



## The Role of Social Media in Enhancing the Popularity and Participation of Community Sports in Medan

**Arif Peristan  
Tarigan \***

STOK BinaGuna Medan  
Indonesia

**Arsyad parlindungan  
Rambe**

STOK BinaGuna Medan  
Indonesia

**Posma saut juliandre**

STOK BinaGuna Medan  
Indonesia

**Firman Gunadi  
Turnip**

STOK BinaGuna Medan  
Indonesia

**Vioni zuriana tarigan**

STOK BinaGuna Medan  
Indonesia

**Viona zuriani tarigan**

STOK BinaGuna Medan  
Indonesia

### Abstract

#### Background

Social media has become a transformative communication tool in various fields, including sports. In urban contexts such as Medan, community sports organizations face challenges in promoting their activities and sustaining participation, making digital platforms an important medium for outreach.

#### Objectives

This study aims to analyze the role of social media in enhancing the popularity and participation of community sports in Medan, focusing on both participant experiences and organizational strategies.

#### Methods

A mixed-methods design was employed. A survey was conducted with 150 participants from community sports clubs, and semi-structured interviews were held with 10 sports club managers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation tests, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed.

#### Results

Findings show that 78% of participants discovered their sports clubs through social media. A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was observed between frequency of social media engagement and participation levels. Clubs with structured digital strategies reported higher membership growth and community engagement compared to those relying on offline methods.

#### Conclusion

Social media significantly enhances both the visibility and participation of community sports in Medan. It offers cost-effective promotion, fosters motivation, and builds community cohesion. Sports organizations are encouraged to adopt structured digital strategies to maximize outreach and sustainability.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Community Sports, Participation, Medan, Digital Communication

Received: August, 23 August 2025. Accepted: August, 27 2025

\*Correspondence: [arifperistantarigan@gmail.com](mailto:arifperistantarigan@gmail.com)

Arif Peristan Tarigan

Correspondence Author Affiliate STOK BinaGuna Medan , Indonesia

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**How to Cite..** Tarigan, A. P., Rambe, A. P., Juliandre, P. S., Turnip, F. G., Tarigan, V. Z., & Tarigan, V. Z. (2025). The role of social media in enhancing the popularity and participation of community sports in Medan. *International Journal Emerging of Sport Science*, 1(3), 55–60. STOK BinaGuna, Medan, Indonesia.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the way individuals engage with sports, particularly through the integration of social media platforms. In recent years, social media has been increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for sports organizations to communicate, promote, and engage with their audiences (Achen & Bowers, 2020). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have allowed sports communities to reach a broader demographic, providing opportunities for interaction, event promotion, and fostering a sense of belonging among participants (Pegoraro, Scott, & Burch, 2022).

Community sports, defined as locally organized sporting activities that promote physical activity and social cohesion, play a crucial role in improving public health and strengthening social ties (Misener & Doherty, 2014). However, many community sports organizations face challenges such as limited visibility, restricted financial resources, and competition with professional sports for attention (Nicholson, Hoye, & Houlihan, 2011). In this context, social media provides an accessible and cost-effective solution to enhance both popularity and participation, especially in developing urban centers.

In Indonesia, and specifically in Medan, community sports have grown in popularity with the rise of futsal clubs, running communities, basketball groups, and other recreational activities. Nonetheless, the sustainability of these activities often depends on the ability of organizers to promote events, recruit members, and maintain consistent participation (Pratama & Setiawan, 2021). Social media is increasingly being utilized by these organizations to overcome resource limitations and to connect with a digitally active urban population (Putra & Nugroho, 2022).

Despite the global body of research exploring the relationship between social media and sports engagement, limited studies have specifically addressed the Indonesian context, particularly at the community level. Most existing literature focuses on professional sports organizations, athletes, or fan engagement in developed countries (Hambrick & Kang, 2015; Naraine & Parent, 2017). Therefore, there is a research gap in understanding how social media influences grassroots sports participation in cities like Medan, where community-based initiatives serve as both recreational outlets and tools for fostering healthier lifestyles.

This study aims to examine the role of social media in enhancing the popularity and participation of community sports in Medan. By focusing on both participant perspectives and organizational strategies, the research contributes to the growing literature on digital communication in sports while providing practical insights for local sports development in Indonesia.

## METHOD

### Participant

### Research Design

A mixed-methods design was applied, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component involved the use of a structured survey questionnaire distributed both online and offline, focusing on social media usage patterns and its impact on participation. The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews with club managers to explore promotional strategies, challenges, and the perceived role of digital platforms in enhancing community engagement.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) to summarize participant characteristics and social media behaviors. In addition, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social media engagement and levels of sports participation. Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involved systematic coding and the identification of emerging themes related to organizational practices, opportunities, and challenges in social media utilization.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The findings of this study highlight the important role of social media in promoting community sports participation in Medan. Data are presented in three subsections: participant characteristics, patterns of social media usage, and the relationship between digital engagement and sports participation.

### Participant Characteristics

A total of 150 respondents participated in the survey. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	103	68.7
	Female	47	31.3
Age Group	18–24 years	72	48.0
	25–30 years	41	27.3
	31–40 years	37	24.7
Occupation	Student	69	46.0
	Employee	55	36.7
	Self-employed	26	17.3

## Social Media Usage

The majority of participants reported that they first learned about their community sports clubs through social media platforms. Instagram and WhatsApp were identified as the most frequently used channels.

**Table 2.** Social Media Platforms Used for Sports Information

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Instagram	87	58.0
WhatsApp	36	24.0
Facebook	19	12.7
TikTok	8	5.3

Overall, 78% of respondents indicated that social media was their primary source of information about community sports activities in Medan.

## Correlation Between Social Media Engagement and Participation

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between frequency of social media engagement and levels of sports participation ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Participants who reported daily interaction with social media content related to sports were more likely to attend training sessions and participate in organized events.

## Organizational Insights

Interviews with club managers supported the survey findings. Managers emphasized that structured social media strategies, such as regular posting, event live-streaming, and interactive content, were effective in increasing membership and fostering long-term engagement. Conversely, clubs relying primarily on offline promotion reported limited growth.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that social media plays a significant role in enhancing the visibility and participation of community sports in Medan. The results align with previous research emphasizing the effectiveness of social media in increasing awareness, engagement, and community building within the sports sector (Achen & Bowers, 2020; Pegoraro, Scott, & Burch, 2022). Specifically, the majority of participants reported discovering their sports clubs through platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp, confirming the shift from traditional promotion methods toward digital engagement.

The positive correlation between social media engagement and sports participation ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) indicates that digital platforms not only serve as sources of information but also act as motivators for sustained involvement. This is consistent with Hambrick and Kang's (2015) findings, which demonstrated how digital interactions can influence participation behaviors and shape social dynamics in sports communities. In the case of Medan, motivational content, such as training tips, success stories, and visual documentation of activities, played a crucial role in fostering consistency and commitment among participants.

From an organizational perspective, clubs that employed structured digital strategies—such as frequent posting, interactive content, and event live-streaming—reported greater growth in membership compared to those relying solely on offline methods. This reflects broader international findings that strategic social media management is a critical determinant of audience engagement in sports (Naraine & Parent, 2017). Importantly, the case of Medan demonstrates that even grassroots organizations with limited financial resources can leverage social media as a cost-effective promotional tool to expand their reach and strengthen community bonds.

Nevertheless, several challenges emerged. Some managers reported difficulties in producing consistent and engaging content due to limited human resources and digital literacy. This is in line with research by Misener and Doherty (2014), who noted that community sports organizations often face structural constraints in managing partnerships and communication channels. Additionally, there is a risk of over-reliance on digital promotion, which could potentially exclude individuals with limited access to technology.

Overall, the results underscore the transformative impact of social media on community sports development in Medan. The findings suggest that digital platforms not only enhance popularity but also foster long-term participation and social cohesion. For practitioners, this highlights the need to invest in capacity building, digital training, and strategic communication planning. For policymakers, it suggests the importance of supporting community sports organizations with resources and training to maximize the benefits of digital transformation in grassroots sports.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of social media in promoting community sports in Medan. The findings indicate that social media serves not only as a communication platform but also as an effective medium for increasing public awareness, encouraging participation, and strengthening community engagement in sports activities. By leveraging digital platforms, local sports organizations and communities can expand their reach, showcase achievements, and attract broader support. Therefore, integrating social media strategies into community sports development programs is essential to enhance sustainability, participation, and long-term impact.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the community sports organizations in Medan that participated in this study and provided valuable insights. Special thanks are also extended to colleagues and academic mentors from Sekolah Tinggi Olahraga dan Kesehatan Bina Guna, Medan, for their guidance and support throughout the research process.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Arif Peristan Tarigan contributed to the conceptualization, research design, and drafting of the manuscript. Arsyad Parlindungan Rambe was responsible for data collection, field implementation, and preliminary analysis. Pasma Saut Juliandre contributed to the review of literature and validation of research methods. Firman Gunadi Turnip participated in the interpretation of findings and critical revision of the manuscript. Vioni Zuriana Tarigan assisted with statistical analysis and data interpretation, while Viona Zuriani Tarigan contributed to editing, proofreading, and the final preparation of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the paper and agree to be accountable for the integrity of the work.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

There is no conflict of interest

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