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How are Portuguese football clubs exploiting sponsored content on Instagram?

- As Paulo Futre<sup>1</sup> said, “charters will come” ... but only for smaller clubs -

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<sup>1</sup> Portuguese football legend, who, in 2011, defended that Sporting CP should sign the best Chinese player to increase the club's visibility in the Chinese market.

## **Research Question**

“How are Portuguese football clubs exploiting sponsored content on Instagram?” - As Paulo Futre said, “charters will come” ... but only for smaller clubs -

## **Abstract**

Under Nielsen Sports guidance, this study aims to provide an overview of the top division Portuguese football clubs' usage of their Instagram accounts, with a particular interest in sponsored content. Overall, this study concludes that, although clubs are taking advantage of sponsorship content, it must be improved in both volume and content-type. Furthermore, this paper also highlights the impact foreign players, namely from Asian markets with a high interest in football, can have on smaller clubs' visibility, and provides individual recommendations for each studied club to improve their Instagram activity and maximize social media sponsorship opportunities.

**Keywords:** Sponsorship; Social Media; Engagement; Football; Digital Marketing

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Literature Review .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Methodology .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1. Assumptions .....	12
3.2. Limitations .....	12
<b>4. Exploratory Analysis .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>19</b>
5.1. 1 <sup>st</sup> Tier .....	19
5.2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Tier .....	20
5.3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tier .....	20
5.4. 4 <sup>th</sup> Tier .....	20
5.5. 5 <sup>th</sup> Tier .....	21
<b>6. Conclusion and Future Research Suggestions .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>7. Annexes .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>8. Bibliography .....</b>	<b>65</b>

## 1. Introduction

Since 1979, the sports club's importance as an advertisement outlet has increased exponentially. It is currently estimated that 70% of worldwide sponsorship spending is targeted at sports entities, resulting in a grand total of more than 3.3 billion euros per year, solely on the top 5 European football leagues (Forbes, 2020; IEG, 2020; KPMG, 2020). To help explain this phenomenon, Machado, J.C., Martins, C.C., Ferreira, F.C., Silva, S.C.e. and Duarte, P.A. (2020) claimed that football has some unique characteristics, such as extreme fan commitment, that cannot be found in other industries. Moreover, Velicia Martín, F., Toledo, L.D. and Palos-Sanchez, P. (2020) research found that football clubs can be considered as a loved brand, as it carries 5 of 6 required components – “*passion*”, “*connection with the brand*”, “*intrinsic reward*”, “*emotional attachment*”, and “*thinking and frequent use*”. The only element lacking is “*quality*”, which implies that fans' loyalty is unmatched. Additionally, Adonis, J. (2016) noticed an increase in employee morale due to sports sponsorship, and Aichner, T. (2019) third study proved how, using football-related content, companies can get higher user engagement.

Like in most industries, COVID-19 also negatively impacted the sports industry. The European Club Association (2020) predicts that such an impact will amount to over 3.6 billion euros in combined revenues losses for the top 10 European leagues. Focusing on Portugal's case, although there is no discrete information on how badly COVID's impact will be, using previous research conducted by Deloitte as a benchmark, it is possible to estimate that LigaNOS football clubs will experience a decrease in revenues of at least 14.5%, correspondent of Matchday revenues, and that its wage-to-revenue rate will increase 10% to a worrying average of 85%. As a consequence, as traditional revenue streams, such as box office, merchandise sales, or hospitality, have been diluted, sponsorship deals gained importance.

Unfortunately, clubs could not fulfill some commitments made with their sponsors, as matchday related sponsor brand activation initiatives took a toll due to COVID-19 impositions (Andrea Agnelli, ECA president, 2020). Moreover, IEG predicts that over 79% of sponsors will change their marketing mix, and, thus, in the sports industry, online advertisement should gain even more relevance.

Currently, one of the best online advertisement outlets is social media, as it is considered the best option for a company to connect to its potential clients, since it facilitates communication and enables brands to shape consumers' perceptions (Mohammadkazemi, R. 2015; Wallace et al., 2011; Yan, 2011; Keller, 2009; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). Moreover, of the leading social networks, Needle, F. (2020) found that Instagram is the one that generates the most engagement, over 23% more than Facebook, while the latter has double the number of monthly users.

Simultaneously, Brandwatch (2017) found that sports are the most expressed topic on Twitter. This way, sports teams and fans have perfectly matched on social media, with football fans wanting to be as close as possible to the club and to voice their opinion (KPMG, 2020; Mohammadkazemi, R., 2015; Ioakimidis, 2010), and teams trying to take advantage of the opportunity to better communicate with fans, and to gather information regarding them, to expand club awareness and attract sponsors (Eagleman & Krohn, 2012; Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Hambrick & Kang, 2015). Consequently, football teams and stars are among the world's highest followed accounts, and due to their unique reach, brands have restructured their sponsorship deals to include the club's and star's social media outlets. Using Influencer Marketing Hub's Influencer Earnings Calculator tool, it can be estimated that the combined value of this paper studied posts surpasses the 16.5-million-dollar mark (**annex 1**).

Additionally, social media has enabled clubs and companies to escape their national frontiers and interact with foreign fans better and faster. On this topic, KPMG claimed that “*It is now not uncommon for major clubs to have 80-90% of their fan base located abroad, often on other continents*”. Furthermore, while mostly associated with European or South American countries, Nielsen found out that, in 2018, UAE and Thailand were the countries with the highest interest in football. The same study also found that the Chinese market was composed of at least 187 million people, more than Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and U-K., combined, followed by the Indian market with more than 125 million people.

Subsequently, it is natural that major football clubs begin to try to expand to such markets. From preseason tours, training/club partnerships to player acquisition, all tricks are being applied. For example, in 2019, Espanyol acquired Chinese star Wu Lei's rights for 2 million euros. As a result, Espanyol's Instagram post announcing the player signing became its most engaged post of the year, and more than 1.600 jerseys were sold in just 48 hours (SportsPro, 2019). Besides that, 2.5 million spectators in China saw his presentation live, and 40 million saw his debut, an astonishing result when compared to the 10 million who watched the “el Classico” and the 177.000 viewers in Spain that saw his debut game (Marca, 2019). Finally, because of how Espanyol handled Wu Lei hiring, the club was able to sign a sponsorship deal in Asia and increased its social media followers by 70%, compared to 2017-2018 (Inside World Football, 2020).

This way, it is possible to infer that football globalization brings new opportunities that can be monetized, creating new revenue streams, and that players with a large fanbase should have a higher valuation, as those players can bring their followers with them. Consequently, the club's negotiation power with sponsors, investors, or kit suppliers, rises as the club's reach expands,

resulting in a growth of revenues, in areas such as TV deals, matchday, and merchandise selling (KPMG, 2020).

Taking all this into consideration, as suggested by Nielsen Sports, this paper aims to provide an overview of the Portuguese football clubs' Instagram ecosystem. Specifically, it intends to recognize the particularities of the best performing content, to what extent sponsorship is being utilized, and, consequently, to offer suggestions of areas of improvement for each club that decision-makers can employ to increase club visibility and sponsorship opportunities.

This study is structured as follows: section 2 and 3 consist of the literature review and methodology applied. Section 4 describes the explanatory analysis, followed by the proposed suggestions in section 5. Finally, section 6 reflects on this paper's main conclusions, its shortcomings, and suggests future research topics.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *Sponsorship as an all*

Considering that one of the main objectives of this study is to understand how sponsorship is being utilized by Portuguese football clubs on their Instagram accounts, it is essential first to comprehend the concept of sponsorship. In 2020, Pyun, D.Y., Cho, H. & Leng, H.K., following previous research conducted by Dean (1999), Dean and Biswas (2001), Gwinner & Bennett (2008), defined sponsorship as “*a third-party endorsement that adds credibility and social value to its products, affecting consumers’ attitude toward the brand*”.

Sponsorship gained traction mainly due to other options increased costs, specifically, traditional media advertising, and due to its noticeable relation between cost and effectiveness to

promote the brand (Abratt & Grobler, 1989; Geoffrey, Donovan, Gilles-Corti & Holman, 2002). Furthermore, according to Meenaghan (1991) and Irwin & Asimakopoulos (1992), sponsorship has two fundamental objectives: trading/product-based, for instance, merchandise rights and sales, and communication ones, as brand awareness and image. In 1993, Sandler & Shani added a third objective – media-related ones. Further research on the topic confirmed the usefulness of sponsorship on brand recognition and brand attitude attributes (Geoffrey, Donovan, Gilles-Corti & Holman, 2002) and its impact on sales (Meenaghan, 2001).

#### *Difference between paid and organic activation*

Once a sponsorship deal occurs, the sponsored brand can be activated following two paths - paid or organic activation. The difference between them concerns the extent to which the sponsored brand is forced upon the promoter's fans/viewers. If the brand is naturally integrated into the promoter's activities, it is considered organic, e.g., football club's shirt publicity (**annex 2**). On the other hand, if it clearly is an advert pushing sponsored content, similar to a sponsored product activation or using the tag "*powered by*" (**annex 3**), it is considered paid activation. This study will focus on the latter.

#### *What do fans value on sport's Instagram accounts?*

Focusing on this paper studied platform, research indicates Instagram as a viable option for sports advertising due to its unique user engagement levels (Reza Mohammadkazemi, 2015; L. Siguencia, D. Herman, G. Marzano & P. Rodak, 2017). Balliauw, M., Onghena, E. and Mulkens, S. (2020) created a model that perfectly describes the interactions between sports sponsorship stakeholders, **annex 4**, and found that the follower base is the main factor when valuing a club's sponsorship potential. So, in order to increase a club's value to attract more sponsors and better



sponsoring deals, it is crucial to understand what fans value the most on the club's Instagram account (Aichner, T., 2019). On the topic, Aichner's investigation also suggested that supporters interact no matter the posting content. Nonetheless, content valued as exclusive, star player advertisement and transmedia seem to generate higher engagement rate than other types (Gyulai, 2016; Osokin, N., 2019; Clavio, 2013; Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; McLaren, 2013; C. Anagnostopoulos, P. Parganas, S. Chadwick, A. Fenton, 2016). Further research on the topic explains that engagement and reach increase if football-related appeals are used (Aichner, T., 2019), and fans engage more if they are incentivized to (Gyulai, 2016; Osokin, N., 2019).

### *Engagement for football clubs*

Widely considered as one of the most valuable metrics in digital marketing, engagement rate in Instagram is composed of the posts “*likes*”, “*comments*”, and “*account reach*”. On the topic, according to Rivaliq's 2020 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report, the average overall engagement rate on Instagram was 1.22%. Explicitly focusing on Sports Teams, the average engagement rate was 2.33% on Instagram, 0.18% on Facebook, and 0.07% on Twitter. It is important to note that, on a daily basis, clubs posting are 2 and 4 times more on Facebook and Twitter, respectively, than on Instagram. Furthermore, this report highlights how *photo* and *album* formats have a higher engagement rate than *video*, even though the first two types are posted more frequently. To conclude, the report also underlines that #training and #football were the best performing hashtags. It is important to note that due to the COVID-19 impact, the team's social activity was “abnormal”. Thus, comparing to the study conducted in 2019, it is possible to conclude that the format performance has not changed, but #goal, #legends, and #fans overperformed the two previously mentioned.

### 3. Methodology

Using Nielsen's tools, data concerning all Instagram posts published by all 18 teams that participated in the Portuguese LigaNos, between the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2019 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2020, was extracted. The number of posts extracted was 15,731, and the extraction included, among others, information concerning the “*date*”, “*type*”, “*likes*”, “*comments*”, “*link*”, “*title*”, “*description*” and “*sponsor name*” for each entry (**annex 5**).

As one of this project's focuses consists of evaluating how each club promotes its own sponsors, the “*sponsor name*” information was considered crucial. Therefore, after a quick analysis, it was possible to assess many sponsored posts not identified. This situation occurred because Nielsen's program only contemplates a post as financed if it is identified as such on Instagram, which was not the case for most of the studied universe. Consequently, all posts were individually analyzed to review if it was sponsored. Moreover, taking advantage of the opportunity and to improve the analysis, it was added to the dataset information regarding “*if the post was sponsored or not*”, the “*sponsor industry*”, “*sponsor's integration level*”, and “*type of content*”. Attached in **annex 6** is the glossary of all types of content discovered.

To appraise the “*sponsor's integration level*”, three criteria were created, “*brand activation*”, “*product activation*”, and “*connection between the post content and the club*”. The final principle was only used for “*club announcements*”, “*partnership*”, “*partner activation*”, and “*partnership*” or partner activation related “*behind the scenes*” posts.

While “*product activation*” consisted of just answering a simple “*yes or no*” question, “*is there any sponsor's product being promoted?*”, the other two criteria were not as easy.

Starting with “*brand activation*”, three sub-criteria were created – “*is the sponsor easily identified in the picture or video?*”, “*is the sponsor easily substituted?*” and “*is there any redirection to the sponsor’s page feature?*”. By responding to these three questions, it was then possible to conclude what the level of brand activation was, ranging from “*low*”, “*medium-low*”, “*medium*”, “*medium-high*”, or “*high*”. In **annex 7** it is described the sub-criteria answer combinations and consequential level of “*brand activation*”.

Regarding the last criteria, “*connection between the post content and the club*” range differed between “*low*”, “*medium*” or “*high*”. Posts in which the content being present did not relate to club endeavors or gave fans any source of advantage were considered as having a “*low*” connection level. If the post gave fans a personalized discount or reward, but the content was not essential for the club's key activities, it was valued as having a “*medium*” bond level. Finally, “*high*” relationship posts consisted of content promoted that were either club’s product or had, or has, a high degree of importance in a club event or day-to-day activities.

Taking into consideration these three criteria, an overall level of “*sponsor integration level*” was reached, which, as in the “*connection between the post content and the club*” criteria, it varied from “*low*”, “*medium*” or “*high*”.

Beginning with “*high*” “*sponsor integration level*”, it consisted of correctly told stories in which the sponsored brand was the main focus, meaning that the sponsor could not be substituted as the post was created around them. All “*partnership*” announcements were considered a highly integrated post as it consists of the moment in which the sponsor becomes part of the club’s family. Besides that, all posts in which the “*brand activation*” criteria were either “*medium-high*” or “*high*” and “*activated a product*” or had a “*high*” “*connection between the post content and the club*” were also considered as high integration posts. In **annex 8, 9, and 10**, it is presented an

example of a “*partner activation*” post, a “*starting XP*” post, and a “*partnership*” post, respectively, and its assessment per criteria.

On the subject of “*medium*” integrated posts, it included all personalized but flawed, sponsored posts, in which the sponsor is treated as vital. Errors in sponsor placement, description omissions, or absence of follow up prevented these posts of a *high* categorization. A post was considered as having a “*medium*” integration level if:

1. It was a “*medium-high*” or “*high*” “*brand activation*” post, but that either lacked *a product being activated* and/or have a “*low*” “*connection to the club*”.
2. The “*brand activation*” was evaluated as “*low*” or “*medium*,” but there was a “*product being activated*”.

In **annex 11 and 12**, it is shared a “*team content*” post and a “*starting XP*” post, respectively, that were considered as having a “*medium*” integration level, and its criteria valuation.

Finally, a post was considered a “*low*” “*sponsor integration level*” if there was a lack of effort to advertise the publications' sponsor. The sponsor could have been easily changed to another brand that the content, or message, would not have changed. Keeping the same evaluation method, it consists of content in which there was no “*product being activated*” and whose sponsor “*brand activation*” was considered “*medium*” or “*low*” due to the ability to be easily substituted. **Annex 13** presents several examples and criteria evaluation.

During the individual post's study, it was discovered that a few data entries either were no longer public or were duplicated. For the purpose of this research, those were removed from the dataset and not taken into consideration during the analysis portion. As a result, out of the 15,731 initial posts, 64 were scrapped, resulting in a final universe of 15,667 posts.

After cleaning and completing the dataset, a league-level descriptive statistical analysis was conducted in order to have a broader perspective of the information available. To complement the study, a more in-depth investigation was performed, in which the 18 clubs were divided into clusters, following a hierarchical clustering approach, Dendrogram, according to the club's average follower number, based on raw data (**annex 14**). This analysis allowed to make a comparative evaluation between each cluster's clubs.

### *Assumptions*

Unfortunately, Nielsen's data did not have complete information regarding the number of followers of some clubs. Since it was a crucial variable for the analysis, an assumption was used for the post's engagement rate calculations. As the information regarding the number of followers of those affected teams is provided at some point in time, and as it is assumed that active Instagram account's reach trend upward, the earliest provided number was considered for all team's missing posts. This hypothesis will not hinder the analysis as the engagement will most likely be underestimated. Furthermore, such an assumption was only used to analyze the engagement rate; all investigation regarding the average follower number was performed using raw data. **Annex 15** shows a detailed description of the teams affected, the number of posts influenced, the value assumed, and the earliest date available.

### *Limitations*

As the categorization and data collection was manually done, some imperfections may have occurred. Furthermore, this research focused on the posting's engagement rate, which is not a complete metric to assess sponsor's visibility and reach growth, as, due to data absence, the number

of new leads received by the sponsor and post shares were not accounted for. Additionally, *video* format content views were not considered as other formats did not have the same metric available.

#### **4. Exploratory Analysis**

After cleaning Nielsen's dataset, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to understand what was happening on a league level.

From it, it was possible to learn that, due to lockdown, clubs required time to adjust their social media strategy, and, as such, *April 2020* was the month with the lowest number of postings (**annex 16**). It is also important to note that the number of sponsored posts increased after the lockdown started due to this strategy adjustment. Furthermore, of the 18 clubs, SL Benfica was the most followed one, and FC Porto the most active. On the other hand, since its account was created mid-season, Belenenses SAD was the less active club and the one with the lowest fanbase (**annex 17 and 18**).

Focusing on the study's most important variable, engagement rate, it was possible to draw some initial conclusions. First, the league's average engagement rate was 2.65%, ranging between 0.11% to 64.03% and with a standard deviation of 2.16%. According to the literature found, Rivaliq's 2020 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report, this result is above the 2.33% industry average. Secondly, data indicates that the engagement rate and follower count have a negative correlation. This is, as the fanbase increases, the engagement rate decreases. Looking at the available dataset, the bottom five clubs, in terms of engagement rate, consist of SL Benfica, FC Porto, CD Santa Clara, Sporting CP, and CD Tondela, being three of the five mentioned clubs the ones with the highest fanbase in the Portuguese league (**annex 18**). Furthermore, agreeing with

another Rivaliq's (2020) finding, *video* format content underperformed compared to *photo*. Moreover, as video length increased, fan's engagement decreased (**annex 19**).

Another meaningful conclusion involves the fan's preferred type of content. Out of the studied 54 categories, only four performed below Instagram's 1.22% average engagement rate, *sub*, *kick-off*, and SL Benfica's exclusives *golo do dia* and *skill da semana*. This result corroborates Aichner, T. (2019) research, in which he concluded that, on a general basis, football fans interact regardless of the content type. Nevertheless, some preferred types of content can be identified, such as *transfers*, *uniforms*, *match pictures*, *FT*, and *travel* (**annex 20**).

Concentrating the analysis on sponsored content, it represented only 9.15% of total postings, while, in terms of engagement rate, performing 0.6% worse than non-sponsored (**annex 21**). Moreover, only two clubs maintained or increased their engagement rate when posting sponsored content, although only Sporting CP and CD Tondela registered average engagement rate values below the platform's 1.22% average (**annex 22**). As expected, format and content type preference followed what was previously mentioned (**annex 23 and 24**). Additionally, almost 44% of sponsored posting contained a sponsor from a sports-related industry, with those posts performing better than most other sectors (**annex 25**).

Although suggesting that sponsorship harms engagement, it is vital to account for other variables impact, such as type and volume of content sponsored compared to not sponsored per club, the disparity between clubs fanbase size, and, for instance, the environment around the club. Thus, this research cannot fully conclude that sponsoring a post directly affects engagement. Nonetheless, on average, full-blown ads, categorized as "*partner activation*", underperformed, especially compared to game-related sponsored content (**annex 24**).

To conclude this subject matter, only 6.90% of sponsored posting used Instagram's sponsoring feature, with them generating an average engagement rate of 1.50%, 0.60% below sponsored content average. Finally, it was not possible to conclude that the integration level attribute directly impacted engagement rate since *low* and *high* integration levels generated similar average engagement rates (**annex 26**). It is also important to note that in only 1.19% of posts was the sponsor problematic to identify, in 64.02%, the sponsors could have been easily substituted, in 58.65% the team failed to direct the fan to the sponsor page properly, and that slightly more than a quarter of posts activated a sponsor's product (**annex 27**).

Finally, looking deeper into the 10 posts that generated the highest number of interactions and the 25 with the highest engagement rate, it is possible to conclude that trophy celebration, big matches, transfers, fair-play, and promoting team's stars incite fan's engagement the most. This discovery validates previous studies on the subject mentioned in the literature review. It is worth noting that only 1 of the referred posts was sponsored.

As stated, in order to better comprehend Instagram's Portuguese clubs' environment, clubs were segmented into tiers based on the average number of followers per post (**annex 14**). From there, the same analysis previously used for the league's study was conducted for each group, with the addition of an individual dissection of each team's 30 best and worst-performing postings. This analysis allowed to compare similar club's social media activities and then provide personalized insights.

As expected, considering what was found in the league's analysis, all tiers had some similarities. The most noticeable one concerned the posting format type. In all groups, *video* content vastly underperformed compared to *photo* formats. This was visible not only on average



engagement rate but also on its weight on the 30 worst performing posts, especially compared to the 30 best (**annex 28**).

Another finding, identical across all clusters, concerns the number of sponsored posts. Research highlights how minimal was the presence of sponsored content on each club top 30 performing posts, while on the other spectrum, its existence was much more noticeable (**annex 29**).

Lastly, even though almost all categories can be used to promote a sponsor, and data indicates that most are not being fully utilized, three categories, *match pictures*, *squad list*, and *team news*, whose average engagement rate was above 3%, were neglected entirely (**annex 30**).

Concentrating on each cluster, the *1<sup>st</sup> tier* comprises the league's three main players, Sporting CP, SL Benfica, and FC Porto. Due to them having a large fanbase, the average engagement rate is lower than in almost all other clubs, however still more than 0.7% higher than Instagram's average. It is important to note that sponsored content volume must be increased on all three clubs, especially Sporting CP and FC Porto, who are missing in an increasingly important revenue stream (**annex 22**).

The *2<sup>nd</sup> tier* is composed of three clubs, whose average follower count ranged between 55.967 and 89.445. Regarding the group specificities, on account of SC Braga and Vitoria SC having been qualified for the Europa League, *travel* and *schedule* related content gained higher notoriety. Besides it, two conclusions stood-out: Vitoria SC fans commitment is remarkable, and one player can have a tremendous impact on the club's visibility. On the first subject, Vitoria SC managed to record an average engagement rate of 4.02% while being the 5<sup>th</sup> most followed club on the platform. For instance, their rival, SC Braga, the 4<sup>th</sup> most followed club, has 10.000 more

followers, almost 15% more, but its average engagement rate was 1.12% lower. Besides, by sponsoring the posting, Vitoria SC recorded an average engagement rate of 3.30%, 1.20% above league average. It is also worth mentioning that Vitoria SC was one of the clubs that best tried to integrate the sponsor on game content (**annex 31**).

Regarding the second finding, Portimonense F. SAD's results caught the eye. During the analysed period, its Instagram account following increased, at least 37%, mainly due to Mohanad Ali's signing. Better known as Mimi, Mohanad Ali is an Iraqi whose Instagram account is followed by over 1.2 million people. Moreover, since his signing, Portimonense F. SAD account's average engagement rate increased from 0.75% to 3.30%, and 29 of the 30 the club's most engaged posts contained Mimi.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> tier consisted of three clubs, connected by their follower count, but that have some glaring differences. On the one hand, Boavista FC is a historic club and the only non-“grande”<sup>2</sup> to lift the league's trophy. FC Famalicão, although having a very loyal fanbase, was promoted last year and overachieved almost all expectations. Finally, although having established its position during the past years, Rio Ave FC experienced a Portimonense F. SAD-like phenomenon.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, Rio Ave FC signed Taremi, who performed both on and off the field. Besides scoring 21 goals in all competitions and helping the club to qualify to European competitions, Taremi, an Iranian whose Instagram account has over 2.5 million followers, was also present in 26 of the 30 best performing posts and was the main responsible for an increase of 56% on the club account reach. Basically, Taremi showed off a Midas touch (**annex 32**).

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<sup>2</sup> “Grande” is a nickname given to the most successful Portuguese clubs – SL Benfica, Sporting CP, and FC Porto

The *4th tier* covered seven clubs with a follower's count ranging between CD Tondela's 23.045 to FC Paços de Ferreira 17.725. Curiously, the two mentioned clubs consisted of the worst-performing account and the best, respectively, according to the average engagement rate attribute (**annex 18**). While CD Tondela's position can be explained by the high usage level of video format content, **annex 33**, FC Paços de Ferreira leading, results from posting a relatively low number of posts and being remarkably consistent with its posting categories.

Moreover, CD Santa Clara is the only club whose engagement rate for sponsored posts is higher than non-sponsored. The explanation of such an incident is related to the fact that CD Santa Clara is the only club that financed some of its *transfers* posts, together with an above-average weight of sponsored *goal* and *highlights* related content.

Finally, a similar phenomenon as Taremi and Mimi could also be verified on CS Marítimo, CD Tondela, and CD Aves. Although Mohammadi's impact on CD Aves' Instagram is challenging to calculate, due to the lack of data regarding the club's account reach in 2019, one can assume it was high since the Iranian has a following of over 300.000 and is a focal point on 9 of CD Aves' 30 best performing posts. Regarding CS Marítimo, although the Japanese is just followed by 20.000 people, due to being present in 23% of CS Marítimo's top 30 posts, Maeda's impact is undeniable. Finally, during the 19/20 offseason, CD Tondela signed two Honduran, Rubio, and Castillo, whose online reach, 28.000 and 37.000 respectively, resulted in them being present in almost 33% of the club's best performing posts.

Speaking about the *5<sup>th</sup> and final tier*, it is composed of two clubs, Belenenses SAD and Moreirense FC, whose account's followers are below 15.000 people. Apart from having a low amount of followers, both clubs also share similarities on the reduced posting volume, average engagement rate, and sponsored posts weight.

## 5. Recommendations

From the analysis conducted, it was possible to identify some areas of improvement for each cluster that will be discussed in this section. In **annex 34**, it is offered additional personalized individual suggestions for each club.

### *1<sup>st</sup> Tier*

Of the identified type of content, *transfers*, *FT*, and *coach message* were among the top 5 performing, but nonetheless, no club exploited them as a way to promote sponsors (**annex 35**). This opportunity is even more evident since trophy celebrations, big match-related subjects, and transfers had a relevant weight among each club's top 30 posts. Au contraire, non-senior man football team-related content tends to perform below average (**annex 36**). This way, creating dedicated accounts for *other sports*, *women football teams*, and *youth teams* may be a compelling strategy to increase the main account's average engagement rate and consequential per post valuation.

Interestingly, although most posts were published during the lockdown, *pastime content* mostly did not perform well. Maybe expanding it to a *fan competition*, by providing a reward for who finds the problem solution, may generate more interactions. Besides that, *fan competitions* can be explored better by asking the fan to comment or like the post, and only after that, having him share the club/post on his own private/public account. Finally, none of these three clubs explore successful topics consisting of presenting a *match report* after each game or announcing the *squad list* (**annex 20**).

## *2<sup>nd</sup> Tier*

Of the top-performing content type, *FT*, *schedule*, *game-recap – highlights* and *goal*, and *transfers* are not being exploited as a sponsorship opportunity (**annex 37**). Again, as stated on the 1<sup>st</sup> tier recommendations, this opportunity gains more importance when the game consists of a perceived big match. Moreover, just like the 1<sup>st</sup> tier, none of the three studied clubs posted any content regarding *match report*.

On the other hand, exclusive regular content, mainly club *athletes Q&As*, gained little traction. As a suggestion, clubs should make this type of content feel special, either by making it rarer, extra creative, or by simply highlighting key takeaways to shorten up the *videos*.

## *3<sup>rd</sup> Tier*

As expected, *FT* and *transfers* were the best performing category, in which big matches generated the most interest, but in none was a sponsor promoted. Besides that, *starting XI*, *training*, *uniforms*, and *team content* appear to be categories to invest in (**annex 38**). Alternatively, and like other tiers, *post* and *pre-match* interviews need to be adjusted (see 2<sup>nd</sup> tier final recommendation).

Moreover, all three clubs added a redirection feature in less than 50% of sponsored posts, and, additionally, product activation could be better utilized.

## *4<sup>th</sup> Tier*

Apart from predictable categories mentioned in previous tiers, *team* or *fan content* tends to perform better, especially compared with *post* and *pre-match* interviews or non-senior male football team content. Additionally, although being informative, *kick-off* and *subs* had a consistent low engagement rate (**annex 39 and 40**).

Focusing on sponsorship, just like in other clusters, several best performing categories are not fully explored. More in-depth suggestions will be offered in **annex 34**, nonetheless, *uniforms* and *game countdown* are specific opportunities for most, if not all, clubs. Furthermore, only two clubs promoted a sponsor in more than 10% of their posts.

Additionally, these clubs need to improve overall brand integration. In over 75% of posts, the sponsor can be easily substituted, most posts do not have a redirection feature, and 5 of the researched clubs promote multiple sponsors in a single post.

On a final note, analysing the worst performing posts emphasized that fans do not largely engage with a topic being overexposed, e.g., club anniversary. Depending on the case, instead of posting multiple posts, about the same subject, in a short period of time, marketers should focus on creating a unique and significant post, which fans will value.

#### *5<sup>th</sup> Tier*

To start, it is important to refer that since both clubs' posting was significantly lower than the rest, **annex 17**, and both clubs' data is similar, no individual consideration will be made on **annex 34**.

Regarding this tier, this research found out less than 10% of posts were sponsored, and some of the best performing categories, such as *transfers*, *ticket info*, and *training*, did not have any sponsored content. Additionally, no post had a *medium level of integration*, and Belenenses SAD should publish sponsored content related to *uniforms* release, just like Moreirense FC. Finally, there was no redirection feature on more than 50% of posts, and *eSports* was among the worst-performing categories.

## 6. Conclusion and Future Research Suggestions

Answering Nielsen Sport's challenge, this project demonstrated how top Portuguese clubs utilize their Instagram accounts and exploit it as a revenue source. In practical terms, this project, particularly the data collection and categorization result, will allow Nielsen Sport's to improve its understanding of the market dynamics and to offer more accurate digital consulting services: by firstly providing a joint study to LigaNOS clubs, and then an in-depth individual analysis.

Combining this project's initial finding, that only 9.15% of all Instagram activity is monetized, and the estimated value of all posts presented in the introduction, it is estimated that LigaNOS clubs lost on a potential 15.1 million USD opportunity on Instagram's sponsorship (**annex 1**). Indubitably, this estimate assumes that all posts would be sponsored, which may not be 100% viable. Nonetheless, as this research highlights, corroborating with Aichner, T. (2019), fans tend to interact regardless of the content. Yet, using a reasonable assumption in which only game-related posts can be sponsored, it can be estimated that clubs lost over 4.5 million USD, which is still a significant amount (**annex 1**). Subsequently, this study offers personalized recommendations for each club to improve its digital footprint and to seize the opportunity to diversify its revenue structure (**annex 34**).

As Balliauw, M., Onghena, E. and Mulkens, S. (2020) underlined, as the number of followers increases, so do interactions, leading to higher visibility and post valuation. Such can also be concluded by analyzing each club post's value estimate (**annex 1 and 18**). This way, it was identified that five clubs employed a specific strategy of signing foreign players, from countries where football demand is very high, with a recognized local popularity. Regarding this topic, data shows that using those players, like Mimi and Taremi, did impact post's engagement rate, and consequently, the club account's follower total. Nonetheless, it appears that this impact

is less noticeable as the club's fanbase increases. Using SL Benfica as an example, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 2020, the club signed three players, Jan Vertoghen, Everton Cebolinha, and Luca Waldschmidt. Although Everton's Instagram account has more than 1.8 million followers, his announcement underperformed compared to Jan, who has less 900.000 followers. Moreover, compared with Luca's report, it only registered 30.000 more likes, 39% more, while the Brazilian's reach is 11 times higher (**annex 42-44**).

Consequently, it appears that Paulo Futre was right all along. When investing in new markets, in which football interest is high and increasing, "*chatters will come*", but, due to the club's fanbase size, such impact is more evident in smaller clubs than on the "3 grandes". Nevertheless, all clubs should take advantage of their most charismatic/beloved players, as using them tends to cause an increased engagement rate. Furthermore, to better utilize a player reach, clubs should try to implement a clause in the player's contract, in which the player agrees to promote the club's sponsors on his private account a fixed number of times.

It is important to note that this research does not recommend that all small clubs should commence signing players based on their Instagram account reach. While a club can find a gem like Rio Ave's Taremi, it can also acquire players with little to no field contribution, like Portimonense's Mimi or Sporting CP's Sunil Chhetri<sup>3</sup>. This study purely highlights the marketing benefits that those signings can have. Besides impacting the clubs' Instagram account, if managed well enough, recruiting international stars can have a significant impact by expanding the club visibility to new markets and improving merchandise sales and sponsorships opportunities. Espanyol and Portimonense F. SAD are great examples of it. As mentioned in the introduction, by

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<sup>3</sup> Football Indian star signed by Sporting CP in 2012, with the objective to help the club expand to the Indian market, who ended up not playing for the club's first team



merely signing Wu Lei, Espanyol improved its TV deals and struck new sponsorship deals in China. In the Portuguese club example, due to a prominent Japanese contingent, one of the club's biggest sponsors is a Japanese company involved in a non-sports related industry.

Focusing on sponsorship opportunities, Sitz, L. (2011) investigation presented an exciting model that helps clubs understanding their crucial areas of operations: “*offer*”, “*identify*”, “*organization*”, and “*consumers*”. By adequately evaluating it, the club will better identify its worth in a sponsorship negotiation and assess if the sponsor's customers and offer are aligned with the club's ones (**annex 45**). The discussed model would be a valuable addition, especially for clubs that have acquired developing markets stars and are looking for sponsorship deals in such markets.

Additionally, this research also found out that fans seem to prefer *photo* format content or shorter *videos* that either bring excitement (“*transfers*”, “*uniforms*”), are informative (“*goals*”, “*highlights*”, “*FT*”), exclusive (“*behind the scenes*”) or in which they are present in (“*fan content*”). Content that traditionally is longer, like “*match preview*”, “*post-match*”, or “*player Q&A*”, should be summarized in a shorter video or photo as an event's highlight. Moreover, as Machado, J.C., Martins, C.C., Ferreira, F.C., Silva, S.C.e. and Duarte, P.A. (2020) found, fans prefer content that rewards them, thus changing *pastime content* to *fan competition* appears to be an excellent opportunity to increase engagement rate.

Continuing the content type discussion, it was discovered that several categories, that traditionally prompt more interactions from fans, are being underutilized as a sponsorship opportunity. For instance, *match pictures*, *team news*, and *squad list* related posts were not financed once, although having average engagement rates above 3% (**annex 20 and 24**). This finding gains more relevance when, agreeing with Watanabe, N.M., Pegoraro, A., Yan, G. and Shapiro, S.L. (2019) research, it was observed a spike in fan' interest when the upcoming match

was considered a big game. To seize the opportunity, clubs should partner with companies that operate in related industries to the topic being present. Using “*match pictures*” as an example, clubs should try to associate with photographic camera manufacturers. Additionally, as CD Santa Clara proved, it is possible to announce a player signing while also advertising a sponsor (**annex 46**). The remaining 17 clubs must follow this example, as *transfers* was the category that generated the most fan engagement.

As a final recommendation, it was found that fans engage less when the sponsor, and its products, are pushed on them as an advert, but do not mind if the sponsor is integrated naturally on content that they rate. This way, as Vitoria SC demonstrated to be possible (**annex 31**), clubs must aim to improve sponsor integration as it better promotes a sponsor, increasing its visibility, and incentivizing interactions. To summarize, clubs need to make sure that the sponsor is easily identified, thoughtfully integrated into relevant content, and that there is a redirection feature, so that fans can quickly learn more about the promoted brand while exerting little effort. By doing so, sponsor interest will increase, and so will the club’s posts valuation.

To conclude, due to time constraints, it was not possible to investigate on a deeper level some relevant variables, their connections, and their direct impact on engagement rate and sponsorship success. Consequently, using this overview as a basis, future research should concentrate on further exploring the effect of using foreign star players on engagement rate, the relationship between sponsorship and engagement rate on social media, the practical effect of increasing sponsor’s integration on a post and understand, to a greater degree, which variable has the most significant direct impact on fans’ engagement.

## 7. Annexes

**Annex 1** – Clubs Instagram post’s estimate according to Influencer Marketing Hub’s tool -

Influencer Earnings Calculator - <https://influencermarketinghub.com/instagram-money-calculator/>

Unfiltered Data					
Clubs	Minimum post valuation	Nº of posts	Total valuation	Nº of non-sponsored posts	Total valuation of non-sponsored posts
Belenenses Futebol, SAD	Not available	167	-	152	-
Boavista Futebol Clube	\$208.50	277	\$57,755	222	\$46,287
CD Tondela	\$143.25	730	\$104,573	673	\$96,407
Clube Desportivo das Aves	\$111.75	353	\$39,448	335	\$37,436
Clube Desportivo Santa Clara	\$157.50	1,172	\$184,590	1,023	\$161,123
CS Marítimo	\$141.00	898	\$126,618	741	\$104,481
FC Paços de Ferreira	\$135.00	420	\$56,700	390	\$52,650
FC Porto	\$3,166.50	2,038	\$6,453,327	1,905	\$6,032,183
Futebol Clube de Famalicão	\$250.50	1,015	\$254,258	973	\$243,737
Gil Vicente Futebol Clube	\$201.75	806	\$162,611	777	\$156,760
Moreirense Futebol Clube	\$112.50	369	\$41,513	341	\$38,363
Portimonense Futebol Sad	\$390.00	813	\$317,070	757	\$295,230
Rio Ave FC	\$244.50	1,100	\$268,950	973	\$237,899
SC Braga	\$399.75	1,420	\$567,645	1,364	\$545,259
Sport Lisboa e Benfica	\$3,351.75	925	\$3,100,369	767	\$2,570,792
Sporting Clube de Portugal	\$2,972.25	1,578	\$4,690,211	1,444	\$4,291,929
Vitória Futebol Clube	\$126.00	1,051	\$132,426	959	\$120,834
Vitória Sport Clube	\$333.75	535	\$178,556	437	\$145,849
Grand Total		15,667	\$16,736,617	14,233	\$15,177,217

Game Related Content					
Clubs	Minimum post valuation	Nº of posts	Total valuation	Nº of non-sponsored posts	Total valuation of non-sponsored posts
Belenenses Futebol, SAD	Not available	55	-	53	-
Boavista Futebol Clube	\$208.50	98	\$20,433	85	\$17,723
CD Tondela	\$143.25	230	\$32,948	194	\$27,791
Clube Desportivo das Aves	\$111.75	74	\$8,270	65	\$7,264
Clube Desportivo Santa Clara	\$157.50	564	\$88,830	501	\$78,908
CS Marítimo	\$141.00	300	\$42,300	189	\$26,649
FC Paços de Ferreira	\$135.00	128	\$17,280	127	\$17,145
FC Porto	\$3,166.50	798	\$2,526,867	722	\$2,286,213
Futebol Clube de Famalicão	\$250.50	299	\$74,900	284	\$71,142
Gil Vicente Futebol Clube	\$201.75	195	\$39,341	174	\$35,105
Moreirense Futebol Clube	\$112.50	158	\$17,775	138	\$15,525
Portimonense Futebol Sad	\$390.00	270	\$105,300	258	\$100,620
Rio Ave FC	\$244.50	298	\$72,861	273	\$66,749
SC Braga	\$399.75	411	\$164,297	371	\$148,307
Sport Lisboa e Benfica	\$3,351.75	171	\$573,149	149	\$499,411
Sporting Clube de Portugal	\$2,972.25	409	\$1,215,650	352	\$1,046,232
Vitória Futebol Clube	\$126.00	263	\$33,138	233	\$29,358
Vitória Sport Clube	\$333.75	224	\$74,760	184	\$61,410
Grand Total		4,945	\$5,108,099	4,352	\$4,535,549

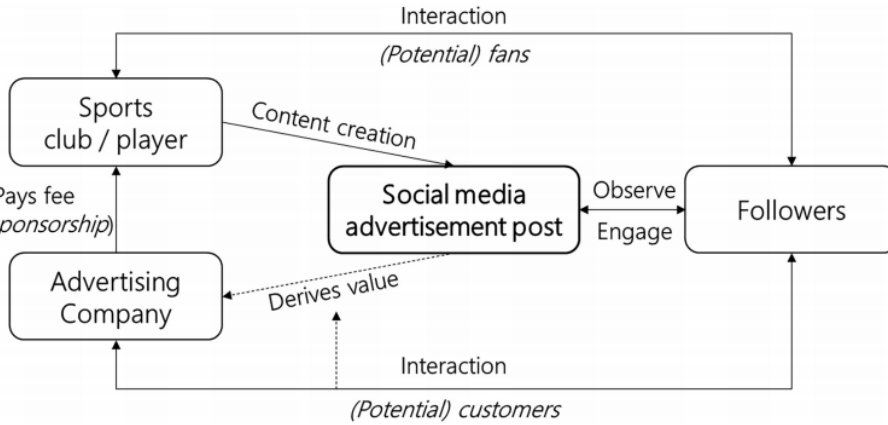
## Annex 2 – Example of organic activation



## Annex 3 – Example of paid activation



**Annex 4 – Balliauw, M., Onghena, E. and Mulkens, S. (2020) sports sponsorship stakeholders interactions model (annex 4)**



**Figure 1.**  
Relationships and interactions between the stakeholders in social media advertising

**Annex 5 – Initial dataset**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
	Account	User Name	followers at Post	Created	Type	Likes	Comments	Views	URL	Link	Photo	Title	Description	Image Text	Sponsor id	Sponsor Name	Total Interact
1	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1552914	2-07-18 00:51:33	Photo	166969	37147	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1552914	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	204,118
2	FC Porto	fcporto	1450321	2-07-16 19:18:29	Album	69753	104603	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1450321	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	174,356
3	FC Porto	fcporto	1442571	2-07-16 00:26:54	Photo	160858	7093	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1442571	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	167,951
4	FC Porto	fcporto	1247073	9-08-24 12:05:39	Photo	144117	4925	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1247073	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	149,042
5	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1296881	9-08-04 23:43:33	Photo	118373	2160	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1296881	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	120,533
6	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1490426	2-04-01 22:06:40	Photo	119573	930	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1490426	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	120,503
7	FC Porto	fcporto	1360918	0-02-16 22:21:19	Photo	116562	1639	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1360918	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	118,201
8	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1423392	0-01-02 22:12:41	Photo	113232	1314	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1423392	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	114,546
9	FC Porto	fcporto	1360918	0-02-16 19:55:18	Photo	112680	1633	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1360918	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	114,313
10	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1439573	0-01-18 01:39:18	Album	111989	969	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1439573	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	112,958
11	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1266374	9-07-11 00:23:20	Album	107586	800	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1266374	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	108,386
12	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1547817	0-07-23 16:13:16	Photo	106811	785	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1547817	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	107,596
13	FC Porto	fcporto	1450321	0-07-16 11:58:59	Album	106269	387	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1450321	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	106,656
14	FC Porto	fcporto	1352013	0-02-08 23:34:51	Photo	100653	2547	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1352013	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	103,200
15	FC Porto	fcporto	1352013	0-02-09 00:40:32	Video	94772	1751	378730	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1352013	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	96,503
16	FC Porto	fcporto	1152546	9-07-05 21:40:32	Photo	94647	1601	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1152546	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	96,248
17	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1296881	9-08-05 00:10:32	Album	94750	597	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1296881	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	95,347
18	FC Porto	fcporto	1442571	9-07-16 01:24:33	Photo	94006	748	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1442571	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	94,754
19	FC Porto	fcporto	1442571	9-07-16 01:14:54	Photo	93996	718	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1442571	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	94,714
20	FC Porto	fcporto	1354997	9-02-09 13:04:27	Album	91353	493	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1354997	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	91,846
21	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1447495	0-01-29 21:33:09	Photo	90996	843	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1447495	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	91,839
22	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1482444	0-03-17 00:05:27	Photo	87851	953	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1482444	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	88,804
23	FC Porto	fcporto	1380026	0-02-23 23:24:57	Video	86951	1314	273868	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1380026	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	88,265
24	FC Porto	fcporto	1442571	0-07-16 00:04:00	Photo	86236	710	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1442571	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	86,946
25	FC Porto	fcporto	1442571	0-07-16 00:59:08	Photo	85239	890	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1442571	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	86,129
26	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1263936	9-07-09 20:06:26	Video	83141	2482	233751	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1263936	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	85,623
27	FC Porto	fcporto	1442571	9-07-16 00:26:04	Photo	84142	975	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1442571	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	85,117
28	FC Porto	fcporto	1365942	0-02-17 12:05:30	Photo	84481	548	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1365942	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	85,029
29	ting Clube de Port	tingclubedesport	832958	0-01-29 17:25:51	Video	81071	3437	951733	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/832958	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	84,508
30	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1266374	9-07-11 00:39:01	Video	82697	957	233871	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1266374	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	83,654
31	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1296881	9-08-05 00:23:00	Album	82837	367	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1296881	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	83,204
32	jort Lisboa e Benf	sibenefica	1401055	9-12-13 18:21:10	Album	82385	466	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1401055	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	82,851
33	FC Porto	fcporto	1219901	9-08-05 14:46:20	Photo	81490	874	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1219901	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	82,364
34	FC Porto	fcporto	1160916	9-07-10 20:01:02	Photo	80498	1811	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1160916	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	82,309
35	FC Porto	fcporto	1450321	2-07-16 17:52:03	Album	79875	414	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/1450321	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	80,289
36	ting Clube de Port	tingclubedesport	832958	0-01-29 17:25:51	Photo	78767	1130	0	instagram.com/p/Instagram.com/832958	nc_sid=8ae9d68	nc_ohc=8ae9d68	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	nc_cat=1008	79,406

## **Annex 6** – Type of content glossary

- a. Archive → Club's past moments remembered.
- b. Awards → Monthly awards given out by 3rd party entities.
- c. Behind the Scenes → Exclusive footage of a club event/action.
- d. Birthdays → Player birthday celebration.
- e. Club Announcement → Announcement made by the board or in the name of the club.
- f. Club TV → Longer video content, mostly exclusive/related to the club media outlet.
- g. Coach Message → Any coach declaration directed to the fans.
- h. Coach Q&A → Whenever a coach has an interview or a fan Q&A.
- i. eSports → All content related with eSports.
- j. Fan Competition → Giveaways.
- k. Fan Content → Pieces made by, with, or for fans.
- l. FT (Full-time) → Information associated with the final game score.
- m. Game Countdown → All content announcing the upcoming game.
- n. Goal → All current game's goals related content.
- o. Goal Awards → Content acknowledging the best goal of the month/year.
- p. Golo do Dia → Specific content created by Benfica during the lockdown.
- q. Highlights → Recap / Best moments of the current year.

- r. Holidays → Celebration of a special day.
- s. HT (Half-time) → Information related to the half-time score.
- t. Kick-off → Post informing the game's kick-off.
- u. Legends → Posts remembering/celebrating club's Legends.
- v. Match Pictures → Posts containing current game's pictures.
- w. Match Preview → Pre-game interviews.
- x. Match Report → Statistics and analysis related to the match.
- y. Matchday → All game-related content posted in the day leading to the game.
- z. Merchandise → All content about club Merchandise, from new product announcements, excluding new uniforms, to discounts.
- aa. Miscellaneous → Visually appealing content with minimalist text.
- bb. MOTM (Man of the Match) → Player of the game award related content (fan given).
- cc. Other Sports → News about any other of the club's sports.
- dd. Partner Activation → Content promoting a sponsor's products.
- ee. Partnership → Posts announcing a new partnership.
- ff. Pastime Content → Playful games created for fan's enjoyment, with no practical reward given.
- gg. Player Message → Any player declaration directed to the fans.
- hh. Player Q&A → Whenever a player has an interview or a fan Q&A.

- ii. Post-Match → Post-game interviews.
- jj. POTM (Player of the Month) → Player of the month award related content (fan given).
- kk. Schedule → All content announcing draw results or new information about the games schedule.
- ll. Skill da Semana → Specific content created by Benfica during the lockdown.
- mm. Social Responsibility → Socially responsible messages or actions taken by the club or club' workers.
- nn. Squad List → Posts announcing the squad chosen for the upcoming game.
- oo. Starting XI → Posts announcing the starting eleven for the upcoming game.
- pp. Stats (Statistics) → Posts containing a relevant statistic.
- qq. Subs (Substitutions) → Posts announcing substitutions made during the game.
- rr. Team Content → Content created by or acknowledging the team/player.
- ss. Team News → All squad related news → Injury Report, National call ups and performance, squad numbers, and composition.
- tt. Ticket Info → Ticket details ahead of a match.
- uu. Topical Content → All club public current affair related posts.
- vv. Training → Content related to the team's practice.
- ww. Transfers → News about new signings, departures, or renewals of contracts.
- xx. Travel → Content related to team' traveling.



- yy. Uniforms → Launch of new kits.
- zz. Warm-Up → Pictures / Videos of the warmup session.
- aaa. Women Football → Content regarding the club's women football squad.
- bbb. Youth News → News regarding any of the younger teams.

#### **Annex 7 – Brand activation sub-criteria combinations**

- a. *Is the sponsor brand easily identified?* → Yes / No
- b. *Can it be substituted with ease?* → Yes / No
- c. *Is there any direct redirection method?* → Yes / No

##### i. Brand Activation Combinations

- 1. Low → N / N / N or Y / Y / N
- 2. Medium Low → N / Y / Y
- 3. Medium → Y / Y / Y or N / N / Y
- 4. Medium High → Y / N / N
- 5. High → Y / N / Y

## Annex 8 – High sponsor integration “partner activation” post



<https://www.instagram.com/p/B06Qcikg36f/>

- In this post, Benfica correctly activates the new Adidas product. The new X19 boots are seamlessly placed in the picture, held by one of the most influential players, and the brand/product is visibly identified in the description.
  - Brand activation → High
    - Identification → Yes
    - Substitutable → No
    - Redirection → Yes
  - Product activation → Yes → The new X19 boots are the main focus of the picture and mentioned correctly in the description.

- Club relation → Medium → Using Grimaldo creates an inclusive feeling but does not mitigate a sense of the post being solely promotional.

#### **Annex 9 – High sponsor integration “starting XI” post**



<https://www.instagram.com/p/B8omghOns7G/>

- In this post, Vitoria SC does the beautiful job of sharing their starting line for the upcoming game and activating their sponsor's products. This way, Sagres' beers are integrated as part of an essential moment of the match.
  - Brand Activation → High → Sagres is easily identified below the account tag.
    - Identification → Yes
    - Substitutable → No
    - Redirection → Yes
  - Product Activation → Yes → Sagres' bottles are the main focus of the picture.

## Annex 10 – High sponsor integration “partnership” post



<https://www.instagram.com/p/B6LMvj8BUyY/>

In this study, all announced partnerships were considered high integration posts as the sponsor is the publication's focus and is welcomed to the club's family.

## Annex 11 – Medium sponsor integration “team content” post



[https://www.instagram.com/p/B\\_Z6HALhsvA/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B_Z6HALhsvA/)

Meo is a focal point in all pictures and is being redirected to the fans via photo identification.

Nonetheless, there is a lack of partner activation in terms of clearly showing the sponsor's product.

- Brand Activation → High → Meo is presented as a focal point in all pictures.
  - Identification → Yes
  - Substitutable → No
  - Redirection → Yes
- Product Activation → No → There is no product being advertised.

#### Annex 12 – Medium sponsor integration “starting XI” post



<https://www.instagram.com/p/CBBkbQ3ntNu/>

Similar to annex 5 but with a significant omission, the sponsor's name. While in annex 5, the fan could see Sagres name below the account name, here Sagres is not mentioned once. This means that fans who do not recognize the brand's logo will not know who it is.

- Brand Activation → Low → Unfortunately, Sagres is only identified via their logo in this post. New clients will not recognize the brand and will not be able to find the brand easily.
  - Identification → No
  - Substitutable → No
  - Redirection → No
- Product Activation → Yes → Sagres' bottles are the focus of the picture.

### Annex 13 – Low sponsor integration post examples



<https://www.instagram.com/p/B1HP-8uh4Dt/>





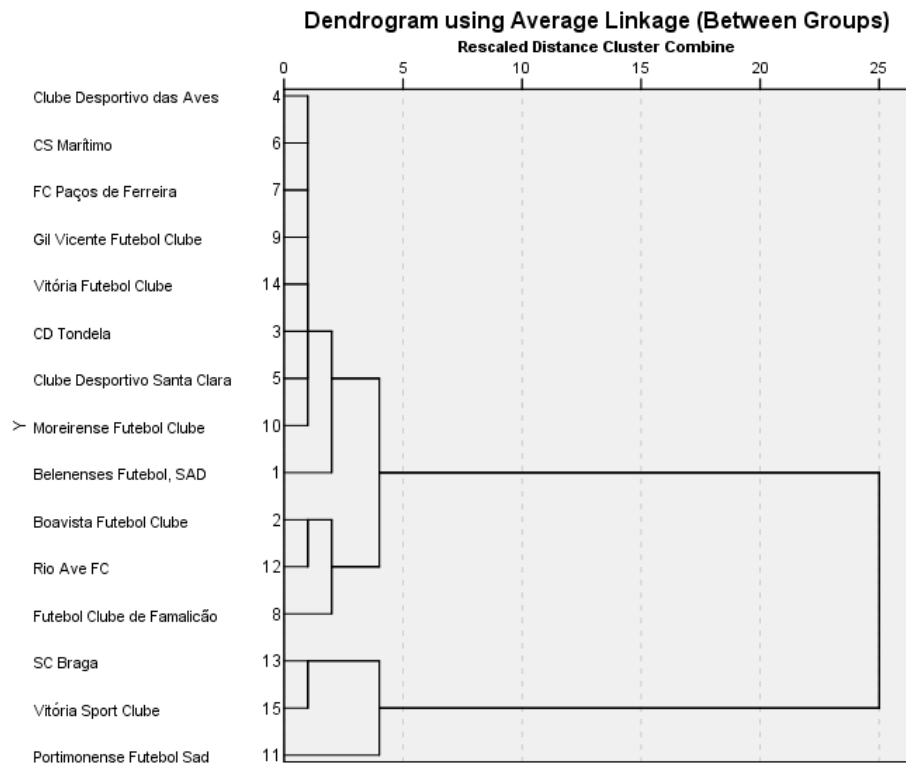
<https://www.instagram.com/p/B3Pig8OndpY/>



<https://www.instagram.com/p/CC6Bla7nNbP/>

- Brand Activation → Low / Medium → Changing either of these sponsors for another brand would not affect the post. Nonetheless, some redirect the viewer to the sponsor's page, increasing its awareness.
  - Identification → Yes
  - Substitutable → Yes
  - Redirection → No / Yes
- Product Activation → None → No product is being advertised

**Annex 14** – LigaNOS club's cluster segmentation → Note: 1<sup>st</sup> tier clubs were not used in the Dendrogram as the difference regarding the followers count was clear





Clusters Based on average followers using raw data (no assumptions):

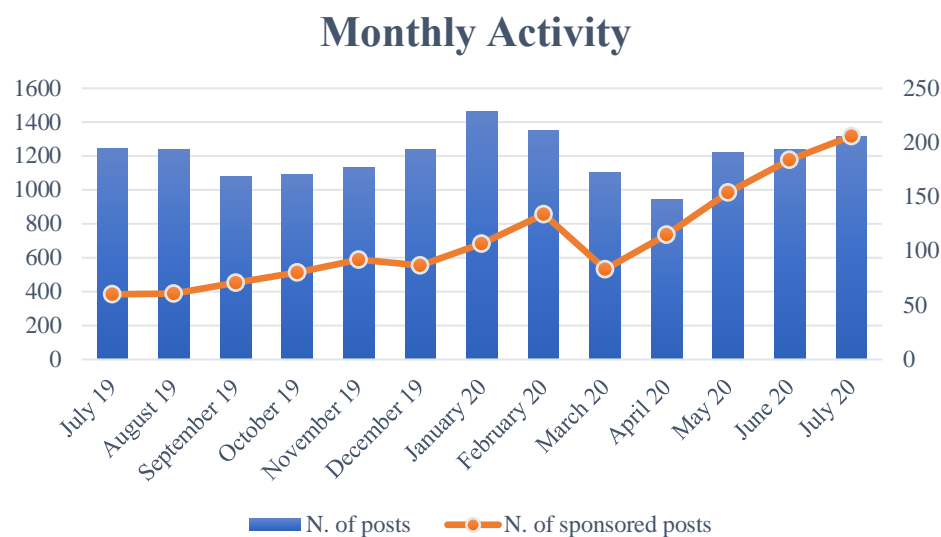
1. SL Benfica, Sporting CP and FC Porto → 1.427.806 – 834.650
2. SC Braga, Vitoria SC and Portimonense F. SAD → 89.445 – 63.345
3. Boavista FC, Rio Ave FC and FC Famalicão → 46.328 – 30.738
4. CD Aves, CS Maritimo, FC Paços de Ferreira, Gil Vicente FC, Vitória FC, CD Tondela and CD Santa Clara → 23.045 – 17.725
5. Belenenses SAD and Moreirense FC → 13.894 – 6.077

**Annex 15** – Detailed description of the posts affected by the follower’s assumption used

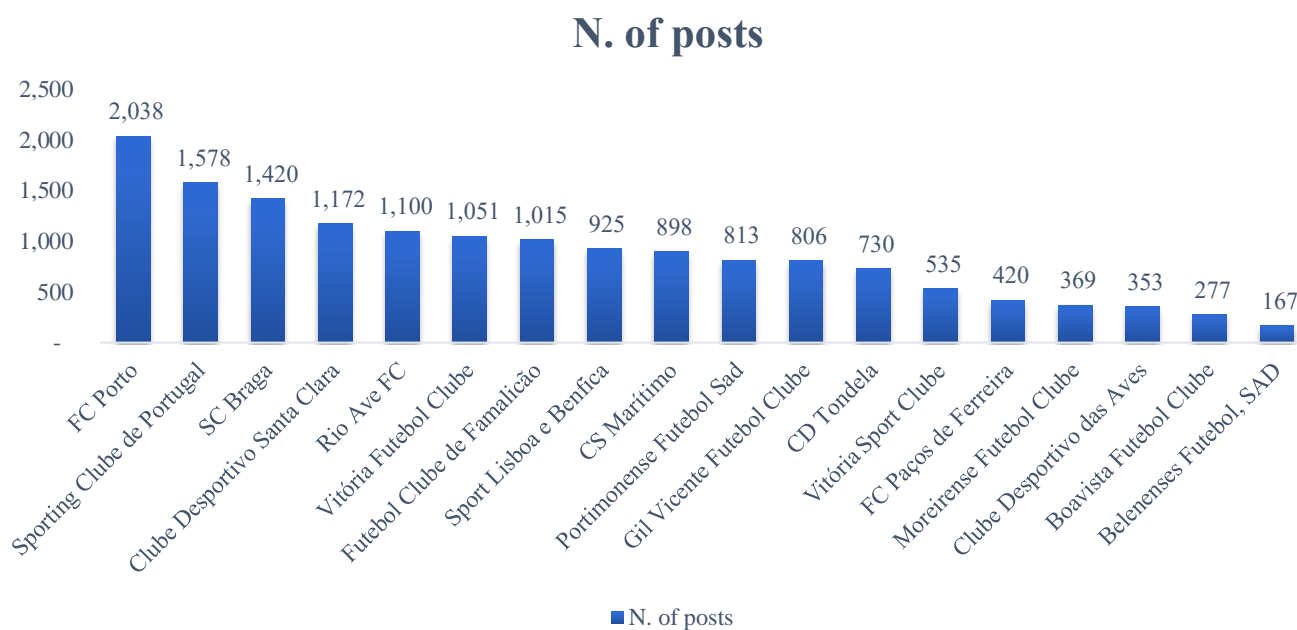
Total of 1.442 divided through 5 teams

Clubs affected	Number of posts	Earliest date available	Assumed value
Belenenses F. SAD	1	3/12/2019	4.390
CD Aves	262	21/02/2020	17.930
FC Famalicão	236	18/10/2019	37.278
Gil Vicente FC	520	21/02/2020	18.713
Portimonense F. SAD	423	21/02/2020	48.665

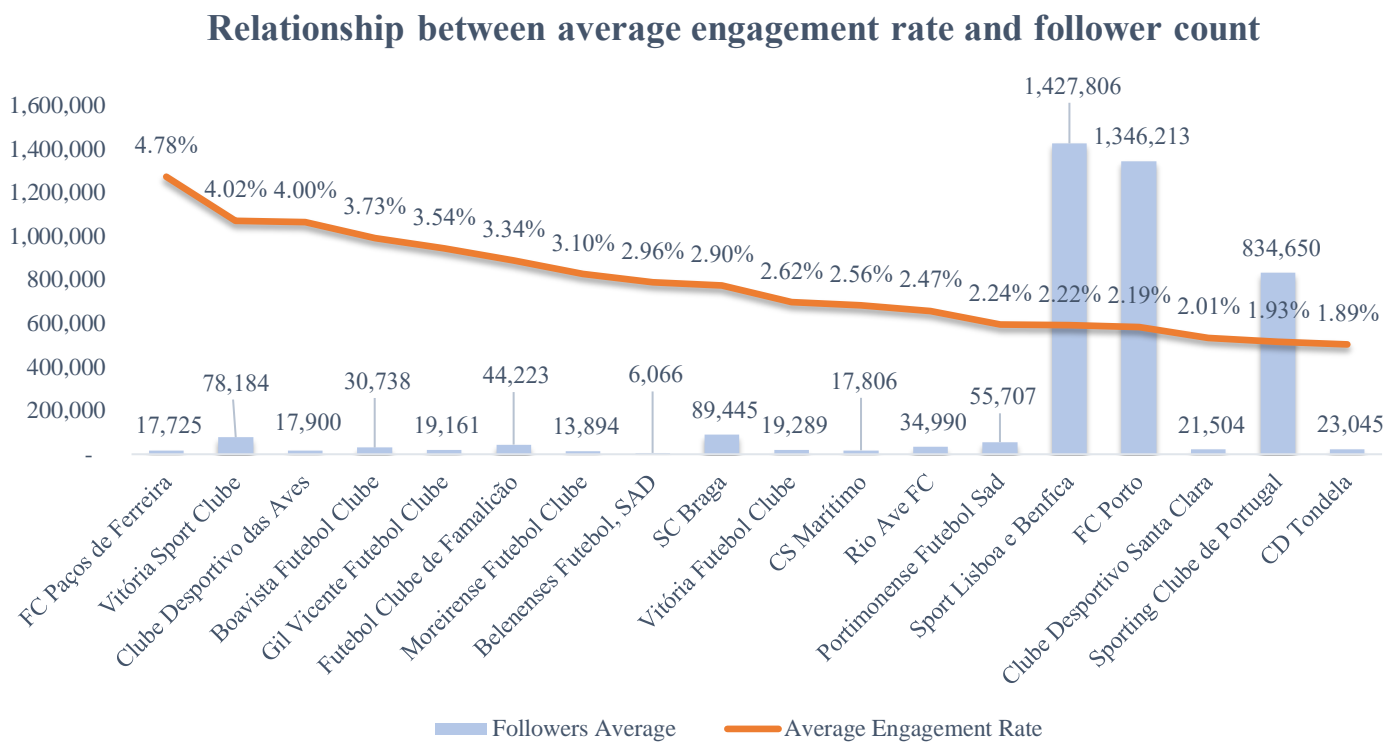
## Annex 16 – League’s monthly activity description



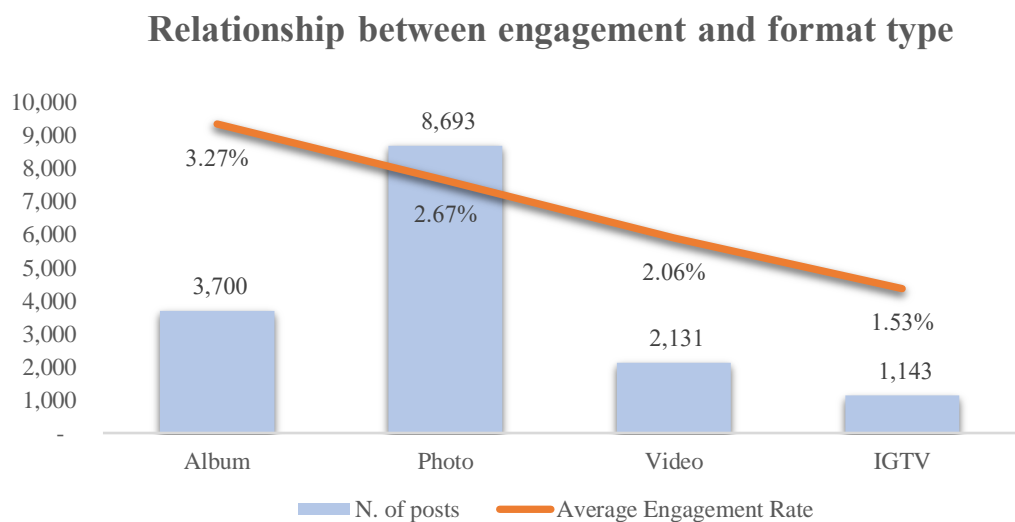
## Annex 17 – Club’s activity description



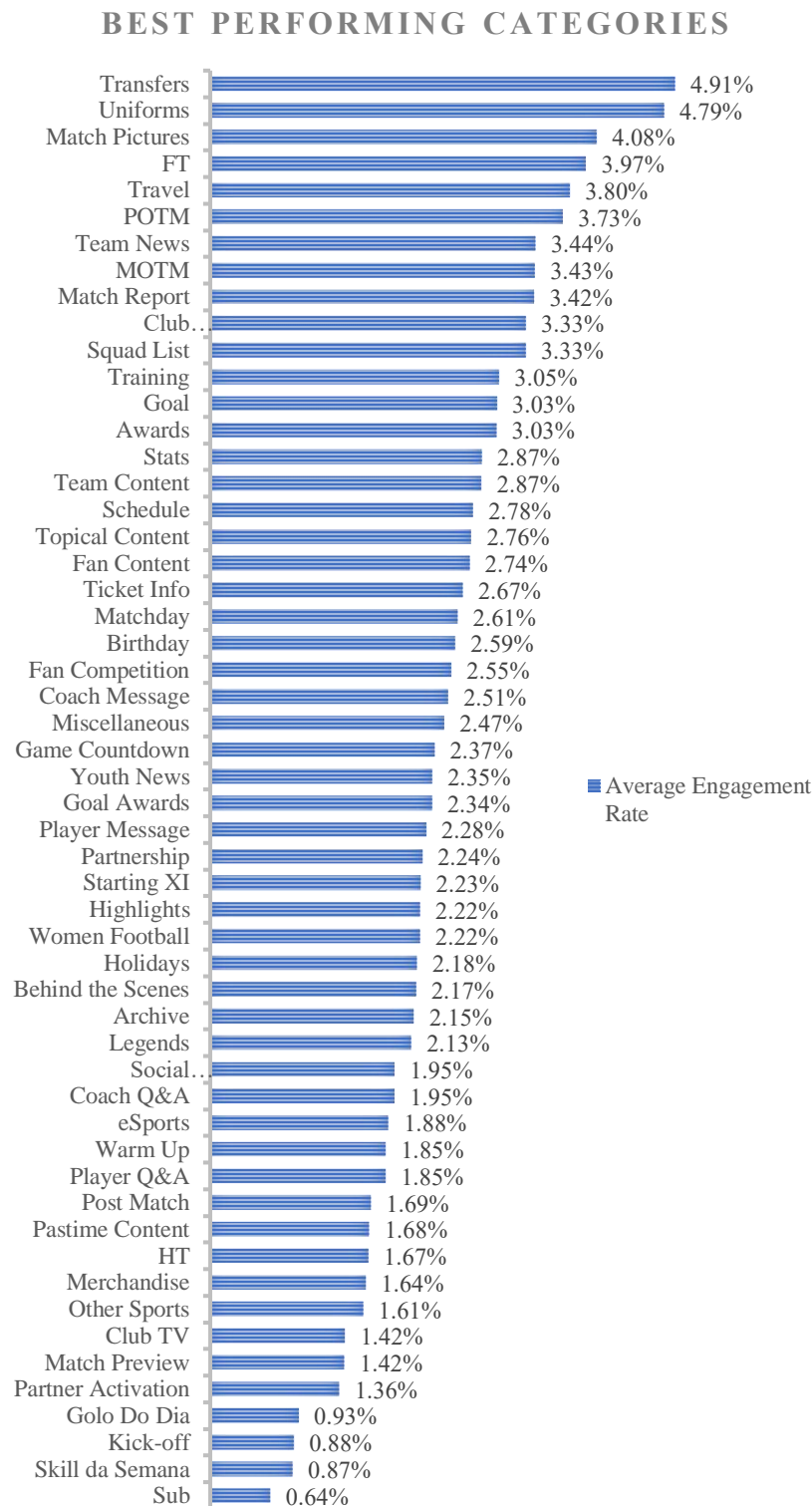
## Annex 18 – Relationship between average engagement rate and follower count



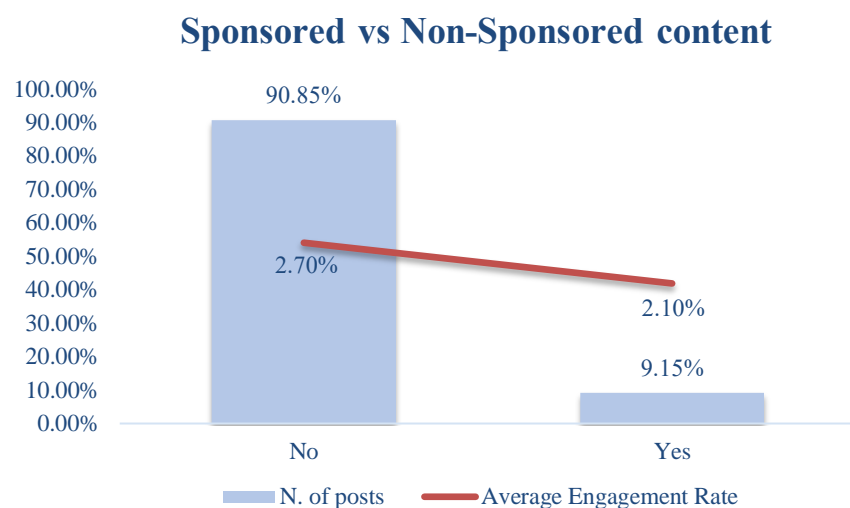
## Annex 19 – Relationship between average engagement rate and format type → Note: IGTV consists of videos with more than 1 min of length



## Annex 20 – Best performing categories



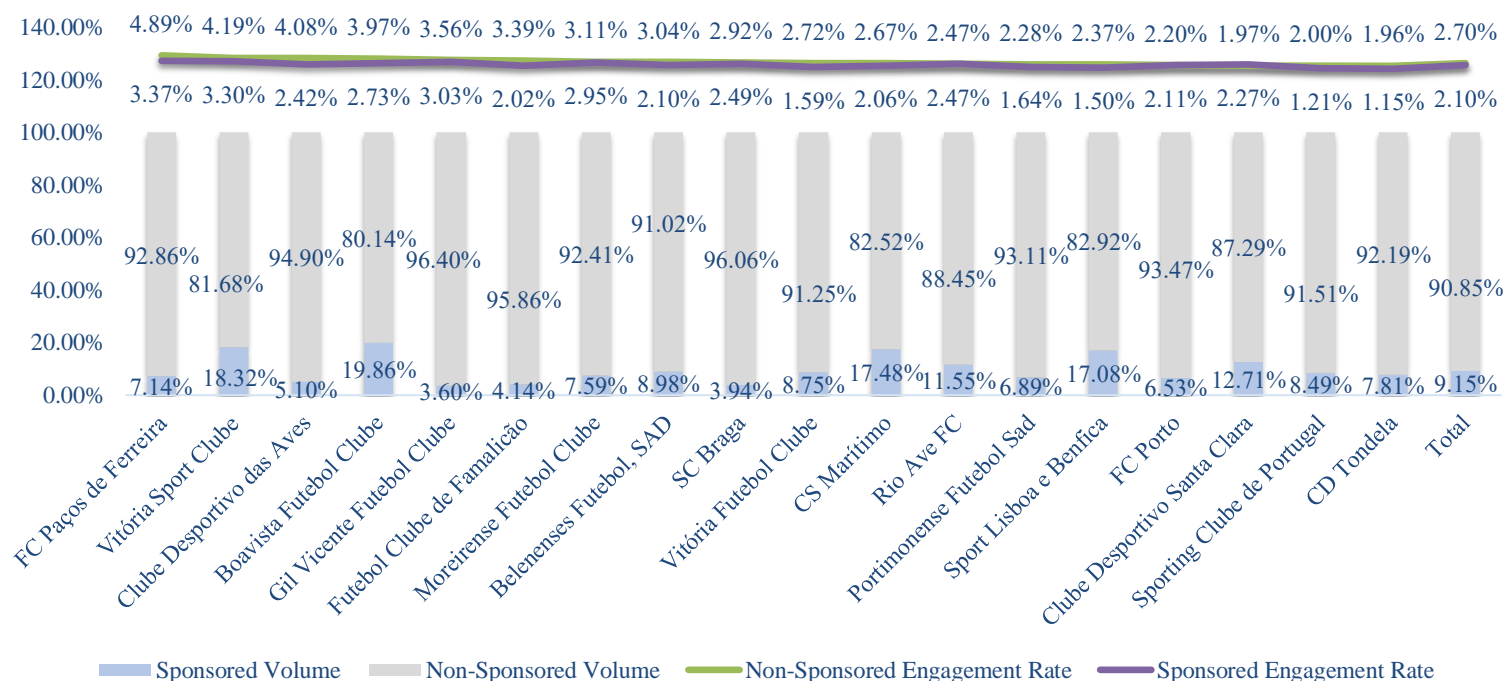
## Annex 21 – Volume and performance comparison between sponsored and non-sponsored content



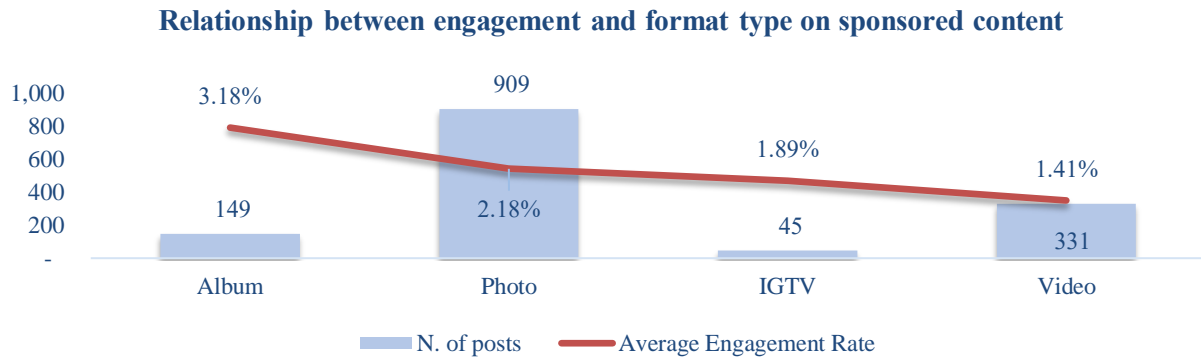
## Annex 22 – Volume and performance comparison between sponsored and non-sponsored content

per club

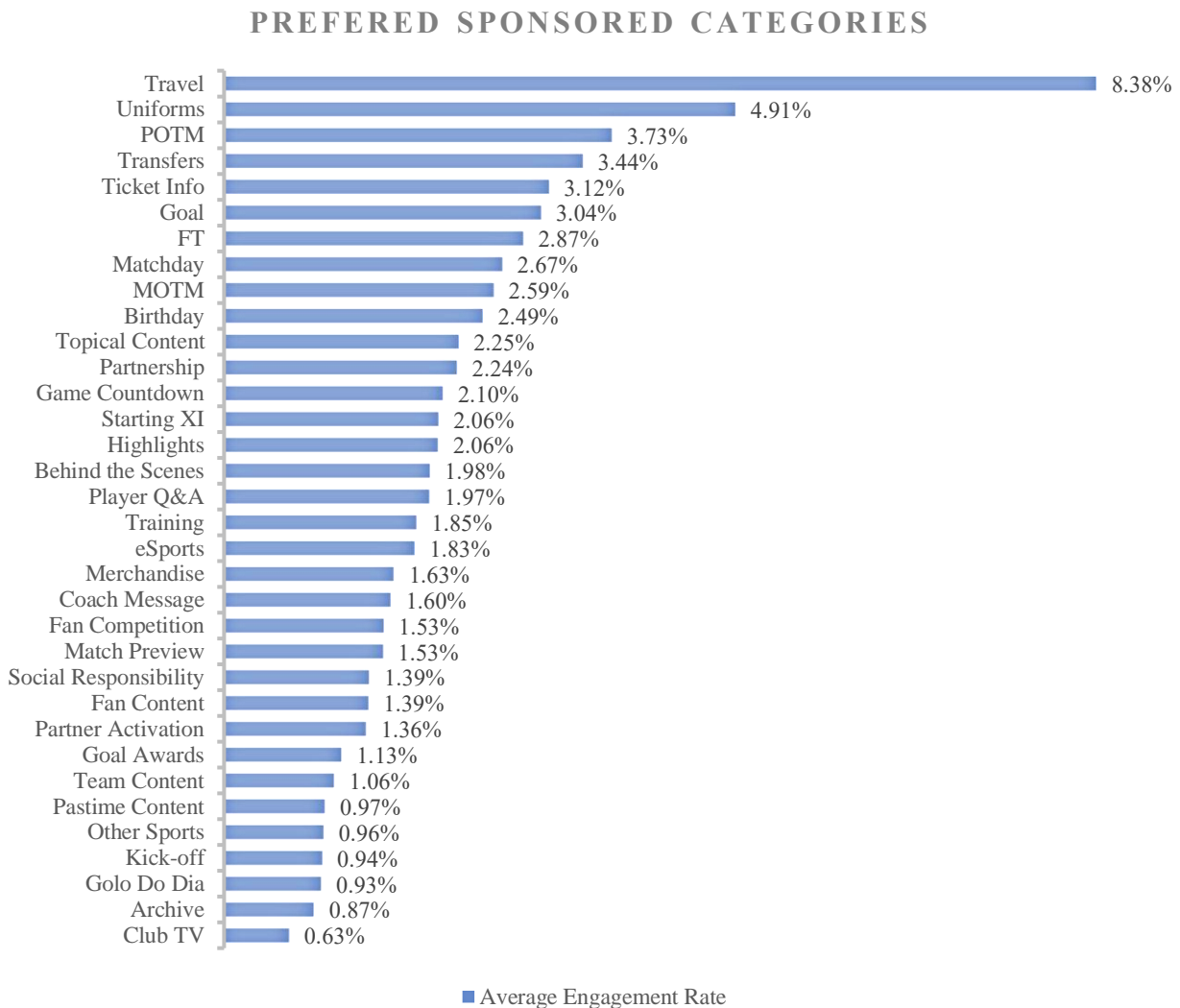
### Sponsored vs Non-sponsored per clubs



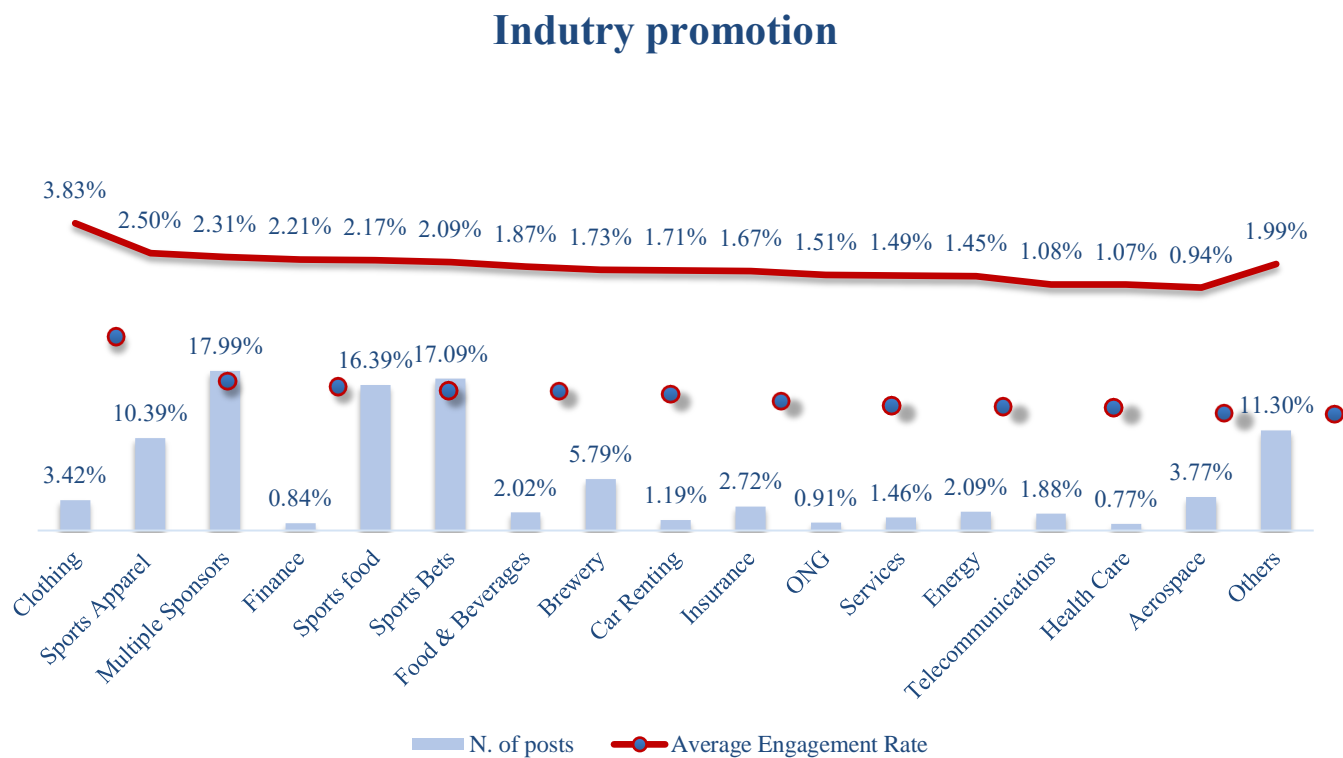
## Annex 23 – Preferred sponsored format type



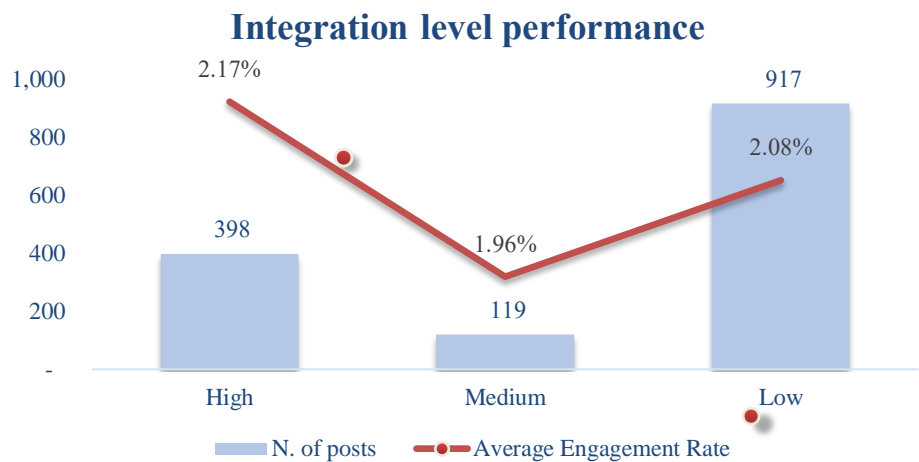
## Annex 24 – Preferred sponsored content type → Note: Categories with at least 5 associated posts



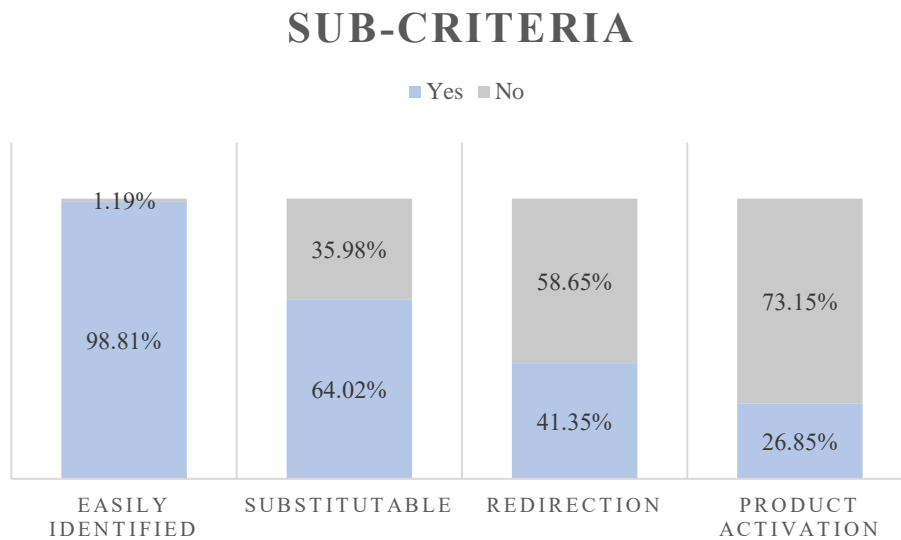
**Annex 25** – Most promoted industries → Note: Industries promoted in more than 10 related posts



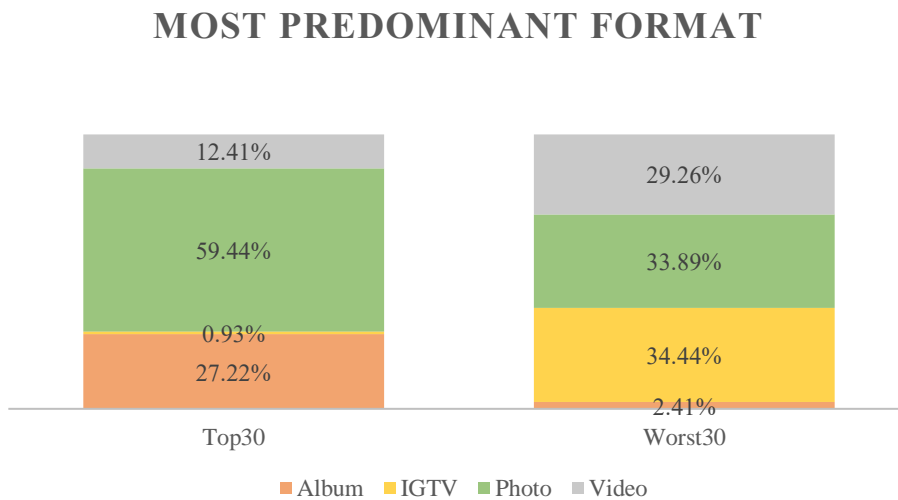
**Annex 26** – Integration level impact on engagement



## Annex 27 – Brand activation sub-criteria

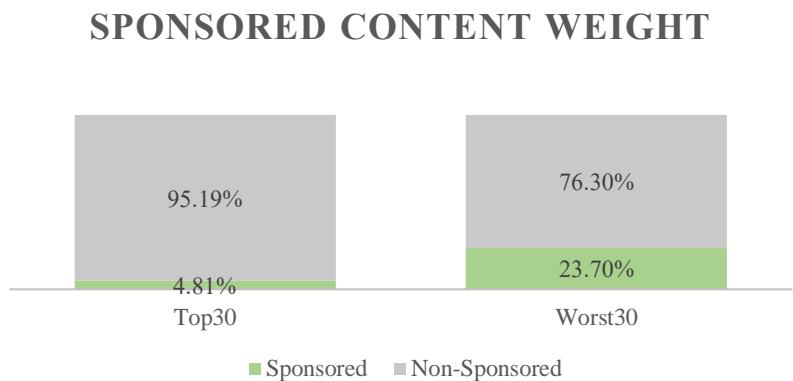


## Annex 28 – Most predominant format type per combined club's top and worst 30 posts

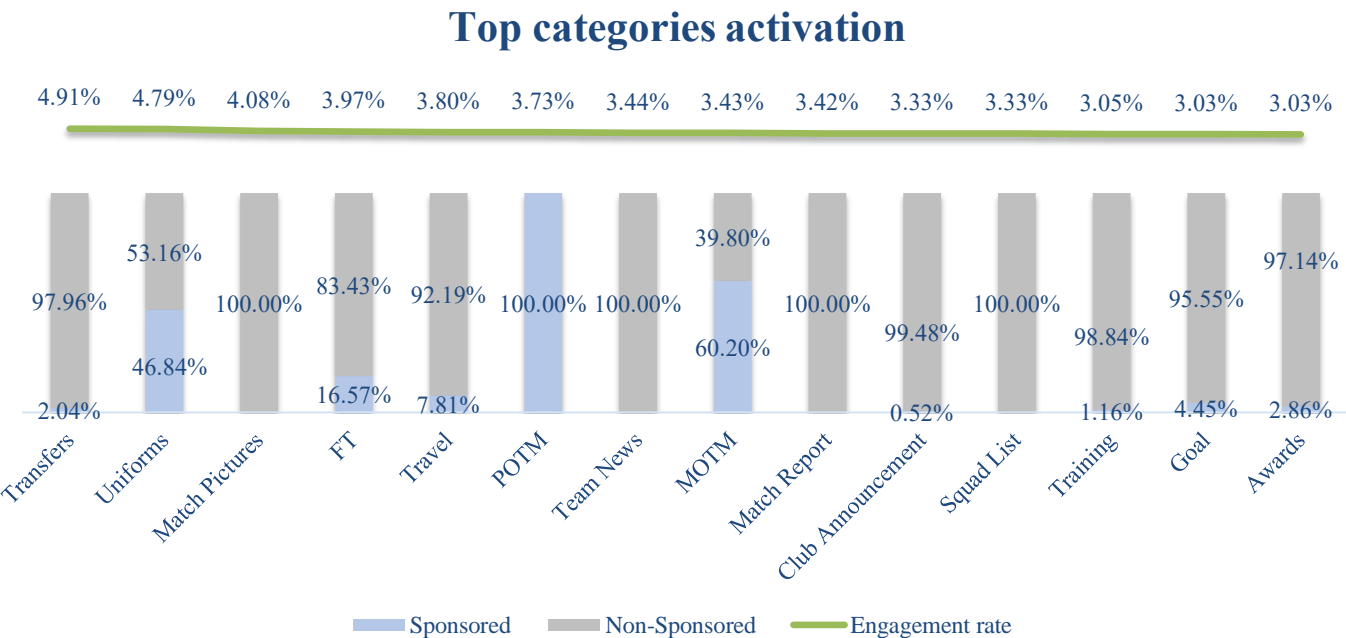




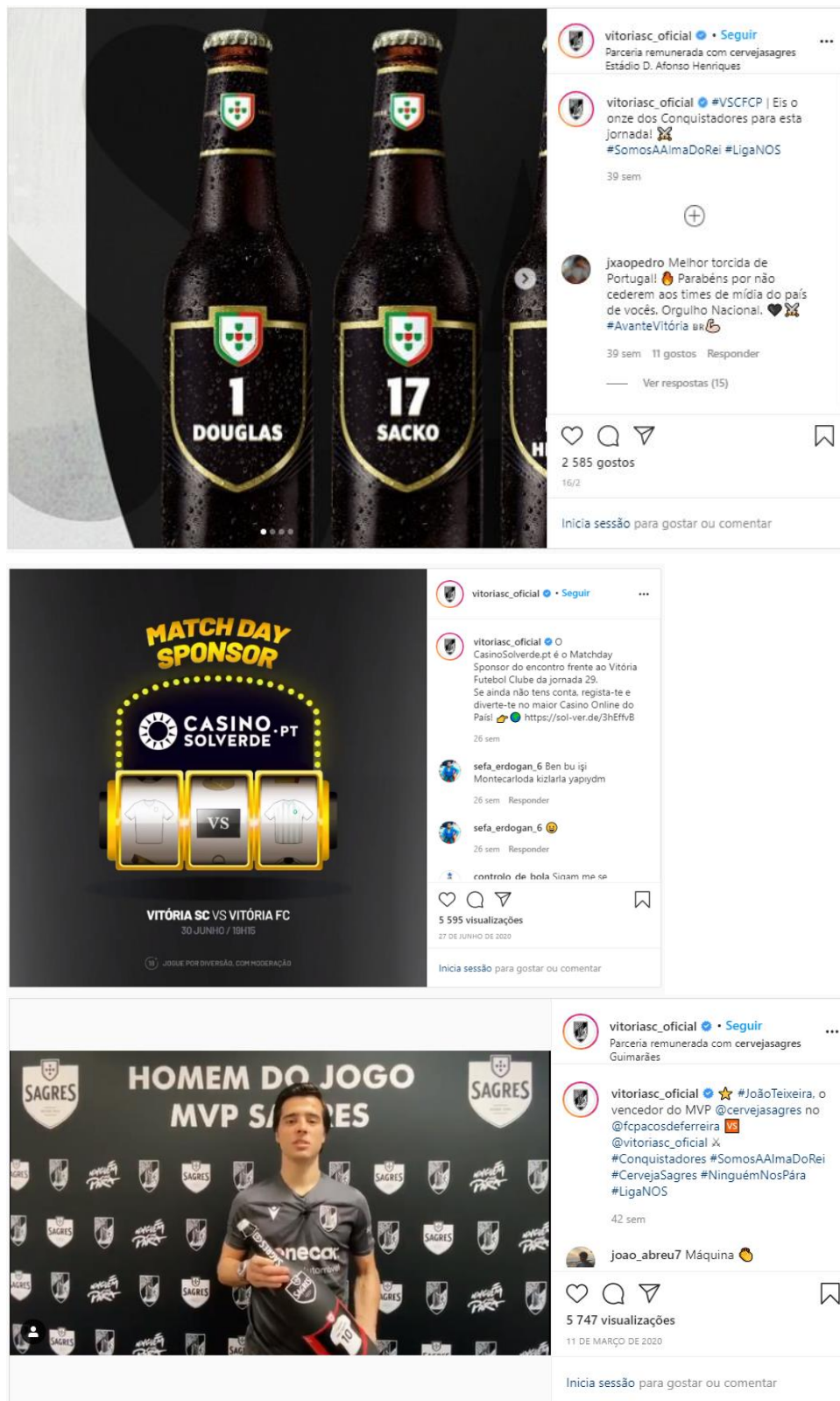
**Annex 29** – Sponsored content weight per combined club’s top and worst 30 posts



**Annex 30** – Biggest underutilized categories



## Annex 31 – Victoria SC *high* integration level posts examples



## Annex 32 – Taremi’s impact



rioavefc • Seguir

rioavefc Consegues resolver este problema? 🤔

Nós ajudamos-te. Tens de saber quais são os números dos nossos jogadores 🤔

Deixa a tua resposta nos comentário 📝

#rioavefc #ficaemcasa #muitonossosemigal

38 sem

peyman\_salarvand9 99 ❤️❤️❤️❤️

765 gostos

Inicia sessão para gostar ou comentar

Total  
number of  
interactions  
→ 827



rioavefc • Seguir

rioavefc É verdade que as contas só se fazem no final do campeonato, mas tu podes fazer agora! 🤔

Consegues adivinhar a resposta deste "problema"? 🤔

#rioavefc #ficaemcasa #muitonossosemigal

39 sem

strangers1368 60

36 sem Responder

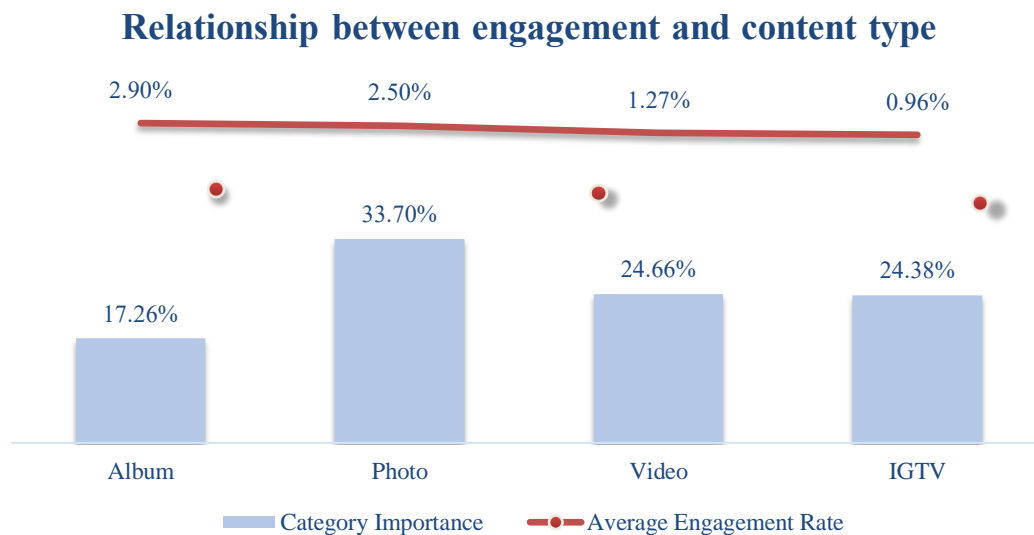
strangers1368 @strangers1368

1605 gostos

Inicia sessão para gostar ou comentar

Total  
number of  
interactions  
→ 2.372

### Annex 33 – CD Tondela’s content type distribution



**Annex 34** – Individual recommendations based on cluster’s analysis → Note: all suggestions add to what was discussed and recommended in this paper

#### *SL Benfica*

Firstly, although being the most followed account, SL Benfica posted 50% less when compared to FC Porto. As FC Porto exemplified, posting more does not translate into a decrease in average engagement rate, as the difference between both clubs is simply 0.02%. Interestingly, this difference could have been higher since SL Benfica’s *video* content outweighs *photo*-based ones.

Related to this, SL Benfica must better explore game-related content. In a minimum of 38 games season, only 3 times did the club post the *game result*, and only 8 times was a *game promoted*. Additionally, SL Benfica did not once announce it’s *starting XI* on Instagram. Finally, compared

to the other “grandes”, SL Benfica could explore the opportunity of partnering with a *sport’s food*-related company.

#### *FC Porto*

In FC Porto’s case, besides the previously given general suggestions, this study found that FC Porto could better promote its sponsors when posting a *partner activation* post. Compared to SL Benfica, FC Porto only activated its partners 3 times, 33 times less than its rival.

Another topic concerns the usage of the club's most influential player or legend. While in Sporting CP and SL Benfica cases, charismatic athletes were the focal point of several of the 30 best performing posts, in FC Porto’s case, it was not as evident. Using players, who are in fans graces or have higher social media reach, tend to have better results.

#### *Sporting CP*

Sporting CP is a fascinating case study. Due to its internal dispute and historically bad season, it is difficult to infer much. Further personalized research should be conducted to obtain better conclusions. Nonetheless, with the data available it is possible to conclude that sponsored *pastime content* was not a good investment in terms of engagement rate. Furthermore, Sporting CP could take advantage of the moment and promote the shirts manufacturer on *uniforms* releases.

#### *SC Braga*

Being the 4<sup>th</sup> most followed club in Portugal will facilitate new sponsorship opportunities. Consequently, the club must look at its Instagram account as an asset to explore. By just sponsoring 3.94% of posts, SC Braga is missing out on more than 545.000 euros.

On a more practical matter, SC Braga needs to learn from Vitoria SC and activate their *travel* posts by partnering with a *clothing* brand. Additionally, *matchday* content can be better explored, and sponsor products more frequently activated.

#### *Vitoria SC*

With such a passionate fanbase, Vitoria SC should increase its postings numbers. As a benchmark, SC Braga posted almost 3 times more than the club from Guimarães. Emphasizing Aichner, T. (2019) research, fans will interact, burnout is not likely as long as the content is relevant. Also, Vitoria SC should promote only one sponsor per post, similarly as it was done on **annex 27**.

#### *Portimonense F. SAD*

Purely looking at social media performance, Mimi was a genius stroke. Nonetheless, Mimi is worthless if he does not perform on the pitch or if the club does not convert Mimi's fans into club supporters. Focusing on the marketing aspect, Portimonense F. SAD should use Mimi's, or Mimi like players, reach to promote sponsors who operate in his country.

Additionally, there is a problem in maintaining the post as minimal as possible. The message does not pass. During the data collection process, it was tough to understand what was the post informing. Moreover, announcing the *starting XI* is a requirement, and *MOTM* can be an excellent opportunity to promote sponsors and players.

#### *FC Famalicão*

While FC Famalicão does a decent job making the sponsor irreplaceable, the club does a poor job leveraging sponsorship in this outlet. Only 4.14% of the post were sponsored. Content related

*matchday*, although already being used, must be activated. Resembling 1<sup>st</sup> tier clubs, creating an individual account for eSports may benefit the account's overall valuation.

#### *Boavista FC*

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest club in Porto, the obvious advice is to boost its Instagram activity. With such a loyal fanbase, over 3.70% of the average engagement rate, posting just 277 times over a season is not enough. This will create opportunities for better sponsorship deals and improve communication with fans. Content underutilized consists of *match pictures*, *training*, and *matchday*. Likewise, focusing on just one sponsor per post will increase sponsorship appraisal.

#### *Rio Ave FC*

Like Portimonense F. SAD, Taremi was the perfect move to expand club visibility. However, it is essential to mention that Taremi was not used once to directly promote a product. Presenting such a tactic to sponsors would have been a great strategy to boost post's price and even arrange deals in Taremi's country. Moreover, in terms of sponsoring opportunities, Rio Ave FC should focus on pre and full match content.

#### *CS Maritimo*

CS Maritimo was a pioneer utilizing sponsored *birthday* posts, an idea that all clubs should employ. Focusing on improvement opportunities, this paper identified that CS Maritimo must improve its sponsor integration. In 89% of the published sponsored posts, the sponsor was integrated at a *low* level. Moreover, in 77% the club promoted multiple sponsors at once making them substitutable. Finally, content regarding *MOTM*, *game countdown* and *team content* has to be activated, and, being an island club, *travel* content may be a good content opportunity to apply.



### *CD Tondela*

The biggest problem identified consists of overusing *video* content. Such impact is even more visible when solely looking at sponsored content, in which *video* content accounted for almost 90% of all posts. *Match pictures*, *FT*, *MOTM*, and *transfers*, are great unexplored opportunities to activate sponsors, while *game countdown* and *fan competition* must be more consistently offered.

### *CD Santa Clara*

As previously explained, CD Santa Clara is the only club in each sponsored content performed better than non-sponsored, due to promoting *transfers*, *highlights*, and *goals* related content, which is not explored by almost any other club. Nonetheless, *subs*, *kick-off*, *youth news*, and *HT* did not generate enough interactions. Besides already the mentioned categories in the general suggestion section, CD Santa Clara must be more consistent with its activity, must implement a redirection element to all sponsored posts, and utilize its *uniforms* posts to promote its sponsors. Moreover, like Marítimo's example, due to being an island club, *travel* content may be a good content opportunity to apply.

### *CD Aves*

To start, the club must increase its activity on the studied social network. While Mohammadi was a great marketing move, the club failed to grip the occasion to promote its sponsors. Only in 5% of the posts was a benefactor advertised, and in some cases, it was difficult to identify the endorsed entity. All game-related categories must be either be added to the communication strategy or exploited to activate a sponsor.



### *Gil Vicente FC*

Although having a committed fanbase, Gil Vicente FC only endorsed a sponsor in 3% of its posts. Furthermore, the club must improve its consistency regarding the content provided, only posting 9 and 3 posts connected to *FT*, and *starting XI* subject, respectively, is not enough. Finally, *women football* was the worst category of all studied, while being one of the most used. Creating a second account may be a good strategy to increase the primary account's value.

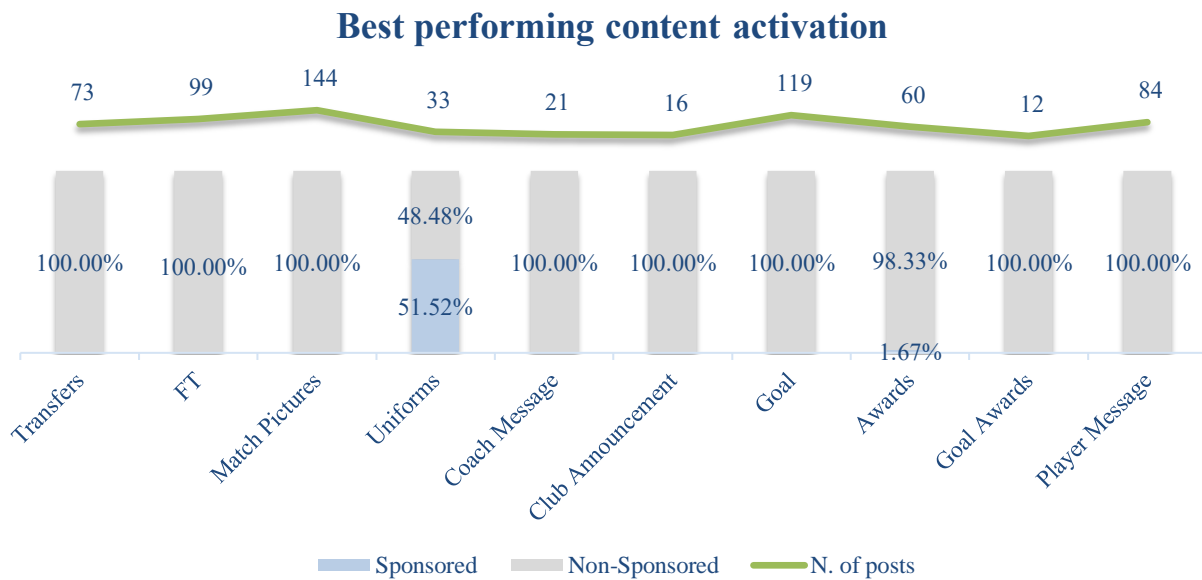
### *Vitoria FC*

Vitoria FC has an adequate strategy, in which most of the essential categories are consistently shared. Nonetheless, *MOTM* and *goal* content are great content opportunities to promote sponsors. Additionally, a significant number of sponsored posts contained more than one sponsor, and more than 67% did not shift the fan to the sponsored page.

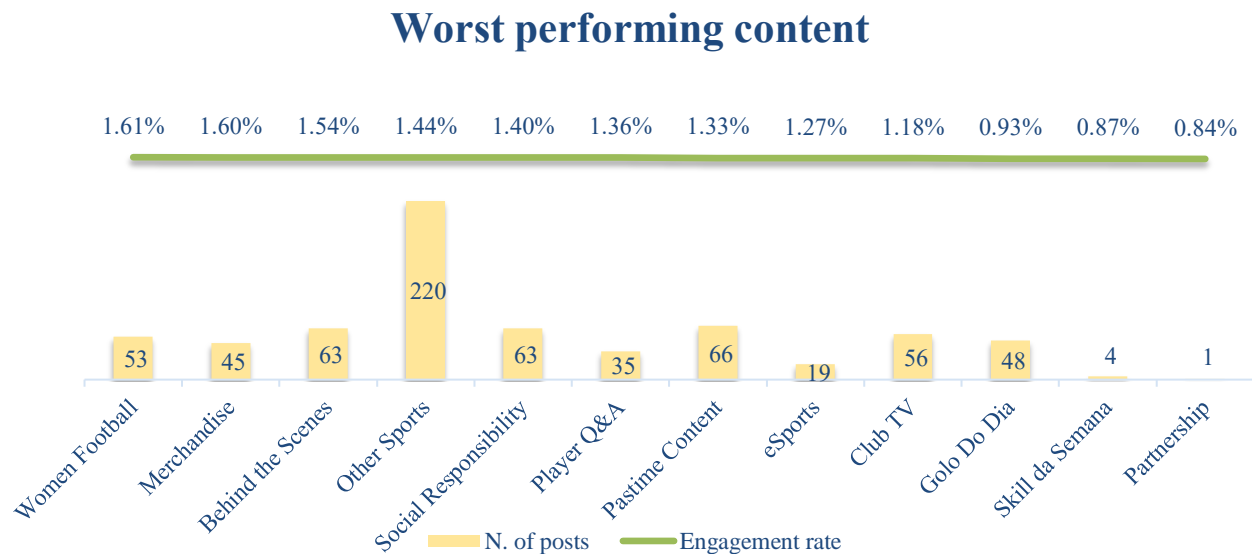
### *FC Paços de Ferreira*

In the club that averaged the best engagement rate, the most glaring flaw was the short volume of posts. Moreover, *album* type content performed impressively well although having little relevance. *Starting XI* and *MOTM* content are the most evidence opportunities for improvement. Finally, no game-related category was used to activate a sponsor, more than one sponsor was advertised in 36% of sponsored posts, and in 63%, the sponsor could have been easily substituted.

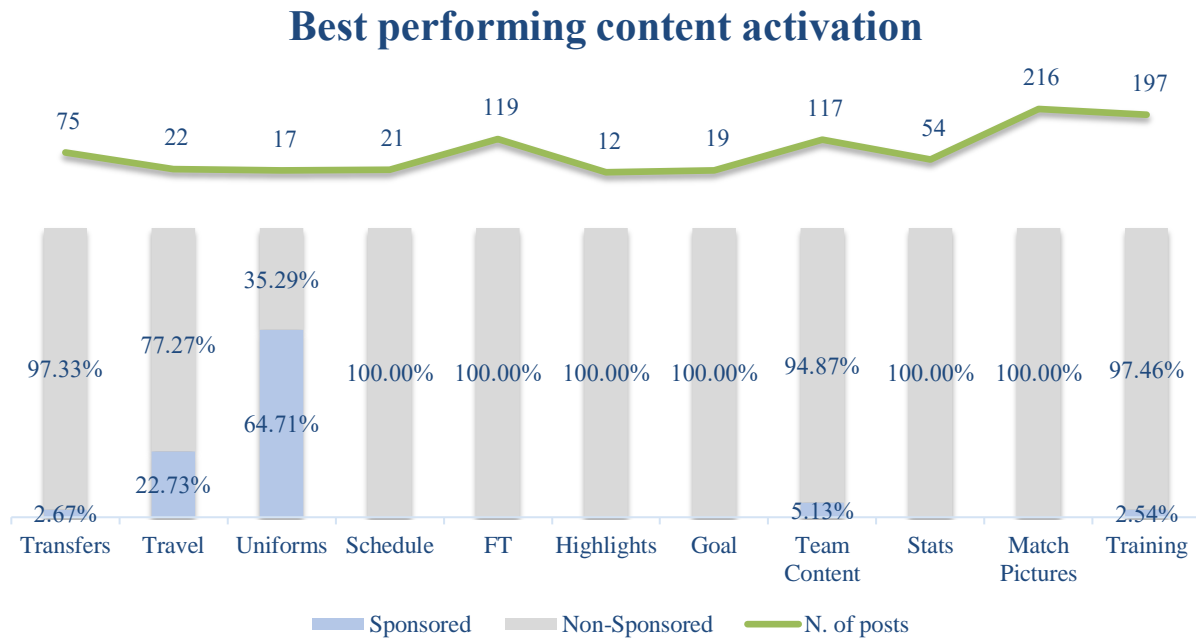
**Annex 35** – Tier 1 missed opportunities → Note: Categories with an engagement rate higher than 2.5%



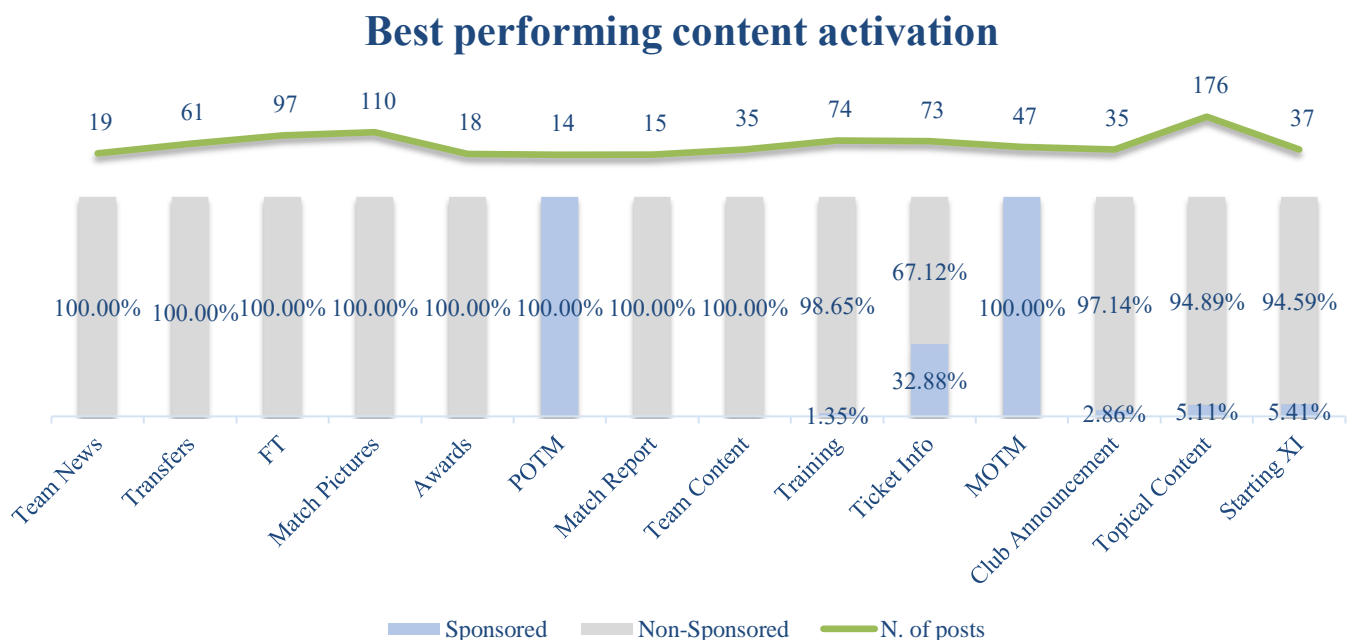
**Annex 36** – Tier 1 wasted investments → Note: Categories with an engagement rate lower than 1.65%



**Annex 37** – Tier 2 lost prospects → Note: Categories with an engagement rate higher than 3% and more than 5 posts related

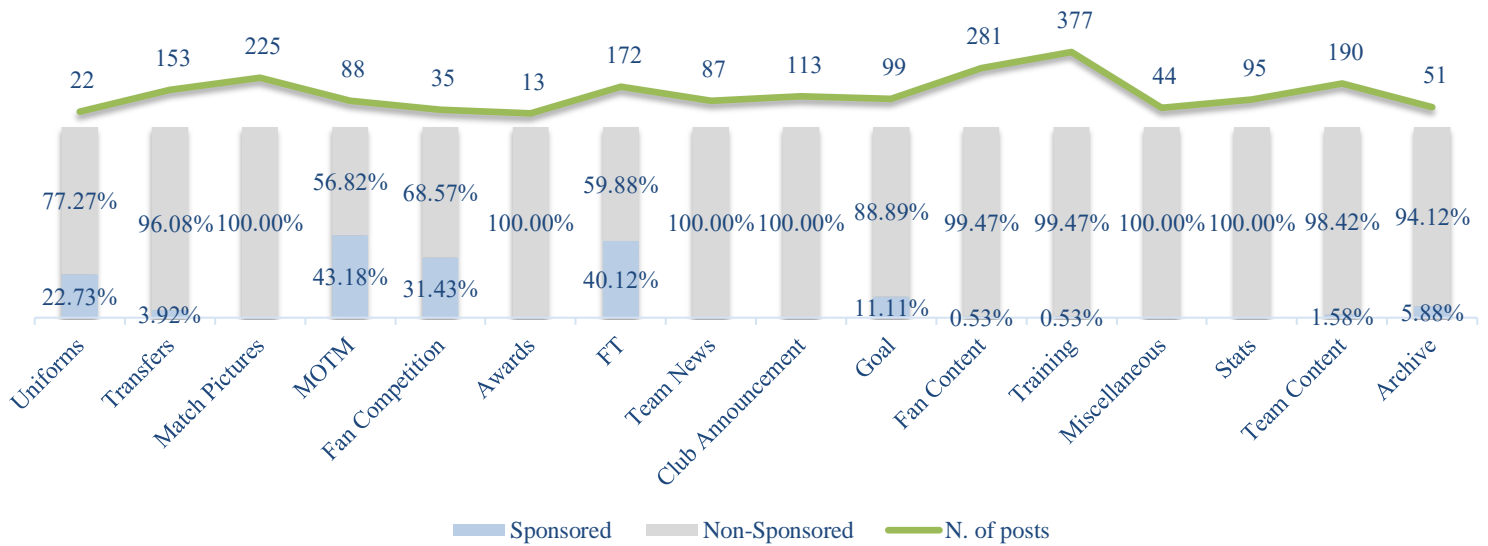


**Annex 38** – Tier 3 missed opportunities → Note: Categories with an engagement rate higher than 3% and more than 5 posts related



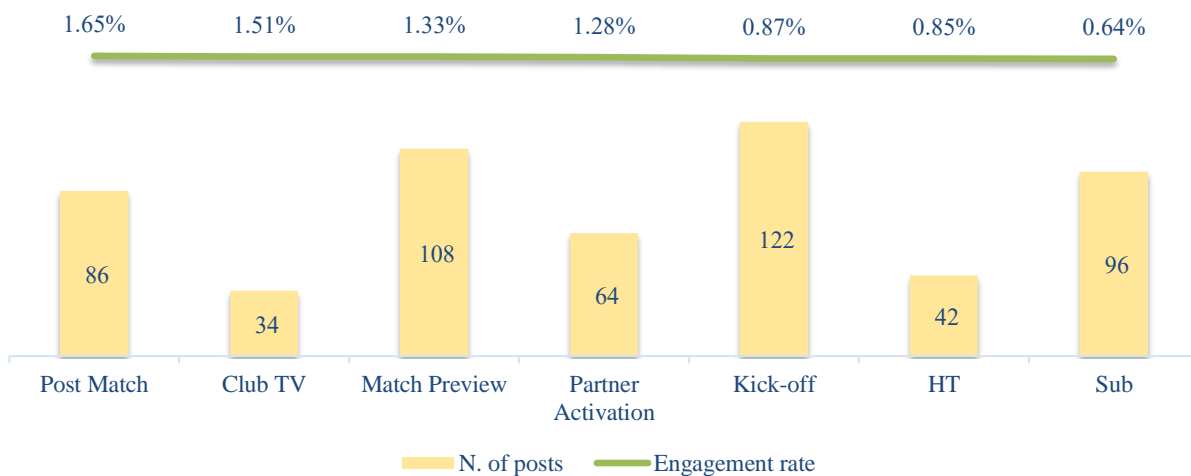
**Annex 39** – Tier 4 wasted opportunities → Note: Categories with an engagement rate higher than 3% and with at least 5 connected posts

### Best performing content activation

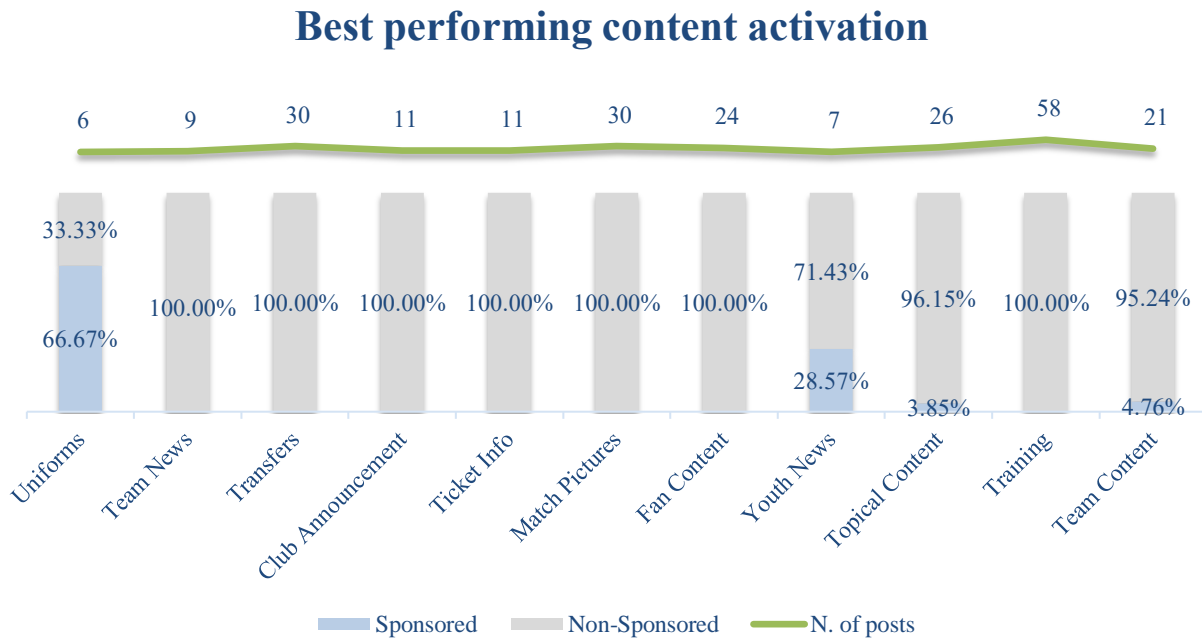


**Annex 40** – Tier 4 fruitless content → Note: Categories with an engagement rate lower than 1.65%

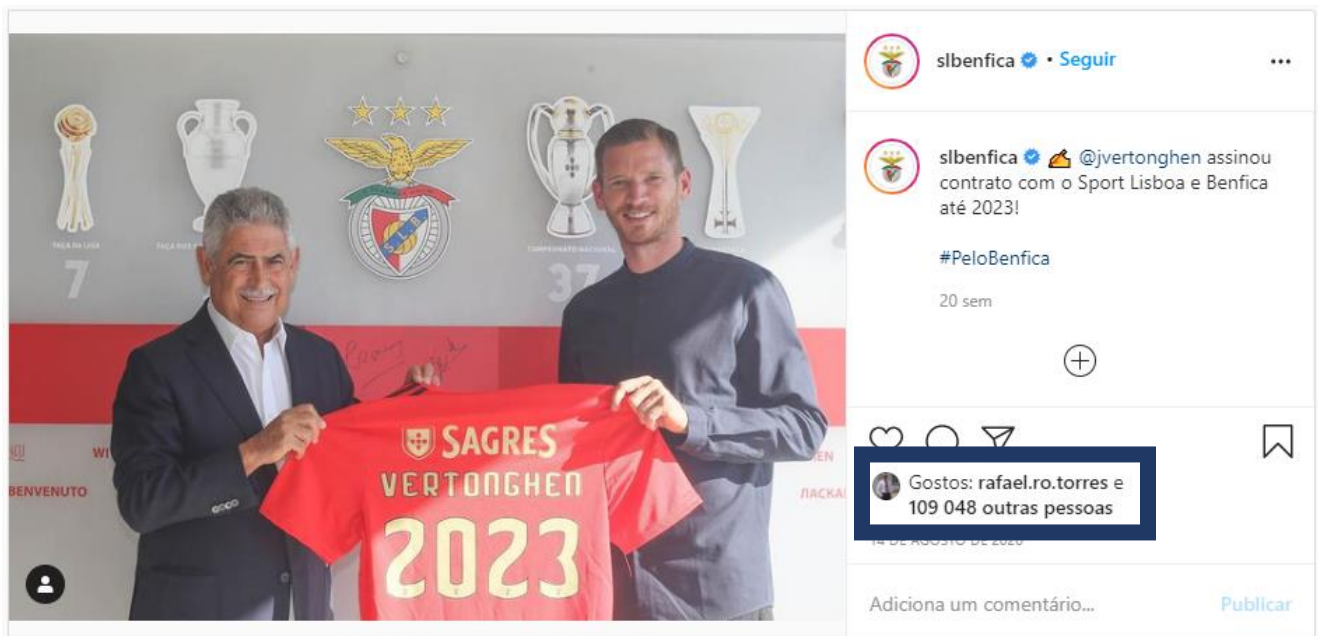
### Worst performing content



**Annex 41** – Tier 5 missed opportunities → Note: Categories with an engagement rate higher than 3% and with at least 5 associated posts



**Annex 42** – SL Benfica Jan Vertonghen's announcement posts and player's Instagram account reach





**Annex 43** – SL Benfica Luca Waldschmidt’s announcement posts and player’s Instagram account reach

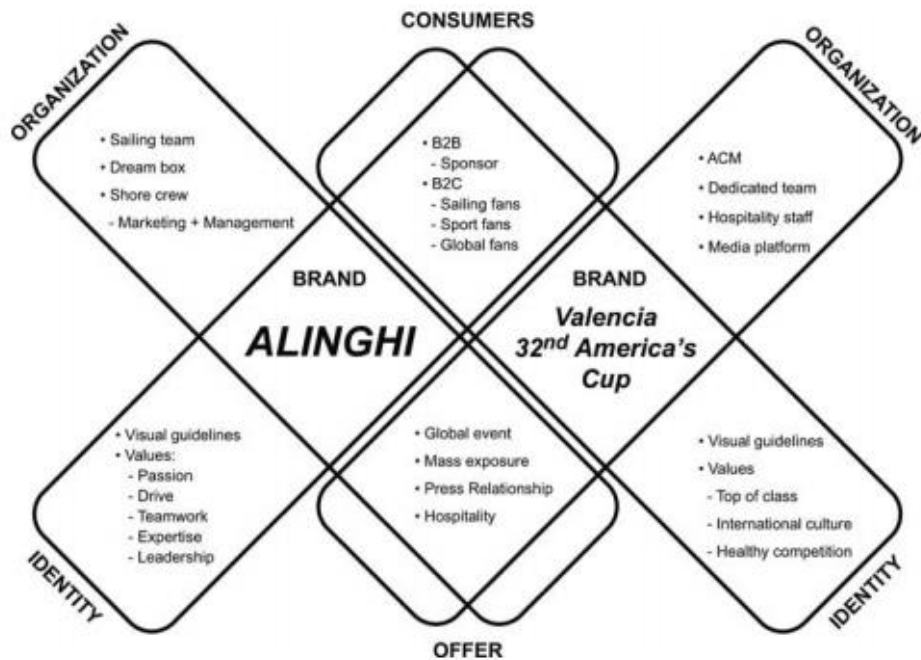


**Annex 44** – SL Benfica Luca Waldschmidt’s announcement posts and player’s Instagram account reach





**Annex 45** – Sitz, L. (2011) brand model alignment example



**Annex 46** – CD Santa Clara *transfers* best practices examples







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