

## **IMPACTS OF WORLD FAMOUS FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN SPORT INDUSTRY THROUGH INFLUENCER MARKETING**

**Tekmil Sezen GÖKSU**

Istanbul Gelişim University, Occupational School, Department of Sports Management  
tsgoksu@gelisim.edu.tr

ORCID : 0000-0002-5764-2106

### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to examine the introduction of products or services by brands through famous athletes; especially the famous football players whose followers increase day by day in the individual Instagram accounts, sharing the promotions of the brands, increasing their likes and comments. These people have a loyal follower group, and this group benefits from the influencer's experience, trusts, believes and adopts what they share. In our study, we have evaluated the football players as the examination group, who have millions of followers and their act as an intermediate to promote brands through the promotional pictures, likes, comments and followers in the Instagram accounts. The limitations of the research is the numerical values obtained from the Instagram accounts of ten football players since June 5, 2018 with more than a million followers. The study was conducted as a qualitative research and it was supported by written documents (information data browsing) and the case study method.

As a result, it has been determined that football players with numerous Instagram followers usually advertise sports brands, and they receive comments and likes through those. The examinations conducted on ten football players who are famous with millions of followers, it has been determined that promotions of sports clothing brands such as Adidas, Nike and Puma have been more frequent and liked more. It has been seen that the private accounts of the athletes become a marketing portal, and it spread rapidly in the social platforms.

**Keywords**  
Football,  
Social Media,  
Marketing,  
Influence

### **1. MARKETING IN SPORT INDUSTRY**

Sport industry is defined as the market that provides consumers activities such as sports, fitness, reaction, leisure time and related products, services, people, places and ideas (Argan and Katircı 2008).

Sport emerges as a phenomenon with increasing impact on human life in today's consumer societies. Considering from an individual perspective, it is known that it provides the development of the physical abilities and mental capabilities of individuals and, on the social side, strengthens the social ties of people. However, the benefits of sports should not be evaluated only by the health of the people. When considered with a perspective of economic gain and employment, with sports facilities and the sports companies that manufacture sporting goods, together with tourism and professional clubs; sports has become an industrial branch (Güneş 2010).

Increasing competition and preferred marketing concept with sport in general and commercialization of football in particular have combined with sports phenomenon. The complexity of the demands and needs of sports consumers, increase of expenditures by spectators and participants have increased the competition within sport economy and demand for marketing of professional sports (Parkhouse 2001).

Due to the diversity of marketing of sports organizations, events and products by customer services, increase in consumer requirements and competition in this area, sports marketing appears as a new study area, that already increases in general marketing (İnan, 2007).

The progress of technology and changes in customer demands have brought various changes in marketing. In addition, the expectations of each generation from the brand or the company are also different (Varnali, 2013). Brands especially benefit from athletes with a high level of population, as the development of implementations in the field of marketing increase which is monitored by a huge group of consumers.

### **1.1 Social Media and Instagram**

Social media is a broad term that refers to web-based pages, blogs, forums, picture, audio records, videos, links, profile pages on social networks, and more. It is possible to define social media as websites based on Web 2.0 technologies that enable deeper social interaction, community formation and collaborative projects. While Web 2.0 is defined by emphasizing its technological dimension, social media is defined by emphasizing its social dimension and usage (Akar, 2010: 17). Web-based services that allow users to create open profiles with set boundaries for people in the system, provide information about other network users with whom they can connect, and view and see the listed links of other users in the system are called as Social Networks (Celik, 2015).

In these circumstances, where the geographical boundaries have completely disappeared, interaction occurs as the individual who shares the information can receive feedback in the form of comment or content sharing. A photo, video or word shared by an individual can be spread in a very short period of time and at the same time the content is being reshaped by every user sharing it (Uraltaş and Bahadırılı, 2012: 36-37).

The use of social media tools, which become more important every day, is also a necessity for enterprises to reach the target audience. Traditional media communication channels are not needed to reach the target consumer audience as they were needed before. Businesses reach their target audience through websites, blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, YouTube, and Instagram (Reinders and Freijssen, 2012).

Instagram, which allows users to take photos and short videos, apply digital filters and share them with friends, also allows private conversations between users through the messaging feature called Direct. There are thousands of social network websites that can appeal to people of all ages and interests from all sections of society.

Thanks to social media platforms, sports clubs and sports fans have the opportunity to communicate quickly and interactively. Both clubs and supporters share about the clubs or athletes and the interaction is ensured. Supporters can easily communicate their wishes and criticisms, and clubs can develop products and services regarding such wishes and criticisms, taking into account the sharing of club supporters (Hambrick and Kang, 2014: 4).

### **1.2 Concept of Influencer Marketing**

Currently, the persons with an influence in social media, and those who became famous through social media are called as phenomenon. As the phenomenons who are being followed in social media have an increasing number of followers, and as their sharing can be viewed instantly through mobile devices; new methods are generated for advertisement and establishing brand attitude. The brands that remain distant from this channel have lagged and their progress to be accepted by young individuals is more challenging (Yaylagül 2017).

In the article published by Köletavitoğlu (2017) on Influencer Marketing author says: "The reflection of word of mouth marketing, which is considered as one of the most influential aspects of marketing world due to close relations with followers based on confidence, brings together the social media phenomena (Influencers) and brands in a new and dynamic business model."

Leaders of digital world and Influencers have the power to change behavior and reprogram the thoughts of target audience just like opinion leaders do. In the Influencer marketing strategy, the power of Internet authorities is used in order to ensure that the target audience realizes the required consumption behavior. Influencer marketing gains its power from 3 sources:

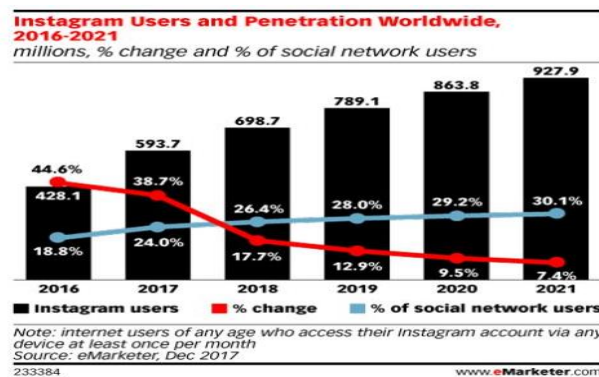
1. **Social access:** Influencers can reach millions of people by using social media applications. Athletes use their official social media accounts.
2. **Original content:** Influencers produce unique, compelling, and marketing-focused niche content. Athletes reflect the information on their life styles and how they spend their day through their account content and sharing.
3. **Consumer Confidence:** Influencers build strong relationships with followers and audience; followers rely on Influencers' opinions. Athletes are followed with interest due to their success, life styles and preferences. For this reason, when they use and promote a brand, this reflects the feeling of confidence on the audience. <https://creatorden.com/influencer-marketing-nedir/> Access Date: 07.04.2018).

The formation of a stable loyalty depends on the consumer's bond to the influencer, his trust, and the level of loyalty as a follower. Athletes need to identify the prototype of their target audience, and segment it as a result of their research and sampling. For this reason, it is necessary to find the influencer who will also represent the brand in a speculative way. Influencer should be able to represent the desired Persona of the brand in a natural and passionate way; and such an example will increase the interaction of brand with the target audience and a loyal customer group will be generated. Ensuring that the athletes could carry the brand in a way to characterize it, to build confidence among their followers and to impact their followers in order to make the right choice will help the followers to become loyal customers. Influencer marketing brings more media reflections and interactivity when compared with gifts, drawings and other marketing strategies. <https://socialfamo.us/influencer-marketing-nedir-101-neden/> Access Date: 16.05.2018

### 1.3 Influencer Athletes and their Instagram Accounts

The research company E-Marketer, which offers trends and insights about digital marketing, media and trade, has published a report on the use of social media. According to the report, in 2017, 2.48 billion people, or 1 in 3 people, used a social network worldwide. The use of social networks in developing markets such as Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa has increased by 8.7 % in 2016.

**Table 1.** 2016-2021 Instagram usage Prediction

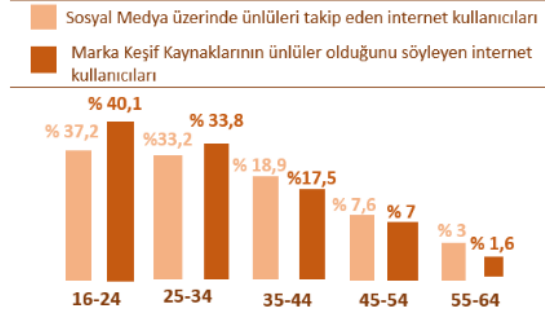


<https://www.emarketer.com/search1/?query=instagram&hitsPerPage=10> Access Date: 13.04.2018.

According to the report, around 594 million people worldwide had regular access to Instagram in 2017. This represents approximately one quarter (24.0%) of total social network users. E-Marketer predicts that the number Instagram users is estimated to become 699 million in 2018 and 928 million in 2021. In other words, it is predicted that Instagram users will constitute 26.4 % of total social network users in 2018, and this will become 30 % in 2021. <http://www.connectedvivaki.com/emarketer-sosyal-ag-kullanici-sayilari-tahminleri/> Access Date: 13.04.2018.

**Table 2.** Impact of Influencers on Consumers through Social Media

### Ünlülerin Etkisi Tüketiciler Üzerinde Nasıl Değişiyor?



Source: Global Web Index, 2017

<http://www.connectedvivaki.com/emarketer-sosyal-ag-kullanici-sayilari-tahminleri/> Access Date: 13.04.2018.

It is seen that social media users are influenced by the opinions of the famous people (Influencers) in order to benefit from the products and services.

**Table3:** World Famous and Influencer Football Players

ATHLETE	BRAND	SECTOR	FOLLOWER	LIKE	COMMENT
Cristiano Ronaldo	Clear	Cosmetics	128 million	4,910,664	58,264
Neymarjr	Pilao Cafe	Drink	94 million	1,129,905	20,656
Lionel Messi	Adidas	Sportswear	92.2 million	4,342,263	26,855
David Beckham	Adidas	Sportswear	46.1 million	827, 532	2,215
Gareth Bale	Altitude mask	Sports Equipment	34.3 million	1,609,943	1899
Luis Suarez	Adidas	Sportswear	27.6 million	705,638	2082
Antoine Griezmann	Puma	Sportswear	16.6 million	818,183	4872
Mohamed Salah	New Balance	Sportswear	15.8 million	1,150,137	4292
Eden Hazard	Nike	Sportswear	13.1 million	574,399	1931
Robert Lewandowski	Oshee	Energy Drink	13 million	363,570	979

The names of the world famous and Influencer football players, number of their Instagram followers, brands that make product promotions from their accounts and the sectors they are involved in, the likes and comments for shared products are included.

When we order the number of followers of Instagram accounts of football players with brand, sector, like and comment numbers; we see that Cristiano Ronaldo has 127 million followers and his share of Clear, which is a cosmetic brand was liked by 4.910.664 persons and received 58.264 comments. Neymarjr has 93.8 million followers and his share of Pilao Cafe, which is a drink brand was liked by 1.129.905 persons and received 20.656 comments. Lionel Messi has 92.2 million followers and his share of Adidas, which is a sportswear brand was liked by 4.342.263 persons and received 26.855 comments. David Beckham has 46.1 million followers and his share of Adidas, which is a sportswear brand was

liked by 827.532 persons and received 2.215 comments. Gareth Bale has 34.3 million followers and his share of Altitudemask, which is a sports equipment brand was liked by 1.609.943 persons and received 1899 comments. Luis Suarez has 27.6 million followers and his share of Adidas, which is a sportswear brand was liked by 705.638 persons and received 2082 comments.

Antoine Griezman has 16.6 million followers and his share of Puma, which is a sportswear brand was liked by 818.183 persons and received 4.872 comments. Mohamed Salah has 15.8 million followers and his share of New Balance, which is a sportswear brand was liked by 1.150.137 persons and received 4.292 comments. Eden Hazard has 13.1 million followers and his share of Nike, which is a sportswear brand was liked by 574.399 persons and received 1.931 comments. Robert Lewandowski has 13 million followers and his share of Oshee, which is an energy drink brand was liked by 363.570 persons and received 979 comments.

## CONCLUSION

Sports-oriented communication which transmits the messages through sports continues to be a type of communication that increases on a daily basis and encompasses the largest segment of the advertising. It is possible to say that it is necessary to use the mix and methods of marketing communication in order to establish links between brands' products and services, sports and followers.

The dynamics of industrial transformation in today's football lead the clubs to re-structure themselves in a more corporate manner, to determine new marketing strategies and to work on relationship management. Football industry has used the production factors of the game and turned into a major industrial product generation and marketing economy all around the world with the help of mass communication and technological tools (Akşar and Merih, 2006).

The perception of the football within the sector at a global level has necessitated the companies to establish certain strategic plans in order to increase their reputation considering the advertisement and market value. The increase in the frequency of use of mobile phones and social media accounts without any criteria of age and technology has ensured to enable the plans to make promotions through individuals with high levels of popularity.

In the study, influencer marketing was examined and it was concluded that there are brands that introduce and promote their products and services through the use of social media accounts of famous persons. In football, the accounts of famous athletes with millions of Instagram followers are examined. It was seen that companies that manufacture sportswear and equipment have made promotions by using the accounts of football players, and drink and cosmetics brands were also among those. The number of likes and comments received by brands that have made advertisements through the accounts of football players are examined. The promotion intended sharing made through Instagram accounts, which is a commonly used social media account type, have visual characteristics and it was also seen that they enable an interactive promotional environment by providing the ability to like and comment by followers.

When we order the number of followers of famous football players; it was seen as follows: Cristiano Ronaldo (127 million), Neymarjr (93.8 million), Lionel Messi (92.2 million), David Beckham (46.1 million), Gareth Bale (34.3 million), Luis Suarez (27.6 million), Antoine Griezmann (16.6 million), Mohamed Salah (15.8 million), Eden Hazard (13.1 million) and Robert Lewandowski (13 million). It is seen that the companies that sell sportswear and equipment have the most likes in the promotions made by athletes. Consumers visit the profiles of famous persons in order to obtain information about the products they wish to purchase and about which they have no knowledge of. They can use their accounts with such sharing in order to attract the existing followers or potential followers and the accounts are kept more exuberant. It is predicted that any future promotion attempts in different sectors for the future might be of great benefit for companies.



**REFERENCES**

- Akar, E. (2010). "Sanal Toplulukların Bir Türü Olarak Sosyalağ Siteleri, Bir Pazarlama İletişimi Kanalı Olarak İşleyişi", Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 10 (1), 107-122
- Akşar, T. & Merih, K. (2006). Futbol Ekonomisi. 1'inci baskı, Literatür Yayıncılık, İstanbul
- Argan, M. & Katırcı, H. (2008). Spor Pazarlaması, Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, Ankara.
- Çelik C. (2015). "Sosyal Medya Üzerinden Yayılan Viral Reklamlarda Mizah Türleri Ve Argo Kullanımı", Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul.
- Güneş, İ. (2010). Futbol Ekonomisi, 1 bs, Karahan Kitapevi, Adana
- Hambrick, M. E. & Kang, S. J. (2014). "Pin It: Exploring How Professional Sports Organizations Use Pinterest as a Communications and Relationship Marketing Tool", Communication & Sport, (7), 1-24
- İnan T. (2007). "Türkiye'deki Futbol Kulüplerinin Gişe Gelirlerini Arttırmaya Yönelik Uygulamalarının İncelenmesi." Çukurova Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, Adana.
- Köletavitoğlu, R. (2017). "Influencer'lar ve Markaları Bir Araya Getiren Pazar Yeri", Fortune Türkiye Dergisinin İnternet Sayfası, 30 Kasım 2017 tarihi saat 03:37'de <http://www.fortuneturkey.com/influencerlar-ve-markalari-bir-araya-getiren-pazaryeri-43379>
- Parkhouse, BL. (2001). The Management of Sport, Pennsylvania, Mc Graw Hill, Third Edition.
- Reinders, A. & Freijssen, M. (2012). The e-Factor: Entrepreneurship in the Social Media Age. BenBella Books, Dallas, USA
- Sepetci N. (2017). "Sosyal Medyada Mahremiyet Algısının Çöküşü: Instagram Örneği", Marmara Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İSTANBUL
- Uraltaş, N. T. & Bahadırılı, S. (2012). "Elektronik Perakendecilik ve Bir reklam Mecrası Olarak Sosyal Ağ Siteleri", Tolga Kara ve Ebru Özgen (Editörler), Sosyal Medya/Akademi, Beta Basım, İstanbul , 21-56.
- Varnalı K. (2013). "Strategy, Adoption, and Competitive Advantage of Mobile Services in the Global Economy", Chapter, 14, Mobile Social Networks: Communication and Marketing Perspectives, Western Illinois University, USA., p. 248 -258. 2013
- Yaylagül Ş. (2017). "Sosyal Medya Fenomenlerine Bağlanmışlığın Belirlenmesi: Yükseköğretim Öğrencileri Üzerine Bir Uygulama", Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 4 (3), 219-235.
- <https://creatorden.com/influencer-marketing-nedir/> Access Date: 07.04.2018).
- <https://creatorden.com/influencer-marketing-nedir/> Access Date: 16.05.2018
- <http://www.connectedvivaki.com/emarketer-sosyal-ag-kullanici-sayilari-tahminleri/> Access Date: 13.04.2018.
- <https://www.emarketer.com/search1/?query=instagram&hitsPerPage=10> Access Date: 13.04.2018.
- <https://www.instagram.com/cristiano/?hl=tr> Access Date: 05.06.2018
- <https://www.instagram.com/davidbeckham/?hl=tr> Access Date: 05.06.2018
- <https://www.instagram.com/leomessi/?hl=tr> Access Date: 05.06.2018
- <https://www.instagram.com/neymarjr/?hl=tr> Access Date: 05.06.2018
- <https://www.instagram.com/garethbale11/?hl=tr> Access Date: 05.06.2018
- <https://www.instagram.com/antogriezmann/?hl=tr> Access Date: 05.06.2018
- [https://www.instagram.com/hazardeden\\_10/?hl=tr](https://www.instagram.com/hazardeden_10/?hl=tr) Access Date: 05.06.2018

<https://www.instagram.com/mosalah/?hl=tr> Access Date: 05.06.2018

[https://www.instagram.com/\\_rl9/?hl=tr](https://www.instagram.com/_rl9/?hl=tr) Access Date: 05.06.2018