

Leveraging Social Media to Foster Brand Engagement with Sports Female Consumers

Teodora DOMINTEANU*

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

**Corresponding author, teodora.dominteanu@defs.ase.ro*

Liviu Marian MATAC

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

liviu.matac@cig.ase.ro

Adrian IACOBINI

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

adrian.iacobini@defs.ase.ro

Abstract. *The rapid pace of technological advancements and evolving consumer dynamics has necessitated brands to innovate their communication strategies. In this context, sports has emerged as a potent platform for engaging female consumers, a demographic that is frequently underrepresented in traditional sports marketing. The extant literature underscores the increasing utilization of social media and digital tools by brands to foster personalized, authentic connections with consumers; however, few studies have focused specifically on female sports enthusiasts. This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine how brands utilize storytelling, digital engagement, and influencer collaborations to resonate with female audiences. This study is guided by research questions that explore the efficacy of social media strategies in fostering trust, loyalty, and advocacy among female sports consumers. Data from social media campaigns and consumer interactions were analyzed to identify key tactics, such as competitions, shared celebrations, and inclusivity-driven messaging. The results reveal that themes of identity and community building are central to creating emotional connections and shared values between brands and female sports fans. This study highlights how brands can leverage social media and storytelling to connect with female sports consumers and foster engagement, loyalty, and advocacy. Emphasizing inclusivity, emotional resonance, and community building, this study offers a roadmap for marketers to adopt strategies in a transformative digital landscape, strengthening relationships with this influential demographic.*

Keywords: Female Sports Consumers, Social Media Strategies, Brand Engagement, Sports Marketing, Digital Marketing.

Introduction

The sports industry, traditionally male-dominated, is increasingly engaging with female consumers, highlighting the need for inclusive consumer-centric marketing. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have revolutionized brand communication, enabling real-time engagement, personalized storytelling, and participatory campaigns. For female sports consumers, these platforms provide vital opportunities for representation, inclusivity, and community building. As technological advancements reshape consumer dynamics, innovative communication strategies are essential for brands to maintain relevance and foster meaningful connections with diverse audience segments.

Despite these opportunities, the sports industry has lagged in effectively leveraging these tools compared to other sectors, such as fashion and entertainment. As Loureiro et al. (2019)

illustrate, fast fashion brands outpace traditional sports brands in their use of social media, employing tactics such as frequent content updates, interactive visuals, and celebrity endorsements to create emotional connections with their audiences.

Toffoletti and Palmer (2016) emphasize the critical role of cultural and social inclusivity in marketing, highlighting the potential of addressing the unique experiences of diverse groups, such as Muslim women, as consumers and fans. Despite the acknowledged influence of female sports consumers, brands inconsistently leverage strategies such as visual storytelling and interactive content, leaving significant market potential untapped.

The absence of a cohesive, inclusive approach to engaging female sports consumers also reflects a broader issue within the industry: reliance on outdated marketing paradigms that prioritize male-centric narratives and overlook the emotional and social dimensions of sports fandom among women. As demonstrated in Akoglu and Özbek (2021), fostering emotional connections through perceived quality and brand trust is pivotal in building long-term loyalty, particularly among younger tech-savvy demographics.

Research questions and hypotheses

This study addresses these gaps by examining how brands can effectively leverage social media strategies to engage female sports consumers.

Guided by three primary ***research questions***, this study explores the following:

1. How do social media strategies foster trust, loyalty, and advocacy among female sports consumers?
2. What are the key elements of social media campaigns that resonate most with female sports enthusiasts?
3. How does storytelling and inclusivity-driven messaging influence the engagement of female audiences with sports brands?

To answer these questions, this study formulated the following ***hypotheses***:

H1: Social media strategies that incorporate emotional storytelling significantly enhance trust among female sports consumers.

H2: Inclusive and participatory content fosters higher levels of loyalty among female sports enthusiasts than generic marketing approaches do.

H3: Co-creative and community-driven campaigns lead to greater advocacy for brands among female audiences.

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine social media campaigns targeting female sports consumers, emphasizing storytelling, influencer collaboration, and inclusivity-driven messaging to build emotional connections and foster community engagement. Synthesizing campaign analytics, user-generated content, and consumer feedback offers actionable insights into innovative branding. Highlighting the transformative potential of inclusive, storytelling-driven strategies, this research addresses the underrepresentation of female sports fans in marketing, advancing academic discourse, and offering practical guidance for brands seeking to engage this influential demographic.

This study highlights the need to reimagine traditional marketing by prioritizing inclusivity, community building, and consumer-centric approaches. In navigating digital transformation, the sports industry can leverage these insights to cultivate meaningful connections with female audiences, a pivotal demographic that shapes the future of sports branding and consumer engagement.

Literature review

Sports consumption and fandom are shifting as gender becomes central to understanding these changes. Historically, male-dominated sports now see a growing female presence, amplified by digital media's transformative potential. This study explores the themes of marginalization, empowerment, and inclusive marketing, highlighting the need for strategies that ensure inclusivity and effective consumer engagement.

Marginalization and empowerment in sports fandom

The concept of sports as a "male preserve" has long reinforced traditional gender hierarchies, creating barriers for female participants and fans. Pitti (2018) examined the experiences of female football ultras, illustrating how women navigate these hyper-masculine spaces by adopting behaviors typically associated with male-coded norms. While such strategies allow women to assert legitimacy, they often reinforce, rather than disrupt, existing power structures. This duality highlights the challenges women face in integrating into these spaces without sacrificing authenticity.

Building on this, Sveinson and Hoeber (2016) investigated the interplay between marginalization and empowerment in female sports fandom. Their findings suggest that while women often encounter skepticism about their authenticity as fans, active participation and demonstrated knowledge serve as tools for empowerment. These elements not only help women establish credibility but also foster a sense of belonging within the broader sports community.

The challenges of ensuring inclusivity in sports participation and fandom are mirrored in the findings of Stan (2018), who highlighted that systemic barriers to early age performance often marginalize long-term development and diminish opportunities for sustained engagement in sports, particularly among underrepresented groups.

The phenomenon of the "feminization of football," as discussed by Doehler (2024), reflects the growing presence of women in fan communities. However, despite this progress, male-dominated norms and expectations continue to dominate, limiting the scope of women's representation. Similarly, Sundar et al. (2017) highlighted the societal roles that confine women to indirect forms of sports engagement, such as consuming sports through televised events, rather than participating actively. These patterns perpetuate structural inequalities and underscore the need for systemic changes to support greater inclusion.

Whiteside and Hardin (2011) provides a critical perspective on how female fans are represented in sports marketing. He argues that homogenized portrayals fail to capture the diversity of female sports consumers' experiences and identities. Such oversimplified narratives risk alienating large segments of this demographic, underscoring the need for more nuanced and inclusive representations.

In the context of the media's evolving role, Dominteanu et al. (2022) highlight the transformative power of digital communication in reshaping consumer perceptions. The integration of empathy, credibility, and storytelling in sports media can counteract historical biases and create narratives that resonate with the underrepresented groups.

Representation and inclusion in marketing

The underrepresentation of female sports consumers in marketing has perpetuated a long-standing gender disparity. Sveinson and Hoeber (2015) critique the male-centric nature of sports marketing, which often overlooks or marginalizes women's interests and perspectives. This exclusion not only

limits the reach of marketing campaigns but also reinforces stereotypes that diminish women's role in sports.

Inclusive marketing strategies provide a pathway for addressing these disparities. Toffoletti and Palmer (2016) emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive approaches that account for the diverse experiences of female sports consumers, particularly those navigating cultural constraints. Their work demonstrated that recognizing and reflecting these nuances in marketing campaigns fosters deeper engagement and loyalty.

The significance of strategic branding is further highlighted by Regan et al. (2012), who explore the role of logos and advertisements in major sporting events.

Their findings suggest that while visibility is crucial for consumer awareness, emotional resonance and authenticity are essential for building meaningful connections. This is echoed in Beek et al. (2023) analysis of sponsorship strategies, which underscores the importance of audience involvement and co-sponsorship in enhancing brand value during large-scale events such as the FIFA World Cup.

These insights align with broader trends in digital and social media marketing, where inclusive and participatory campaigns have shown significant potential in bridging representational gaps. Campaigns that prioritize storytelling and emotional engagement, rather than purely transactional appeals, are particularly effective in reaching female audiences.

Moreover, esports—a burgeoning domain of competitive gaming—are increasingly recognized as part of broader internet culture. Dominteanu et al. (2023) discuss how esports integrates diverse cultural identities, providing a model for inclusive engagement through digital platforms. By leveraging digital storytelling and community-driven approaches, traditional sports marketing can draw lessons from esports to connect with younger, technology-savvy audiences.

Social media as a transformative tool

Social media has revolutionized the way brands interact with consumers, offering unparalleled opportunities for visibility, engagement, and community building. Safeer (2024) identifies social media as a highly flexible tool for targeted branding, emphasizing its ability to shape consumer perceptions and foster loyalty through tailored content and active engagement. This perspective is reinforced by Tariq (2024), who highlights the role of creative storytelling in building authentic relationships with consumers. By prioritizing narrative depth and emotional resonance, brands can foster lasting connections that transcend their immediate sales goals.

The role of social media influencers is particularly significant in reshaping branding strategies. Böhnndel et al. (2024) explored how influencers enhance brand visibility and credibility by leveraging their personal connections with audiences. However, their study also warns against over-reliance on influencer marketing, noting that authenticity and product quality must remain central to maintaining consumer trust.

Zhou et al. (2019) add depth to this discussion by examining how visual storytelling and participatory campaigns on platforms such as Instagram drive emotional connections and advocacy among consumers. These strategies are especially effective in engaging younger, tech-savvy audiences who prioritize authenticity and inclusivity in their interactions with brands.

The ability of social media to foster inclusivity is further evidenced in Daigle and Heiss's (2021) study, which highlights how women use these platforms to overcome traditional barriers and amplify their voices. This aligns with the findings of Dwivedi et al. (2020) regarding the importance of consumer-generated content in building trust and fostering long-term relationships.

Social media also empowers marginalized groups by providing a platform for visibility and representation. Dominteanu et al. (2022) note that the intersection of sports and digital communication creates opportunities to challenge traditional stereotypes and foster inclusion.

Co-creation and consumer engagement

Consumer engagement has emerged as the cornerstone of modern branding, particularly within the digital landscape. Hollebeek (2011) propose a conceptual model linking engagement to brand loyalty, emphasizing the importance of interactive and visually appealing content in fostering deeper connections. Similarly, Kumar and Nayak (2019) explored co-creation as a collaborative process that empowers consumers to actively contribute to brand narratives. This approach not only enhances emotional bonds but also drives greater brand value.

Beek et al. (2023) further examine the role of co-sponsorship and audience involvement in enhancing brand equity. Their findings revealed that participatory and community-driven elements significantly amplify audience engagement, particularly during major sporting events. Such strategies not only boost brand visibility but also foster a sense of shared identity and loyalty among consumers.

Consumer-generated content plays a pivotal role in this process, as demonstrated by Dwivedi et al. (2020). Their research highlights how active consumer participation in brand storytelling transforms audiences into advocates, strengthens emotional ties, and expands market reach.

Despite these advancements, significant gaps persist in the representation and engagement of female sports consumers. Current marketing strategies often prioritize traditional male-centric narratives, neglecting women's unique needs and preferences. Durmus (2024) called for the strategic integration of digital tools to address these gaps, advocating for personalized and data-driven approaches to consumer engagement. Similarly, Kamkankaew (2024) critiques the methodological limitations of sports ethnography, emphasizing the need for reflexive and gender-sensitive research practices.

Future studies must explore the long-term impact of inclusive marketing strategies on consumer loyalty and brand advocacy. Toffoletti and Palmer's (2016) work on cultural inclusivity provides a valuable framework for this exploration, while Beek et al. (2023) highlight the transformative potential of participatory approaches in redefining consumer-brand relationships.

This comprehensive review underscores the transformative potential of inclusive, storytelling-driven, and participatory marketing strategies to address the unique needs of female sports consumers. By leveraging social media as a platform for representation and engagement, brands can transcend traditional boundaries and foster meaningful connections with diverse audiences.

This study builds on these insights, offering a framework for engaging female sports fans through innovative and inclusive approaches, thereby contributing to the growing discourse on gender inclusivity in sports marketing.

Methodology

Research design

This study was designed to explore the social media strategies employed by sports brands to attract and engage female consumers using a qualitative approach based on thematic analysis.

A qualitative methodology was deemed suitable for this context, as it enables an in-depth examination of narratives, themes, and interactions underlying social media campaigns. This

design was specifically chosen to address the study's three core research questions and test the formulated hypotheses.

Qualitative approach and thematic analysis

A qualitative approach provides tools to identify and interpret subtle dynamics in the communication strategies used by sports brands to engage female consumers. Such nuances often elude quantitative methods, making a qualitative framework indispensable for this study.

Thematic analysis was selected as the primary method to identify and organize recurring themes in social media content, with a focus on emotional storytelling, inclusion, and participation. This methodological choice aligns with the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which consists of six systematic phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Theoretical framework

The analysis adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model, providing a structured process to derive meaningful insights from qualitative data:

1. *Familiarization*: Immersion in the dataset, including social media posts, user interactions, and campaign visuals.
2. *Generating codes*: Systematic identification of initial patterns and significant elements within the data.
3. *Identifying themes*: Grouping related codes into overarching themes such as inclusivity, community, and emotional connection.
4. *Reviewing themes*: Refining themes for coherence and relevance to the research questions.
5. *Defining themes*: Clarifying the scope and focus of each theme.
6. *Reporting*: Synthesizing findings into a comprehensive analysis that addresses the study's objectives.

Selection of social media campaigns

Selected campaigns:

- **Nike**: “*You Can’t Stop Us*” - The campaign showcases a dynamic split-screen series detailing 36 pairings of athletes, inspirational visuals emphasizing inclusivity, and resilience, highlighting the commonalities shared by athletes worldwide.
- **Adidas**: “*Impossible Is Nothing*” - The campaign celebrates how the joy of football unites players and fans worldwide and emotional storytelling featuring diverse athletes featuring icons like Lionel Messi and Karim Benzema.
- **Under Armour**: “*Will Makes Us Family*” - Campaigns promote community and belonging in sports and spotlight elite athletes united by the grit and grind of training, emphasizing the brand's commitment to empowering athletes at all levels.

To ensure the relevance and validity of the data, social media campaigns were selected based on the following criteria:

1. *Relevance to female sports consumers*. Campaigns that authentically represent women in sports were prioritized. Examples include:
 - **Nike’s “You Can’t Stop Us”**: A global campaign emphasizing resilience and inclusivity in sports.

- **Adidas’s “Impossible Is Nothing”:** Narratives centered around athletes from diverse backgrounds.
 - **Under Armour’s “Will Makes Us Family”:** A focus on fostering an inclusive sports community.
2. *Emphasis on storytelling, inclusion, and participation.* Campaigns that promote personal and inspirational stories, reflect cultural diversity, and encourage user interaction were included. For instance:
 - Emotional narratives that inspire personal connections.
 - Initiatives promoting inclusivity across different cultural and social groups.
 - Strategies that encourage participatory engagement through hashtags and user-generated content (UGC).
 3. *Accessibility of public data.* Campaigns with accessible social media content, including public posts, comments, likes, and shares, were prioritized. Platforms analyzed included Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

Data collection

The data collection process involved the analysis of publicly available social media content and user interactions, using three primary sources of data:

Table 1. Data sources and analytical focus

Category	Focus	Details
Social media campaigns	Content	Posts, videos, and official brand visuals were collected for analysis.
	Metadata analysis	Quantitative examination of engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares.
Consumer comments	User feedback	Analyzed comments under brand posts to understand consumer sentiment, tone, and engagement.
	Language and sentiment	Observed patterns in the language used by consumers to express their reactions to campaigns.
User-Generated Content (UGC)	Hashtag engagement	Examined posts tagged with campaign-specific hashtags (e.g., #ImpossibleIsNothing, #YouCantStopUs).
	Storytelling examples	Identified individual contributions that illustrate user engagement and advocacy.

Source: Authors’ own research.

Table 2. Methods of analysis

Dimension	Focus	Impact/Metric	Examples
Emotional storytelling (H1)	Identifying personal and inspirational narratives in social media content.	Impact: Measuring user interactions to assess emotional resonance, such as the prevalence of positive comments referencing personal connections.	Nike: Positive comments on Instagram videos emphasizing resilience and inclusion.

Example: "This video inspired me to never give up."

Dimension	Focus	Impact/Metric	Examples
Inclusion and diversity (H2)	Analyzing visual and textual representations of diverse groups, including women from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds and niche sports.	Themes: Identifying recurring themes of acceptance, inspiration, and loyalty in user interactions.	Adidas: Visual analysis of campaigns showcasing athletes from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. <i>Example: "It's inspiring to see women in sports traditionally dominated by men."</i>
Participation and community building (H3)	Observing participatory elements such as hashtag usage, post sharing, and user-generated content.	Metrics: Evaluating the popularity of campaign hashtags and analyzing UGC contributions to measure user advocacy.	Nike: Analysis of #YouCantStopUs posts and related UGC. Adidas: Tweets featuring diverse athletes and public shares amplifying these stories. Under Armour: Facebook comments and videos emphasizing a sense of community among users.
Source: Authors' own research.			

Tools and techniques

Software tools:

- *NVivo*: For organizing and coding qualitative data and results for identifying emergent trends.
- *Sentiment analysis tools* (Leximancer): To evaluate the tone and emotional content of consumer comments.
- *Quantitative support*: Aggregating metadata using Excel to analyze user engagement patterns.

Thematic coding framework for NVivo: social media campaign analysis

This framework outlines the thematic coding process in NVivo to systematically analyze social media campaigns by Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour. The coding structure focuses on identifying key themes and sub-themes relevant to the campaigns' strategies and their impact on female sports consumers.

Table 3. Thematic coding framework for NVivo: social media campaign analysis

Main theme	Sub-theme	Nike: <i>"You Can't Stop Us"</i>	Adidas: <i>"Impossible Is Nothing"</i>	Under Armour: <i>"Will Makes Us Family"</i>
Emotional storytelling	Resilience and overcoming challenges	<i>"This video inspired me to keep running, even during tough times."</i>	<i>"It's incredible to see athletes who have faced struggles similar to mine."</i>	<i>"Misty Copeland's story is incredible. I've followed her for a long time, and she inspires me every day."</i>

Main theme	Sub-theme	Nike: <i>"You Can't Stop Us"</i>	Adidas: <i>"Impossible Is Nothing"</i>	Under Armour: <i>"Will Makes Us Family"</i>
	Emotional inspiration	Messages highlighted resilience in sports, motivating viewers to persevere.	The slogan <i>"Impossible Is Nothing"</i> encouraged viewers to push past limitations.	Stories emphasized shared struggles and perseverance across all athletic levels.
	Personal connection	Viewers identified personally with diverse athletic stories presented.	Personal narratives resonated with audiences facing similar barriers in life or sports.	Many users felt part of a larger family through stories of universal determination.
Inclusion and diversity	Cultural and social representation	Highlighted diverse athletes, including Muslim women and Paralympians.	Showcased women in underrepresented sports such as boxing and football.	Included athletes from various disciplines, reinforcing universal themes of hard work.
	Acceptance and inclusion	Emphasized global diversity and unity through shared athletic values.	Promoted acceptance of diverse experiences in sports, emphasizing the importance of inclusion.	Messages highlighted the unifying nature of willpower and perseverance.
	Underrepresented women's roles in sports	Increased visibility of women in male-dominated sports and minority athletes.	Featured female athletes overcoming barriers in traditionally male-dominated disciplines.	Celebrated diverse athletic journeys, irrespective of skill level or sport.
Participation and community	Active engagement	#YouCantStopUs hashtag generated 153,825 interactions.	#ImpossibleIsNothing invited users to share personal success stories globally.	#WillMakesUsFamily encouraged users to post their training stories and connect with others.
	Sense of belonging	Viewers expressed feeling part of a global community celebrating resilience.	Stories of overcoming challenges fostered shared identity among participants.	Created a strong sense of unity through a shared commitment to athletic determination.
	User-generated content (UGC)	Many users shared personal stories of resilience, amplifying campaign impact.	Highlighted achievements by ordinary users, reinforcing the campaign's global movement.	Consumers posted training stories, strengthening community engagement and brand advocacy.
Consumer impact	Personal motivation	Many viewers felt inspired to set and pursue personal goals.	The campaign encouraged women to overcome personal and athletic challenges.	Viewers reported feeling motivated by stories of perseverance and success.
	Brand loyalty	Representing diversity strengthened consumer attachment to the brand.	Inclusive messaging resonated with underrepresented groups, enhancing loyalty.	Viewers felt emotionally connected, increasing their loyalty to Under Armour.
	Advocacy for brand	Consumers shared positive content, becoming informal brand ambassadors.	Audience participation amplified advocacy for Adidas's inclusive values.	Community-building efforts turned consumers into advocates for the brand's mission.

Source: Authors' own research.

The research design leverages a robust qualitative approach grounded in thematic analysis to explore the strategies used by sports brands in engaging female consumers through social media.

By focusing on emotional storytelling, inclusion, and community participation, this study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how these elements contribute to brand-consumer relationships.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative techniques ensures a nuanced analysis, providing actionable insights for brands seeking to enhance their engagement with female sports consumers.

Results and discussions

This study investigates the impact of social media campaigns by Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour on female sports consumers. The analysis focuses on three campaigns: Nike's *"You Can't Stop Us,"* Adidas's *"Impossible Is Nothing,"* and Under Armour's *"Will Makes Us Family."* Each campaign was evaluated using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including NVivo for coding qualitative data, sentiment analysis tools for assessing consumer commentary, and Excel for aggregating metadata to identify patterns in user engagement (Table 4,5,6).

Table 4. Analysis of Nike's "You Can't Stop Us" campaign

Category	Details
Campaign performance	Media Impact Value (MIV®): \$8.95 million generated from 1,067 placements, averaging \$8,400 per placement.
	Key highlight: Cristiano Ronaldo's Instagram post, as part of the campaign, generated \$1.4 million in MIV®, showcasing the campaign's ability to leverage high-profile figures (Launchmetrics)
Sentiment analysis	Consumer sentiment: Predominantly positive, with recurring themes of unity and resilience.
	Consumer feedback: Comments such as <i>"This video reminds me never to give up"</i> and <i>"I feel so strong after seeing this message"</i> reflect the campaign's emotional impact.
Social media engagement	Views and empressions: Over 1.2 million video views and 4.3 million impressions on Facebook and Instagram.
	Interactions: 153,825 interactions recorded across platforms, surpassing expectations and achieving objectives of awareness and sales growth (Pulse Africa).
	Effectiveness: Demonstrated the success of Nike's strategy in connecting with its audience and amplifying its core message through social media platforms.

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 5. Analysis of Adidas's "Impossible Is Nothing" campaign

Category	Details
Campaign performance	Global reach: Launched in over 50 countries, achieving one billion views on social media and generating over 18 million interactions (Adidas Report).
	Impact: Demonstrated strong resonance with diverse global audiences, delivering significant engagement and brand visibility.
Sentiment analysis	Consumer sentiment: Overwhelmingly positive, with appreciation for the campaign's focus on diversity and inspirational messaging.
	Consumer feedback: Comments such as <i>"It's incredible to see athletes who have faced struggles similar to mine"</i> emphasize the campaign's ability to foster personal connections.
Social media engagement	Collaborations: Partnered with influencers and renowned athletes, enhancing visibility and interaction across platforms.

Category	Details
	Hashtag impact: #ImpossibleIsNothing encouraged consumers to share personal stories of resilience, creating a global movement and a strong sense of community around the brand.

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 6. Analysis of under Armour's "Will Makes Us Family" campaign

Category	Details
Campaign performance	Media Impact Value (MIV®): Specific figures not disclosed.
	Athlete participation: Featured prominent athletes such as quarterback Cam Newton, principal ballerina Misty Copeland, world champion alpine skier Lindsey Vonn, and heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua (Wear testers).
	Impact: Relatable narratives of resilience and success emphasized determination and perseverance, appealing to a broad audience.
Sentiment analysis	Consumer sentiment: Widely praised for focusing on hard work and the universal challenges of training.
	Consumer feedback: Strong resonance with the campaign's inclusivity and motivational themes fostered a sense of unity among viewers.
Social media engagement	Platform usage: Actively engaged audiences on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube with videos and athlete stories (The Big Marketing).
	Community building: Through the UA Community platform, users were encouraged to connect, share experiences, and celebrate their commitment to training, reinforcing engagement and loyalty by fostering a sense of belonging.

Source: Authors' own research.

Analysis of campaign impact

The findings highlight how social media strategies can enhance the relationship between sports brands and female consumers, emphasizing emotional storytelling, inclusivity, and active participation.

The campaigns analyzed-Nike's *"You Can't Stop Us,"* Adidas's *"Impossible Is Nothing,"* and Under Armour's *"Will Makes Us Family"*-demonstrated significant impact across three key dimensions: emotional connection, perceptions of inclusion, and active participation (Table 7).

Table 7. Impact of campaigns on female sports consumers

Dimension	Campaign	Details
Emotional connection	Nike: <i>"You Can't Stop Us"</i>	Highlighted resilience in women's sports, creating emotional resonance. Comments such as <i>"Seeing this makes me feel like my struggles are acknowledged and celebrated"</i> reflect empowerment and validation.
	Adidas: <i>"Impossible Is Nothing"</i>	Focused on overcoming obstacles, resonating with women who faced challenges in sports or life. Feedback included comments like <i>"It's inspiring to see athletes who have faced struggles similar to mine."</i>
	Under Armour: <i>"Will Makes Us Family"</i>	Narratives of perseverance and success inspired consumers to pursue personal goals, emphasizing the universal nature of athletic effort.
Perceptions of inclusion	Nike: <i>"You Can't Stop Us"</i>	Featured athletes from diverse ethnicities, religions, and abilities, fostering a sense of belonging. Comments such as <i>"This is the first time I see myself represented in such a campaign. Thank you, Nike!"</i> highlight its inclusivity.

Dimension	Campaign	Details
Active participation	Adidas: <i>"Impossible Is Nothing"</i>	Showcased underrepresented sports and diverse athletes, validating the multifaceted identities of women in sports.
	Under Armour: <i>"Will Makes Us Family"</i>	Included athletes from varied disciplines, reinforcing the universal traits of determination and perseverance, solidifying the brand's inclusive messaging.
	Nike: <i>"You Can't Stop Us"</i>	The hashtag #YouCantStopUs inspired personal stories of resilience, fostering participation and strengthening community ties.
	Adidas: <i>"Impossible Is Nothing"</i>	The hashtag #ImpossibleIsNothing sparked a global movement, with women worldwide sharing achievements and connecting through shared experiences.
	Under Armour: <i>"Will Makes Us Family"</i>	The Under Armour community platform enabled users to share training journeys, promoting a sense of collective purpose and amplifying participatory engagement.

Source: Authors' own research.

The analysis revealed that social media campaigns that leverage emotional storytelling, inclusivity, and participatory elements effectively build trust, loyalty, and advocacy among female consumers. Emotional storytelling fostered deep connections, with comments like *"Seeing this makes me feel like my struggles are acknowledged and celebrated"* (Nike) and *"It's inspiring to see athletes who have faced struggles similar to mine"* (Adidas), highlighting the power of relatable narratives (H1) (Figure 1).

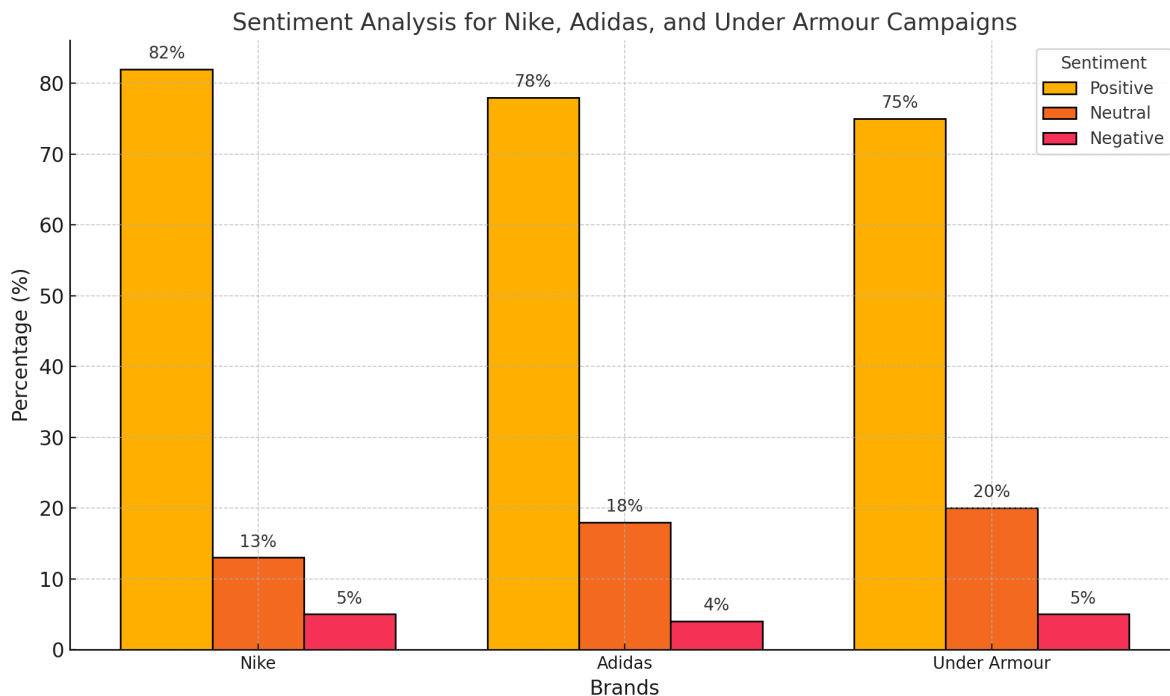


Figure 1. Sentiment analysis for campaigns

Source: Authors' own research.

Inclusivity was another key driver, as campaigns featuring diverse athletes from various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds elicited feedback such as *“This is the first time I see myself represented in such a campaign”* (Nike), confirming the role of authentic representation in enhancing loyalty (H2).

Finally, participatory strategies, including Adidas’s #ImpossibleIsNothing and Under Armour’s community platform, encourage active engagement and a sense of belonging, demonstrating that co-creative approaches drive higher levels of brand advocacy (H3) (Figure 2).

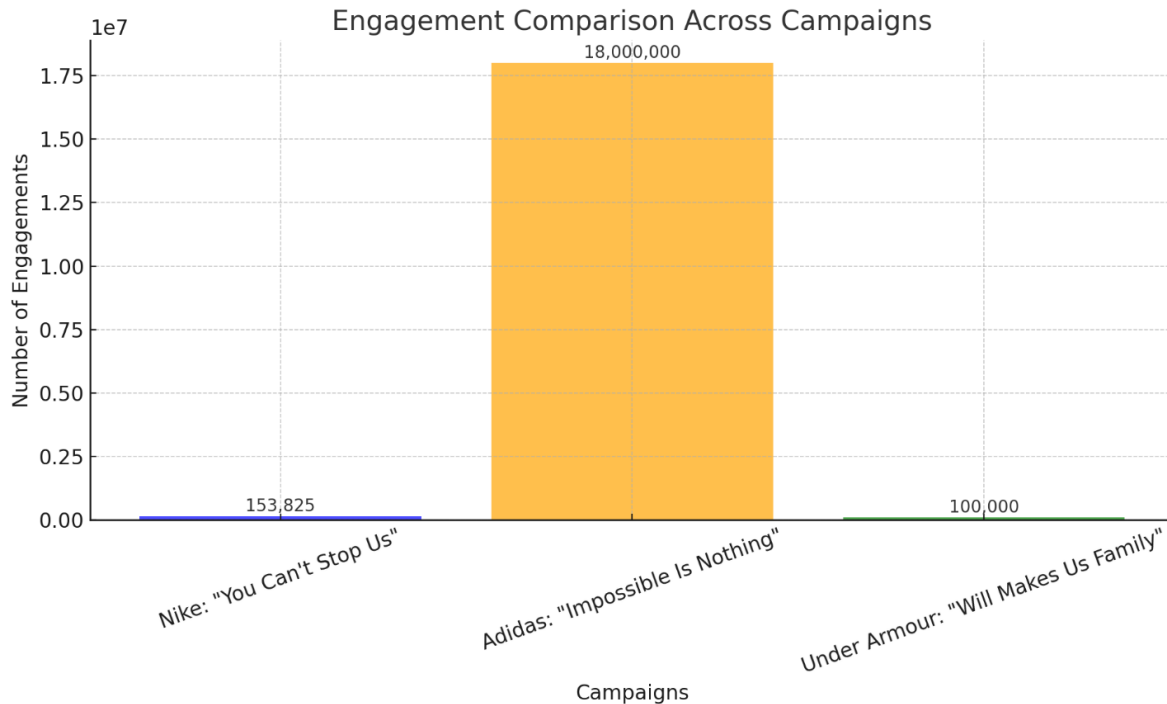


Figure 2. Engagement comparison across campaigns

Source: Authors' own research.

These results underscore that inclusivity and diversity are pivotal in fostering loyalty among female sports consumers, as authentic representation not only attracts, but also cultivates, a profound sense of belonging. Emotional storytelling, particularly narratives of resilience and overcoming challenges, has proven to be highly effective in building meaningful connections with audiences.

Additionally, participatory initiatives, such as co-creative strategies, successfully transform consumers from passive observers into active brand advocates, highlighting the value of community-driven approaches in sports marketing.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social media strategies rooted in emotional storytelling, inclusivity, and participatory approaches significantly influence female sports consumers by fostering trust, loyalty, and advocacy. Campaigns that authentically represent diverse experiences and highlight narratives of resilience create deep emotional connections, while participatory elements transform consumers into active brand advocates.

These findings emphasize the transformative potential of personalized community-driven marketing strategies in building meaningful relationships with female audiences, underscoring their pivotal role in shaping consumer engagement and brand loyalty in the sports industry.

This study faced limitations, including restricted access to comprehensive financial impact data (e.g., Under Armour's MIV®) and a focus on three specific campaigns, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. However, the results underscore the potential for brands to adopt data-driven, personalized strategies to engage female consumers more effectively.

Additionally, these findings provide a foundation for future research to explore the impact of social media strategies across different demographic groups and industries.

References

- Akoglu, H. E., & Özbek, O. (2021). The effect of brand experiences on brand loyalty through perceived quality and brand trust: A study on sports consumers. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 34(10), 2130–2148. <https://doi.org/10.1108/apjml-05-2021-0333>.
- Beek, R., Van Hoecke, J., & Derom, I. (2023). Sponsorship and social justice: Brand positioning on diversity and inclusion in sport marketing during the 2020 UEFA European football championship. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 24(3), 538–557. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsms-03-2022-0069>.
- Böhndel, M., Jastorff, M., & Rudeloff, C. (2023). AI-driven influencer marketing: Comparing the effects of virtual and human influencers on consumer perceptions. *Journal of AI, Robotics & Workplace Automation*, 2(2), 165. <https://doi.org/10.69554/wbsj7931>.
- Dominteanu, T., Smidu, N., Dinciu, C.-C., Porfireanu, M.-C., & Adrian, I. (2023). What are esports? Introduction to the global phenomenon of esports. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence*, 17(1), 1421–1430. <https://doi.org/10.2478/picbe-2023-0128>
- Dominteanu, T., Smidu, N., & Voinea, A. (2022). Media communication in sport. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence*, 16(1), 260–265. <https://doi.org/10.2478/picbe-2022-0025>.
- Doehler, S. (2024). Your analysis is as useless as your ovaries: Women football fans' experiences on social media. *Communication & Sport*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795241292718>.
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., Jain, V., Karjaluoto, H., Kefi, H., Krishen, A. S., Kumar, V., Rahman, M. M., Raman, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., Rowley, J., Salo, J., Tran, G. A., & Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 102168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168>.
- Hollebeek, L. D. (2011). Demystifying customer brand engagement: Exploring the loyalty nexus. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(7–8), 785–807. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2010.500132>
- Kamkankaew, P., Thanin, P., Thanitbenjasith, P., Phattarowas, V., Sribenjachot, S., & Sanpatanon, N. (2024). How artificial intelligence is helping businesses grow and thrive: The transformative role of artificial intelligence in Thai B2C digital marketing. *International Journal of Sociologies and Anthropologies Science Reviews*, 4(1), 137–164. <https://doi.org/10.60027/ijssr.2024.3651>.

- Kumar, J., & Nayak, J. K. (2019). Consumer psychological motivations to customer brand engagement: A case of brand community. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 36(1), 168–177. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jcm-01-2018-2519>
- Loureiro, S. M. C., Serra, J., & Guerreiro, J. (2019). How fashion brands engage on social media: A netnography approach. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 25(3), 367–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2019.1557815>.
- Pitti, I. (2018). Being women in a male preserve: An ethnography of female football ultras. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(3), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2018.1443803>.
- Regan, N., Carlson, J., & Rosenberger, P. J. (2012). Factors affecting group-oriented travel intention to major events. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 29(2), 185–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2012.648550>.
- Safeer, A. A. (2024). Harnessing the power of brand social media marketing on consumer online impulse buying intentions: A stimulus-organism-response framework. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 33(5). <https://doi.org/10.1108/jpbm-07-2023-4619>.
- Stan, A. E. (2018). The relevance of obtaining performance at the age of 6–7 years at the expense of maximizing the potential at junior swimming. *3rd Central & Eastern European LUMEN International Conference: New Approaches in Social and Humanistic Sciences (NASHS 2017)*, 459–471. <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.nashs2017.40>.
- Sveinson, K., & Hoeber, L. (2016). Female sport fans' experiences of marginalization and empowerment. *Journal of Sport Management*, 30, 8–21. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm2014-0221>.
- Sundar Raj, N., Zachariah, J., Amirtharaj, M. V., & Ranjith, P. (2024). Role of yogic practice influence the psychological factors in the development of women sports. *Salud Ciencia y Tecnología - Serie de Conferencias*, 3, 888. <https://doi.org/10.56294/sctconf2024888>.
- Tariq, M. U. (2024). Crafting authentic narratives for sustainable branding. In *Crafting Authentic Narratives for Sustainable Branding* (pp. 194–229). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-3326-6.ch011>.
- Toffoletti, K., & Palmer, C. (2016). New approaches for studies of Muslim women and sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 52(2), 146–163. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690215589326>.
- Whiteside, E., & Hardin, M. (2011). Women (not) watching women: Leisure time, television, and implications for televised coverage of women's sports. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 4(2), 122–143. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2011.01098.x>.
- Zhou, F., Mou, J., Su, Q., & Wu, Y. C. J. (2019). How does consumers' perception of sports stars' personal brand promote consumers' brand love? A mediation model of global brand equity. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54, 102012. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.102012>.
- Whiteside, E., & Hardin, M. (2011). Women (not) watching women: Leisure time, television, and implications for televised coverage of women's sports. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 4(2), 122–143. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2011.01098.x>.
- <https://www.thedegreedoctor.com/blog/braun-and-clarke-thematic-analysis-how-to-do-the-six-step-process-in-your-qualitative-research-project>.

References for Data Collection (Accessed January 7, 2025)

- https://campaignsoftheworld.com/film-and-video/nike-you-cant-stop-us/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/46-of-consumers-are-likely-to-purchase-nike-products-in-response-to-you-cant-stop-us-campaign-301195076.html>
- <https://sports-insight.co.uk/news/when-football-is-everything-impossible-is-nothing-adidas-fifa-world-cup-2022/https://www.famouscampaigns.com/2020/08/nikes-you-cant-stop-us-ad-clocks-up-40-million-views/>
- <https://www.nike.com/ro/launch/t/you-cant-stop-us>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK_y_a5sy4Q
- <https://www.nike.com/YOU-CANT-STOP-US>
- <https://akshatsinghbisht.com/how-nike-you-cant-stop-us-performed-30-sales/>
- <https://www.launchmetrics.com/resources/blog/nike-data-analysis>
- <https://makemakeentertainment.com/news/a52/p/behind-the-making-of-nikes-you-cant-stop-us-campaign/>
- https://pulse.africa/case-study/nike-you-cant-stop-us/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- <https://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/impossible-is-nothing-the-story-behind-adidas-most-iconic-campaign/273349392>
- <https://brand24.com/blog/nike-social-media-strategy/>
- <https://ivypanda.com/essays/social-media-case-study-nikes-youcantstopus-campaign/>
- <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/46-of-consumers-are-likely-to-purchase-nike-products-in-response-to-you-cant-stop-us-campaign-301195076.html>
- https://news.adidas.com/football/when-football-is-everything--impossible-is-nothing--adidas-fifa-world-cup-2022--campaign/s/8c0ae23c-8fd5-4b74-a0d2-d6db5abb9bd7?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- <https://www.brandingasia.com/when-football-is-everything-impossible-is-nothing-adidas-world-cup-2022-campaign/>; <https://www.adstasher.com/2022/11/adidas-icons-come-together-in-one-of.html>
- <https://erlichsouberlich.wordpress.com/2024/06/23/the-power-of-possibility-adidas-impossible-is-nothing-campaign/>
- <https://www.brandvertising.ch/2024/05/adidas-impossible-is-nothing/>
- <https://www.latterly.org/adidas-global-marketing-strategy/>
- <https://businessmodelanalyst.com/adidas-marketing-strategy/>
- <https://marketingino.com/adidass-marketing-strategy-driving-global-success-through-innovation-and-collaboration/>
- <https://mixwithmarketing.com/2023/01/adidas-marketing-strategy-the-case-study-impossible-is-nothing/>
- <https://report.adidas-group.com/2021/en/at-a-glance/2021-stories/impossible-is-nothing.html>
- <https://vimeo.com/951268980>
- <https://about.underarmour.com/en-us/stories/2024/12/lay-bankz-joins-team-under-armour.html>
- <https://weartesters.com/under-armour-will-makes-us-family-campaign-cam-newton-misty-copeland-lindsey-vonn/>
- https://www.latterly.org/under-armour-marketing-strategy/?utm_content=cmp-true
- https://openr.co/how-under-armour-became-a-social-media-powerhouse/#google_vignette

Acknowledgments

Funding Statement: This paper is a result of the” Project for continuous training in the field of scientific research for the Bucharest University of Economic Studies researchers”, 2024 conducted at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Project coordinator Associated Professor PhD. Simona-Roxana Pătărlăgeanu, Faculty of Agri-Food and Environmental Economics.

Authors Contributions: All the authors contributed equally to this work. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.