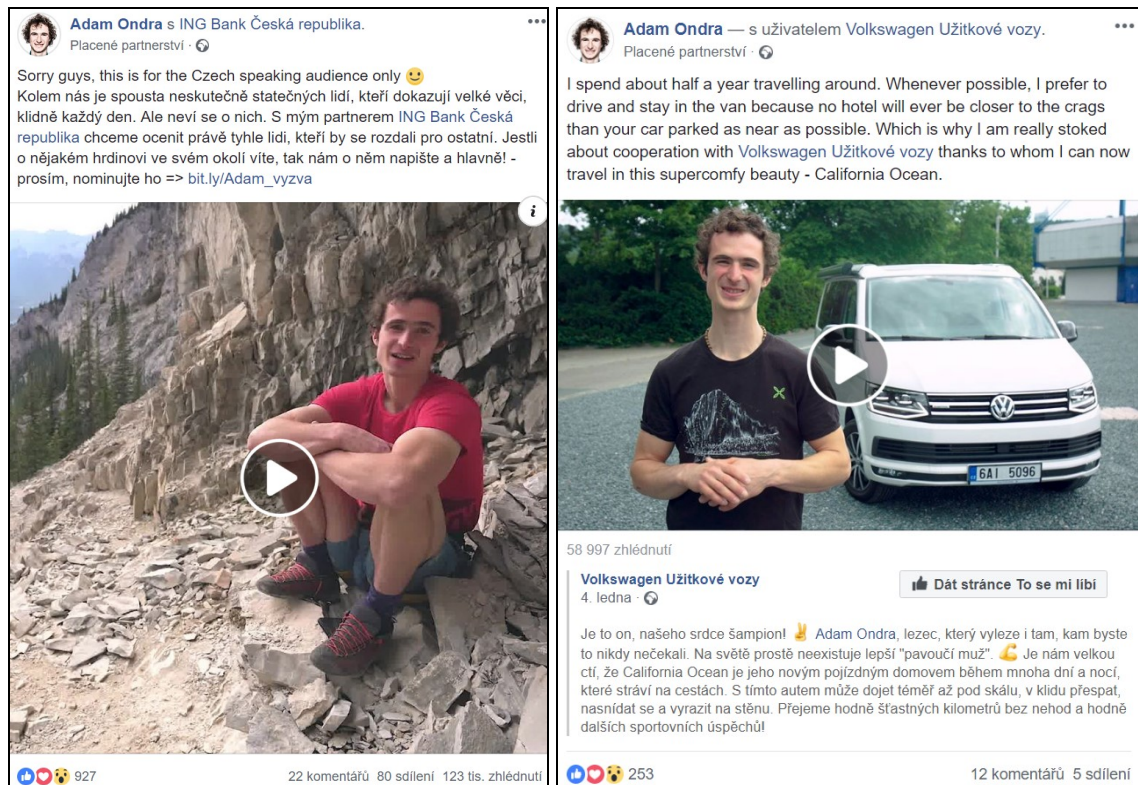
Figure 133: Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on Adam Ondra's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corp. Spons. (1st m.)	Corp. Spons. (2nd m.)	Corp. Spons. (3rd m.)	Corp. Spons. (4th m.)	Corp. Spons. (5th m.)	Corp. Spons. (6th m.)	Corp. Spons. (7th m.)	Corp. Spons. (8th m.)	Total
Black Diamond	98	37	11	10	2	0	0	1	159
La Sportiva	11	31	70	28	8	0	1	0	149
Montura	40	65	25	14	2	0	0	0	146
Tendon	3	11	39	45	9	1	0	0	108
Mall TV	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
AIX holds	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
BMW	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
GORE-TEX	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
ING Bank	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Kotelna Brno	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Liebnitz	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Mammut	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Stablecam	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Kärcher	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Fisherman's Friend	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mazagrande	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Patizon	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
PUCtraining	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Vertical-Life Climbing App	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Volkswagen	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
ZEISS	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	194	150	149	100	23	3	2	1	622

Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author's own work

Ondra had several signed social media paid partnership contracts, e.g., with ING Bank and Volkswagen. Ondra commented on his collaboration with those two companies as follows: “[T]here are a lot of people who think I should be sponsored only by outdoor companies and should not sell my soul too much to the mainstream. On the other hand, everyone uses banks and cars. For example, it is our free choice whether we buy cigarettes or not. But when it comes to banks and cars, we actually have no choice but to use them,” (Ondra, in Mitáč, 2019). In the case of Volkswagen, the climber contacted the automobile company himself. Ondra added: “I have been driving VWs for many years, and it is a car that I would buy anyway,” (Ondra, in Mitáč, 2019). Figure 134 shows examples of paid partnership posts on Adam Ondra's official Facebook page.

Figure 134: Examples of Paid Partnership Posts on Adam Ondra's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author's own work

3.14.2 Fans' Reactions

The climber's posts evoked intense reactions from his fans. On average, his posts were shared 24 times and received 494 likes and 17 comments. Ondra's most liked, commented upon and shared post was published in February 2019, when he announced that the movies presented at the 2018 Reel Rock Festival, including one called the "Age of Ondra" (Reel Rock, 2020), were available for download online. That post was shared 2,500 times, liked by 13,001 people, and commented upon 1,900 times. The post was published only in the English language. Fans often tagged their friends under it to alert them to its content (see Figure 135).

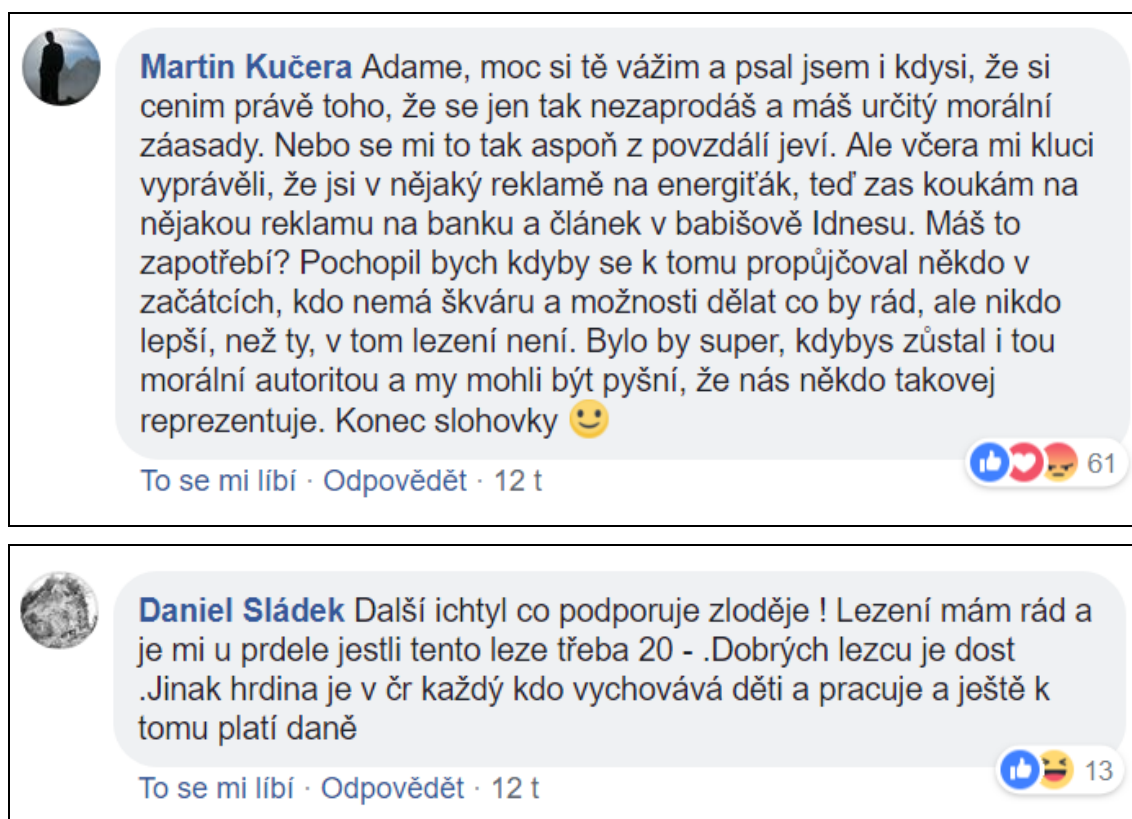
Figure 135: Post with the Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Adam Ondra's Official Facebook Page and a Sample of Fans' Tags under the Post (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author's own work

Ondra's Facebook contributions were well received by his supporters and 209 posts were commented upon mostly positively. Fifty-four posts had balanced positive and negative reactions. Only two posts were commented upon mostly negatively. Ondra claimed that he carefully considers putting commercial content onto his social media pages (Ondra, in Mitáč, 2019). His fans' critical comments mostly showed displeasure with commercialization. Examples of the reactions to a post promoting ING Bank are shown in Figure 136. Ondra's fan Martin Kučera appealed to moral values, fearing that Ondra would lose the moral high ground in the fan's eyes. Daniel Sládek called Ondra "an idiot who supports thieves." Sládek added that he is not interested in how good a climber Ondra is, because there are a lot of good climbers in the world. He added that his real heroes are common people who take care of their children and pay their taxes.

Figure 136: Examples of Negative Fans' Reactions to Perceived Commercialism in Adam Ondra's Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Adam Ondra, Author's own work

Ondra realized that the climbing fandom could perceive some kinds of promotion negatively. He thought that these opinions are still in the minority, however. (Ondra, in Mitáč, 2019.) He said he does not read fans' comments on Facebook: "Not at all. Just on Instagram. I think it is a waste of time. . . . [S]ocial media should still be used reasonably," (Ondra, in Mitáč, 2019).

3.15 Lukáš Krpálek

The second male athlete competing in an individual niche sport that is competed in the Summer Olympic Games, is the "judoka," or judo fighter, Lukáš Krpálek. He is the most successful judoka in Czech history and is famous in Czech society thanks to his triumph at the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games in 2016 (Kadeřábek, 2018). Krpálek says that his Olympic victory completely changed his life and put him in demand: "Another call from an unknown number. Another person I don't know anything about, who definitely wants something. Participation in a social event.

A conversation. Collaboration on a project I have never heard of. These things rolled me for a few weeks,” (Krpálek, in *Bez frází* [Without phrases], 2020b).

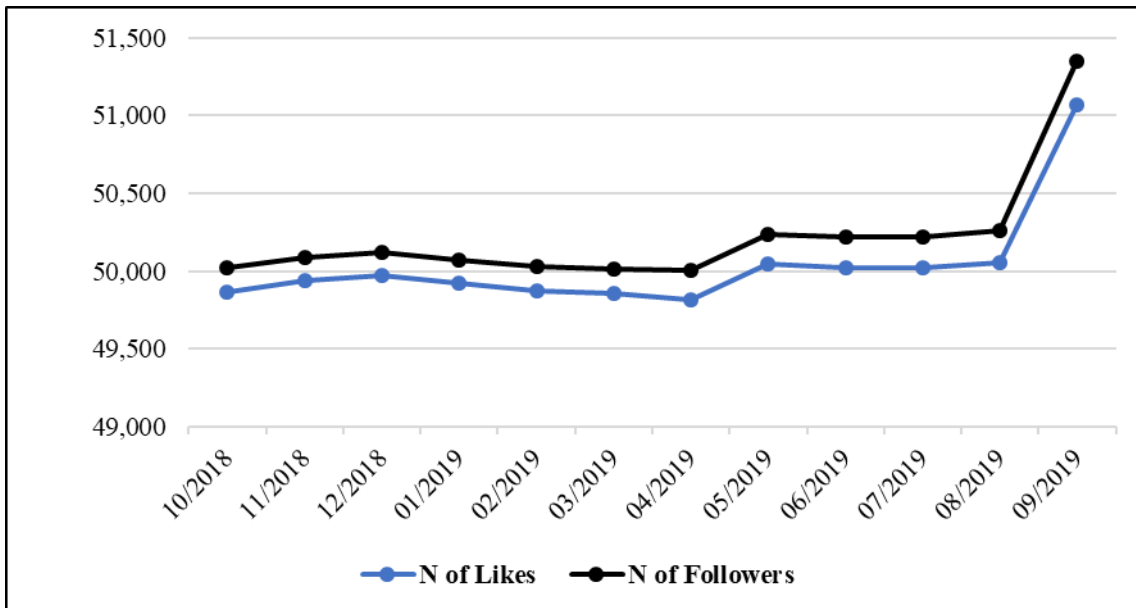
Besides his gold medal at Rio de Janeiro, he has won two World Championships and three European Championship titles, two bronze medals in the World Championships, and one silver and one bronze medal in the European Championships. Krpálek also achieved many successes in competitions like the Judo Grand Prix and the World Cup (IJF, 2020a; JudoInside.com, 2020; Olympic.cz, 2018b).

3.15.1 Communication on Social Media

Krpálek has official social media profiles on Facebook (Lukáš Krpálek, 2020) and Instagram (lukaskrpalek, 2020). The posts he published in the observation period on Facebook differ only occasionally from those on Instagram. In most cases, the content of his posts is the same. Krpálek’s PR manager Karel Tejkal (2019) stated: “Lukáš discusses the content of his social media profiles with me, but he adds the content to the pages himself, with his own hands.” Krpálek has a private Facebook profile as well, but his posts are not visible to the public on that profile. The only content that is visible on his private account, besides his profile and cover picture, is what is posted by his friends (Lukas Krpálek, 2020).

The number of likes and followers of Lukáš Krpálek’s official Facebook page fluctuated from October 2018 to September 2019, but both indicators generally trended upward (see Figure 137). The number of likes on Krpálek’s page grew from 49,813 to 51,073. The number of his followers was consistently larger, ranging from 50,006 to 51,352 in the same period. The first significant increase in those indicators was evidenced in April and early May 2019, when Krpálek placed third in the 2019 Antalya Grand Prix (IJF, 2020a). Moreover, the most substantial increase happened in August 2019, a month in which Lukáš Krpálek achieved his greatest success of the observation period — the World Championship title in the senior 100+ kg class in Tokyo, Japan (IJF, 2020b). Figure 137 also shows a small decrease in the number of Krpálek’s fans and followers which occurred during his off-season period.

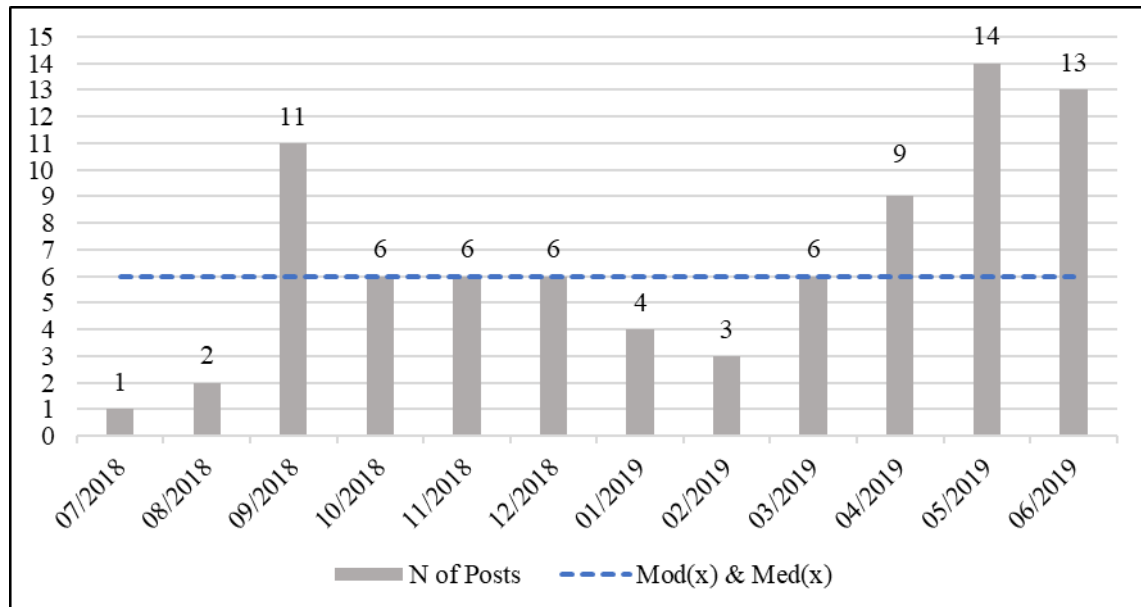
Figure 137: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Lukáš Krpálek's Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author's own work

As Figure 138 shows, the intensity of Krpálek's posting activity varied during the observation period. The mode and the median number of his monthly posts was six. He created the largest number of posts in May (14) and June 2019 (13), the months in which two big events of the judo season took place including the Antalya Grand Prix in May 2019. (IJF, 2020a.) Then, in the following month, Belarus hosted the Second European Games in Minsk. Krpálek had the honor of carrying the Czech flag at the opening ceremony of those Games, but he did not bring a medal home with him. (ČTK & iDnes.cz, 2019a; ČTK & iDnes.cz, 2019b).

Figure 138: Number of Posts on Lukáš Krpálek’s Official Facebook page, with Mode (Mod(x)) and Median (Med(x)) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author’s own work

Generally, Krpálek published more posts (52) during the judo season than in the off season, when he published 28 (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015). There was hardly any difference in the subject matter in the posts he published in season and out of season (see Figure 139).

Figure 139: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Postings on Lukáš Krpálek’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	22	40	62
Diversity	6	12	18
Total	28	52	80

Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author’s own work

The thematic content of the Krpálek’s Facebook page was mostly focused on sport, but he did publish some diverse posts on that social media channel (see Figure 139). Krpálek commonly added photos of the family to his posts, including photos of his children and his dog (see Figure 140). “Children are very popular with my fans, as are animals,” admitted Krpálek’s PR manager, Karel Tejkal (Tejkal, 2019). Krpálek has established a separate Instagram account for his dog, Oliva (oliva_krpalkova, 2020). “It is funny that Lukáš enjoys doing the dog’s profile more than his own,” commented his manager Karel Tejkal (Tejkal, 2019).

Figure 140: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Lukáš Krpálek's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author's own work

Krpálek used visual and interactive items in his social media communication in the observation period. Over 90 percent of his posts were accompanied by one or more pictures or hashtags. Links and videos were added to eight and six posts, respectively (see Figure 141).

Figure 141: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Lukáš Krpálek's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	7
	The post contains picture(s)	73
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	74
	The post contains video(s)	6
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	72
	The post contains link(s)	8
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	6
	The post contains hashtag(s)	74
Language(s)	Czech	59
	English	2
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	19

Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author's own work

Krpálek tended to write his posts in Czech, which he used for more than 70% of his posts. Both Czech and English, or emoticons only without any text, were used

in nineteen posts. The English language was used by itself in two posts during the observation period (see Figure 141).

The greater part of Krpálek’s official Facebook posts mentioned the names of his sponsors or partners. Interestingly, only one sponsor received no more than a single mention, all the others had more than one. (See Figure 142.) Three of the four sponsors that appeared on Krpálek’s Facebook page were directly related to sport and active lifestyles, but the one he most often mentioned (18 times) was a maker of judoka clothing, Ippon Gear. Besides the sports brands and a health and physical fitness app (Aktivně a zdravě), the automobile dealer CarTec Liberec was tagged once. Tejkal confirmed that the presence of sponsors on Krpálek’s social media is important for his client: “As for Lukáš Krpálek, we deal with one automobile dealer, and they are mainly interested in his Instagram and social media profiles. . . . There is an issue of ‘power’,” (Tejkal, 2019). Krpálek’s PR manager added that the promotional tie-in has to make sense.

Figure 142: Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on Lukáš Krpálek’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Total
Ippon Gear	18	18
Nike	9	9
Aktivně a zdravě	3	3
CarTec Liberec	1	1
Total	80	80

Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author’s own work

Krpálek’s sponsors’ products and services were tagged by links and hashtags on his official Facebook page, but were not always disclosed as advertising content. Krpálek used his social media accounts to announce new collaborations with commercial subjects as well as non-profit organizations (see Figure 143).

Figure 143: Examples of Tagging of Sponsored Content and a Collaboration Announcement on Lukáš Krpálek's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author's own work

As previously stated, it might be expected that several types of promotion would appear on Krpálek's Facebook page. However, our analysis showed that the types he most commonly presented were self-promotion and competition promotion, both in season and off season. He rarely published posts with other categories of promotional material (see Figure 144). Krpálek's promotional postings were often supported by promotional pictures (71 posts) and hashtags (43 posts out of a total of 80).

Figure 144: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Posts on Lukáš Krpálek's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	2	1	3
Product	2	1	3
Charity	1	3	4
Self-promotion	12	28	40
Competition	11	18	29
Family and friends product	0	1	1
Total	28	52	80

Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author's own work

3.15.2 Fans' Reactions

Krpálek's posts were liked 1,250 times a month on average, and shared on average by approximately 30 of his fans. An average of 27 comments were written on one of Krpálek's typical posts in the observation period. The highest number of likes (4,501) appeared under a story about Krpálek's winning the gold medal at the 2019 Antalya Grand Prix after a relatively unsuccessful four months of competition. The athlete used this social media post to thank his fans. A statement, accompanied by a photo and published after Krpálek's failure to win a medal at the 2018 World Judo Championship, received the most comments (144) of any of his posts in the observation period. The fans expressed their opinions of the controversial verdict of the jury and strongly supported Krpálek. Krpálek's most-shared post (186 times) was added to the judoka's page on October 15, 2018 after his victory at the 2018 Cancun Grand Prix. (Šedivý & Man, 2018.) Figure 145 shows that Krpálek's most liked and commented posts contained photos with a similar composition.

Figure 145: Posts with Most Likes, Comments, and Shares on Lukáš Krpálek's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author's own work

The community of Czech judo fans reacted positively to 71 posts of Krpálek's 80 posts in total. In the remaining nine cases, the prevailing tenor of the comments was neutral. None of the posts evoked a predominantly negative response. Tejkal recommended that his clients not reply to their fans on social media: "All the pages with which I have something to do are managed as one-way communication. We do not get involved [in responding] at all; it would need a special team. If Lukáš were to answer his fans, it would be like a contract with the devil. If you answer once, you have to answer every

time,” (Tejkal, 2019). Krpálek’s PR manager claimed that the judoka follows his advice (Tejkal, 2019), but still, some responses by Krpálek to fans’ comments could be seen on his official Facebook page in the observation period (see Figure 146). The athlete usually joked with his fans, explained the results of his judo competitions to them, or thanked his admirers for their support.

Figure 146: Examples of Lukáš Krpálek’s Responses to Fans’ Comments (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Lukáš Krpálek, Author’s own work

3.16 Josef Dostál

Last but not least in our sample is Josef Dostál, a canoeist who represents the Czech Republic in the canoe sprint races. Dostál comes from a sporting family; his mother is a former Czech volleyball player and a famous jazz singer, and his father was a kayaking coach. The parents introduced all of their children to canoeing but did not push them to participate (*josefdostal.com*, 2020; ICF.com, 2020).

Dostál won his first medals in international competition at the 2011 Junior World Championships, where he won the K1 (kayak single) at 1,000 meters and placed second in the K1 at 500 meters (*josefdostal.com*, 2020). One year later, he won a bronze medal in the 1,000 meters at the London Olympics as a member of the Czech K4 team, which included Dostál, Daniel Havel, Lukáš Trefil, and Jan Štěrba (Beránek, 2012). At the next Summer Olympics, the Czech K4 team won another bronze with Dostál

in the 1,000 meter race.⁶⁵ Dostál won the gold in the 1000 meters K1 by himself. He has also won trophies and medals in the World and European Championships, the World Cup series, and World Cup races (*Josefdostal.com*, 2020).

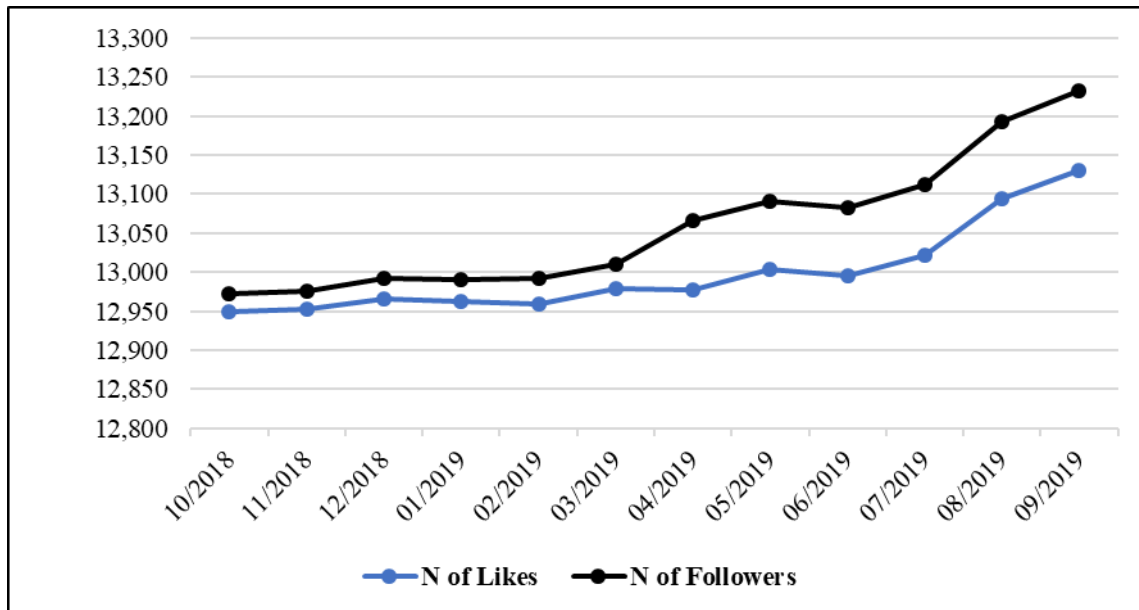
3.16.1 Communication on Social Media

Josef Dostál has an official Facebook page (Josef Dostál, 2020) as well as a private one. (Pepa Dostál, 2020.). He also has a public Instagram account (j_dostal, 2020). He has a YouTube channel (Josef Dostál (CZE), 2020), where he saves videos that he can use in other media, including Facebook. However, the last video Dostál added to YouTube was added four years ago. He probably uses different tools for archiving his videos now (Josef Dostál (CZE), 2020). Dostál described his way of using Facebook and Instagram as follows: “In the past, I used Facebook and Instagram differently. Recently, you can find almost the same content on both of them. Facebook is better used to explain ideas, show agreement and disagreement, and refer visitors to an article or video. Instagram is more about nice photos, it better connects the influencer with the fans, and you can come up with better ‘nonsense’,” (Dostál, 2020). Dostál considered presenting himself on other social media, but he decided not to do so. “I considered that, but I came to the conclusion that my channel wouldn’t be good enough, because I don’t have enough creativity and time for it,” (Dostál, 2020).

Although Dostál is an Olympic gold medalist, as well as the winner of numerous World and European championships, the numbers of likes and followers he received in the observation period was not extremely high. Dostál commented: “That could be because canoeing is not a mainstream sport, it is a niche sports discipline” (Dostál, 2017). Both of the two indicators followed upward trends, however, and the number of likes on Dostál’s Facebook page increased from 12,949 to 13,131 in the observation period. His number of followers moved up from 12,973 to 13,233 (see Figure 147).

⁶⁵ The crew remained the same as in London (Havel, Trefil, Dostál, Štěřba). However, it was the last time when this discipline (the K4 1,000m) had a place on the Summer Olympic program. The K4 distance has been shortened to 500m for the Tokio 2020 Olympics, (Hašek, 2016).

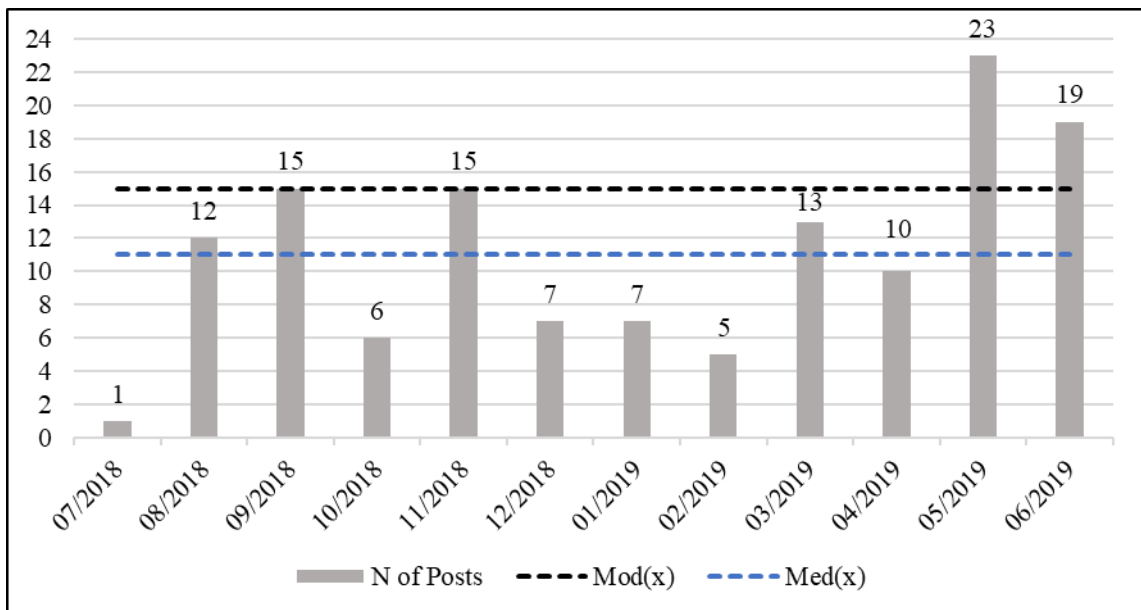
Figure 147: Number of Likes and Number of Followers of Josef Dostál's Official Facebook Page (October 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author's own work

From July 2018 to June 2019, Josef Dostál posted 133 posts on Facebook. He published more of them (81) out of season; 52 were posted during the canoeing season. On the other hand, Dostál's most active month on Facebook was May 2019, the month in which the 2019 international canoeing season began. In the observation period, Dostál had great success in his sport, and he increased the intensity of his social media communication. "It is better to be active at a time when one is being watched more. It [communication on social media] has much greater reach and entertainment potential. Success on the water is reflected on the social networks," (Dostál, 2020). Figure 148 reveals that the number of items posted on Dostál's official Facebook page varied. The median number of his posts was relatively high (11), but in half of the observed months the number of his posts was significantly lower. However, Figure 148 shows that Dostál began to be more active on his official Facebook page in May 2019. He confirmed that in his interview. "This was partly due to the sponsors. They don't want to be promoted only on Instagram; they want to reach another target group," (Dostál, 2020).

Figure 148: Number of Posts on Josef Dostál’s Official Facebook Page, with Mode ($Mod(x)$) and Median ($Med(x)$) of Numbers of Posts (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author’s own work

Although Dostál has a personal manager, Jan Koukal (*josefdostal.com*, 2020; O2 TV Sport, 2017), he takes care of his social media activity on his own. “I manage my social media accounts completely on my own, no one helps me. . . . I have attended seminars on social media communication. One or two were conducted by my manager. People with well-managed social networks responded to some of my questions,” (Dostál, 2020). Dostál enjoys communicating with his fans on social networks, so he dedicates a significant amount of time to that. “If I already have the material I want to use, I just need ten minutes to edit the photo and caption it properly. Occasionally, my girlfriend or my friend Vilda Kukačka helps me with that. It is harder with the idea and realization; it sometimes takes me more time,” (Dostál, 2020).

Dostál’s official Facebook page was mainly oriented to sports-related posts in the observation period. Posts he dedicated to canoeing accounted for approximately two-thirds of the whole sample of his posts. It is evident from Figure 149 that Dostál tended to publish more diverse posts in the off season.

Figure 149: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Topic of Posts on Josef Dostál’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/Topic	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Sport	45	45	90
Diversity	36	7	43
Total	81	52	133

Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author’s own work

“Sometimes I comment on a topic that annoys me, where I know I can improve things by doing so. I do not want to react to current news, because I don’t know much about that and I am not an expert on the topics. Because of my affiliation with the Czech Army, I try not to comment on politics,” (Dostál, 2020). Examples of Dostál’s sports-related and diverse postings are illustrated in Figure 150.

Figure 150: Examples of Typical Sports-related and Diverse Posts on Josef Dostál’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author’s own work

Dostál’s sports-related and diverse posts were often accompanied by interactive content. More than two-thirds of his posts contained at least one picture, 30 posts were based on videos, and 50 made reference to other (web)pages with links (see Figure 151).

Dostál described how he works with such content: “I usually select either interesting material or things that will entertain my followers. I am definitely not afraid to share jokes on my account. I want to show that I have the same problems as others do. Thus I can better connect with my fans,” (Dostál, 2020). As for links to items in other media, Dostál described a change in his social media routine: “I shared them a lot in previous years, nowadays I share them only if I agree with the author to do so,” (Dostál, 2020).

Dostál commonly used hashtags. As Figure 151 shows, 127 of his 133 posts in our sample were accompanied by one or more hashtags. He used his personal hashtags most frequently (cf. Arai et al., 2013; Arai et al., 2014). “The hashtag #dostalstyle was created with the ambition to point out that one must set a goal in one’s life and achieve it through systematic work. The idea is that people should enjoy life and spread a good mood, even if they work hard. It came to my mind — Why should I have a better life just for myself, when others could have it too? I use the hashtag #torpedostal in my posts, to signify aggressiveness and strength. . . . It merges the words ‘torpedo’ and ‘Dostál’,” (Dostál, 2020).

Figure 151: Pictures, Videos, Links, Hashtags and Languages in Posts on Josef Dostál’s Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Item	Description	N of posts
Picture(s)	The post does not contain picture(s)	30
	The post contains picture(s)	103
Video(s)	The post does not contain video(s)	103
	The post contains video(s)	30
Link(s)	The post does not contain link(s)	82
	The post contains link(s)	51
Hashtag(s)	The post does not contain hashtag(s)	6
	The post contains hashtag(s)	127
Language(s)	Czech	94
	English	19
	Both/ Without text/ Emoticons only	20

Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author’s own work

Dostál preferred to use the Czech language. Over two-thirds of his posts were in Czech only (94 of 133 in our sample). His remaining content was almost equally divided between Czech/English or nontextual posts and posts written in English (see Figure 151). Dostál said: “I used to write everything bilingually, but since Facebook launched its built-in translator, I mostly use Czech. Sometimes I know that the translator will mistranslate my post, so I use English, but only rarely. And about using English only . . . I definitely do not want to do that, because many Czech people do not speak

English, and by doing using English I would lose my opportunity to be in contact with them,” (Dostál, 2020).

The canoeist said that he takes promotion as part of his job. (Dostál, in O2 TV Sport, 2017). As displayed in Figure 152, only nine of his 133 posts were determined to be non-promotional. However, one of those nine posts contained a promotional picture and three were accompanied by a promotional hashtag, so they were not entirely free of promotional intent. Dostál occasionally used videos to promote himself and his competitions in the observation period, and he shared reports of his successful races. Video content appeared in 24 of his 133 posts. All of those posts were categorized as non-promotional.

Figure 152: Crosstabulation – Season vs. Promotional Category of Posts on Josef Dostál’s official Facebook page (July 2018 – June 2019)

Season/ Promotional Category	Season		Total
	Off-season	In the season	
Without promotion	8	1	9
Product	15	5	20
Self-promotion	55	14	69
Competition	2	31	33
Family and friends product	1	1	2
Total	81	52	133

Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author’s own work

In the off season, the main purpose of Dostál’s promotional posts was self-promotion, followed by product advertisements. Competition announcements and reports prevailed among the other subcategories of promotional content (see Figure 152).

Dostál’s team established the conditions for his commercial collaborations, including the amount of required social media activity, with each sponsor or partner on an individual basis (Dostál, 2020). The athlete actively involved himself in that process. “Mostly it depends on my ideas. Even if I get a direct ‘order,’ I always have final approval, so it is usually modified. Sometimes I talk with my manager, Jan Koukal, about the final concept, but the discussion is mostly about the details,” (Dostál, 2020). Dostál confirmed that his fans like to participate in his sponsors’ contests. “From my experience, the contests help to build relationships with followers, and they are attractive to most of them.” (Dostál, 2020). The athlete also pointed out that he would never promote any products that he does not use or that are not in line with his sports lifestyle. (Dostál, 2020; see Figure 153).

Figure 153: Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on Josef Dostál's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Corporate Sponsor (1st mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (2nd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (3rd mentioned)	Corporate Sponsor (4th mentioned)	Total
Alpine pro	14	4	1	0	19
Nelo Kayaks	6	2	2	0	10
Oriflame	8	0	0	0	8
Vojenská zdravotní pojišťovna	4	0	0	1	5
TIGER	1	3	0	0	4
Oakley	3	0	0	0	3
PRIM	0	3	0	0	3
Dansprint	0	2	0	0	2
Ergo	2	0	0	0	2
ATOMIC SKIING	0	1	0	0	1
Frekvence 1	1	0	0	0	1
Hartmann Rico	0	1	0	0	1
Starbucks	1	0	0	0	1
Toyota	1	0	0	0	1
Veroval CZ	1	0	0	0	1
Total	42	16	3	1	62

Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author's own work

Examples of Dostál's posts aimed at promoting commercial partners, including their contests, are illustrated by Figure 154. The contests he promoted in the posts displayed in Figure 154 were his most commented-upon posts in the observation period.

Figure 154: Example of Promotion of Sponsors (including a Contest) on Josef Dostál's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author's own work

3.16.2 Fans' Reactions

A post published after Dostál's victory at the 2018 World Championships in the 500 meters K1 received the most likes. The greatest number of shares of Dostál's posts in the observation period was 31. Two posts were shared that often, one a funny self-promotion video Dostál published on November 8, 2018, and the other a sports-related post with commercial content from June 30, 2019 (see Figure 155).

Figure 155: Posts with Most Likes, and Shares on Josef Dostál's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)



Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author's own work

On average, the canoeist's posts received 250 likes, six comments, and were shared five times. The comments under his posts were predominantly positive or neutral (see Figure 156). Dostál responded to his fans' comments when he found it useful or necessary (Dostál, 2020).

Figure 156: Type of Comments under the Posts on Josef Dostál's Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral comments	56	42,1	42,1	42,1
Mostly positive comments	77	57,9	57,9	100,0
Total	133	100,0	100,0	

Source: Official Facebook Page of Josef Dostál, Author's own work

3.17 Comparison

3.17.1 The Influence of Selected Factors on the Communication of the Czech Professional Athletes in the Sample

The conducted research focused on verifying the theoretical assumptions about athletes' social media behaviors, as well as uncovering trends and particularities in the sample

of the Czech professional athletes and their official Facebook pages.⁶⁶ In line with the approach used in previous research, an athlete's popularity and attractiveness were measured by the numbers of his or her fans and followers. In this dissertation, the same trends described in previous research — the same increase and decrease in the values of those indicators under certain conditions — were observed (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015; Hambrick et al., 2010; Seng & Gear, 2014). The values we observed for those indicators, sorted from highest popularity and attractiveness to the lowest among the athletes in the sample, are shown in Figure 157.

Figure 157: Numbers of Posts and Average Number of Page Likes and Followers of the Official Facebook Pages of Selected Czech Professional Athletes (October 2018 – September 2019)⁶⁷

Athlete's Name	Sports Discipline	Athlete's Popularity		Athlete's Attractiveness	
		N of Page Likes 10/2018	N of Page Likes 09/2019	N of Page Followers	N of Page Followers
Čech Petr	Football / Soccer	5,080,504	↓ 5,021,539	4,987,629	↓ 4,938,381
Kvitová Petra	Tennis	661,613	↓ 646,446	662,558	↓ 651,837
Sáblíková Martina	Speed Skating	319,602	↓ 306,846	317,075	↓ 305,021
Samková Eva	Snowboarding (Snowboardcross)	191,108	↓ 188,061	190,896	↓ 188,811
Ledecká Ester	Snowboarding / Alpine skiing	151,019	↑ 154,015	151,412	↑ 154,577
Plíšková Karolína	Tennis	111,612	↑ 113,157	116,131	↑ 118,054
Ondra Adam	Climbing	85,757	↑ 88,532	104,884	↑ 111,196
Vítková Veronika	Biathlon	61,256	↓ 61,009	60,332	↓ 60,187
Krpálek Lukáš	Judo	49,868	↑ 50,022	51,073	↑ 51,352
Hejnová Zuzana	Athletics (T&F)	40,844	↓ 40,675	40,413	↓ 40,335
Pastrňák David	Ice Hockey	39,050	↑ 39,122	47,559	↑ 48,050
Krčmář Michal	Biathlon	24,337	↑ 24,637	24,384	↑ 24,736
Koubek Tomáš	Football / Soccer	20,747	↑ 21,121	22,503	↑ 22,974
Voráček Jakub	Ice Hockey	20,136	↑ 20,306	33,867	↑ 34,217
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	Beach Volleyball	18,765	↑ 18,802	18,828	↑ 18,906
Dostál Josef	Canoe	12,949	↑ 12,973	13,131	↑ 13,233

Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

Without a doubt, the most popular and attractive athlete in the sample was soccer goalkeeper Petr Čech, who gathered more than twice as many likes and followers as all the other athletes in the sample together. This was despite the fact that his social media activity was rather low compared to the others. On the other hand, he experienced a slight decrease in both popularity and attractiveness over the observation period (cf. Pillár, 2019). The second most popular and attractive athlete was tennis player Petra

⁶⁶ See Chapter 2, Methodology (p. 42).

⁶⁷ Athletes are sorted according to their social media popularity as measured by number of page likes (from highest to lowest).

Kvitová with more than 600,000 fans and supporters, followed by four other female athletes: speed skater Martina Sáblíková, snowboarder Eva Samková, skier and snowboarder Ester Ledecká, and tennis player Karolína Plíšková. All of these successful professional athletes regularly updated their official Facebook pages. Except for Sáblíková, they all compete in sports disciplines that are popular worldwide. The new opportunities afforded to athletes competing in niche sports by social media, as suggested by Geurin and Clavio (2015) and Parganas and Anagnostopulos (2015), have not yet been fully realized. Karolína Plíšková had significantly more followers than fans in the observation period. In the case of the other female athletes, the number of likes and the number of followers they attracted did not much differ from each other (see Figure 157).

The rock climber Adam Ondra attracted more than 80,000 fans and 100,000 followers even though he has not yet competed in an Olympic Games. These relatively high numbers for an athlete from a niche sport may be the result of his frequent posts on Facebook, as well as the adrenaline factor in his sports discipline. This finding accords with that of L'Etang (2013). Surprisingly, the biathlete Veronika Vítková also achieved relatively high numbers in terms of her popularity and attractiveness, as measured by likes and follows on her official Facebook page. Both numbers exceeded 60,000, although she published only seventeen posts during the whole observation period. The relatively large number of her fans and followers may be attributable to the popularity of the sport of biathlon with the general Czech public (Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2017; Czech Statistical Office [Český statistický úřad], 2019). However, that theory did not hold for her male counterpart in the biathlon, Michal Krčmář, whose popularity and attractiveness were around 24,000 likes and followers. It must be noted that Vítková has been more successful in the sport than Krčmář in the long run. On the other hand, Krčmář gained in popularity and attractiveness from October 2018 to September 2019 as he had about 300 more supporters at the end of the observation period than he had at the beginning (see Figure 157).

The popularity and attractiveness of judoka Lukáš Krpálek fluctuated around 50,000 likes and followers, which must be judged as a success when one considers the relative popularity and the nature of his sport. Krpálek achieved that level of fan engagement thanks to his perceived authenticity, which is an influential factor according to Bernstein and Blain (2002), as well as Pronschike et al. (2012). Krpálek attracted

almost 10,000 more supporters than did Zuzana Hejnová, although their publishing activity was almost the same (80 versus 77 posts during the observation period, respectively). Unexpectedly, three of the world-famous male athletes playing in team sports, ice hockey players Jakub Voráček and David Pastrňák and soccer goalkeeper Tomáš Koubek, lagged behind the aforementioned individual athletes in terms of their Facebook popularity and attractiveness, even though they posted regularly on their official pages. That finding contrasts with previous research (e.g., Bernstein and Blain, 2002). However, as Janko (2019) highlighted, ice hockey players more commonly use Twitter than Facebook for self-promotion. Also, the Czech national ice hockey and soccer teams have not achieved any significant success recently, which may influence individual players' popularity and visibility.

Only two athletes in the sample, beach volleyball player Markéta Nausch-Sluková and canoeist Josef Dostál, did not surpass the milestone of 20,000 fans or followers. However, both of them are internationally successful representatives of niche sports with a slowly growing Facebook fan base.

The number of fans and followers of the pages of the four most popular athletes in our sample — Čech, Kvitová, Sábliková, and Samková — decreased over the course of the observation period. All of those athletes have had long-term, stable careers, and became famous before the observation period began. Although all but Petr Čech continue in their active sports careers, the decline in their numbers may indicate a gradual “retreat from glory”.

When speaking of gender differences, conducted research verified that social media is a powerful tool for fighting masculine hegemony in the world of sports, as suggested by Billings et al. (2018) and Toffoletti (2016). The female athletes in the sample engage Facebook fans and followers and have results that are similar to or even better than those of their male colleagues. The research proved that female athletes have the potential to gain new fans and followers if they achieve good sports results. Even if their success is unpredictable, but they are still successful in the long term, their fan base gradually grows, as demonstrated by the example of Ester Ledecká. The assumptions that fans' perception of and reactions to female athletes' social media posts are more negative than those of male athletes, and that they attract more trolling to their pages, were not confirmed. That finding does not support Lumsden and Morgan's (2012) theories.

Both the female and the male athletes in the sample presented themselves mainly as professional sportsmen or sportswomen on their official Facebook accounts. This was confirmed in the interviews we conducted. That in turn confirms the findings of Smith and Sanderson (2015). Regardless of gender, some of the athletes, e.g., Josef Dostál, Ester Ledecká, and Eva Samková, often shared pieces of their ordinary lives or strong opinions on their social media pages, especially in the off-season period. The female representatives of adrenaline sports, namely Ledecká and Samková, published more diverse posts than sports-related posts in the off season. However, Ledecká's and Samková's posts were neither feminized nor sexually suggestive. Their posts concentrated on their daily routines, travel experiences, or documented funny moments in their lives. These are the same topics that were previously identified on both male and female social media pages by Lebel and Danylchuk (2012).

The conducted research proved that the popularity of the athlete's chosen sport influenced their social media usage in the observation period. Whether the sport is a mainstream or niche one influenced the manner in which the athletes managed and administered their official social media channels. Whereas all the representatives of mainstream sports employed professional agents or managers who collaborated closely with them, some of the athletes from niche sports administrated their official social media pages entirely on their own. Josef Dostál and Markéta Nausch Sluková mentioned in their interviews that they like to things that way, although they sometimes accepted advice from experts or close friends. The athletes also sought training in the use of social media, as did other athletes in the study by L'Etang (2013).

Whether a sport is team or individual played an important role in the official Facebook presentations of Czech professional athletes. Generally, athletes competing in team sports, like soccer goalkeeper Tomáš Koubek and hockey player David Pastrňák, emphasized promotion of team events in their posts, especially in the period just before and during their matches and competitions. Koubek and Pastrňák often inserted links to the official Facebook page of their teams and sought to build up the relationship between their fans and their teams, similar to a finding by Pronschike et al. (2012). Beach volleyball player Markéta Nausch-Sluková took a slightly different approach. From time to time she provided a link in her posts to the team page, but she mainly provided links to her own social media presence on her public Facebook and Instagram public pages. Nausch-Sluková used her official social media pages in a way that was similar to the strategy pursued by individual athletes. She

said this was because of her previous negative experience with the breakup of her former beach volleyball team, and was not related to the kind of sport in which she participates. Additionally, some of the athletes from individual sports disciplines promoted their training with the national teams in their sports, e.g., canoeist Josef Dostál, biathlete Michal Krčmář, and judoka Lukáš Krpálek. Those athletes were “used” or featured as leaders of the national teams or national associations, such as Olympians for the Olympic Games. This phenomenon has previously been described by Rahman and Rockwood (2011).

The adrenaline factor of a sport, or a sport’s reputation as an extreme sports discipline, influenced the way the athletes in that sport and in our sample presented themselves on social media and their communication with visitors to their official Facebook pages in the observation period. This comports with L’Etang’s (2013) findings. Skier and snowboarder Ester Ledecká, climber Adam Ondra, and snowboarder Eva Samková frequently used visual and interactive items in their social media communication, while the textual parts of their posts were often very brief. The athletes also spoke in their own “language” or slang, as was observed by Pedersen et al. (2007) in their study.

Regarding the use of slang, the athletes were observed to use specific terms used in the same or similar sports disciplines, e.g., hockey and tennis (cf. Pedersen et al., 2007). The manner and intensity of their communication depended highly on the approach preferred by the other athletes in the sample. This research showed that the character and style of selected athletes’ postings did not depend on the athlete’s gender or the type of sport, but on each person’s own personality and preferences. This finding is contrary to the conclusions of Lebel and Danylchuk’s (2012) and Mutz and Meier (2016) in their studies.

3.17.2 The Promotion of Commercial Interests and Disclosing of Content on the Official Facebook Pages of Selected Czech Professional Athletes

The research showed that all the Czech professional athletes in our sample used their official Facebook pages for promotional purposes, as do foreign professional athletes (cf. Branscome & Wann, 1991; Devlin, 2017). This also corresponds with Kotler et al.’s (2017) claim that social media content consists mainly of advertising. Generally,

the largest number of promotional posts (861) in the sample were focused on self-promotion, followed by announcements and reminders of competitions (705). Over two hundred posts (238) related to specific products or services. Sixty-seven of the 2,008 posts in the entire sample mentioned charities or foundations, and 38 were dedicated to family or friends' products or services. Only 99 posts published in the observation period were categorized as non-promotional (see Figure 158), but even so, most of them contained promotional photos, videos, links or hashtags, or some combination of them.

Figure 158: Categorization of Types of Promotion in the Posts on the Official Facebook Pages of All Selected Czech Professional Athletes (July 2018 – June 2019)

Promotional Category	N of posts
Without promotion	99
Product	238
Charity	67
Self-promotion	861
Competition	705
Family and friends product	38
Total	2008

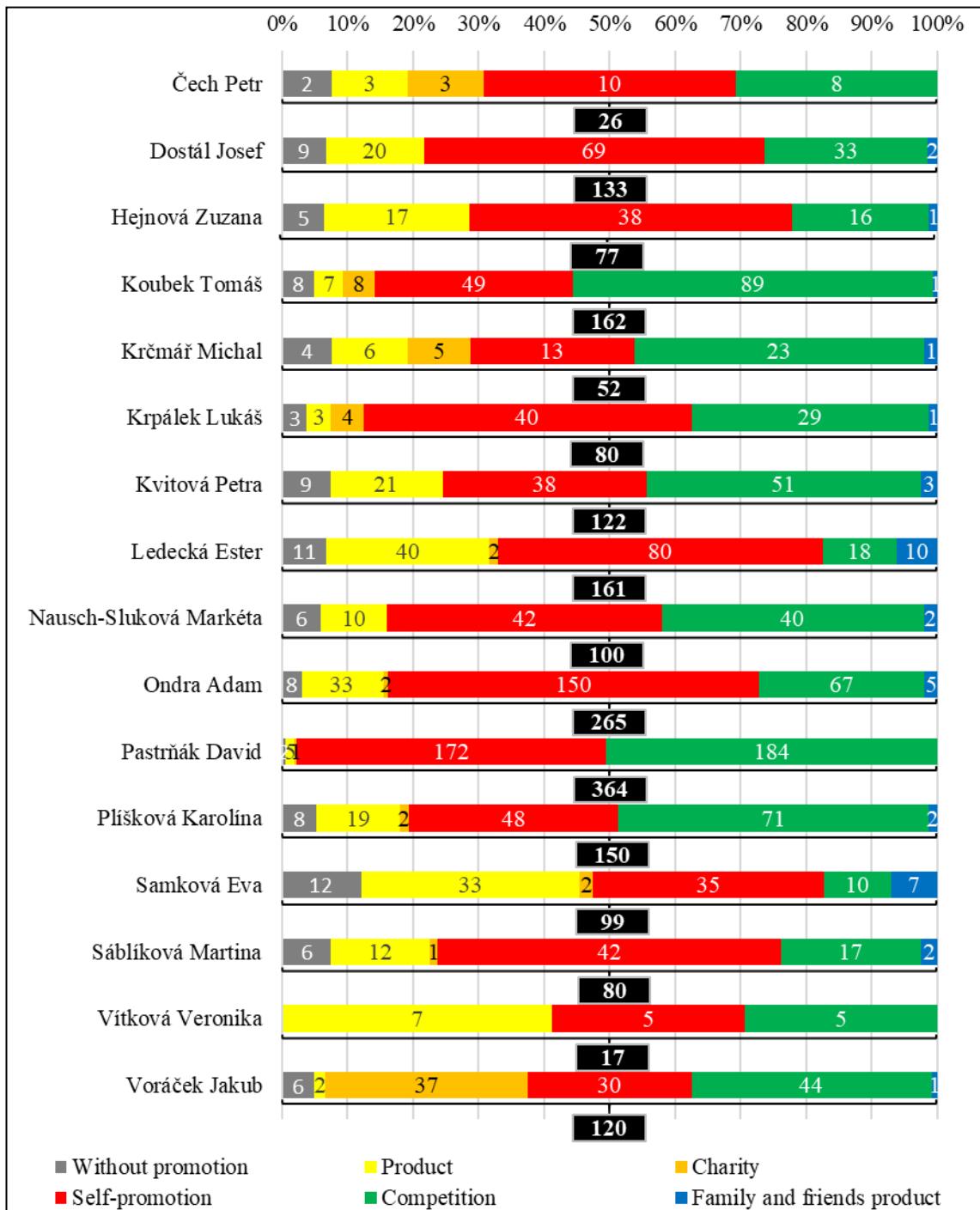
Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

The types of promotion by each athlete depended on the communication style he or she preferred. As Figure 159 shows, self-promotion was most common in the posts of soccer goalkeeper Petr Čech, canoeist Josef Dostál, track and field athlete Zuzana Hejnová, judoka Lukáš Krpálek, skier and snowboarder Ester Ledecká, beach volleyball player Markéta Nausch Sluková, climber Adam Ondra, snowboarder Eva Samková, and speed skater Martina Sáblíková. Six other athletes, namely soccer goalkeeper Tomáš Koubek, biathlete Michal Krčmář, tennis players Petra Kvitová and Karolína Plíšková, ice hockey players David Pastrňák and Jakub Voráček, published more posts related to promoting their competitions. The one exception was biathlete Veronika Vítková, who concentrated predominantly on promoting products. At the same time, it must be considered that the total number of posts Vítková published on her official Facebook page from July 2018 to June 2019 was relatively small compared to the rest of the athletes in our sample (see Figure 159).

Besides that, the largest absolute number and also the greatest proportion of posts that were product-oriented were identified on the Facebook pages of the female adrenaline sports representatives: Ester Ledecká and Eva Samková. Both of them also promoted family and friends' products and services more often than the other athletes

in our sample. These results are in line with L'Etang (2013), who identified differences in the promotional content of the communication of adrenaline and mainstream sport athletes.

Figure 159: Categorization of Posts with an Emphasis on Promotion on the Official Facebook Pages of Select Czech Professional Athletes (July 2018 – June 2019)⁶⁸



Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

⁶⁸ Athletes are sorted alphabetically (by their surnames, from A to Z).

Eleven of the sixteen athletes in our sample supported a charity on their official Facebook page, which indicates the trend towards social responsibility. The greatest number of such posts was identified on Jakub Voráček's page. He used the space on his social media accounts to announce upcoming and past events and activities sponsored by his multiple sclerosis foundation. Voráček was the only athlete in the sample who had established his own foundation. He was motivated to do so because his sister suffers from multiple sclerosis (see Figure 159).⁶⁹

All of the athletes in our sample promoted competitions and races more frequently during their sport's season than in its off-season period. The most significant drop in activity was evidenced on Pastrňák's, Koubek's and Plíšková's Facebook pages. It is necessary to note that the length of the off-season periods in their sports is much shorter than that of their sports seasons. Contrary to the findings of previous research (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015), the selected Czech athletes emphasized the promotion of products and services during the off season. As the athletes indicated in their interviews, their reason for doing so is a decrease in media interest in their sporting activities during the off season, especially in the case of niche sports disciplines. The athletes also had more time to create Facebook content of other types (cf. Hejnová, 2020; Nausch-Sluková, 2020).

The athletes took different approaches to charity postings. The soccer and ice hockey players' teams supported various philanthropic initiatives, for example, by promoting them during their matches. The individual athletes, such as the biathlon representatives in the sample, promised to donate specific sums of money to charity depending on their results in their competitions. It is therefore understandable that most of the posts categorized as promoting a charity were published during the athletes' sports' seasons. Jakub Voráček, as the founder of his multiple sclerosis foundation, promoted his project all year round. The intensity and the number of self-promotional posts, and of posts that mentioned family and friends' products in the sample varied from one athlete to another (see Figure 160).

⁶⁹ See Chapter 3.4, Jakub Voráček (p. 90).

Figure 160: Season vs. Promotional Category of Posts on the Official Facebook Pages of Selected Czech Professional Athletes (July 2018 – June 2019)⁷⁰

Athlete's Name	Season	Without promotion	Product	Charity	Self-promotion	Competition	Family and friends product	Total
Čech Petr	Off-season	1	2	0	4	0	0	7
	In the season	1	1	3	6	8	0	19
Dostál Josef	Off-season	8	15	0	55	2	1	81
	In the season	1	5	0	14	31	1	52
Hejnová Zuzana	Off-season	3	14	0	33	5	1	56
	In the season	2	3	0	5	11	0	21
Koubek Tomáš	Off-season	0	0	1	3	0	0	4
	In the season	8	7	7	46	89	1	158
Krčmář Michal	Off-season	4	6	5	9	4	1	29
	In the season	0	0	0	4	19	0	23
Krpálek Lukáš	Off-season	2	2	1	12	11	0	28
	In the season	1	1	3	28	18	1	52
Kvitová Petra	Off-season	1	2	0	3	2	0	8
	In the season	8	19	0	35	49	3	114
Ledecká Ester	Off-season	8	16	0	42	0	4	70
	In the season	3	24	2	38	18	6	91
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	Off-season	5	9	0	30	3	1	48
	In the season	1	1	0	12	37	1	52
Ondra Adam	Off-season	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	In the season	8	33	2	150	67	5	265
Pastrňák David	Off-season	1	5	1	6	0	0	13
	In the season	1	0	0	166	184	0	351
Plíšková Karolína	Off-season	0	1	0	2	1	0	4
	In the season	8	18	2	46	70	2	146
Samková Eva	Off-season	12	25	2	27	2	6	74
	In the season	0	8	0	8	8	1	25
Sáblíková Martina	Off-season	6	10	1	21	3	2	43
	In the season	0	2	0	21	14	0	37
Vítková Veronika	Off-season	0	2	0	4	1	0	7
	In the season	0	5	0	1	4	0	10
Voráček Jakub	Off-season	2	1	21	10	3	1	38
	In the season	4	1	16	20	41	0	82
Total	Off-season	53	110	32	261	37	17	510
	In the season	46	128	35	600	668	21	1498

Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

Both the sports-related and the diverse content of the selected athletes were accompanied by visual and interactive promotional items, which confirms the observation in previous research of an increasing use of interactive content in promotional communication on social media (cf. Brown et al., 2013; Fisher

⁷⁰ Athletes are sorted alphabetically (by their surnames, from A to Z).

& Wakefield, 1998; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Over 60% of all the posts in our sample contained one or more promotional pictures; almost half of them provided at least one promotional link to the page's visitors. Promotional hashtags and videos appeared in a smaller number of the athletes' posts — 374 hashtags and 272 videos in 2008 posts.

Figure 161 provides a detailed graphic breakdown of the visual and interactive promotional content in the posts on the official Facebook pages of the selected Czech professional athletes. Most of the athletes, namely Petr Čech, Zuzana Hejnová, Tomáš Koubek, Lukáš Krpálek, Petra Kvitová, Ester Ledecká, Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Adam Ondra, David Pastrňák, Karolína Plíšková, Martina Sáblíková and Veronika Vítková, noticeably preferred using pictures for promotions and announcements. Michal Krčmář published promotional pictures and videos almost equally often. Adam Ondra and Jakub Voráček commonly used promotional links on Facebook to promote themselves as well as their personal projects. Josef Dostál predominantly promoted himself, his events, and his sponsors and partners with the assistance of hashtags. Two-thirds of the posts on Eva Samková's Facebook page were accompanied by a promotional picture, link, or hashtag.

Figure 161: Visual and Interactive Promotional Content in Posts on the Official Facebook Pages of Selected Czech Professional Athletes (July 2018 – June 2019)⁷¹

Athlete's Name	N of posts containing promotional photo(s)	N of posts containing promotional video(s)	N of posts containing promotional link(s)	N of posts containing promotional hashtag(s)	Total N of Posts
Pastrňák David	237	42	193	12	364
Ondra Adam	124	31	206	13	256
Koubek Tomáš	109	34	83	5	162
Ledecká Ester	105	26	52	3	161
Plíšková Karolína	109	24	54	30	150
Dostál Josef	86	24	46	114	133
Kvitová Petra	80	22	56	11	122
Voráček Jakub	19	22	93	1	120
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	75	9	42	45	100
Samková Eva	62	11	59	61	99
Krpálek Lukáš	71	5	5	43	80
Sáblíková Martina	62	6	18	4	80
Hejnová Zuzana	42	5	32	19	77
Krčmář Michal	23	6	20	4	52
Čech Petr	16	5	11	0	26
Vítková Veronika	15	0	7	9	17
Total	1235	272	977	374	1999

Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

The research showed that Czech athletes promote their corporate sponsors about as often as do their foreign counterparts (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). All of the selected athletes are celebrities in the eyes of sports-oriented audiences, so their popularity allows them to promote commercial entities effectively (cf. Fink et al., 2020; Mikuláš, 2020). The number and types of commercial entities promoted by the athletes on their official Facebook pages fluctuated, as demonstrated in Figure 162. Ester Ledecká promoted the largest number of brands (29). Her sponsors in the observation period included food and beverage companies (RedBull, Milka, Coca Cola, Leki), sports equipment companies (ATOMIC Skiing, Don Quiet), car manufacturers (Audi, Toyota), and a betting company (Tipsport). Among other companies, she collaborated with fashion and accessories brands (PONER, Richard Mille) and Mattel, a toy company that manufactures iconic toys like the Barbie

⁷¹ Athletes are sorted according to the total number of posts containing visual and interactive promotional content (from highest to lowest).

doll. In some cases, e.g. RedBull or Milka, Ledecká became the brand ambassador (cf. Kitchen, 2008; Novak, 2021). She featured their products on her Facebook page in the observation period (see Figure 106, p. 159), but they are not always properly disclosed.⁷²

A representative of an extreme sport, Adam Ondra, claimed second place in the number of companies he promoted, giving space to 21 companies. He frequently mentioned not only sports brands such as Black Diamond, La Sportiva and Montura, as shown in Figure 162, but also a beverage, Mazagrande, the internet shop MALL.cz, and ING Bank (see Figure 133, p. 182). On the other end of the spectrum, David Pastrňák's official Facebook page mentioned the smallest number of companies. Two of the three he mentioned were sports-oriented companies. Pastrňák mainly promoted the ice hockey brand Bauer, which figured in 78 of his total of 364 posts in our sample (see Figure 32, p. 88).

The promotion of international brands such as Nike and RedBull dominated the Facebook pages of the athletes in our sample during the observation period. The type and the international popularity of the sports disciplines in which the athletes participated influenced the type of sponsors they mentioned. Representatives of internationally well-known disciplines such as ice hockey, soccer, and tennis tended to promote huge multinational corporations. The athletes in our sample from niche disciplines like speed skating and biathlon featured more domestic Czech sponsors in their Facebook posts. However, this was not true of all the athletes in the sample. For example, tennis player Karolína Plíšková promoted both international and national sponsors in the observation period.

⁷² As evidenced later on, almost all of the sampled athletes struggled with the disclosure of commercial collaboration on social media in the observation period.

Figure 162: Comparison of Mentions of Sponsors in Posts on the Official Facebook Pages of Selected Czech Professional Athletes (July 2018 – June 2019)⁷³

Athlete's Name	N of promoted private entities	1st mostly mentioned entity / brand	2nd mostly mentioned entity / brand	3rd mostly mentioned entity / brand
Ledecká Ester	29	RedBull (22 times)	ATOMIC Skiing; Milka (9 times)	
Ondra Adam	21	Black Diamond (159 times)	La Sportiva (149 times)	Montura (146 times)
Hejnová Zuzana	17	Nike (15 times)	Superlife CZ; Zdravé stravování (4 times)	
Voráček Jakub	16	Bauer; GolfDigest (2 times)	Auto Esa; CCM; City Tools; Česká Spořitelna; Krokodýl; Óčko; RailReklam; Rengl; RH Centrum; Starobno; Střída Sport; Tipsport; Vínofol; WIKI (once)	
Dostál Josef	15	Alpine Pro (19 times)	Nelo Kayaks (10 times)	Oriflame (8 times)
Koubek Tomáš	14	Puma (12 times)	Samsic (11 times)	Nike (7 times)
Kvitová Petra	14	Nike (8 times)	ALO Diamonds (6 times)	L'OCCITANE en Provence (4 times)
Samková Eva	13	RedBull (19 times)	Honor; Kari Traa (17 times)	
Plíšková Karolína	12	FILA (47 times)	Pražská plynárenská, a.s. (17 times)	Merkur die Vorsicherung (8 times)
Krčmář Michal	10	Vincentka (2 times)	Alpine Pro; Atex; CEF; Foxart.cz; Hamé; Montana Sport; Rossi; Viessmann (once)	
Sáblíková Martina	9	Under Armour (14 times)	Čeps (6 times)	STRABAG (3 times)
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	8	RedBull (20 times)	STRABAG (6 times)	Tipsport (5 times)
Čech Petr	7	Fly Emirates (9 times)	Puma (3 times)	FlashScore.com; Yokohama Tyres (2 times)
Vítková Veronika	5	Atex; Česká Pojišťovna; Hamé; Fischer; GoPro (once)		
Krpálek Lukáš	4	Ippon Gear (18 times)	Nike (9 times)	Aktivně a zdravě (3 times)
Pastrňák David	3	Bauer (78 times)	Chance; Under Armour (once)	
Summary		Black Diamond (159 times); La Sportiva (149 times); Montura (146 times); Bauer (80 times); RedBull (61 times); FILA (47 times); Nike (39 times); Alpine Pro (20 times); Ippon Gear (18 times); Honor (17 times); Kari Traa (17 times); Pražská plynárenská, a.s. (17 times); Puma (15 times); Under Armour (15 times); Samsic (11 times); Nelo Kayaks (10 times); ATOMIC Skiing (9 times); Fly Emirates (9 times); Milka (9 times); STRABAG (9 times); Merkur die Vorsicherung (8 times); Oriflame (8 times); ALO Diamonds (6 times); Čeps (6 times); Tipsport (6 times); L'OCCITANE en Provence (4 times); Superlife CZ (4 times); Zdravé stravování (4 times); Aktivně a zdravě (3 times); Atex (2 times); FlashScore.com (2 times); GolfDigest (2 times); Hamé (2 times); Vincentka (2 times); Yokohama Tyres (2 times); Auto Esa (once); CEF (once); CCM (once); Chance (once); City Tools (once); Česká Pojišťovna (once); Česká Spořitelna (once); Fischer (once); Foxart.cz (once); GoPro (once); Krokodýl (once); Montana Sport (once); Óčko (once); RailReklam (once); Rengl (once); RH Centrum (once); Rossi (once); Starobno (once); Střída Sport (once); Viessmann (once); Vínofol (once); WIKI (once)		

Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

Generally speaking, the differences and similarities in the athletes' posts depend on whether their sport is a team or individual one and also on the popularity of their sport. The research done by Pedersen et al. (2007) also demonstrated the importance of those factors. The careers of athletes doing individual and niche sports benefit from sponsors' support because in most cases their regular salaries are smaller than those of soccer and ice hockey players. Additionally, representatives of individual sports must manage and pay for training camps and other expenses by themselves. For Samková, Ledecká, and Ondra, the best training and preparation conditions are found outside the Czech Republic, so they have to pay travel

⁷³ Athletes are sorted according to the total number of promoted private entities (from highest to lowest).

and subsistence costs to keep themselves at the top level of their sports. Athletes in team sports promoted a mix of themselves and their teams and their team and individual sponsors.

Athletes competing in the same sports had similar approaches to promotion in their social media posts. Tennis players mentioned both sports-related and non-sports-related sponsors and partners from various industries. The sports brand Puma featured prominently in the posts of both the soccer goalkeepers in the sample, as did Bauer in the posts of the ice hockey players. The biathletes had a limited number of sponsors, most of which were commercial partners of the Czech Biathlon Association, like Atex, Česká Pojišťovna, and Hamé. Individual athletes sponsored by Nike, like Zuzana Hejnová, Lukáš Krpálek, and Petra Kvitová, were required by contract to promote the brand on their social media pages (Tejkal, 2019). The beverage company RedBull was commonly mentioned on the official pages of younger generation of successful individual athletes. The brand's logo was visible in the Facebook profile pictures of Ester Ledecká, Eva Samková and Markéta Nausch-Sluková.⁷⁴

We noted gender differences in the promotion of commercial entities. Most of the female athletes used their profiles (although not exclusively) for the promotion of fashion, accessories, and cosmetics, which allowed them to reach a wider audience (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Tamir et al., 2015). On the other hand, in some cases an ambition to go against the usual habits was observable. For example, Josef Dostál started to collaborate with the cosmetics company Oriflame and became the male face of that brand, and not only on social media.⁷⁵ Furthermore, there was a growing trend toward equality in the gender of the athletes sponsored by automobile and betting companies, e.g., Audi, Mototechna, Toyota, Volkswagen, and Tipsport. Those companies appeared on the official Facebook pages of both male and female athletes in the sample.

Because Czech legislative norms are vague, the disclosing of commercial collaboration in social media posts is not obligatory, even for widely known people,

⁷⁴ See Chapter 3, Results (p. 66).

⁷⁵ See Chapter 3.16, Josef Dostál (p. 193).

including athletes.⁷⁶ The Czech professional athletes and their managers agreed that the disclosing of commercial content is important, but they did not have any unified, clear-cut strategy for doing so. The research we conducted revealed that no athlete in the sample ever used the hashtags #ad, #sponsored, or #spolupráce (the latter is Czech for “collaboration”). Generally, except for the paid partnership posts published by Adam Ondra and Karolína Plíšková, commercial items on the athletes’ official Facebook pages published in the observation period were not clearly disclosed as advertisements (see Samoregulace.cz [Autoregulation.cz], 2018; *Férová reklama [Fair advertising]*, 2020). Despite that, some athletes argued that they do alert their fans to commercial content on social media in other ways.

Zuzana Hejnová claimed that she always discloses her posts with sponsors and partners and replies to fans’ comments related to that issue. She said she does not want to overfill her official social media pages with commercial content (Hejnová, 2020). Markéta Nausch-Sluková admitted that she has a problem with identifying what “commercial collaboration” is, but she tries to follow published rules and recommendations (Nausch-Sluková, 2020). Eva Samková (like Ledecká and Ondra) identified a partnership when it was the main purpose of their posts. If it was secondary, she just added company links or hashtags without any particular disclose (Samková, 2020). Josef Dostál stated that the manner of disclosing was decided upon individually with each of his sponsors and partners (Dostál, 2020).

Karolína Plíšková’s manager also admitted that commercial collaboration is sometimes not obviously disclosed on the tennis player’s official Facebook page (Hrdlička, 2020). Michal Krčmář and Veronika Vítková also admitted to a similar lack of disclosing of commercial collaboration. In their cases, it is unclear whether that was their intent or just an omission, because they did not comment on that issue. The rest of the athletes in the sample, as well as some of the above-mentioned individuals, regularly sought advice about how to disclose their commercial collaboration on social media, either from their managers or from (potential) sponsors and partners (Kozlovský, 2020; Pillár, 2019; Tejkal, 2019).

⁷⁶ See Chapter 1.2.4, Disclosure Requirements for Commercial Collaboration and Advertising in Czech Legislation (p. 27).

3.17.3 Attitudes of Selected Czech Professional Athletes Toward the Use of Social Media

The athletes in the sample differed in their approaches to the use of social media during the observation period.⁷⁷ The presence of the athletes on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube is summarized in Figure 163. The research revealed that all the athletes had established at least an official Facebook page and a public Instagram page. A tendency to prefer Instagram over Facebook and to connect their pages on both media in order to unify their content was observed. The athletes and managers praised the intuitiveness and ease of feeding content onto Instagram in comparison with Facebook. The content on the athletes' Facebook and Instagram pages was not completely identical due to slightly different terms of use on the two platforms and also differences in the guidelines set by the athletes' management teams for each social media platform (cf. Sládeček, in IKSŽ, 2018). For example, Petr Čech and Karolína Plíšková usually simply approved the content added to their Facebook pages, whereas they actively created their Instagram posts themselves (Hrdlička, 2020; Pillár, 2019).

⁷⁷ See Chapter 3, Results (p. 66).

Figure 163: Comparison of Establishment of Social Media Pages/Channels by Selected Czech Professional Athletes (as of November 30, 2020)⁷⁸

Athlete's Name	Official Facebook page	Public Instagram Page	Twitter Account	YouTube Channel	N of social media pages / channels
Koubek Tomáš	YES	YES	YES	YES	4
Ondra Adam	YES	YES	YES	YES	4
Čech Petr	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Dostál Josef	YES	YES	NO	YES	3
Kvitová Petra	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Ledecká Ester	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Pastrňák David	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Plíšková Karolína	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Sáblíková Martina	YES	YES	NO	YES	3
Vítková Veronika	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Voráček Jakub	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Krčmář Michal	YES	YES	YES*	NO	2 (3*)
Hejnová Zuzana	YES	YES	NO	NO	2
Krpálek Lukáš	YES	YES	NO	NO	2
Samková Eva	YES	YES	NO	NO	2
Total	16	16	10 (11*)	4	46 (47*)

* Michal Krčmář's Twitter account was established in September 2020, after the end of the observation period (mkrmar23, 2020b).

Source: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Interviews with Athletes, 2018 – 2020; Author's own work

Ten of the sixteen athletes in our sample had Twitter accounts in the observation period. Not all of them actively use Twitter. The ice hockey players, soccer players and tennis players used their Twitter accounts actively, but the others did not post on that platform during the observation period. Witkemper et al. (2012) also observed more active use of Twitter among professional soccer and ice hockey players. Twitter was not popular among the other Czech professional athletes. For example, one of the active Twitter users, Markéta Nausch-Sluková, admitted that she is not sure about what content is appropriate for that platform. Two athletes without Twitter accounts, Josef Dostál and Eva Samková, mentioned that they do not feel they need to have them (Dostál, 2020; Samková, 2020).

Four athletes in the sample, Josef Dostál, Tomáš Koubek, Adam Ondra and Martina Sáblíková, maintained public YouTube channels. Their reason for adopting

⁷⁸ Athletes are sorted according to the number of social media pages / channels (from highest to lowest).

Youtube was similar for all of them: they published videos of their training so they could be viewed and then shared on other online and social media afterward. Other than Ondra, the athletes in our sample rarely used their YouTube channels. Koubek published only one video during the observation period, and both Dostál and Sábliková posted no content at all on YouTube from July 2018 to June 2019 (Adam Ondra, 2020c; Josef Dostál (CZE), 2020; MARTINASABLIKOVÁful, 2020; Tomáš Koubek, 2020c).

The attitudes toward social media of the Czech professional athletes in the sample varied. None of them publicly expressed excitement at using that form of communication. Aside from Ledecká, who competes in both niche and mainstream sports disciplines, niche sport athletes talked more positively about social media and tended to be more involved in managing and administering their presence on it. Representatives of individual sports like Josef Dostál, Adam Ondra, and Markéta Nausch-Sluková, were aware that they have an opportunity to attract sponsors and partners through social media. They are attentive to fulfilling their commitments to their sponsors. On the other hand, all of the athletes in our sample who participated in mainstream sports employed a marketing agency or PR expert to maintain the flow of communication on their official social media pages and accounts. The employment of social media exports was mentioned in previously published studies of athletes' behavior (cf. McKelvey & Masteralexis, 2011; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012).⁷⁹

Whether or not the Czech professional athletes like to use social media, the problematic aspects of usage were identified by the conducted research. The first important factor, mentioned by PR managers in the sports field Ondřej Kozlovský, Pavel Pillár, and Karel Tejkal, is that Czech athletes do not have enough time to administer their social media accounts themselves (cf. Barefoot & Szabo, 2010; Kozlovský, 2020; Pillár, 2019; Tejkal, 2019). Josef Dostál confirmed that. He said that he had considered presenting himself on more social media platforms, but he decided not to do so because of the extensive demands it would place on his time (Dostál, 2020).

Another factor is the impact of athletes' perception of their fans' reactions on their psychology. The PR managers recommend that their sports clients not read the comments on their social media pages, because that could negatively affect their psychological stability, self-confidence and ultimately their performance in their sport

⁷⁹ See Chapter 3, Results (p. 66).

(cf. Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Kozlovský, 2020; Pillár, 2019; Tejkal, 2019). Nevertheless, most of the athletes not only read their fans' reactions, but also responded to them, both publicly and privately. Some of the athletes said that they regularly turn to “rescue mechanisms” to deal with the feelings induced by fan-produced content. For example, Zuzana Hejnová disconnects herself from social media — and even deletes social media apps from her phone — in the run up to important competitions (Hejnová, 2020). Other athletes, e.g., Tomáš Koubek, turn off their fans' option to send private messages to their official social media pages in order to eliminate one important avenue for fans to contact them (Pillár, 2019). The communication of the athletes on social media is closely connected to their fans' and followers' reactions, as is explained in the following sub-chapter.

3.17.4 Fans' Reactions

Comparison of the reactions to the athletes' posts shows that the name of the athlete and the athlete's personal story influence the intensity of their fans' engagement on social media (Arai et al., 2014; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). Figure 164 summarizes the average numbers of post likes, comments and shares of the official Facebook pages of selected Czech professional athletes with leading soccer goalkeeper Petr Čech. Figure 164 also shows that of the athletes in the sample, the tennis player Petra Kvitová, who staged a thrilling come back after the violent attack in her flat and hand surgery, attracted the second largest average number of likes (3,803) and comments (189) to her posts (Daněk et al., 2016; WTA, 2020b). This deeply human story, combined with the fact her posts are written in English, encouraged her supporters to react to the content she posted. Speed skater Martina Sáblíková garnered only a slightly lower number of likes and comments as a multiple Olympic, World, and European champion with an immaculate media image. This research indicated that a good reputation in the public eye, without any scandals, both helped and “harmed” the athlete's social media influence (cf. Rae et al., 2017; Stone et al., 2003). Those of Sáblíková's posts that announced her races or presented their results were highly shared (by 143 people on average). However, the athlete who garnered the fourth largest average number of comments (52) under her posts was Karolína Plíšková. That may be caused by her controversial reputation. Paradoxically, scandals and problems can increase athlete's attractiveness, as Stone et al. (2003) acknowledged.

A unique aura of success and smooth self-presentations helped skier and snowboarder Ester Ledecká and judoka Lukáš Krpálek successfully target their Czech social media audiences.

Figure 164: Numbers of Posts and Average Numbers of Post Likes, Comments and Shares of the Official Facebook Pages of Selected Czech Professional Athletes (July 2018 – June 2019)⁸⁰

Athlete's Name	N of Posts	Avg. N of Post Likes	Avg. N of Post Comments	Avg. N of Post Shares
Čech Petr	26	18,533	598	465
Kvitová Petra	122	3,803	189	68
Sáblíková Martina	80	3,683	142	143
Ledecká Ester	161	1,605	37	31
Plíšková Karolína	150	1,282	52	22
Krpálek Lukáš	80	1,250	27	30
Koubek Tomáš	162	918	36	26
Vítková Veronika	17	818	35	10
Voráček Jakub	120	716	45	32
Samková Eva	99	644	9	9
Krčmář Michal	52	631	17	9
Pastrňák David	364	561	14	18
Ondra Adam	265	494	17	24
Hejnová Zuzana	77	309	16	4
Dostál Josef	133	250	6	5
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	100	143	3	2

Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

Overall, the prevailing tenor of comments under the posts published by the athletes in our sample was positive, as the data presented in Figure 165 confirms. Still, some posts on some of the athletes' official Facebook pages received a majority of negative comments. The topics of the negative comments varied. The main targets of critical comments were the results of competitions that were unsatisfactory to the fans, the athlete's physical appearance or character, overcommercialization of the athlete's posts, and his or her political opinions.

These topics were similar to those mentioned in previous research (cf. Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012; Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). For athletes participating in team sports, some fans published comments

⁸⁰ Athletes are sorted according to the average number of post likes (from highest to lowest).

that questioned the athlete's loyalty to his or her team. Karolína Plíšková drew criticism aimed at her personal relationships. Her husband and manager, Michal Hrdlička, has a controversial reputation. Some of Plíšková's fans thought that he influenced her to repeatedly change her coaches and distracted her from her performance on the tennis court.

*Figure 165: Tenor of Comments under the Posts on Selected Athletes' Official Facebook Page (July 2018 – June 2019)*⁸¹

Athlete's Name	N of Posts with Mostly Positive Comments	N of Posts with Mostly Neutral Comments	N of Posts with Mostly Negative Comments	Total N of Posts
Pastrňák David	295	62	7	364
Ondra Adam	209	54	2	265
Koubek Tomáš	151	10	1	162
Ledecká Ester	149	10	2	161
Plíšková Karolína	119	24	7	150
Dostál Josef	77	56	0	133
Kvitová Petra	122	0	0	122
Voráček Jakub	99	21	0	120
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	62	38	0	100
Samková Eva	89	10	0	99
Krpálek Lukáš	71	9	0	80
Sáblíková Martina	78	2	0	80
Hejnová Zuzana	72	4	1	77
Krčmář Michal	46	6	0	52
Čech Petr	26	0	0	26
Vítková Veronika	16	1	0	17
Total	1681	307	20	2008

Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

When athletes did not achieve the results their fans expected, the fans were often positive and supportive on social media. Fans mainly reacted negatively to a perceived lack of concentration or effort that the athletes put into their performances. Such comments appeared under posts by Tomáš Koubek and Karolína Plíšková. In the case of Michal Krčmář, fans reacted negatively to controversial statements he made in the mass media and on his social media channels in the observation period.

Visitors to the official Facebook pages of most of the selected athletes, including Zuzana Hejnová, Petra Kvitová, Ester Ledecká, and Adam Ondra, viewed what they

⁸¹ Athletes are sorted according to the total number of posts (from highest to lowest).

perceived as overcommercialization of their posts mostly negatively. Hejnová replied to her critics, explaining what commercial collaboration means to her and what she intended to accomplish with her posts. The actual influence that the athletes' promotional posts had on their fans and followers purchasing behavior was not determined. However, the fans frequently participated in sponsors' contests offered on the official social media pages of some of the athletes, for example, those of Nausch-Sluková (2020) and Kozlovský (2020).

Josef Dostál, David Pastrňák, and Karolína Plíšková, said that they intentionally do not discuss politics on their official social media pages and accounts (Dostál, 2020; Hrdlička 2020; Pastrňák, in *Fight Club News*, 2020). On the other hand, Zuzana Hejnová and Jakub Voráček claimed that they will comment on current political affairs if they believe it is "necessary" (Hejnová, 2020; Voráček, in Pokorný, 2019). Negative reactions to posts in which they stated their political opinions were seen, but were not the majority of the comments.

The athletes and their managers claimed that they do not delete critical comments that do not contain vulgar expressions or extremely rude statements. The managers of the tennis players, Michal Hrdlička and Karel Tejkal, deleted abusive comments posted by unsuccessful bettors (Hrdlička, 2020; Tejkal, 2019). Additionally, Plíšková hid some reactions to her May 2019 posts three months after they were published.⁸²

⁸² See Chapter 3.6, Karolína Plíšková (p. 107).

Conclusion

This dissertation focuses on the communication of selected Czech professional athletes on social media, taking into account the commercialization of sport in this area. The goal of this work is to analyze the phenomenon both from the perspective of the athletes who are communicating on social media and from the perspective of the fans who receive messages of both a sports-related and a commercial character from them. The ambition of the dissertation is to document the athletes' social media communication in the Czech environment over the observation period. Because similar studies of athletes' social media use have been realized in other countries, this research helps to detect regional variations in communication by athletes and the commercialization of sport.

The dissertation addresses three main research questions and advances nine hypotheses, which were answered and tested using an explanatory sequential mixed method research design (Creswell, 2014). A comprehensive quantitative content analysis of selected Czech professional athletes' official Facebook pages in a one-year-long period was complemented with semi-structured interviews of the athletes or, if they were unavailable, of their PR or social media managers.

The first research question was: "How do Czech athletes use their official Facebook pages?" Three hypotheses (H1, H2, H3) were advanced under this research question. Two of them (H1, H3) were partially confirmed and one (H2) was not confirmed.

H1, that the intensity of communication activity by athletes on their official Facebook pages is greater during their sport's usual season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015), was partially confirmed.

As Figure 160 shows, the number of posts published on the official Facebook pages of the selected Czech professional athletes in their sports' seasons was almost three times higher than the number of posts they published off-season. On the other hand, four exceptions were identified: the Facebook pages of Josef Dostál, Zuzana Hejnová, Michal Krčmář, and Eva Samková had more posts in the athletes' off seasons.

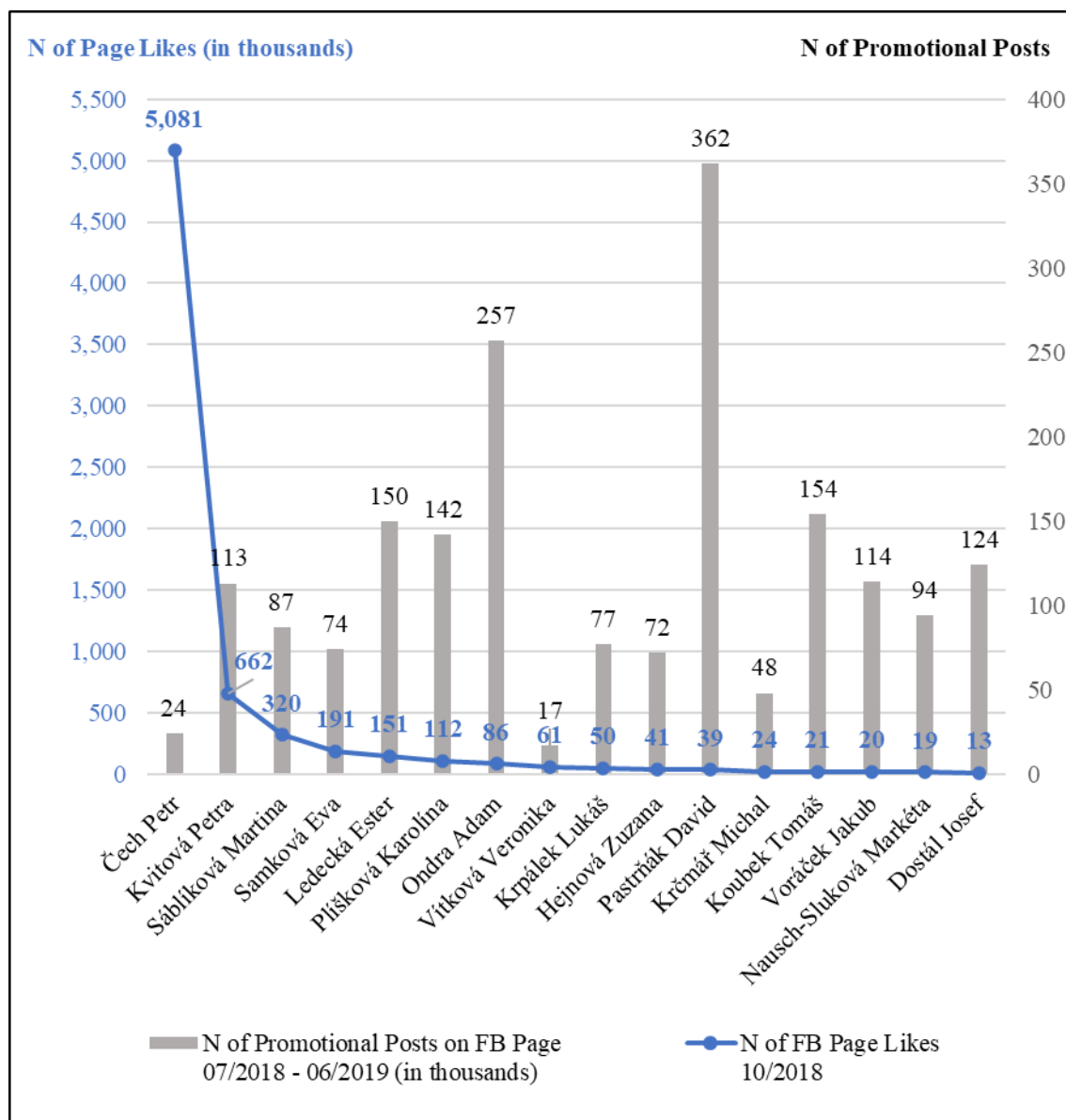
The relatively short off-season periods of some sports included in the research must be considered.⁸³

H2, that popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) use their official Facebook pages more intensively than do less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011), was not confirmed.

The content analysis as well as the semi-structured interviews showed that neither offline nor online popularity straightforwardly influences the intensity of athletes' social media communication. Petr Čech, the most famous and popular athlete in the sample, published the second-lowest number of posts on his official Facebook page among the selected athletes. This may have been because Čech announced during the observation period that 2019 would be the last year of his active sports career. Still, Martina Sáblíková's and Eva Samková's Facebook activity in the observation period did not confirm this hypothesis either. Moreover, Josef Dostál, who as an athlete is less popular than Petr Čech, published 133 posts in the observation period, more than four times as many as Čech. As shown in Figure 166, the hypothesis that athletes who are more popular communicate more intensely on their official Facebook pages was not confirmed in the observation period.

⁸³ See Chapter 3, Results (p. 66).

Figure 166: Comparison of Facebook Popularity (Measured by Number of Likes of Athletes' Official Facebook Pages in October 2018) and Intensity of Communication (Measured by Numbers of Posts Published on Athletes' Official Facebook Pages from July 2018 to June 2019)⁸⁴



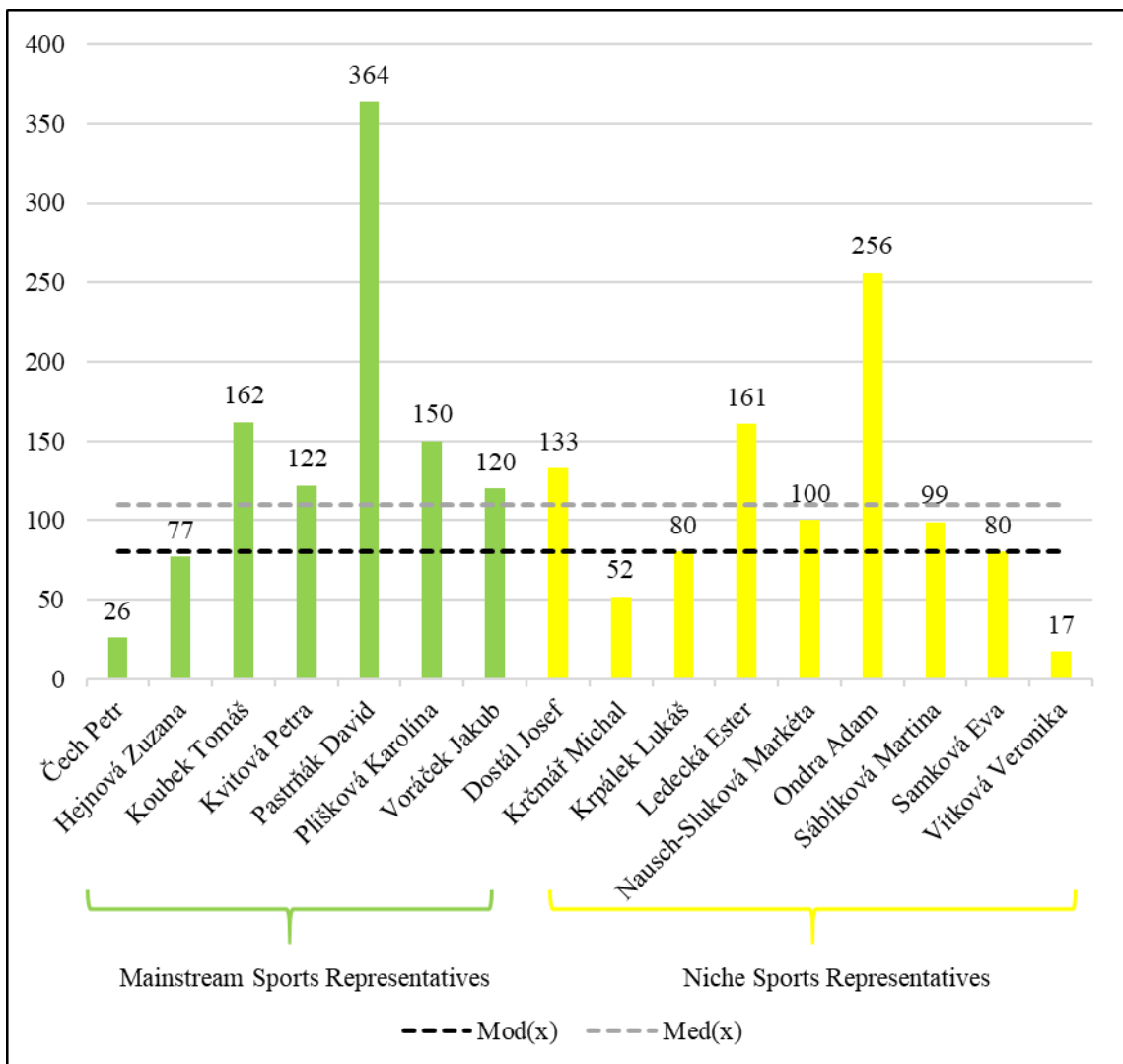
Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

H3, that the Facebook pages of athletes who participate in mainstream sports will contain a greater number of posts than those of athletes who participate in niche sports (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015), was partially confirmed.

⁸⁴ Athletes are sorted according to the average number of page likes (from highest to lowest).

Although the research sample contained fewer official Facebook pages published by athletes participating in mainstream sports (7) than it did of the representatives of niche sports (9), mainstream sports athletes published 34 more posts than did the niche sports athletes during the observation period. Five of the seven mainstream sports representatives had greater Facebook activity on their official Facebook pages than the median for the sample (110 posts per year), while posts by only three of the nine niche sport athletes exceeded the median value (see Figure 167).

Figure 167: Comparison of the Intensity of Communication (Measured by Numbers of Posts Published on Selected Czech Athletes' Official Facebook Pages from July 2018 to June 2019) of Athletes Participating in Mainstream and Niche Sports⁸⁵



Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

⁸⁵ Mainstream and niche sports representatives are sorted alphabetically (by their surnames, from A to Z).

Regardless of the significant differences in the number of the athletes' posts, the hypothesis was only partially confirmed because there were exceptions in the behavior of the athletes. Among the selected mainstream athletes, Petr Čech and Zuzana Hejnová had relatively low activity on their Facebook pages. This may be because they preferred to train and concentrate on their races and matches rather than “feed” their social media accounts (Hejnová, 2020; Pillár, 2019). On the other hand, Josef Dostál, Ester Ledecká and Adam Ondra published an above-average number of posts, despite the fact that they compete in niche sports disciplines. Moreover, Ondra posted 256 items during the observation period, which was the second-highest number of all the selected athletes.

The Czech professional athletes in the research sample were selected because they had at least a certain minimum of activity on their official Facebook page before the observation period began. Therefore, it is not surprising that all the athletes used their official Facebook pages at least to some extent during the observation period. All of them were personally involved in the process of creating their Facebook content, but the intensity of their personal involvement differed. Josef Dostál, Zuzana Hejnová, Michal Krčmář, Lukáš Krpálek, Markéta Nausch-Sluková, Eva Samková and Veronika Vítková administered their official Facebook pages on their own. They attended seminars aimed at techniques for using social media or consulted about their posts with PR managers and social media experts. The other athletes employed an agency or individual to manage and administer their social media accounts, although they retained the right to approve, modify or reject posts before they were released on their social media feeds.

Some of the athletes connected their official Facebook pages to their public Instagram pages, which allowed them to publish the same or similar posts on both platforms. Other athletes perceived differences between the two platforms in terms of how they should be used, their purpose, and their administration. Their content was originally produced, either for Facebook or Instagram.

The intensity of the communication and the selection of topics for posts on the athletes' official Facebook pages depended on many variables and factors. Generally, most of the athletes in the sample focused on sports-related topics, especially during their sports' seasons, and did not share details of their personal lives. However, in the category of diverse content, the athletes often showed their daily routines, free

time activities, hobbies and other interests in their posts. Their posts were most frequently accompanied by pictures. The use of other virtual and interactive items depended on each athlete's preferences.

The results of this research proved that the character of a sport as mainstream or niche, and whether the sport is perceived as an extreme sport or not, influences the style of athletes' communication on Facebook (cf. L'Etang, 2013; Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Pedersen et al., 2007). Snowboarder Eva Samková and snowboarder/skier Ester Ledecká published a relatively large number of diverse posts. Another niche sports representative, Adam Ondra, frequently presented fragments of his ordinary life in his sports-related posts, because rock climbing uniquely has a season that lasts the whole year round. Samková and Ondra, as well as members of their teams, occasionally replied to their fans' comments, which created an impression of openness to communication (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003).

Tennis players Petra Kvitová and Karolína Plíšková presented themselves on Facebook not only as professional athletes, but as attractive women, which their admirers appreciated in their comments. On the other hand, critical voices aimed at their appearance and attractiveness were sometimes raised on the Facebook pages of both tennis players.

Overall, the research proved that selected Czech professional athletes, or at least their managers and PR representatives, understand the importance of their social media presentation. Within the observation period, the intensity of the athletes' posting activity tended to be higher in the usual season of their sports. It was proven that the athletes' social media popularity did not directly influence the intensity of their posting activity.

The second research question was formulated: "How do Czech athletes use their official Facebook pages for promotional and commercial purposes?" Four hypotheses (H4, H5, H6, H7) were related to this research question. One of them (H7) was confirmed, two (H4, H6) were partially confirmed and one hypothesis (H5) was not confirmed.

H4, that the intensity of promotional activity on athletes' official Facebook pages is greater during their sport's usual season (cf. Geurin & Clavio, 2015), was partially confirmed.

Overall, the number of promotional posts published in the athletes' sports' usual seasons was almost three times greater than the number of their off-season posts (1,498 compared to 510). The difference mainly resulted from the absence of competition promotions out of season (see Figure 160). However, the official pages of four athletes participating in individual sports disciplines, Josef Dostál, Zuzana Hejnová, Michal Krčmář, and Eva Samková, contained more promotional content outside of their sports' seasons. Martina Sáblíková published an equal number of promotional posts in both periods. These results contrasted with the findings of Geurin and Clavio (2015) and with "PR logic." Promotional posts published during the season normally gain more attention because people follow the athletes' pages in the season more intensely in the off season. Therefore, commercial partners should be more interested in being promoted by athletes during the season and put pressure on athletes to promote their brands at that time. Two athletes gave the following reasons for their unusual behavior: they have more time in the off season and they must put greater effort into attracting fans' and media attention at that time (Hejnová, 2020; Samková, 2020).

H5, that popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) post more promotional content because they have the ability to gain more sponsors and earn more money than less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011), was not confirmed.

Social media popularity, as measured by the number of likes and followers an athlete's social media page attracted, did not affect the number of promotional posts the athletes published in the observation period. Moreover, Petr Čech, the most popular Czech athlete on Facebook, published the second-smallest number of posts categorized as promotional. The opposite was not true either. The most active athletes in terms of promotional Facebook posts, David Pastrňák and Adam Ondra, ranked in the lower third in terms of their popularity on Facebook (see Figure 156). Regarding the athletes' ability to gain sponsors, the results of the research are in line with studies already undertaken, which found that both popularity and attractiveness, as well as an athlete's personality, affect the intensity of his or her promotional activity (cf. Blaszká et al., 2017; Mutz & Meier, 2016; Wenner, 1998). In our sample, Josef Dostál and Eva Samková, who speak freely in interviews and have cultivated a public image as honest young athletes, have greater ability to gain sponsors than an introvert like Veronika Vítková (cf. Pillár, 2019). However, according to Tejkal, an athletes' sporting success

is at least as important as popularity, attractiveness, and personality in that regard (Tejkal, 2019).

H6, that male athletes mainly focus on endorsing sports-related products, whereas female athletes promote a wider range of brands (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012) was partially confirmed.

On average, the female athletes in the sample promoted a wider range of brands than their male counterparts. Female athletes tend to be more interested in fashion, accessories, and cosmetics, which motivates them to accept sponsorship offers from manufacturers and service providers in those areas. Furthermore, increasing gender equality results in women entering what are traditionally “male” spheres of interest, such as automobiles and sports betting. Hypothesis H6 was not fully confirmed, however. The industries that were traditionally considered as “female,” e.g. cosmetics, were also promoted by one male athlete. Canoeist Josef Dostál promoted Oriflame’s male cosmetics and the company’s new product line of foods and nutritional supplements on his official social media pages. Adam Ondra collaborated intensively with many companies outside the sports industry. His corporate sponsors were in the banking and beverage industries. Ondra also had the second-largest number of mentions of private entities on his official Facebook page (see Figure 162). These findings indicate that there is a shift in the minds of sponsors and partners away from the old gender-based approach to sponsorship evidenced by previous research (cf. Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Tamir et al., 2015).

H7, that the official Facebook pages of athletes participating in extreme sports tend to have a more promotional character than the pages of other athletes, was confirmed.

The character of the Facebook posts of the extreme sports representatives included in the research sample, Ester Ledecká, Adam Ondra, and Eva Samková, was highly promotional. Ledecká and Ondra posted an above-average amount of promotional content. The ratio of the number of their posts with promotional content to those with non-promotional content was relatively high (see Figure 159). Only four of the 99 posts Samková published on her official Facebook page in the observation period contained no promotional items at all. Ondra had signed contracts for promoting paid partnerships on his social media, which was unusual for a Czech professional

athlete in the observation period.⁸⁶ The research showed that the successful extreme sports athletes in the sample did not suffer from a lack of interest on the part of sponsors. On the other hand, the fans of the extreme sport athletes recognized promotional content when they saw it. They occasionally criticized Ledecká, Samková and Ondra for overcommercializing their social media pages.

All of the selected athletes used their official Facebook pages for promotional and commercial purposes, although the intensity and type of promotion differed. A relatively larger number of posts were dedicated to self-promotion, competition announcements, and product promotion compared to the other categories of promotion. The athletes dedicated some posts to charities, for both team and individual initiatives. Only a minor part of the promotional items the athletes published contained promotions of family members' and friends' products (see Figure 159).

The athletes published more promotional posts during their sport's usual season. Self-promoting posts and competition announcements were commonly found on the athletes' Facebook pages in those periods. Contrarily, product promotion appeared more often in the off season, when the need to post competition announcements and reports understandably decreased.

Differences between male and female athletes in their social media promotional activity was confirmed. Male athletes were more sports-oriented in their choice of brands, while female athletes promoted a wider range of brands from various industries. The Facebook pages of the extreme sports representatives contained more promotional content than the pages of the other athletes in the sample.

The ability to gain sponsors depended more on the athlete's personal characteristics than on his or her popularity or sporting results. The athletes and their managers stated that sponsors and partners want to see originality and authenticity in posts, and great sporting results alone are not enough to satisfy them (cf. Dostál, 2020; Nausch-Sluková, 2020; Pillár, 2019; Tejkal, 2019). Commercial collaboration took various forms, from barter to cash financial support, and came from a broad range of industries, including automobile companies, the banking sector, food and beverages, cosmetics, and clothing brands.

⁸⁶ See Chapter 3, Results (p. 66).

Commercial collaboration on the pages of the selected Czech professional athletes was not always clearly disclosed. The reasons for that were the athletes' insufficient knowledge of the relevant legislation and codes of ethics, if not an intentional circumvention of the rules. Athletes and managers declared that they comply with requests and instructions they received from their sponsors and partners. Only a minority of them formed paid partnerships with advertisers in the observation period.

The third research question posed was, "How do visitors to the official Facebook pages of selected athletes react to the content posted on those pages?" The hypotheses (H8 and H9) related to this research were partially confirmed.

H8, that the audience (fans and followers) reacts more intensively to posts published on the official Facebook pages of popular athletes (i.e., sports celebrities) than those of less popular athletes (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Witkemper et al., 2012), was partially confirmed.

Fans and visitors to the official Facebook pages of the selected athletes reacted to the content posted from July 2018 to June 2019 in many ways and with varying intensity (see Figure 168).

Figure 168: Popularity of Czech Professional Athletes on their Official Facebook Pages as of 10/2018 and Average Number of Post Likes, Comments and Shares from July 2018 to June 2019⁸⁷

Athlete's Name	N of Page Likes 10/2018	Avg. N of Post Likes	Avg. N of Post Comments	Avg. N of Post Shares
Čech Petr	5,080,504	18,533	598	465
Kvitová Petra	661,613	3,803	189	68
Sáblíková Martina	319,602	3,683	142	143
Samková Eva	191,108	644	9	9
Ledecká Ester	151,019	1,605	37	31
Plíšková Karolína	111,612	1,282	52	22
Ondra Adam	85,757	494	17	24
Vítková Veronika	61,256	818	35	10
Krpálek Lukáš	49,868	1,250	27	30
Hejnová Zuzana	40,844	309	16	4
Pastrňák David	39,050	561	14	18
Krčmář Michal	24,337	631	17	9
Koubek Tomáš	20,747	918	36	26
Voráček Jakub	20,136	716	45	32
Nausch-Sluková Markéta	18,765	143	3	2
Dostál Josef	12,949	250	6	5

Source: Official Facebook Pages of Selected Athletes, 2018 – 2019; Author's own work

The most common way in which visitors reacted to posts was “likes,” which can be both positive and negative (see Figure 5). Markéta Nausch-Sluková received the smallest average number of likes of her posts (143) of all the selected athletes. Josef Dostál received the second-smallest number (250). The largest average number of likes in the sample went to posts by Petr Čech (18,533), Petra Kvitová (3,803) and Martina Sáblíková (3,683). The most comments under posts on average went to Čech (598), Kvitová (189 comments) and Sáblíková (149), while the least commented-upon posts on average were published by Nausch-Sluková (3) and Dostál (6). The situation with the average number of shares was similar. The most shared posts were released by Čech (465), and posts on Sáblíková's page were shared more times on average than were Kvitová's (143 versus 68 shares per post). The least-shared posts were on the official Facebook page of Markéta Nausch-Sluková (two shares of each post on average), followed by Zuzana Hejnová's and Josef Dostál's pages (four and five shares of each post on average, respectively). As shown in Figure 168, these

⁸⁷ Athletes are sorted according to the number of page likes (from highest to lowest).

measurements of the intensity of fans' and followers' reactions (average likes, shares, and comments) do not strictly correlate with the popularity of athletes' official Facebook page. On the other hand, the correlation is observable in the cases of the most and least popular athletes in the sample. Therefore, hypothesis H8 was partially confirmed.

H9, that negative reactions on the official Facebook pages of sportsmen are most often aimed at poor sports performance and results, whereas sportswomen are criticized more for their appearance or for personal reasons (cf. Lumsden & Morgan, 2012; Toffoletti, 2017), was partially confirmed.

Negative reactions and criticism characterized the minority of reactions to the selected athletes' official Facebook pages in observation period. If criticism of male athletes appeared, it was predominantly aimed at their perceived poor sports performance. The negative reactions aimed at female athletes in the sample mentioned their inadequate sports performance, their appearance, or their personal life and relationships (e.g., Plíšková, Samková). The type of criticism of female and male sports representatives found on their official Facebook pages differed, but hypothesis H9 cannot be fully confirmed. For example, Jakub Voráček also obtained negative fans' feedback about his appearance and personal opinions, and Tomáš Koubek was occasionally criticized for the openness of his communication on social media by some of his followers.

In conclusion, this research proved that selected Czech professional athletes used their official Facebook pages in the observation period mainly for their own self-presentation and for commercial and promotional purposes. In the dissertation, the hypotheses based on the previous findings of the foreign academic studies were verified, and three research questions were answered. One hypothesis (H7) was confirmed, six hypotheses (H1, H3, H4, H6, H8, H9) were partially confirmed, and two hypotheses (H2, H5) were not confirmed, which indicates that overall, the Czech professional athletes' social media usage differed from that of the athletes from the other countries, as described in studies conducted by Geurin and Clavio (2015), Hambrick and Mahoney (2011), and Pegoraro (2010).

Regarding the overall scope of the project, the author concedes that the results of this study are partially limited. The first limitation was the relatively small sample

of the athletes' pages that were examined. As proven by the research, each athlete communicated in a unique way. Thus, the results have to be interpreted with regard to context. Additionally, the research sample does not include every Olympic sport, and each chosen sports discipline is represented by only one or two athletes. For the validation and further generalization of results, it would be necessary to include more athletes from various sports disciplines in the sample.

Secondly, the selected athletes' social media communication was observed in a certain period of time. Because it began three months after the end of 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics, the observation period did not include any Olympic Games. It would be interesting to compare the results of the conducted research with the athletes' communications after the Summer Olympics or during the Olympic Games. An extension of the observation period would also help to validate the conclusions.

Another limitation lay in the second phase of the research. Unfortunately, not every athlete or manager agreed to be interviewed. In a few cases, the author had to rely on a review of publicly available sources. The willingness and availability of possible respondents for face-to-face interviews has noticeably decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Due to that, the author preferred to conduct the interviews using every possible way to gain information over the methodological clearness. Although the author still affirms her decision to be the correct one in this course of action, it could be beneficial to interview all the athletes and their managers face-to-face, when possible.

Finally, the reference social media of the research was Facebook. Selected athletes' communication on the other social media was also examined, but not to the same extent. Because social media communication is a complex process, it would be beneficial to explore this phenomenon also on other social media, such as Instagram or TikTok, which popularity have risen since the time when the research was realized.

However, despite its limitations this research confirmed that Czech professional athletes' motivations for using social media were individual. The way social media was used and administered differed from one athlete to another. The interviewed managers and athletes interviewed sometimes found the fans' reactions and negative voices problematic. Another problematic issue was the insufficient disclosure of commercial collaboration.

Despite those problems, a presence on social media is a big opportunity for Czech professional athletes, which they can use to increase their visibility in the public eye as well as to present their ideas, opinions and thoughts in the way they prefer. The question for the next generation of Czech athletes is not whether they should present themselves on social media but how they should use it to achieve their desired goals — and which social networks are appropriate for that. The communication with fans is also a topic for discussion, as well as the implication for further research.

Summary

This dissertation aimed to explore the communication of Czech athletes via social media, with a focus on the commercialization of sport in this area. The purpose of the research was to analyze the use of social media by athletes who communicate with their fans and followers through social networking sites. It was also intended to analyze the perspective of their fans, who receive messages from the athletes' of both a sports-related and commercial nature. Although studies focused on these phenomena have been conducted in other countries, there has not yet been a similar, complex study in the Czech Republic. Athletes' communications via social networks, and their potential in the context of sports communication as a whole, is a topic of current interest. Exploring the topic is beneficial and expands the body of knowledge about the phenomenon. This research also helps to detect regional differences in sports communication and the commercialization of sport on social media.

The dissertation focused on how selected Czech professional athletes used their official Facebook pages. It also deals with the fans' and visitors' reactions to the content posted on these pages (cf. Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011). The research consisted of two parts; a content analysis of selected athletes' Facebook pages and an analysis of interviews. The data we developed from the content analysis was encoded over the course of one year in order to preclude the possibility of distortion of the results due to seasonality. For the second part of the study, interviews were conducted with athletes or their representatives and the information gained from those interviews was analyzed. Both parts of the research were complementary and expanded the reach of the study.

The conducted research proved that the selected Czech professional athletes used their official Facebook pages in the observation period for their own self-presentation and for commercial and promotional purposes. To conclude, the Czech professional athletes' social media usage differed from that of the athletes from other countries as previously described by Geurin and Clavio (2015), Hambrick and Mahoney (2011), and Pegoraro (2010). However, the results were limited by the relatively small sample of the athletes' pages we examined. An extension of the observation period would help to validate the conclusions.

Czech professional athletes' motivations for using social media were individual and the way social media was used and administered differed from one athlete to another. The managers and athletes we interviewed sometimes found the fans'

reactions and negative voices problematic. Another problematic topic was the insufficient disclosure of commercial collaboration.

Despite those problems, a presence on social media is a big opportunity for Czech professional athletes, which they can use to increase their visibility in the public eye as well as to present their ideas, opinions and thoughts in the way they prefer. The question for the next generation of Czech athletes is not whether they should present themselves on social media but how they should use it to achieve their desired goals — and which social media are appropriate for that.

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