Sporda Markalaşmada Dijitalleşme ve Sosyal Medyanın Kullanımı

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Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, sporda marka inşasının kullanılan araçların ve sporun dijitalleşmesiyle nasıl geliştiğini incelemektir. Bu çalışma spor dünyasındaki dijitalleşme ve sosyal medya ile markalaşma çalışmalarına sadece takımlar veya kulüpler tarafında değil, sporcular tarafında nasıl geliştiğine bakmaktadır. Diğer taraftan spor çevresi üretkenliği artırmak üzere farklı dijitalleşme araçlarını ve türlerini kullanarak gelecekte performansı bambaşka boyutlara çekebilecektir. Ayrıca, spor ve medyanın farklı ve ters ilişkisi düşünüldüğünde, medya spor ile ilgili gerek sporcu ve teknik direktör veya antrenör gerekse de takım ve diğer paydaşların haber peşinde koşmaktadır, ancak sosyal medyanın spor paydaşlarının direk iletişimi ile tehdit altındadır. Diğer taraftan, Sosyal medya takipçileri takımlar ve sporcular açısından incelenerek bu aracın marka inşası için nasıl kullanılabileceği anlaşılabilecektir. Takımların ve sporcuların kendileri ile ilgili bilgiyi direk yayınlamaları marka inşası için güçlü bir araç olduğu için Sosyal medya kullanımı bir strateji olarak kullanılabilir. Dijitalleşme, e-sporun ortaya çıkmasıyla farklı marka inşa platformları doğmuştur. E-spor icra eden ve takipçi sayısının çokluğu bu alana olan ilgiyi artırmıştır. E-spor etkinliklerinin büyümesi ve seyirci sayısının artması da yine bu platformun markalar için bir mabed haline geldiği aşıkardır. Hergün artan takipçi sayısına bağlı olarak marka inşası için önemli bir platform haline gelmiştir. E-spor ile marka inşa etmek spor ekosistemi içerisinde önemli bir yer almaktadır.

Atıf Bilgisi / Reference Information

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Use of Digitalization and Social Media in Sports Branding

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand the digitalization of sports and tools used in sports in building brands. This work looks into the branding in the sports world, not only from the perspective of team or clubs, but also athletes through the use of digitalization and social media. Sports ecosystem is utilizing different tools in digital forms to increase their productivity and these advancements will bring sports to a different level of performance in the near future. In addition, sports and media have a special bond, where media is heavily interested in any news of sports; however, social media is threatening this relationship where teams and athletes can now directly communicate with their stakeholders (sponsors, fans, etc.). Moreover, looking at the numbers of social media followers of teams and athletes, how these tools are utilized will serve as a guideline for future brand building in sports. Digitalization also affected the way sports is utilized, and the rise of e-sports changed the way brand building. The massive number of followers and interested parties have triggered interest in e-sports which is growing at a fast pace. Brand building through e-sports is also becoming a great platform in the sports ecosystem.

Research Article

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Introduction

Through the advances in technology, many things have changed in the ecosystem of individuals and businesses. Use of the Internet, social media, and cutting-edge technological devices has transformed the way organizations do business and consumers behave. Inevitably, digitalization of news, entertainment, shopping and communications along with many other means of interaction has become an area of interest for not only business world but also the academic world. Many studies have been done on digitalization in many different disciplines. However, there is a significant challenge for digital marketing people; for example, customers are inclined to use numerous devices for different purposes; there is a tremendously growing level of competition because digital means are fairly inexpensive and easy; henceforth, it becomes harder to capture the attention and maintain patronage.

In sports, many stakeholders have benefited from digitalization: clubs and teams, brands and sponsors, athletes and trainers, scouts, families and fans, and media. Digitalization has influenced these stakeholders in many different aspects such as organizational governance, technological advancement or integration, accessibility, building identity and brands, engagement, etc.

In the era of social media, brands have changed their strategies towards using flat forms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. thinking it would be an easy way to get into the heads of consumers. Brands used major parts of their budgets to “create content” to capture attention, yet digital crowds changed the way culture works and fired it back (Holt, 2016). So, creating iconic brands have gained interest. The world of sports also adapts this phenomenon in their branding actions.

Media has a great interest in sports throughout many years. Where many companies spent billions of dollars every year to be in the eyes of the consumers using media, on the contrary, media runs after sports teams, athletes, clubs, etc. to capture any news possible. Thus, sports and media have a special relationship and digitalization of media gave a great opportunity for both parties to gain attention and be available 24 hours, 365 days.

In sports, digitalization has also opened new avenues for new sports disciplines, such as e-sports. It is growing at an enormous rate and it is expected to intensify in the near future. Involving people from different age groups, there are approximately 380 million e-sports audience with 165 million fans and 215 million occasional viewers (Gray, 2018).

In this study, sports world will be the main interest in digitalization. Different stakeholders are interested in usage of the digital means of delivering their businesses in their ecosystems. Sports teams, clubs, athletes, scouts, fans and media use digitalization as a great tool to use their branding activities and be visible to anyone who is interested. Branding in sports, digitalization in sports and e-sports will be discussed in this study.

Branding in Sports

Today, sports industry is growing at a fast pace and branding in sports is becoming a vital element. Building brands from clubs, teams, athletes, coaches, and fan communities have gained importance not only practically but also academically. Moreover, brands are uniquely affected by marketing efforts Keller (2003), and sport teams are working strategically on long-term branding efforts as the central notion for their marketing activities (Gladden and Milne, 1999). There has been many studies on brand equity in the latest years (Gladden, Milne, and Sutton, 1998; Ross, 2006; Biscaia et al., 2013; Biscaia et al., 2016; Underwood, Bond, and Baer, 2001; Ross, Russell, and Bang 2008; Boyle and Magnusson, 2007; Kerr and Gladden, 2008; Gladden and Milne, 1999; Watkins, 2014) and they look at brand value from the perspective of fans.

Brand equity is explored in relations of team, university, and market-related factors deriving on Aaker's (1996) brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty (Gladden and

Milne, 1999; Gladden et al., 1998; Kerr and Gladden, 2008); or Keller's (1993) brand knowledge (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Ross 2006; Watkins, 2014; Ross, Russell, and Bang 2008).

Keller (1993) views brand equity from the customer's perspective, "*consumer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory*" (p.2). Two of the elements considered are the awareness of brand and uniqueness of the brand image in the minds of the consumer; thus, in sports, these two are considered to be important elements in Gladden and Funk's (2001) brand equity model. Sport's product's uniqueness is its unpredictability and uncontrollable nature the game itself with between two teams. Additionally, the consumption of the sport product is experiential and emotional (Mullin et al., 1993).

Another model is Gladden, Milne, and Sutton's (1998) where they based it on Aaker's (1996) with brand associations, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand awareness. Considering the antecedents of brand equity as product related (success, head coach and star player); organization related (reputation and tradition, conference and schedule, and entertainment package or product); and market related (local-media coverage, geographic location, competitive forces, and support). Accordingly, these conditions since they will affect brand equity. Consequently, the team/club will have national media exposure, merchandise sales, individual donations, corporate support, atmosphere, ticket sales, and, at the end, market perception (Gladden et al. 1998).

Clubs, teams, athletes, events or organizations deal with something sacred (Milligan 2009), evoking a certain personality, presence, and product, or service in people's minds (Aaker 1991) which is vital in sports. Thus, working on branding, Gladden and Funk (2001) mention that sport teams with many fans following the team from different media channels will have great brand equity. Wang, Chih-Hung and Tang (2018) encourage sports organizations to use social media to communicate their values, enhance team prestige, deliver "*wholesome superior image*" along with other means of communications.

Digitalization in Sports

According to Brunett (2016), athletes and teams are taking advantage of digitalization with five trends:

1. Hyperconnectivity – being connected anywhere at all times,
2. Mobile devices – providing instant access to data almost instantaneously,
3. Supercomputing and cloud computing – storing and retrieving vast data sets easily,
4. Analytics – providing athletes and coaches with concurrent insights from consequent of collected data,
5. Cybersecurity – keeping data on players and teams and protecting from hackers and rivals.

These tools provide a better connection with other players in their teams, coaches, trainers, or others. Not only connectivity, but player development, evaluation, scouting, and training are also better with these tools. Also, in order to stay healthy, athletes use these tools to prevent injury, get better diagnostics and recovery. Consequently, many different stakeholders – such as scouts, assistant coaches, trainers, etc. - can use the data to analyze the opponents better by dwelling on the weaknesses and by using simulations, a team can preplay its opponent before the real game time. On another side of the equation, fans also benefit from these tools where they can access instant information and statistics on teams and athletes (Brunett, 2016).

According to Xiao et al. (2017), changes to the sports industry has been prompted by digital technologies in organizational, technological, symbolic, and educational components of sports. Table 1 gives the details of these components in detail.

Table 1 – Implications of Digitalization on the Sports Industry

Organizational component:	
•	“Business intelligent and analytics are increasingly utilized in sport organizations to pursue both business outcomes and sports outcomes.”
•	“Emergence of digitally born sports, such as e-Sports, the organization of which demonstrates different dynamics, creates new types of competitions for traditional sports.”
•	“Utilization of digital touch points, such as websites, mobile applications, and social media, enable new ways to interact and engage with various stakeholders, (e.g., sponsors, advertisers, players, club management, national association employees and management).”
•	“New specialized stakeholders, such as data providers, software developers, and data analysts, emerge with capabilities addressing the digital technologies.”
Technological component:	
•	“Commercialization of the technological component of sports (physical skills and knowledge) results in producing new digital products, such as e-Sports.”
•	“Increasing accessibility, traceability, and visibility of the technological component of sports (physical skills and knowledge) driven by the use of IoT and data analytics technologies, as well as emerging digital platforms that enable data production and data aggregation.”
•	“Technological component of sports is increasingly integrated in live broadcasting (consumption) of sports event, which creates new revenue streams.”
•	“The increasing importance of technological component that is enabled by digital technologies in creating competitive advantages.”
•	“Players play a more active role in the production and distribution of their own technological data, and hence democratizing the recruitment process (from top-down to bottom-up).”
Symbolic component:	
•	“Pluralization of channels for sport organizations and its members to identify and brand themselves.”
•	“Digital presence of sports increases the accessibility of sports events and related content to potentially more stakeholders than before.”
•	“Display and rituals are extended to online sphere with digital means.”
•	“Boundaries between online display and offline (physical) display are blurred.”
•	“Visibility to actions (goals, fouls committed, inappropriate behavior) increases.”
Educational component:	
•	“Increasing utilization of data analytics in training, preparation and post-match analysis, challenges the traditional way of coaching, and demands new skill sets for sports producers.”
•	“Technological advancement in HCI, IoT, VR, and AR create more individualized/tailored training opportunities, or in some cases, replaces physical training with virtual training (digital simulator).”
•	“‘Democratization’ of sports as information asymmetries (‘training secrets’) reduced when novel practices spread viral.”

Source: Xiao et al. p.6-7, 2017

Digital transformation has been a hot topic and PcW (2018) gathers research from around the

world to understand the patterns and usage of Internet and social media. It is inevitable part of every business; thus, sports also go into a great transformation. Today, it is predicted that in the future, stadiums will rely on digital solutions on different management extents (Deloitte 2018). According to PcW (2018), there has been three waves: first wave is the digital commerce; second wave is digital consumption; and third wave is digital identities. Since sports is one of the “fifteenth default categories on Youtube” (Stauff 2009: 236), and, accordingly, media consumption patterns have also been affected by digitalization. Sata et al. (2018) indicate that ticketing is in the digital world, and with the QR codes, physicality of tickets will be history.

Social Media in Sports

One of the most popular media channels in marketing today is social media. According to Stokes (2008), social media is where people create and share written and visual contents (Stokes 2008) collaborate on content, experiences and ideas, and convene for fun and business (Strauss and Frost 2009) though control of their messages in a virtual communication network (Chung and Austria 2010). The increasing accessibility through personal devices such as smartphones, tablets, or PCs is a crucial driver for increasing usage and the growth of progressively active online communities (Stavros, Meng, Westberg and Farrelly 2014).

Today's sports marketers understand significance of communication and interaction with fans by means of different social media platforms (Williams ve Chinn, 2010). Social media helps developing communities and culture around organizations and individuals (Holt 2017) and using social media branding is important for sports organizations and athletes, coaches, etc. as well. Hochschild (1983) calls “emotional labor” as producing emotional condition in another person, and through social media, sports organizations create and develop these emotions and affections for their followers. It is important to understand the core followers in terms of their value systems and sensitivity (Thorpe and Dumont 2018). Also, William and Chinn's (2010) study supports the importance of maintaining a relationship with fans through the usage of social media for stronger and more interactive communications. Furthermore, social media poses many opportunities for clubs and sports organizations in reaching their fans or supporters to maintain interaction at a low cost in terms of brand information (Wysocki 2012). For example, NFL (National Football League) had a contract with Twitter to broadcast games (Andrews and Ritzer 2018). While social media helps to establish strong relationship between teams/clubs and fans, it also helps to increase brand value (Watkins 2013). Moreover, social media also help clubs generating revenue (Atali 2013). Direct communication opportunity, provided by social media, generates a great tool to establish and maintain a robust brand identity, thus, reassure fans to repeat consumption (Cooper 2009).

Social media platforms' increased popularity creates chances for reaching and attracting current and new fans where all parties can consume and create information and communicate with one another (Clavio and Walsh 2014). Usage of social media can be explored from the different perspectives of almost all stakeholders in sports including fans, teams/clubs, and athletes.

Fans' consumption of sports have been changed by social media (Filo, Lock and Karg 2015). Fans' interest in leagues have increased and fans' encounter with sponsors at more than one platform have been possible with social media (Broughton 2010). Fans follow social media accounts of their favorite teams to identify with their social identities, develop and satisfy their fan identities (Watkins 2013). College students use Twitter and use four fan motivations -information, entertainment, pass time, and fandom - for following sports clubs via social media (Witkemper et al. 2012). Another study on university students revealed that students follow their favorite teams' social media platforms to interact, learn, share and participate in events or competitions (Clavio and Walsh 2014). Turkish fans

use social media to get information, share content, and communicate with the club (Atalı 2013). Research on NBA fans revealed, hope, esteem and camaraderie motives drive them to use social media which enables them to be connected to their teams (Stavros et al. 2014). Akkaya and Zerenler (2017) exposed Besiktas fans to engage in social media usage for getting information about the team, team's merchandise, game and tickets, transfers, news, finding the accurate information, reading the comments, following promotions, and being informed about sponsors' campaigns.

Social media provides a platform for organisations where it is easy and free to introduce new ideas and products/services; thus, brand-related information is effortlessly provided to create awareness and build profitable relations with customers in order to foster loyalty (Clark and Melancon 2013). Accordingly, clubs/teams can use social media as an open platform for listening and discovering new ideas coming from fans, which would bring the organization and the fans closer (Witkemper et al. 2012). Twitter is a great social media platform for sport organizations to deliver time specific and direct content as a branding activity (Pegoraro 2010). Various college sports organizations use Facebook as a branding tool to build awareness and image, with evidence supporting the usage of brand associations in their contents (Wallace, Wilson, and Miloch 2011); however, Abeza and O'Reilly (2014) revealed that many sports organizations underused Facebook as a branding tool to create or preserve a dialogue with their fans.

In Turkey, official websites of SuperLeague teams revealed inadequate infrastructure and the information provided – written and visual – are insufficient and complicated (Yildiz and Ozsoy 2013); therefore, these clubs should invest in better social media accounts. Instead, social media accounts of these clubs are better than the websites where they market their brands and licenced merchandise, produce various activities, and share information (Kuyucu 2014). Additionally, Besiktas FC uses social media accounts actively, and they deliver information on campaigns of their sponsors, present merchandising products, maintain fan relationship, and provide news about the team (Akkaya and Zerenler 2017). Sports events also utilize social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to provide behind-the-scenes, real-time online text-based, event -related visual imagery content to cultivate brand relationship with fans (Thomson et al. 2018). Picture-sharing social media sites, such as Instagram, is also gaining interest in managing the use of visual imagery (Thomson et al. 2018). Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018) conducted a study in English Premier League to reveal that all teams in the league have Instagram accounts to provide visual content to boost fan engagement; however, Instagram is text-constraint, so brand managers will find creative and thoughtful ways to cultivate their brands (Anagnostopoulos et al. 2018).

In Turkey, many clubs and teams are using social media accounts effectively and efficiently, providing information on games, results, news, events, players, etc. 2018-2019 Turkish Super League teams and their followers on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are presented on Table 2 for Basketball Clubs/Teams and Table 3 for Football Clubs/Teams. The tables are listed in the order of the current rankings of teams; yet as seen on the tables, success of the teams does not necessarily represent team/club's number of followers.

Table 2 Turkish Basketball SuperLeague Team's Social Media Followers

	Instagram	Facebook	Twitter
Fenerbahçe BC	818k	11k	648k
Anadolu Efes BC	73.8k	270k	162k
Galatasaray BC	223.9k	197.9k	322k
Tofaş BC	14.4k	527	14.4k
Türk Telekom BC	5k	37.2k	24.4k
Gaziantep BC	9.3k	16.8k	32k
Banvit BC	14.8k	28k	21.1k
Beşiktaş BC	141k	104k	242k
Darüşşafaka BC	23.4k	43.5k	16.5k
Karşıyaka BC	30.1k	267	54.3k
Bahçeşehir Koleji BC	17k	1654	4k
Büyükçekmece BC	n.a	393	3k
Başakşehir BC	5.6k	n.a	88.4k
Afyon Belediye BC	7.3k	11k	3.6k
Sakarya BC	10.6k	13.5k	5.3k

as of May 4 2019

29th week of the Turkish Superleague

*k - thousand

**n.a. – not available

Source: Prepared by the author

Confusingly, in Turkey, some clubs have both football and basketball teams, and, thus, some of the football followers also follow basketball teams. According to KPMG Football Benchmark report in 2019, Galatasaray FC is followed by 27 million fans in social media, compared to Barcelona FC with 225 million followers, Porto FC 6 million, Bayern Munchen FC 72 million, Juventus FC 67 million, Manchester City FC 59 million, Paris Saint- Germain 64 million, and PSV Eindhoven with 2 million followers.

Table 3 Turkish Football SuperLeague Team's Social Media Followers

	Instagram	Facebook	Twitter
1 - Başakşehir FC	77.2k*	90.5k	88.4k
2 - Galatasaray FC	5.9m**	11.9m	8.43m
3 - Beşiktaş FC	2.6m	5.6m	3.81m
4 - Trabzonspor FC	435k	916k	1.63m
5 - Alanyaspor FC	35k	32.7k	23.8k
6 - Antalyaspor FC	45.5k	43.3k	23.8k
7 - Yeni Malatyaspor FC	35.1k	20.3k	34.1k
8 - Çaykur Rizespor FC	46.9k	282.7k	62.6k
9 - Konyaspor FC	106k	227.9k	239k
10 - Kasımpaşa FC	25.4k	42k	33.4k
11 - Sivasspor FC	63.9k	232.1k	80.7k
12 - Kayserispor FC	44.1k	30k	100k
13 - MKE Ankaragücü FC	75.3k	70.9k	53.9k
14 - Fenerbahçe FC	3.9m	8.8m	6.52m
15 - Göztepe FC	108k	163.5k	195k
16 - Erzurumspor BB FC	42k	26k	36.k
17 - Akhisarspor FC	28.2k	63.9k	26k
18 - Bursaspor FC	118k	551k	648k

31st week of Turkish SuperLeague

*k – thousand

**m - million

Source: Prepared by the author

On the athletes' side, social media is a direct and popular platform for communication as well. athletes create content, build reputation, and endorse their sponsors (Dumont 2018). Twitter is a tool used by athletes to provide insider information to fans and this may create strong emotional links (Kassing and Sanderson 2010). Hambrick et al. (2010) also studied how athletes utilized social media, specifically Twitter, to interact with fans and found interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, fandom, and promotional categories as the main areas of shared information.

According to Girandola (2018), social media created a platform where athletes not only can share whatever they want, but also create a new revenue avenue through product endorsements and sponsors. The list of 50 most influential athletes on social media in 2018 from 20 countries in eight different sports include eleven American athletes and 28 soccer players. This list starts with Cristiano Ronaldo at number one, soccer player from Portugal, with a salary of \$64 million, endorsements \$32 million, total social media influence of 342.4 million (122.7million Facebook likes, 75.7 million Twitter and 144 million Instagram followers) and at number 50 Robert Lewandowski, soccer player from Poland with a salary of \$11.6 million, \$7.1 million of endorsements, total social media influence of 24 million (9.2 million Facebook likes, 1.2 million Twitter and 13.6 million Instagram followers (Girandola

2018). The only Turkish descendent Germany born soccer player Mesut Ozdil is included in this list at number 11 with a salary of \$20 million, %7 million of endorsements, total social media influence of 73.1 million (31.4 million Facebook likes, 23.6 Twitter and 18.1 million Instagram followers). (

Forbes' 2018 List of the World's Highest paid athletes has 100 athletes who earn the highest in the world. Salary/winnings along with endorsements are totalled to list the athletes; however, their social media standing is not included in this list, so Table 4 lists the top 20 along with their Facebook and Twitter followers to see whether their earnings are along the lines of their followers.

Table 4 – World's Highest Paid Athletes and their Social Media Followers

	Total earnings	Instagram	Twitter	Facebook
1. Floyd Mayweather: (Boxing, U.S.)	\$285 m	23m	7.9m	13.3m
2. Lionel Messi: (Football, Argentina)	\$111 m	117.1m	2.73m	88.8m
3. Cristiano Ronaldo: (Football, Portugal)	\$108 m	164.6m	76.6m	121m
4. Conor McGregor: (MMA, Ireland)	\$99 m	30.8m	7.5m	7.9m
5. Neymar: (Football, Brazil)	\$90 m	115.1m	42.3m	59.8m
6. LeBron James: (Basketball, U.S.)	\$85.5 m	48.9m	42.1m	22.7m
7. Roger Federer: (Tennis, Switzerland)	\$77.2 m	5.9m	12.4m	14.5m
8. Stephen Curry: (Basketball, U.S.)	\$76.9 m	25m	13.1m	8.3m
9. Matt Ryan: (American Football, U.S.)	\$67.3 m	351.4k	318k	180k
10. Matthew Stafford: (American Football, U.S.)	\$59.5 m	215.4k	13.9k	12.8k
11. Kevin Durant: (Basketball, U.S.)	\$57.3 m	10.4m	17.4m	10.1m
12. Lewis Hamilton: (Racing, U.K.)	\$51 m	10.8m	5.42m	4m
13. Russell Westbrook: (Basketball, U.S.)	\$47.6 m	13m	5.92m	4.9m
14. James Harden: (Basketball, U.S.)	\$46.4 m	9.8m	6.14m	1.2m
15. Canelo Alvarez: (Boxing, Mexico)	\$44.5 m	4.7m	1.33m	3m
16. Tiger Woods: (Golf, U.S.)	\$43.3 m	1.9m	6.37m	3m
17. Drew Brees: (American Football, U.S.)	\$42.9 m	1.1m	3.15m	1.9m
18. Sebastian Vettel: (Racing, Germany)	\$42.3 m	763.7k	103k	7.2m
19. Derek Carr: (American Football, U.S.)	\$42.1 m	646.6k	417k	345k
20. Rafael Nadal: (Tennis, Spain)	\$41.4 m	6.6m	15.6m	14m

Source: Forbes The World's Highest-Paid Athletes 2018 and author generated.

Forbes 2018 The World's Highest Paid Athletes' Top 100 does not include any female athletes, and when searched top 10 female highest paid athletes are in Table 5. Although they do not ear as much as the top 100 in the world, their social media stances are similar, if not better.

Table 5 – Highest Paid Female Athletes and Their Social Media Followers

	total earnings	Instagram	Twitter	Facebook
Serena Williams (Tennis, U.S)	\$18.1 m	10.9m	10.9m	5.3m
Caroline Wozniacki (Tennis, Denmark)	\$13 m	1.4m	3.08m	1.5m
Sloane Stephens (Tennis, U.S.)	\$11.2 m	379k	211k	216k
Garbine Muguruza (Tennis, Spain)	\$11 m	712.1k	479k	458.2k
Maria Scharapova (Tennis, Russia)	\$10.5 m	3.5m	8.68m	14.5m
Venus Williams (Tennis, U.S.)	\$10.2 m	1.1m	1.77m	2.2m
P.V.Sindhu (Badmington, India)	\$8.5 m	1.2m	2.64m	1.3m
Simone Halep (Tennis, Romania)	\$7.7 m	1m	250k	1.5m
Danica Patrick (Race Car, U.S.)	\$7.5 m	678.1k	1.85m	1.3m
Angelique Kerber (Tennis, Germany)	\$7 m	626.9k	404k	852k

Source: Forbes The World's Highest-Paid Athletes 2018 and author generated

Looking at Turkish sports world, Turkish athletes are also utilizing the social media platforms for their fans (Please see Table 6). The numbers of their followers are increasing daily, and for their personal branding, they need to invest in social media for fan engagement and communications.

Table 6 – Turkish Athletes and Their Social Media Followers

	Instagram	Twitter	Facebook
Arda Turan (Football)	6.5m	2.1m	6.6m
Caner Erkin (Football)	829k	715k	509k
Nuri Sahin (Football)	779k	12.7k	2.7m
Cedi Osman (Basketball)	576.8k	223k	30k
Dogus Balbay (Basketball)	46.8k	34.2k	12.6k
Cagla Buyukakcay (Tennis)	92k	49k	53.6k
Marcel Ilhan (Tennis)	19k	2k	15.8k

Source: generated by the author

Another work on athletes by SportsPro (2018) calculates marketing potential of 50 athletes worldwide with the data provided by Hookit, with emphasis on their value through how much they earn, home market, age, willingness to be marketed and their appeal limit along with social followers, athletes engagement rates (promoted posts from Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube), totalling up to 100 points. In this list, again American athletes dominate (10 athletes), and also soccer players with 21 places. There are 15 female athletes against 35 male athletes and the average age is just under 24 (SportsPro 2018). So, by these studies and rankings, sponsors can use these athletes to promote their product and brands through athlete's visibility to their fans.

Emergence of E-sports

One of the most recent hot topic for the digital world of sports is the emergence of e-sports. From the technological perspective e-sports represents creating digital products in the format of games by turning physical skills and knowledge into commercial means (Xiao et al. 2017). Digital games exist for a long period of time starting from the 50s with emergence of computers and the games such as "Tic-Tac-To" and "Tennis for two". And in 1972, the first esports tournament "the Intergalactic Spacewar Olympics" was held by Stanford University's "Laboratory for Artificial Intelligence" with the game "Spacewar" and 24 players participated, and then came the arcades and home consoles around 1970s (Larch 2019).

Witkowski (2012) defines e-sports as "an organized and competitive approach to playing computer games (p350)." E-sports is similar to real sport types (Hebbel-Seeger 2012), yet it is still a debate whether the players are actual athletes or not because it lacks the bodily action. Yet, e-sport players claim that they have to be in shape in order to concentrate (Hebbel-Seeger 2012).

According to Nielsen's World Football Report (2018), EA Sports' FIFA 18 game sold 10 million copies in the first three months on the market and it is one of the most popular esports games; thus, FIFA and EA collaborated to launch FIFA eWorld Cup (Nielsen 2018). Amazon.com purchased Twitch providing access to 55 million of their viewers in 2014 to take advantage of the esports world by spending \$1.1 billion (Andres and Ritzer 2018). Football clubs in Turkey also saw this great opportunity to be a part of this ever-growing world of e-sports, and Besiktas, Fenerbahce and Galatasaray now have e-sports teams to compete in tournaments (Ayar 2018).

Many esports events are considered "high profile megaevents" which generates millions of dollars each year (Andrews and Ritzer 2018). Statistics on esports go back to 1998 with total of 9 tournaments and with active players of 34, dominated with US players (28 players), four Canadian, one English and one Swedish players, earnings totaling \$131,700. In 2018, total number of tournaments were 3738, active players of 20371, total earnings of \$158 million, again topped by US players, followed by Chinese and Korean players. Today, as of May 2019, total number of tournaments is 1013 with 8616 active players. Highest earnings reach up to almost \$100million by almost 13000 US players. The most popular games are Dota 2, Counterstrike: Global Offensive, League of Legends, Overwatch, Fortnite, Playerunknown's: Battleground In this list, Turkey is ranked 33rd with an earning of \$111,176 by 60 players so far in 2019; however, in 2018, 178 Turkish e-sports players finished 22nd with a total earning of \$1.2 million (Esports Earnings 2019). It can be concluded that number of players, tournaments, spectators, and the amount of prize money is increasing every year.

Throughout the world, students benefit from being an e-sport player as well. Many universities are providing scholarships to students (Syracuse University Staff 2019). In Turkey, Bahcesehir University (BAU) is one of the first universities to provide scholarships to students and add e-sports in its curriculum. BAU started providing scholarships in 2017 and, as of 2019, there are 20 students studying and working in the e-sports centre with an e-sports scholarship. 10 students are ranked in the top 1000 in the world. There are 515 active players, who are BAU students, as a member to this centre, and 49 of these students are of other nationalities. BAU's e-sports team was 2018 CEL Turkey League of Legends National Champion; 2018 UE Masters League of Legends European Champion; 2019 University CS:GO Championship Winner; and 2018 Turkish University Sports Federation's FIFA19 Championship Winner. Furthermore, BAU has 6 teams playing League of Legends, Counter Strike: Global Offensive; PUBG; Fortnite; Rainbow Six Siege, and FIFA19 (Arslan 2019). BAU utilizes e-sports as a branding tool in its communication activities.

This digital world is a great place to place advertising to promote brands. With the increased number of fans (please see Table 7) who follow this sport bring a great opportunity for brands to be

involved. Accordingly, for those brands that want to break through the clutter, this platform becomes a great place to dwell on for their branding activities.

Table 7 – Number of e-Sports Fans

Year	Fans
2016	270M
2017	365M
2018	411M
2019	451M
2020	495M

Source: Syracuse University Staff 2019

Conclusion

Digitalization in sports brings great opportunities and threats for everyone involved. In the near future, use of advance data, augmented reality or virtual reality, digitalization will bring new avenues for many stakeholders in the ecosystem of sports. Digitalization is inevitable in opening new paths to grow; sports world highly benefits and will continue to benefit from these digital opportunities. However, keeping up with these improvements and changes in order to prosper in the world of sports is up to the organizations and individuals.

Clubs and teams are investing heavily in being visual and active with their fans and sponsors using social media. Hearing back from their fans will give clubs/teams a chance to better serve them in the future. Thus, it is advisable to take advantage of this platform and not only use social media for information dissemination, but also information gathering. Creating stories to share with fans will also

For once, branding opportunities have been individualized and to the target market, thanks to social media. Creating awareness, building loyalty, and generating associations are made possible through effective use of social media. Involving fans with new project and activities will make clubs/teams more successful in terms of increasing brand equity. For athletes, direct touch with fans and sponsors will also create brand loyalty and increase personal brand equity.

Fans take advantage of digitalization as well. They want to be in touch with clubs/teams, athletes. Thus, reading and watching live coverage of actions and events can increase loyalty and create value; thus, their attachment to organizations or individuals will amplify.

E-sports is growing at an exponential rate and it is essential for sports organizations or individuals to take part in this world. For brands, this is a great platform to break through the clutter and be visible to target groups in order to create awareness and build brand equity. Unfortunately, this study does not cover the changes in media consumption in terms of broadcasting. Media entities are also struggling with digitalization and trying new areas in the digital world. On the other hand, fan engagement and fan experience are not discussed in detail since it is a whole different topic in digitalization and can be dwelled on in much more detail. Also, since creating content is coproduced with fans and clubs, sport and prosumption and cocreation can be discussed in detail which was not covered in this study.

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