

# Contemporary Issues in International Marketing – Conference Abstract

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## Building international relationships through social media marketing: A netnography of football communities

McCarthy, et al (2014) undertook a multiple case study of social media and football clubs and found that “There is considerable scope for enhanced understanding of the way in which fans, members and customers will evolve their engagement with brands through social media over the next few years.” Understanding the benefits and challenges of digital marketing and communications for sports clubs in the digital age is an important aspect of the evolving discipline of Digital Marketing. Cooperstein, (2013) highlighted that we have moved from the age of information (1990-2010), to the age of the customer where massive IT investments and billions of people interacting online have created a wave of massive, disruptive change to business. Football clubs are examples of high impact brands with loyal customers who are using social media to reach out to international audiences.

This paper uses empirical evidence using a netnography approach to explore and evaluate this phenomenon. Netnography is now a well established, twenty year old method of conducting ethnography online (Kozinets 2015). Given the quantity of people online and the amount of data in the public domain, Netnography has been described as “faster, simpler, and less expensive than traditional ethnography, and more naturalistic and unobtrusive than focus groups or interviews” (Kozinets 2002). This study uses the blended qualitative methods of online participant observation, interviews and social network analysis to evaluate the effect of relationships between international football fans and the clubs that they support.

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- Kozinets, R. V. 2015. *Netnography Redefined* Sage, SAGE Publications (available at <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/netnography/book242765>).
- Kozinets, R. V. R. 2002. “The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities,” *Journal of marketing research* (39:1), pp. 61–72 (available at <http://journals.ama.org/doi/abs/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935>).
- McCarthy, J., Rowley, J., Ashworth, C. J., and Pioch, E. 2014. “Managing brand presence through social media: the case of UK football clubs,” *Internet Research* (24:2), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 181–204 (available at <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?issn=1066-2243&volume=24&issue=2&articleid=17106747&show=html>).